

Genesis 13:1-20

by John Calvin

Abram's decision to return to Canaan and his subsequent separation from his nephew Lot serve as a reminder of the importance of following God's will and being mindful of the consequences of our actions.

Scripture: Genesis 13:1-3, Genesis 13:5-10, Genesis 13:13-14

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Gods Faithfulness"

Description

John Calvin preaches about Abram's journey out of Egypt, highlighting God's protection and the wealth he acquired, showing how riches did not hinder him from seeking the land of Canaan. The separation from Lot due to strife among their servants teaches lessons on moderation, peacekeeping, and the dangers of ambition and contention. The promise of the land to Abram's seed, compared to the dust of the earth, demonstrates God's faithfulness and the importance of faith in His word. Abram's response by moving through the land and building an altar signifies his unwavering trust and worship of God.

Transcript

1. And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.
1. Et ascendit Abram ex Aegypto, ipse et uxor ejus, et omnia quae erant ei, et Lot cum eo ad Meridiem.
2. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.
2. Et Abram dives erat valde pecore, argento et auro.
3. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai;
3. Et perrexit per profectiones suas a Meridie usque ad Bethel, usque ad locum ubi fuerat tabernaculum ejus in principio, inter Bethel et Hai;
4. Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.
4. Ad locum altaris quod fecerat in principio: et invocavit ibi Abram nomen Jehovae.
5. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.

5. Et etiam ipsi Lot ambulanti cum Abram erant pecudes, et boves, et tabernacula.

6. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.

6. Et non ferebat eos terra, ut habitarent pariter: quia erat substantia eorum multa, et non poterant habitare pariter.

7. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

7. Et fuit contentio inter pastores pecudum Abram, et pastores pecudum Lot: et Chenaanaeus et Pherizaeus tunc habitabant in terra.

8. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

8. Et dixit Abram ad Lot, Ne nunc sit contentio inter me et to, et inter pastores meos et pastores tuos: quia viri fratres sumus.

9. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

9. Numquid non omnis terra est coram to? separa to nunc ame: si ieris ad sinistram, dextram tenebo: et si ad dextram ieris, sinistram tenebo.

10. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

10. Et levavit Lot oculos suos, et vidit omnem planitiem Jarden, quod tota esset irrigua, antequam disperderet Jehova Sedom et Hamorah, sicuti hortus Jehovae, sicut terra Aegypti, ingrediente to in Sohar.

11. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

11. Et elegit sibi Lot omnem planitiem Jarden, et profectus est Lot ad Oreientem, et separaverunt se alter ab altero.

12. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

12. Abram habitavit in terra Chanaan, et Lot habitavit in urbibus planitiei, et tetendit tabernaculum Sedom usque.

13. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

13. Viri autem Sedom erant mali, et scelerati coram Jehova valde.

14. And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

14. Et Jehova dixit ad Abram, postquam separavit se Lot ab eo, Leva nunc oculos tuos, et vide a loco ubi es, ad Aquilonem, Meridiem, Orientem, et Occidentem.

15. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

15. Quia omnem terram quam tu vides, tibi dabo et semini tuo usque in saeculum.

16. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

16. Et ponam semen tuum sicut pulverem terrae: quia si poterit quisquam numerare pulverem terrae, etiam semen tuum numerabit.

17. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

17. Surge, ambula per terram in longitudinem ejus, et in latitudinem ejus: quia tibi dabo eam.

18. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

18. Et tetendit tabernaculum Abram, et venit, et habitavit in quercubus Mamre, quae sunt in Hebron: et aedificavit ibi altare Jehovae.

1. And Abram went up out of Egypt . In the commencement of the chapter, Moses commemorates the goodness of God in protecting Abram; whence it came to pass, that he not only returned in safety, but took with him great wealth. This circumstance is also to be noticed, that when he was leaving Egypt, abounding in cattle and treasures, he was allowed to pursue his journey in peace; for it is surprising that the Egyptians would suffer what Abram had acquired among them, to be transferred elsewhere. Moses next shows that riches proved no sufficient obstacle to prevent Abram from having respect continually to his proposed end, and from moving towards it with unremitting pace. We know how greatly even a moderate share of wealth, hinders many from raising their heads towards heaven; while they who really possess abundance, not only lie torpid in indolence, but are entirely buried in the earth. Wherefore, Moses places the virtue of Abram in contrast with the common vice of others; when he relates that he was not to be prevented by any impediments, from seeking again the land of Canaan. For he might (like many others) have been able to flatter himself with some fair pretext: such as, that since God, from whom he had received extraordinary blessings, had been favorable and kind to him in Egypt, it was right for him to remain there. But he does not forget what had been divinely commanded him; and, therefore, as one unfettered, he hastens to the place whither he is called. Wherefore, the rich are deprived of all excuse, if they are so rooted in the earth, that they do not attend the call of God. Two extremes, however, are here to be guarded against. Many place angelical perfection in poverty; as if it were impossible to cultivate piety and to serve God, unless riches are cast away. Few indeed imitate Crates the Theban, who cast his treasures into the sea; because he did not think that he could be saved unless they were lost. Yet many fanatics repel rich men from the hope of salvation; as if poverty were the only gate of heaven; which yet, sometimes, involves men in more hindrances than riches. But Augustine wisely teaches us, that the rich and poor are collected together in the same inheritance of life; because poor Lazarus was received into the bosom of rich Abraham. On the other hand, we must beware of the opposite evil; lest riches should cast a stumblingblock in our way, or should so burden us, that we should the less readily advance towards the kingdom of heaven.

3. And he went on his journeys . In these words Moses teaches us, that Abram did not rest till he had returned to Bethel. For although he pitched his tent in many places, yet he nowhere so fixed his foot, as to make it his permanent abode. He does not speak of the south in reference to Egypt; he merely means that he had come into the southern part of Judea; and that, therefore, he had, by a long and troublesome journey, arrived at the place where he had determined to remain. Moses next subjoins, that an altar had before been there erected by him and that he then also began anew to call upon the name of the Lord: whereby we may learn, that the holy man was always like himself in worshipping God, and giving evidence of his piety. The explanation given by some, that the inhabitants of the place had been brought to the pure worship of God, is neither probable, nor to be deduced from the words of Moses. And we have stated elsewhere what is the force of the expression, 'To invoke in the name,' or, 'To call upon the name of the Lord;' namely, to profess the true and pure worship of God. For Abram invoked God, not twelve times only, during the whole course of his life; but whenever he publicly celebrated him, and by a solemn rite, made it manifest that he had nothing in common with the superstitions of the heathen, then he is also said to have called upon God. Therefore, although he always worshipped God, and exercised himself in daily prayers; yet, because he did not daily testify his piety by outward profession before men, this virtue is here especially commended by Moses. It was therefore proper that invocation should be conjoined with the altar; because by the sacrifices offered, he plainly testified what God he worshipped in order that the Canaanites might know that he was not addicted to their common idolatries.

5. And Lot also , which went with Abram . Next follows the inconvenience which Abram suffered through his riches: namely, that he was torn from his nephew, whom he tenderly loved, as if it had been from his own bowels. Certainly had the option been given him he would rather have chosen to cast away his riches, than to be parted from him whom he had held in the place of an only son: yet he found no other method of avoiding contentions. Shall we impute this evil to his own excessive moroseness or to the forwardness of his nephew? I suppose, however, that we must rather consider the design of God. There was a danger lest Abram should be too much gratified with his own success inasmuch as prosperity blinds many. Therefore God allays the sweetness of wealth with bitterness; and does not permit the mind of his servant to be too much enchanted with it. And whenever a fallacious estimate of riches impels us to desire them inordinately, because we do not perceive the great disadvantages which they bring along with them; let the recollection of this history avail to restrain such immoderate attachment to them. Further, as often as the rich find any trouble arising from their wealth; let them learn to purify their minds by this medicine, that they may not become excessively addicted to the good things of the present life. And truly, unless the Lord were occasionally to put the bridle on men, to what depths would they not fall, when they overflow with prosperity? On the other hand, if we are straitened with poverty, let us know, that, by this method also, God corrects the hidden evils of our flesh. Finally, let those who abound remember, that they are surrounded with thorns and must take care lest they be pricked; and let those whose affairs are contracted and embarrassed know, that God is caring for them, in order that they may not be involved in evil and noxious snares. This separation was sad to Abram's mind; but it was suitable for the correction of much latent evil, that wealth might not stifle the armor of his zeal. But if Abram had need of such an antidote, let us not wonder, if God, by inflicting some stroke, should repress our excesses. For he does not always wait till the faithful shall have fallen; but looks forward for them into the future. So he does not actually correct the avarice or the pride of his servant Abram: but, by an anticipated remedy, he causes that Satan shall not infect his mind with any of his allurements.

7. And there was a strife . What I hinted respecting riches, is also true respecting a large retinue of attendants. We see with what ambition many desire a great crowd of servants, almost amounting to a

whole people. But since the family of Abram cost him so dear; let us be well content to have few servants, or even to be entirely without them, if it seem right to the Lord that it should be so. It was scarcely possible to avoid great confusion, in a house where there was a considerable number of men. And experience confirms the truth of the proverbs that a crowd is commonly turbulent. Now, if repose and tranquility be an inestimable good; let us know, that we best consult for our real welfare, when we have a small house, and privately pass our time, without tumult, in our families. We are also warned, by the example before us, to beware lest Satan, by indirect methods, should lead us into contention. For when he cannot light up mutual enmities between us, he would involve us in other men's quarrels. Lot and Abram were at concord with each other; but a contention raised between their shepherds, carried them reluctantly away; so that they were compelled to separate from each other. There is no doubt that Abram faithfully instructed his own people to cultivate peace; yet he did not so far succeed in his desire and effort, as to prevent his witnessing the most destructive fire of discord kindled in his house. Wherefore, it is nothing wonderful, if we see tumults often arising in churches, where there is a still greater number of men. Abram had about three hundred servants; it is probable that the family of Lot was nearly equal to it: 353 what then may be expected to take place between five or six thousand men, -- especially free men, -- when they contend with each other? As, however, we ought not to be disturbed by such scandals; so we must, in every way, take care that contentions do not become violent. For unless they be speedily met, they will soon break out into pernicious dissension.

The Canaanite and the Perizzite . Moses adds this for the sake of aggravating the evil. For he declares the heat of the contention to have been so great, that it could neither be extinguished nor assuaged, even by the fear of impending destruction. They were surrounded by as many enemies as they had neighbors. Nothing, therefore, was wanting in order to their destruction, but a suitable occasion; and this they themselves were affording by their quarrels. To such a degree does blind fury infatuate men, when once the vehemence of contention has prevailed, that they carelessly despise death, when placed before their eyes. Now, although we are not continually surrounded by Canaanites, we are yet in the midst of enemies, as long as we sojourn in the world. Wherefore, if we are influenced by any desire for the salvation of ourselves, and of our brethren, let us beware of contentions which will deliver us over to Satan to be destroyed.

8. And Abram said unto Lot . Moses first states, that Abram no sooner perceived the strifes which had arisen, than he fulfilled the duty of a good householder, by attempting to restore peace among his domestics; and that afterwards, by his moderation, he endeavored to remedy the evil by removing it. And although the servants alone were contending, he yet does not say in vain, Let there be no strife between me and thee: because it was scarcely possible but that the contagion of the strife should reach from the domestics to their lords, although they were in other respects perfectly agreed. He also foresaw that their friendship could not long remain entire, unless he attempted, in time, to heal the insidious evil. Moreover, he calls to mind the bond of consanguinity between them; not because this alone ought to avail to promote mutual peace, but that he might more easily bend and mollify the mind of his nephew. For when the fear of God is less effectual with us than it ought to be; it is useful to call in other helps also, which may retain us in our duty. Now however since we all are adopted as sons of God, with the condition annexed, that we should be mutually brethren to each other: this sacred bond is less valued by us than it ought to be, if it does not prove sufficient to allay our contentions.

9. Is not the whole land before thee ? Here is that moderation of which I have spoken; namely, that Abram for the sake of appeasing strifes voluntarily sacrifices his own right. For as ambition and the desire of

victory 354 is the mother of all contentions; so when every one meekly and moderately departs, in some degree, from his just claim, the best remedy is found for the removal of all cause of bitterness. Abram might indeed, with an honorable pretext, have more pertinaciously defended the right which he relinquished, but he shrinks from nothing for the sake of restoring peace: and therefore he leaves the option to his nephew.

10. And Lot lifted up his eyes . As the equity of Abram was worthy of no little praise; so the inconsideration of Lot, which Moses here describes, is deserving of censure. He ought rather to have contended with his uncle for the palm of modesty; and this the very order of nature suggested; but just as if he had been, in every respect, the superior, he usurps for himself the better portion; and makes choice of that region which seemed the more fertile and agreeable. And indeed it necessarily follows, that whosoever is too eagerly intent upon his own advantage, is wanting in humanity towards others. There can be no doubt that this injustice would pierce the mind of Abram; but he silently bore it, lest by any means, he should give occasion of new offense. And thus ought we entirely to act, whenever we perceive those with whom we are connected, to be not sufficiently mindful of their duty: otherwise there will be no end of tumults. When the neighboring plain of Sodom is compared to the paradise of God, many interpreters explain it as simply meaning, that it was excellent, and in the highest degree fertile; because the Hebrews call anything excellent, divine. I however think, that the place where Adam resided at the beginning, is pointed out. For Moses does not propose a general similitude, but says, 'that region was watered;' just as he related the same thing respecting the first abode of man; namely, that a river, divided into four parts, watered it; he also adds the same thing respecting a part of Egypt. Whence it more clearly appears, that in one particular only, this place is compared with two others.

13. But the men of Sodom . Lot thought himself happy that so rich a habitation had fallen to his share: but he learns at length, that the choice to which he had hastened, with a rashness equal to his avarice, had been unhappily granted to him; since he had to deal with proud and perverse neighbors, with whose conduct it was much harder to bear, than it was to contend with the sterility of the earth. Therefore, seeing that he was led away solely by the pleasantness of the prospect, he pays the penalty of his foolish cupidity. Let us then learn by this example, that our eyes are not to be trusted; but that we must rather be on our guard lest we be ensnared by them, and be encircled, unawares, with many evils; just as Lot, when he fancied that he was dwelling in paradise, was nearly plunged into the depths of hell. But it seems wonderful, that Moses, when he wishes to condemn the men of Sodom for their extreme wickedness, should say that they were wicked before the Lord; and not rather before men; for when we come to God's tribunal, every mouth must be stopped, and all the world must be subject to condemnation; wherefore Moses may be thought to speak thus by way of extenuation. But the case is otherwise: for he means that they were not merely under the dominion of those common vices which everywhere prevail among men, but were abandoned to most execrable crimes, the cry of which rose even to heaven, (as we shall afterwards see,) and demanded vengeance from God. That God, however, bore with them for a time: and not only so, but suffered them to inhabit a most fertile region, though they were utterly unworthy of light and of life, affords, as we hence learn, no ground to the wicked of self-congratulation, when God bears also with them for a time, or when, by treating them kindly, and even liberally, he, by his indulgence, strives with their ingratitude. Yet although they exult in their luxury, and even become outrageous against God, let the sons of God be admonished not to envy their fortune; but to wait a little while, till God, arousing them from their intoxication, shall call them to his dreadful judgment. Therefore, Ezekiel, speaking of the men of Sodom, declares it to have been the cause of their destruction, that, being saturated with bread and wine, and filled with delicacies, they had exercised a proud cruelty against the

poor, (Eze 16:49.)

14. And the Lord said unto Abram . Moses now relates that after Abram was separated from his nephew, divine consolation was administered for the appeasing of his mind. There is no doubt that the wound inflicted by that separation was very severe, since he was obliged to send away one who was not less dear to him than his own life. When it is said, therefore, that the Lord spoke, the circumstance of time requires to be noted; as if he had said, that the medicine of God's word was now brought to alleviate his pain. And thus he teaches us, that the best remedy for the mitigation and the cure of sadness, is placed in the word of God.

Lift up now thine eyes . Seeing that the Lord promises the land to the seed of Abram, we perceive the admirable design of God, in the departure of Lot. He had assigned the land to Abram alone; if Lot had remained with him, the children of both would have been mixed together. The cause of their dissension was indeed culpable; but the Lord, according to his infinite wisdom, turns it to a good issue, that the posterity of Lot should possess no part of the inheritance. This is the reason why he says 'All the land which is before thee, I assign to thee and to thy seed. Therefore, there is no reason why thou, to whom a reward so excellent is hereafter to be given, shouldst be excessively sorrowful and troubled on account of this solitude and privation.' For although the same thing had been already promised to Abram; yet God now adapts his promise to the relief of the present sorrow. And thus it is to be remembered that not only was a promise here repeated which might cherish and confirm Abram's faith; but that a special oracle was given from which Abram might learn, that the interests of his own seed were to be promoted, by the separation of Lot from him. The speculation of Luther here (as in other places) has no solidity; namely, that God spoke through some prophet. In promising the land "for ever," he does not simply denote perpetuity; but that period which was brought to a close by the advent of Christ. Concerning the meaning of the word **עולם** (olam ,) the Jews ignorantly contend: but whereas it is taken in various senses in Scripture, it comprises in this place (as I have lately hinted) the whole period of the law; just as the covenant which the Lord made with his ancient people is, in many places, called eternal; because it was the office of Christ by his coming to renovate the world. But the change which Christ introduced was not the abolition of the old promises, but rather their confirmation . Seeing, therefore, that God has not now one peculiar people in the land of Canaan, but a people diffused throughout all regions of the earth; this does not contradict the assertion, that the eternal possession of the land was rightly promised to the seed of Abram, until the future renovation.

16. And I will make thy seed as the dust . Omitting those subtleties, by means of which others argue about nothing, I simply explain the words to signify, that the seed of Abram is compared to the dust, because of its immense multitude; and truly the sense of the term is to be sought for only in Moses' own words. It was, however, necessary to be here added, that God would raise up for him a seed, of which he was hitherto destitute. And we see that God always keeps him under the restraint of his own word; and will have him dependent upon his own lips. Abram is commanded to look at the dust; but when he turns his eyes upon his own family, what similitude is there between his solitariness and the countless particles of dust? This authority the Lord therefore requires us to attribute to his own word, that it alone should be sufficient for us. It may also give occasion to ridicule, that God commands Abram to travel till he should have examined the whole land. To what purpose shall he do this, except that he may more clearly perceive himself to be a stranger; and that, being exhausted by continual and fruitless disquietude, he may despair of any stable and permanent possession? For how shall he persuade himself that he is lord of that land in which he is scarcely permitted to drink water, although he has with great labor dug the wells? But these are the

exercises of faith, in order that it may perceive, in the word, those things which are far off, and which are hidden from carnal sense. For faith is the beholding of absent things, (Heb 11:1,) and it has the word as a mirror, in which it may discover the hidden grace of God. And the condition of the pious, at this days is not dissimilar: for since they are hated by all, are exposed to contempt and reproach, wander without a home, are sometimes driven hither and thither, and suffer from nakedness and poverty, it is nevertheless their duty to lay hold on the inheritance which is promised. Let us therefore walk through the world, as persons debarred from all repose, who have no other resource than the mirror of the word.

18. And Abram removed his tent 355 Here Moses relates that the holy man, animated by the renewed promise of Gods traversed the land with great courage as if by a look alone he could subdue it to himself. Thus we see how greatly the oracle had profited him: not that he had heard anything from the mouth of God to which he had been unaccustomed, but because he had obtained a medicine so seasonable and suitable to his present grief, that he rose with collected energy towards heaven. At length Moses records that the holy man, having, performed his circuit, returned to the oak, or valley of Mare, to dwell there. But, again, he commends his piety in raising an altar, and calling upon God. I have already frequently explained what this means: for he himself bore an altar in his heart; but seeing that the land was full of profane altars on which the Canaanites and other nations polluted the worship of God, Abram publicly professed that he worshipped the true God; and that not at random, but according to the method revealed to him by the word. Hence we infer, that the altar of which mention is made was not built rashly by his hand, but that it was consecrated by the same word of God.

Footnotes

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"Familiam Lot minime fuisse parem verisimile est." The words are capable of two opposite renderings, according to the different sense in which minime is taken. It may either mean "by no means," or "at least." The Old English translation renders it in the former method. "It is very likely that the household of Lot was much less." The French version adopts the latter meaning. "Il est bien vraye -- semblable que la famille de Lot n'a pas este moindre." Neither of the versions give a very probable meaning. The context seems almost to demand the translation which the Editor has ventured to prefer. -- Ed

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"Et tetendit Abram tabernaculum." Abram pitched his tent. This seems to be the true meaning of the word ■■■■■; yet the term pitched does not so well agree with the context as the term removed; in the use of which word our translators have followed the Septuagint, (■ποσκην■σαζ,) and the Vulgate, (movens igitur tabernaculum.) The Arabic (according to the Latin translation) brings out the same sense, by a periphrasis, "Abram fixed his tent in divers places till he came and dwelt in the land of Mamre." And this is probably the true solution of the difficulty. -- Ed

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