

THE ORIGINS OF IT ALL!: A STUDY OF GENESIS
XVI.) HANDLING STRIFE
GENESIS 13:1-18

Q: I heard that some of us are familiar with church splits. In general terms, what were say have been the underlying causes?

Q: Is it always a bad thing when believers decide to 'go their own way'? Why or why not?

With these thoughts in mind, let us return to the life and journey of Abram and the lessons from it that God's word has for us today.

A.) RETURN TO WORSHIP (vv. 1-4)

- Following the experiences, mistakes and sins of Egypt, Abram chooses to get back on the Lord's path, in the Lord's way, following by faith.
- His first act upon returning to the Land, therefore, is to worship!

Q: How can Abram go from his actions in the previous section to worship here? Isn't that hypocritical? Why or why not?

NO! It's called living by faith in the LORD and His mercy and grace.

B.) SCARCITY & STRIFE (vv. 5-7)

Q: Why was there strife?

Jealousy; Greed – who was the most prosperous and who would be the most prosperous. All the intensified by the limited available land. Not only was it limited geographically, but more importantly it is limited because of the peoples already settled throughout the area. Fear, too, was a factor then.

Q: What is the relationship between strife and faith?

Incompatible, opposites, mutually exclusive! The only reason all of the above things were significant concerns was because of a lack of faith in God's promises.

Q: What parallels can we identify of strife in the church today because of limited resources?

- Pastor's time, attention
- Budget allocations
- Ministry emphases
- Facilities usage
- Giving
- Volunteerism

C.) A RESPONSE OF FAITH (vv. 8-9)

- In stark contrast to his attitude and behavior to the earlier famine and time in Egypt, Abram now reacts with great generosity, wisdom, and selflessness – all borne of a greater faith in the LORD and His fulfillment of His promises!
- Considering his past actions, it would be easy to second guess Abram's true motives here. Scripture, however, makes this clear in verse 8 when Abram begins his response with the plea: *“Please, let's not have quarreling between you or me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, since we are relatives.”*
- By all rights and cultural imperatives, Abram should have had the first and unchallenged choice over his nephew, Lot.
- Yet, Abram understood an even greater part of being a leader than it's privilege and power. And, that, is it's **responsibility!** Abram understood that his first responsibility was not to get his own way or even claim his own rights, but to ensure the peace of his people. And, further, that this is most true and important among relatives.
- Often, **the price of responsibility, leadership and preserving peace is self-sacrifice!**
- Was this not also Jesus' greatest example? And has He not made each of us brothers & sisters?
- The second significant part of this, is Abram's recognition that sometimes that greatest solution to strife is **amicable separation.**

Q: What implications might this have for us today?

There are appropriate times for Christians to agree to go their separate ways, avoid strife by limiting contact, even perhaps worshipping and ministering in different communities. *The key, however, is to remember that this must still be done amicably – with a righteous attitude before God without anger, bitterness, regret or feelings of superiority!*

D.) A RESPONSE OF SIGHT (vv. 10-13)

- Now, let's contrast Lot's sinful, humanistic response.
- The most significant difference is that whereas Abram was led by faith, Lot is led by sight!
- Second, whereas Abram deferred when his role was to claim, Lot claimed when his role was to defer.

- “***Lot looked out and saw . . . so Lot chose [for himself].***”
- He looked and saw what appeared to be the best, most lush and sustainable land.
- He trusted his own eyes, perceptions and emotions over, above and against those of his God-appointed leader and most importantly of God Himself!

Q: Where have we seen this before? What did it mean and what was the result?

The Garden – sin, deception, and selfish rebellion. Ultimately, leading to, separation, immorality, disaster and death!

- Consider these reflections from John Calvin:
“...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 fancied that he was dwelling in paradise, was nearly plunged into the depths of hell. . . 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.” (Commentaries on Genesis, Vol. I, pp. 373-374)
- “***Lot lived in the cities of the valley and set up his tent near Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were evil, sinning greatly against the LORD.***”
- Even as he settled the best of the land, Lot intentionally set up on the outskirts of the to other peoples. What is the significance of this?
- Dr. Henry Morris writes:
“... He dwelled 'in the cities of the plain' – not actually within the cities, since he still lived in his tent, but in their orbit, as it were, near enough to enjoy their advantages but not yet actually a part of their life. Christians today often follow the same path, hoping to have both the spiritual blessings of a separated walk with God and the carnal advantages of fellowship with the world. Sooner or later, however, one has to decide which it will be. He cannot have it both ways. Neither God nor the world will allow it. Lot first 'pitched his tent toward Sodom,' but soon he 'dwelt in Sodom' (Genesis 14:12), and finally 'sat in the gate of Sodom' (Genesis 19:1) as one of its business leaders. Thus began the tragedy which would ultimately destroy him and his family.”
 (The Genesis Record, pg. 304)

E.) FAITH RE-AFFIRMED (vv. 14-17)

Q: What is the LORD's response to Abram and what is it's significance?

God re-affirms His promise. His promise is dependent on His perfect will and power, NOT the will and power plays of others. Therefore, the man of faith such as Abram can give and give in the name of peace amongst family and never be able to lose God's promises or blessings!

F.) WORSHIP CONTINUED (v. 18)

- Notice, though he gave up what appeared to be the best land that was rightfully his to a greedy, immoral man and tribe and moves to a less impressive land, what is the attitude of Abram?
- He shows no bitterness, regret, anger, vows of vengeance, cries of unjust treatment or betrayal.
- He calmly plants new roots and worship the LORD!

CONCLUSION:

Dr. Allen P. Ross summarizes this lesson superbly when he writes:

“... He (Abram) was unselfish and magnanimous because he trusted the promises of God. He had learned that it was not by his own plan or power that he would come into possession, not by jealously guarding what he thought was his. God would give it to him, even if he gave it away a hundred times.”

(Creation & Blessing, pg. 289)