

LESSONS

1st Lesson: Genesis 13: 1 – 12

1. Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot was with him, to the South. 2. And Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. 3. And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai. 4. To the place of the altar, which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord. 5. Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. 6. And the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. 7. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelled then in the land. 8. So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife, I pray, between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. 9. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate, I pray, from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." 10. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as you go toward Zoar. 11. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. 12. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom.

2nd Lesson: Luke 11: 14-23

14. And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. 15. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons." 16. And others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. 17. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. 18. If Satan also be divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. 19. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 20. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 21. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. 22. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. 23. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters."

3rd Lesson: AC 1581

That 'separate yourself, now, from me' [Genesis 13: 9] means that good cannot manifest itself unless that which does not accord is reduced to nothing is clear from what has now been stated, namely that the internal man desires that that in the external which does not agree with the internal should separate itself. For until it has been separated the good

which flows in constantly from the internal man, that is, from the Lord by way of the internal man, cannot manifest itself. With regard to the separation however it should be realized that it is not a separating but a dying down. In nobody with the exception of the Lord can evil that is in the external man be separated, for once a person has acquired something it stays with him. But it does seem to be separated when it dies down, for when it dies down it seems to be reduced to nothing. Moreover it is the Lord alone who is responsible for it so dying down as to be seemingly reduced to nothing. And when it does in this way die down, goods for the first time flow in from the Lord and move the external man. The state in which angels live is such as this. All they are conscious of is that evil has been separated from them, but in fact it is purely a withholding from evil and thus a dying down in such a way as to be seemingly reduced to nothing. Consequently it is an appearance, which angels also recognize when they reflect on the matter.

S E R M O N

Separation of Abram and Lot
A Sermon by
Rev Michael E. Ferrell

Is not the whole land before you? Please separate, I pray, from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left. Genesis 13: 9

Overview of Story:

Obeying the voice of the Lord, Abram departed from his homeland and journeyed to the land of Canaan. He took with him his wife, Lot his nephew, all the servants in his household, and all of his possessions (Genesis 12: 1-5). Because a severe famine consumed the land of Canaan they all traveled to Egypt (Genesis 12: 10) where both Abram and Lot prospered.

Down in Egypt, Abram acquired riches in livestock, silver and gold while Lot accumulated an abundance of flocks, and herds, and tents. Then they departed out of Egypt and returned to the land of Canaan. As Abram and Lot began to settle in the land a problem arose: the land was not able to support them and a dispute arose between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot.

Recognizing that they were brethren, Abram proposed to Lot that he survey the land and take for himself whatever portion of the land he desired. Abram said to Lot “please separate, I pray, from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.” So Lot chose the plain of Jordan and he and Abram separated. While Lot selected all the plain of Jordan and pitched his tent toward Sodom, Abram dwelled in Canaan, eventually settling in Hebron where he erected an altar to the Lord.

Canaan, Famine and Egypt:

The land of Canaan symbolizes the Lord's kingdom in the heavens and the Lord's church on earth (AC 1585:2). While we're living here in the natural world, the land of Canaan can symbolize the Lord's heavenly influence within us as He endeavors to instill His kingdom within us now. But there's a problem: from ourselves there is a famine or "scarcity of knowledges" (AC 1460). As a result we can suffer from a "deprivation of the knowledges of good" and therefore decline into "falsities and evils" (AC 1460:3).

Consequently, we must dwell in Egypt. We learn from the Heavenly Doctrine that Egypt means knowledge that we acquire from learning (AC 1541). Our knowledge derives from arts and sciences, principles of morality, civil laws, and various other subjects a person may study while in the world. A person also gains knowledge from life experiences.

The journey of Abram and Lot speaks about spiritual realities describing the Lord's desire that we set our hearts, our minds, and our life upon heaven (i.e. go to the land of Canaan). But there is a famine in the land: of ourselves we lack sufficient means to acquire heaven for ourselves. Therefore, once we have made the decision to commit to a heavenly life we must continue our journey to Egypt: we must then engage ourselves in learning how we should live.

Riches in Egypt:

Abram became enriched while in Egypt. He acquired livestock, silver, and gold. According to the Heavenly Doctrine, these possessions of Abram represent goods, truths and the good of love (AC 1549, AC 1552). We may conclude then, that a person must endeavor to learn what is good and truthful (life in Egypt). However, a person should not only learn about heavenly qualities. He must also allow the Lord's goodness and love to dwell within his heart and mind and life.

We all have been inspired by the Lord's love within us. We often imagine the wonderful possibilities in living a heavenly life of love of the Lord and other people in the world around us. As we continue to open ourselves and receive of the Lord we may become enriched with an abundance of livestock, silver and gold. The Lord's love and goodness may dwell within us, filling us with an abundance of heavenly qualities that are necessary for our spiritual development.

Lot also became enriched while in Egypt. He acquired flocks, herds, and tents. We can know from the Lord's Word that Lot symbolizes what can be learned from the "sensuous" or "what is the same, the external" nature of a person (AC 1563). Lot can illustrate the reality that our external nature seeks pleasure and delights from worldly and earthly things (AC 1563:2). Knowledge that we learn from the plane of our "sensuous" and "external" nature can be useful. However, this is true as long as we keep knowledge derived from this source in proper perspective.

We must be careful to not allow knowledge we acquire from our senses alone and their delights to define reality for us. The flocks, herds, and tents that Lot possessed have a negative connotation. They represent within a person knowledge, pleasures and delights that are contrary to the Lord's love and goodness. Therefore they are "things [with a person] that are to be separated, and thus things that are not good" (AC 1565). If not separated there can be internal turmoil.

Conflict in Canaan:

Conflict developed between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. A spiritual reality revealed here is that goodness and truthfulness (symbolized by Abram) and knowledge gained from external, sensuous experiences (symbolized by Lot) may often disagree to such an extent that they cannot dwell together within a person. Abram represents the internal of a person while Lot symbolizes a person's external (AC 1571).

On the one hand a person recognizes the value of loving the Lord and the neighbor and therefore commits to living a heavenly life according to the Lord's commandments. On the other hand, one problem is that a person's external nature, if not subjugated, causes him to delight in worldly pleasures. Then a disagreement arises between his internal desire to obey the Lord and his external nature that seeks to pursue sinful delights (AC 1571).

This strife between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot symbolizes the conflict that can arise when a person commits to becoming someone who, from the Lord, is loving and kind even though a part of him can be perhaps callous or maybe uncaring. While heavenly qualities should dwell within us we must not neglect the fact that a part of us can prevent the Lord's love and goodness to influence the way we live.

We must be careful that we do not develop an attitude of indifference toward other people because this will incite us to harbor hatred and contempt toward them. That the land could not support both Abram and Lot tells us that a part of human nature (represented by Lot) threatens to destroy the Lord's heaven within us. Conflict between heavenly loves and hellish desires that takes place within a person must be put to rest. This kind of situation demands our immediate attention.

Separation of Abram and Lot:

Abram spoke to Lot, urging him, "please let there be no strife, I pray, between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate, I pray, from me" (Genesis 13: 8-9). Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. Haran had a son that he named Lot. Haran died and then his father Terah died. So Abram took in Lot his nephew.

The Heavenly Doctrine explains the spiritual relationship between Abram and Lot. That Abram and Lot are brethren means in the spiritual sense that because the internal and external of a person are united together, good and truth of his internal should not disagree with good and truth of his external (AC 1577:5, AC 1578). In simple terms, the

relationship between a person's internal and external should be such that no variance should exist between his internal life (intentions, thoughts) and his external life (the way he lives).

But we know a person can conceal his intentions and pretend that he is loving and kind when he is not. Please note that when He was in the world the Lord said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls" (Luke 11:17). He also taught that, "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other" (Luke 16:13).

To settle the dispute between their herdsmen Abram acted kindly toward Lot. He offered Lot an opportunity to select for himself any portion of the land that Lot desired. So they separated, Lot selecting all the plain of Jordan and pitching his tent toward Sodom while Abram remained in the land of Canaan. The separation of Abram and Lot can have two meanings for us.

The Plain of Jordan:

First, Lot observed that the plain of Jordan was well watered everywhere and therefore selected this region for himself. The Lord says in the Word that the plain of Jordan represents, with a person, all the goods and truths in his external (AC 1585). What can this mean for us? We know that we should love the Lord and our neighbors. We can visualize living according to the Word. We have on many occasions allowed the Lord's love to reflect itself in our conduct toward one another.

We often act upon good intentions and behave in a heavenly manner that is useful to our friends and neighbors. When a person truly lives a life of charity toward the neighbor there is agreement between goods and truth in the internal (heart and mind) of the person with the goods and truths in his external (his outward behavior). Lot selecting all the plain of the Jordan symbolizes this agreement between the internal and external of a person. Our internal and external, when united together, are like brethren who dwell in peace instead of conflict and animosity.

That plain of the Jordan is well watered also tells us that "goods and truths can grow there" (AC 1586). We can say that as long as we allow the Lord's goodness and truthfulness to flow into our heart, minds, and our outward life, there is no limit to the heavenly uses we may perform in service of the Lord and our neighbors. In order for this to be true we must be willing to remove any barriers that run counter to the Lord's purpose for us. There must be a separation of Abram and Lot.

Lot in Sodom:

The separation of Abram and Lot can have a second meaning for us. Lot selected the plain of Jordan. However, he pitched his tent as far as Sodom. We can know from the Heavenly Doctrine that Lot pitching his tent toward Sodom symbolizes that although

goods and truths may reside within the internal of a person, his external can be filled with evil desires and the love of self (AC 1598). We must not forget this reality of human nature.

Evil inclination, a characteristic of human nature, endeavors to express itself in outward behaviors. This endeavor produces strife between the goods and truths flowing in from the Lord and the person's external. Our external nature is prone to provide an outlet for the inclination toward evil.

The image of Lot separating from Abram symbolizes the removal of human impurities in the form of bad desires, thoughts, and behavior that are in disagreement with the Lord's love and goodness. We make this cleansing process possible when "as of self" we shun evils as sins while we participate with the Lord in our regeneration.

Let's recognize how we are and be honest with ourselves. Let's realize that in as much as we continue following the Lord a part of us can be filled with sinful loves and selfishness. As long as we accept this possibility we can then take the necessary steps to do something about it. We must allow Lot (things within us contrary to heaven) to separate. All the while we must remember that human nature, in and of itself, rejects heaven.

Concluding Ideas:

This fascinating story about the separation of Abram and Lot is about us. Inasmuch as we continue to live a life of charity we can reject anything that is contrary to the Lord's goodness and truthfulness. We can refuse to allow negative desires, thoughts, and behaviors to rise up within us and deter us from our goal of serving the Lord and our neighbor. Abram's nephew Lot must be separated. When we examine ourselves and discover something we know is wrong we can say "please separate, I pray, from me."

We can do what is good from the Lord as long as evils and falsities and all things contrary to heaven are recognized for the ugliness that they are. Then with the Lord's help we can cast these bad things away from us. As we continue serving the Lord He can make us worthy of His kingdom.

And let us pray this prayer to the Lord: "Wash me from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:2, 7).

Amen.