

Lot's choice, and its consequences  
Genesis 13:1-18; 19:12-14,23-28

Introduction

A dispute arose between the herdsmen of Abraham's livestock, and those of Lot. Obviously a dangerous situation was developing. Abraham and Lot were now so prosperous in their flocks and herds that the land could not support them all. There was quarrelling over pastures and water supplies. The danger was that the quarrelling would affect family relationships and personal relationships. Therefore a parting of the ways was inevitable. A decision had to be made, a decision that revealed much about the people involved, showing up their characters for what they were. A decision that had far-reaching consequences which no one could foresee at the time – like so many decisions.

The crucial choice which Lot made

When parting ways came, Abraham was anxious to avoid trouble. Lot was Abraham's brother's son, and probably Abraham was Lot's spiritual father. Abraham did not want to spoil that relationship. He was also perhaps worried about the impression made on onlookers. Canaanites and Perizzites lived in the land, and Abraham did not want to dishonour God by his dealings with Lot.

So Abraham acted very generously. Abraham was the more senior, and he had the promise of God that the land would be his, so he had every right to dig in his heels and insist he got the best pasture. But Abraham acted in a humble and self-effacing way, giving the younger man, his junior, the choice. He was confident that no matter what the outcome, God would not fail him and He would keep His promise.

Lot was not concerned about good manners or respect. His own interests were his main consideration. Lot looked. He saw that the plains of the Jordan were well watered, they looked the best, and he made them his own. He set off to the East. Nothing could be better for his flocks and herds. The guiding light in his choice was his material prosperity. He wanted to get on, to do the best for himself.

But as far as spiritual prosperity was concerned, it was a disastrous choice. **Lot lived among the cities of the plains and pitched his tents near. Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord** (Genesis 13:12,13). Lot was not concerned with the spiritual effect of his decision. His main interest was getting on, and doing well for himself. It is not wrong to have possessions or to seek prosperity. The problems come when this is the main concern in life, the thing that dominates our whole outlook, and all the spiritual consequences of gaining them are brushed aside.

Lot had no respect for Abraham, and in seeking his own prosperity he put himself in a position where spiritual disaster awaited him. He did not have the spiritual calibre of Abraham and he could not resist the pressures which were to come on him.

This is a very important point to consider. How far do spiritual needs play a part in our decisions? How far do we think of the spiritual consequences of our next move? Particularly in the area of marriage, the spiritual consequences of the union of a man and woman should be considered. Scripture warns against being unequally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14), and to ignore that brings spiritual disaster. Also the spiritual consequences of moving house or job – will I be moving to a new church where the Word of God is faithfully preached and where there is helpful fellowship to belong to?

Of course we could argue as Lot could have argued, “But Sodom needs a witness”. But it is folly to take a step which involves spiritual danger unless God has given clear and unmistakable guidance (c.f. Daniel placed in Babylon). If God really wants us there, He will lead us and keep us. But it is folly to pray “Lead us not into temptation”, and then walk straight into it. If God does not clearly send us to Sodom, it would be disastrous to go. Some posts and jobs are perilous, e.g. jobs overseas and in the forces, because of the loneliness and spiritual isolation which they entail. Even jobs nearer home can involve much peril because of the compromises promotion can lead to.

If God unmistakably tells us to pitch our tent close to Sodom, then it is right to go. But we need to be very sure. In every change in life we face – friendships, marriage, house, job, promotion – we must consider the spiritual consequences, not just to ourselves, but to our family, and to the work God has already entrusted to us.

#### The spiritual deterioration to which Lot’s choice led

So an irrevocable step was taken by Lot. It was a reflection of his spiritual state. He did not have depth of character or depth of relationship with God. He had leant on Abraham as a prop, and when Abraham was no longer there, when he went away from Abraham’s worship at his altar, his prayers, advice and good influence, disaster was only a matter of time.

The shallow and superficial Christian can never stand for long in spiritual dangers. No strength of character to resist pressures. Step by step Lot went into decline. From pitching his tent towards Sodom, he went to living in Sodom. Then he discovered that all that glitters is not gold. Other people cast an envious eye on the district, made war, and Lot and his possessions were captured. Thanks to Abraham’s generosity, Lot was set free. But still he had not learnt his lesson, and back to Sodom he went.

He was drawn into the social and civic life, and called the men there his “brethren”. He rose to a high position, and sat at the gate, i.e. a leading citizen. But what a mess he was in. His wife was no use or support spiritually. His children were born and brought up in a moral cesspool. They only ever knew the corruption and unnatural vice of Sodom. Their characters were so depraved that later on they got their father drunk so that they could commit incest with him.

But Lot lacked the strength of character to get up and get out of the place. Therefore he sank deeper and deeper into moral mire. There were times when his conscience was stirred. Peter says, **Lot, a righteous man** (“righteous” in a comparative sense), **who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men, for that righteous man,**

**living among them day by day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he heard and saw** (2 Peter 2:7,8). He no doubt had his better moments when he realized how wrong it all was. He knew right from wrong, and maybe he looked at the distant hills where his uncle Abraham was, and longed for the company he had once known. He may have thought of the prayers and the godly life of his uncle, and the wholesome atmosphere he created everywhere he went. He may have despised himself, and recognised what a fool he had been, and longed for his time over again. But he took no decisive steps to get out of the situation. He never said, “Enough is enough. I’m getting out of here.” He tried to protest and warned the people Sodom would be destroyed, **but his sons-in-law thought he was joking** (Genesis 19:14). There was no power in his testimony. He was too much like them now to be taken seriously.

It had been a gradual decline. He had had a good start in life. Then one compromise after another. He was out of touch with God. He had moved away from the influences that would have kept him straight. He had never established a godly home. He had put material prosperity before the welfare of his family. His children were just like everyone else, and the whole thing ends in drunkenness, debauchery, and two illegitimate children by his own daughters. What a tragic life, and there have been many “Lot’s” since.

There are many solemn warnings about the gradual falling away and spiritual decline. Slowly and imperceptibly we can grow away from God and spiritual things and our commitment. The Bible is full of warnings. **His hair is sprinkled with grey and he does not notice** (Hosea 7:9) is the sad story of the people of God in the Old Testament. The prophets gave many warnings, and many of the parables of Jesus, e.g. the parable of the sower, contain warnings. **The love of most will grow cold** (Matthew 24:12). **No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God** (Luke 9:62). **Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me** (2 Timothy 4:10). **You have forsaken your first love** (Revelation 2:4).

Like the gradual fall of autumn leaves, so hearts can gradually turn from God. “The Devil’s little strokes have felled many great oaks.” For every man the Devil captures by force of sudden temptation, he captures 10 by quiet sapping of spiritual strength in secret places. It begins with little things and leads on to more serious ones. The thief who cannot get through the door of a house may send a little boy in through an unguarded window. Then the child opens the main door from within, and the house is plundered. When people backslide openly it is because they have been backsliding inwardly for months before.

Where are we spiritually? The question is not where were we 5 years ago, or 1 year ago, but now. Drifting spiritually? Take a long hard look at yourself. Consider where things might end if you keep going as you are. Once out of God’s will, relying on your own resources, going your own way, there is no telling where it will end. Whatever you do, do not push it to the back of your mind and say things might get better somehow or other. Take decisive action – where Lot failed. Get up and go back to the Lord without delay. Turn to Him with all your heart. Acknowledge the sin, and do not excuse it. Ask for His forgiveness, and yield yourself to Him. **If we confess**

**our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins** (Philippians 1:9). He will restore your soul and lead you once again in the paths of righteousness.

But you must take decisive steps and make every adjustment necessary to do His will. Whatever has to be got rid of, do it. For your own soul's sake, and for the spiritual well being of everyone with whom you are in touch.

#### Subsequent blessing on Abraham

We will end on a positive note. Abraham was not perfect, as we know from chapter 12. But he had the root of the matter in him – quiet confidence in God, in His promise and power to overrule in every situation. His life was founded on a solid rock. Therefore he was magnanimous and generous and gracious to the younger man who owed him everything. He was not being weak when he gave the choice to Lot. There was real strength of character here. He did not have bad feelings; he was not quarrelsome or stand on his own dignity. **If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone** (Romans 12:18). **The Lord's servant must not quarrel, instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful** (2 Timothy 2:24).

When principles are not at stake, or we are not involved in giving way to wrongdoing, i.e. when only personal interests are at issue, be prepared to give way. **Let your gentleness be evident to all** (Philippians 4:5). Abraham knew his affairs were in God's hands, and God's promises were absolutely reliable. Therefore his life had a confidence, stability and depth about it. **Those who honour me, I will honour** (1 Samuel 2:30). He may have appeared to be the loser, but in the run this was not so. **For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favour and honour. No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless** (Psalm 84:11). So it was, after Lot had left with the better portion, God who sees the end from the beginning, came to Abraham and showed all the land to the North, South, East and West, and promised it to him (Genesis 13:14-17).

God kept renewing His promise and reassuring Abraham of His presence and blessing. God became an increasing reality. **Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward** (Genesis 15:1). In having God, we have everything worth having. Nothing is more important than knowing Him, being right with Him, belonging to Him, and living for Him. **Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever** (Psalm 73:25,26).

Even materially we will not lose. In the end Abraham had more than Lot ever had. **Be content with what you have. For He Himself has said, Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you** (Hebrews 13:5). There is security, safety and blessing in God and only in Him. **Blessed is the man who trusts in you** (Psalm 84:12).

*“They who trust Him wholly  
Find Him wholly true”  
(F.R.Havergal)*

Lot is a warning to all. Abraham is an example to all.