

Abraham (Part Five)

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 13-Feb-90; Sermon #BS-AB05

We are going to pick up where we left off the last time.

Acts 7:5-8 “And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.’ Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.”

When Oliver Cromwell was outlining the education he wanted for his son Richard, he said, “I would have him know a little history.” Now it is to history, specifically the history of the Israelite people, that Stephen appeals to when he is given his defense before the Jews.

If you would go through it, and I know that you have, you would see that it is a very broad approach to the history of Israel, he did not go into a great deal of detail. But I think to more appreciate what Stephen said that one has to understand that he said it during a period of great religious stress that was at least in part due to the changes that the Christians were proposing to the Jews, that these changes were challenging the very pillars of the Jewish faith at the time. Those pillars were the law, the land, and the Temple.

Stephen does not directly address the law issue as he does the land and the Temple issue. The law issue is not dealt with in Acts until the fifteenth

chapter, but here in this account of chapter 7, Stephen takes great pains to show the Jews that the land and the Temple were never really in the position of importance with God and His servants that the Jews assigned to them.

In other words, God's servants saw, that is, they understood the spirit and intent of these things as being more important than the things themselves. Now the Jews, in turn, looked upon the Christians as being dangerous innovators and they wanted to continue to hold on to the old understanding.

There is a conservatism that is good and builds. Something you never want to change from is the basic law of God and its intent. You never want to change from the Sabbath, you are conservative in that regard, you hang on to it, and it is going to cause good things to come into your life. It is something that will build.

On the other hand, there is a conservatism that is bad and destructive. Now in this case, the conservatism of the Jews was bad and destructive for them spiritually, and of course it spread out into other areas as well, because the spiritual was going to have an impact on the day-to-day life.

Now the difficult thing is perceiving the difference between the two. The best thing in most cases is to continue to walk in faith, because any time changes come, it is going to bring with it a measure of confusion and you are going to wonder which way to turn. Where should I go? What should I do? What should I hang on to? Did I really make this change? Do I believe this change? Can I support this change? Can I make it a part of my life? Are those people who are instituting this change wrong in what they are doing here?

Well, in the case of the New Testament, the ones who are proposing the changes happen to be the representatives of God, and they were correct. The Jews in this case were wrong in their conservatism, in wanting to hang on to their former ideas, their concepts regarding the land, the law, and the Temple. But perceiving the difference, when to hang on, when to let go, is sometimes very difficult, and the best thing to do whenever the confusion arises is to continue going ahead in faith, be patient, and examine the fruits.

Now we are going to look at something in regard to Abraham that impacts this because Abraham lived by faith. Back in Hebrews 11th chapter, there appears a couple of statements, that , if you think about them they seem to be somewhat contradictory.

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Just hang on to that. You see there could have been in Abraham's life some of that confusion that I was telling you about that he did not know where he was going. I think that where faith was involved there is always going to be a measure of that element involved.

Hebrews 11:9-10 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Hang on to that thought and let us go to verse 17.

Hebrews 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Now it is this phrase, "accounting that God was able," that seems to be somewhat contradictory to verse 8, that "he went out not knowing where he went." That accounting, my Bible has a marginal reference that says "considering," which I do not think is quite as accurate as "accounting." But this really is an accounting or bookkeeping, and it means just what you think it means, he added it up.

In this situation with Isaac, Abraham evaluated the command that was given to him by God. He added up the evidence that he knew from the things that

God had spoken to him. Now part of that evidence was that God had made a promise and that Isaac was a partial fulfillment of that promise. That he was the promised seed, through whom the rest of the promise was going to be fulfilled. God said to slay this one, to sacrifice him. Sacrifice the promised son and therefore, if Abraham did that, then how is the promise going to be fulfilled?

How would you evaluate, how would you add up a situation like that if you were in Abraham's circumstance? Well, you would have to have done it the way Abraham did. That is, beginning with a known fact, that it is impossible for God to lie. That God had the power to carry out everything that He said He would do. God had promised; therefore He was going to carry out exactly what He said. So, the answer to Abraham's dilemma was either one or two alternatives. Either God was going to resurrect Isaac after Abraham sacrificed him, or He was going to have to provide something else to sacrifice. It had to be one or the other if God's promise was going to be fulfilled through Isaac. So, he added up the evidence that was available to him, he stepped out then, walked to Mount Moriah, probably turning it over in his mind as he went in that direction, but he was already moving, and it was already a done thing. A finished work, as it were, as he was already moving to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac.

Now understanding it that way, these two verses can easily be reconciled. This is what is important to you and me. Abraham did not have all the evidence that he needed in order to reach a firm picture, vision, understanding of how every circumstance was going to work out in which God was involved. But there always was enough evidence available for him to step out in faith trusting God that God would provide. The difficult situation indeed would be resolved, and that Abraham would be able to meet or to do all that was required of him.

So it is with you and me today. We often do not know where we are going, and there are times of confusion, times that doubts assail us, and we wonder, and we fret and we worry. Being in this work keeps us on edge. But as with Abraham, there is always enough evidence that this is the work of God, that God will direct the faithful and bring them through for their good.

God kept Abraham on edge through almost constant movement, and He had to do it that way with the man who was going to become the father of the faithful, so that the spiritual lesson for us as being pilgrims would be clearly visible, it would be written and there would be a word picture there for me and you to see and we could understand the lessons of faith.

Now go back to Acts 7. What Stephen emphasized about Abraham to the Jews is very important to you and me. And that is that though Abraham entered into his promised inheritance, he did not live in it as if living in it was the consummation of God's purposes for him. Now watch what was emphasized.

Acts 7:5 And God gave him no inheritance in it . . .

But everybody here and everybody there knows that Abraham was faithful in the land even though he never received it as an inheritance. Therefore the conclusion has to be that Abraham obeyed regardless of the fact that God had not yet come through with the promised inheritance. So just being on the land was not the consummation, was not the fulfillment of God's purpose for him. Abraham saw that. Why? Because he perceived the intent of the land and the intent of his moving about. The Jews did not see that, but Abraham did. What Abraham cherished as most important was the covenant and the personal relationship that God had established with him, whatever Abraham's state or place of residence.

It was because that was what Abraham cherished is why he was the friend of God. Brethren, it is the relationship that counts with God, not the state we find ourselves in. God puts us through or He allows us to fall into a variety of conditions in order to determine whether it is the relationship that counts with us.

Abraham did not abandon the relationship because he never got a chance to settle down and be like other normal people.

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.

Paul had to learn this, and I am sure that Abraham had to learn this. I do not mean to imply that Abraham made no mistakes along the way. It was something he had to learn. We have to learn that God means what He says, *that He really is with us*. He is in us, and we have to learn that the state He allows us to be in is not necessarily a measure of His regard for us.

Paul wrote this from prison. Was the fact that he was in prison a measure of the regard that God had for him? No. He was one of the greatest workers on behalf of God. God loved him very deeply. God honored the man by allowing his writing to become part of His Word. It had nothing to do with His regard for Paul except that He might have had regard for the apostle Paul's health or whatever and decided that this was the time for the apostle Paul to rest in prison, or he would have burned himself out sooner. This was the time for the apostle Paul to be in prison so that he could write letters and take care of the churches, which maybe he could not have done if he was out free, parading around doing more preaching of the gospel.

So his state, his condition had little to nothing to do with the regard that God had for the apostle Paul. But Paul had to learn that, and it is something that all of us have to learn as well.

Philippians 4:12-13 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

That was Paul's acknowledgment in that last verse that his sufficiency was not within himself but rather his sufficiency was within Christ and His abilities, strengths, or powers. To be able to be content in whatever state that he found himself in was a result of the relationship he had with Jesus Christ, not because he had the sufficiency within himself. In other words, God indeed had supplied his need.

Back to Abraham again. Abraham had to learn this lesson as well and I think that it is very interesting to notice what Abraham stated at the conclusion of what was undoubtedly the supreme trial of his life and that is when he was commanded to sacrifice Isaac.

Genesis 22:13-14 Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide.

God had provided. I think that pretty much sums up a major lesson that Abraham learned through the entirety of his one-hundred years of living by faith. God did provide. We have to learn this too.

Our movement or pilgrimage is not so much one of moving from place to place, though for some of us that is an element in our life, but for most of us, it is not. We do not move from place to place like Abraham did. Rather, it is a movement from one circumstance to another, or one event, or one situation to another.

I Corinthians 10:13 shows that Christians, by and large, move through the same basic circumstances as their neighbors in the world. However, there is one major difference, and that is, God is with *us*. God wants to see how we are going to react. He wants to see whether it is the relationship with Him that matters most to us, just as He did with Abraham. Abraham set the pattern; Abraham passed the test. He showed God, in an overall sense, it was not the land, it was not the promised seed. It was the relationship that Abraham valued.

Now what is it that you want most? Well, maybe it is peace and safety, maybe it is a life of ease, maybe it is good health. All these are part and parcel of the application of the promises of God. Maybe you want to escape to a place of safety. Again, you see, that is something that God offers to us. Maybe it is salvation itself. What is it that is important to you? Well, God wants to see how we are going to react. He wants to see whether it is the relationship with Him that matters most to us.

This question arose at the very beginning with Adam and Eve. They rejected the opportunity of a relationship with God. They rejected the Tree of Life, listened to Satan, and took the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. What was the result of the path they chose? Well, the relationship was broken away, they were separated from God.

In a sense if you understand it, this is the question. Are you willing to live life on God's terms because the relationship means that much to you and me? If we react according to faith, faith in God, then God will create His holy righteous character in us. He will write it on our heart and mind.

So, there will be times of poverty. Will we tithe despite that, when we have the opportunity to earn money because we know that not tithing is to steal, and that is sin, and sin works to destroy the relationship with God? That is what happened in the Garden of Eden. They stole from the tree, and it broke off the relationship.

Now which do we value most, the relationship or prosperity? There are going to be opportunities to lust, to lie, to steal, to commit adultery, fornicate, dishonor parents, break the Sabbath, commit idolatry. There will be opportunities galore to sacrifice ourselves in service doing good to our neighbor. How will we react? Have we gotten the picture? Do we agree with it? Are we taking positive steps to do something about it, because we value the relationship with God into whose Family we are born and whose Son we are to marry?

Now, answer this question. If you had a child who was beloved of you in every way possible, to a degree that we cannot understand, would you want to give your child to another person who did everything possible it seems to break the relationship, to mar it, to destroy it, who lied, who stole, who had deep relationships with others not of the same mind? I do not think you would want to give your son or daughter to someone like that at all. Someone who rejected your family and your ways in favor of some other way.

Restoring a relationship is at the heart and core of it. Abraham passed the test with flying colors by living by faith. When the opportunities to do these things occur, most of the time, he did very, very well. There were times that he did not do so well. But Abraham was learning too, he was growing in faith and growing in grace. We see some of his mistakes. But he passed the test with flying colors. So he is the father of the faithful now, and he is a pattern for you and me.

Now let us go back to Abraham again in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:10-16 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you.” So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh’s house. He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

I am beginning to believe more strongly that there is a possibility that Abraham made a mistake by going into Egypt. Was he forced there by the famine? I do not think that I can say with exactness, but you might remember when we read from Josephus, he said that the famine was in Egypt as well. He also said that the Egyptians circumvented the situation by digging a lot of wells all over the country. There is no indication in this account that Abraham dug any wells, but later in Genesis, both he and Isaac dug wells it seems all over the place. God later in the book of Genesis describes Canaan as being well-watered. To me that seems to indicate that there might have been water there even in the drought.

Now turn with me back to Hebrews 11, back to that faith chapter again. A little bit later there is a string of examples of faith given in verse 30, and quite a number of people who exhibited faith toward God are mentioned there. Rehab and Gideon and Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel.

Hebrews 11:34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

There were all kinds of difficult situations they found themselves in and they turned to God in faith and God delivered.

Hebrews 11:35 Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Now it is that “not accepting deliverance” that I want you to think about just a bit. I want you to remember that Abraham, here in Genesis 12:10, is fairly early in his conversion and I do not mean to call him into account. It is very easy to do that, when one is looking at a couple thousand years back and we are not going through the situation. I am just pointing out that he, like us, just might have taken the convenient way out of an admittedly difficult situation in which he failed to trust God long enough.

Do you remember Jesus’ words there in Matthew 24:13, where after talking, prophesying about what is undoubtedly going to be one of the most difficult periods of time that humanity will ever have to face? Talking about wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes in different places and famines and disease epidemics and the love of many waxing cold, and He says these are just the beginning of sorrows and there will be great tribulation as never was before. And then He says those ominous words, “He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved.”

The trials that God allows you and me to fall into require a great deal of endurance. There is a lot of waiting, times of confusion, not having all the answers, being in doubt. So it puts a great deal of pressure on us. It seems, brethren, that in every case, that a door, I will call it that, seemingly opens that enables us, to somehow or another circumvent the situation quite easily. But the question is, is that the way in which we should go? Maybe it is, and maybe it is not.

Now I think that this is what happened with Abraham here. That there was a convenient way out of this situation, and I do not mean to demean this situation at all. I mean, if you have a retinue there of some 2,000 or so

people, and you are concerned about them living, water in a period of famine is a crisis situation. Abraham was in that kind of situation. Is it possible that he did not trust God sufficiently, long enough.

Let us consider a few things. First of all, let us start with the symbolism, because there might be a lesson here. He had just left the area of Babylon. God said, "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you." Now it seems that he no sooner gets there, a crisis arises right after his calling, and he wants to turn away from the land, "Hey, this isn't so good here, this isn't what I bargained for, I didn't expect it to be quite this difficult." But he comes out of the land of confusion, Babylon, and went right into the land of Egypt.

Egypt is a Greek name for that land. Egypt in the Bible, if you would look into the Hebrew, is called Mizraim. Mizraim means straitened, as strait is the way. It means difficult. Depending upon the application it can mean besieged or imprison. A city is besieged, and when you are in a besieged city surrounded by the enemy, you are in a strait situation, you are in prison. The enemy has you surrounded, and your life may be hanging in the balance, because you are either going to starve to death because of the lack of food, or the enemy is going to get in there and possibly kill you. Because they want the city and they want to subdue your country.

So the symbolism shows that Abraham went right out of confusion and right into prison. That does not sound like he is making any ground, does it. We might also ask the question. He was in the land of the Canaanites. What did the Canaanites do for water? They had to live too. Well, we might say they went to the Jordan River. If they went to the Jordan River, is it possible that Abraham could have gone to the Jordan River as well? I do not know, just suppositions. It indicates to me that there were possibilities that were not explored.

We also have to begin to look at, just for a moment anyway, that it seems as though when he was in Egypt, according to the biblical account, according to what God chose to reveal what happened there, things did not go very well for him. They did not go well at all. This of course is where he was led to

deny Sarah as his wife. The only reason that things worked out there as well as they did is because God made it work. God is able to make lemonade out of lemons.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

At any rate, it just does not appear to me that Abraham waited very long for God to supply, or that he did a great deal, to find water.

I want you to notice back there in Genesis that Abraham told a half-truth in order to avoid a trial. He is just coming from one trial, and he knew enough about Egypt that he was heading for another. Now there is nothing wrong with avoiding a trial. In fact God says,

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.

But telling half lies is not the way to avoid a trial. Abraham apparently forgot the consequences of sin, he forgot about the promises of God, he forgot about the possible defilement of Sarah, all in an effort to protect himself. Does that sound familiar? Have you ever done anything like that? I mean, have you ever told anything that was less than the truth in order to protect yourself, in order to make yourself to look good in the eyes of the people to whom you were speaking? We all do things like that. Telling half-truths, or lies, is not the way to avoid a trial. Just as God in His mercy saved them from their weaknesses.

This is one of the few times in the Bible where Abraham is shown getting off the track. The reason he was doing it is because he thought that he was gaining for himself greater safety and liberty. He lost his footing regarding Sarah, he was not trying to gain the Kingdom of God, but he was trying to gain the world. The result was a stinging rebuke by the pagan Egyptian.

Genesis 12:17-20 But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. And Pharaoh

called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way.” So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

I get the picture of Abraham being escorted right out of the country. That is the way he got rid of the plagues.

Now think about this. What a humbling experience that must have been for Abraham. A Christian ought to have power over other people’s consciences for good. In other words, when it comes to good and evil, we ought to make them feel a measure of guilt for doing evil if we do nothing except not participate in what they are doing. And if we do not, we are a poor witness for God. We do not have to change them, but we should make them feel a measure of revulsion for us, want to get rid of us, expel us, want us out of their presence, however you might want to put it, not want us around.

Abraham’s expulsion here, I think at least shows you and me that the world will not have us among them. If we do not leave, they will force us out. What it shows then is Abraham making a turn and once again escaping from the world.

Now in Genesis 13, the weeding-out process continues in the separation from Lot. Let us read about the first three or four verses.

Genesis 13:1 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South.

They were actually traveling northeast here, and the reference of going to the south was going south of the Promised Land to the Negev, probably in the area of Beersheba, if your familiar with a map of Israel.

Genesis 13:2-4 Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. 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, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

Abraham separated from Ur, was separated from his father's house, from Terah, he was separated from Egypt now, and now he is going to be further separated from his kindred, from Lot his nephew. It is interesting to note, as we look at this in passing (we will get to it a little bit later here), but it was not until after Abraham was separated from Lot, that God told Abram to "lift up your eyes and see the land which I am going to give you." It is entirely possible, since the promised seed had not been given yet, that Abraham might have had Lot in the back of his mind as a possible heir. God is going to show Abraham that Lot is not the heir and they are going to separate.

Now Lot was a good, I would not say overall, but a good carnal minded man. There was a difference between Abram and Lot. The Bible says (it is interesting one of the ways it shows the differences), is that Abram walked with God, but it does not say that Lot walked with God. It always says that Lot was with Abram. It's an interesting little thing.

Genesis 12:4 So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him.

Then we just read in Genesis 13:1 "and Lot with him."

Now he was tagging along, Lot walked with Abraham. But spiritually, Lot just did not have it. But for a while, as long as he was walking with Abraham, it appears as though he might have had it. He was at one, but it could not last.

I think that it is interesting as it shows in verses 3 and 4, that God brought Abraham back from the place in which he swerved to go down into Egypt. I think there is a lesson there. Sometimes, brethren, we have to backtrack almost to the very beginning, back on the bean so we can continue our journey to the right destination. I want to show you a couple of places in the New Testament where the apostle shows that very clearly.

Hebrews 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

They had to go back to the very beginning. There is another example in the letter to the church at Ephesus.

Revelation 2:5 “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.”

That is another reason, another piece of evidence, why I think that Abram made a mistake in going down to Egypt. It was not a continuation of the journey except that it was a digression off to the side. God made it work out, and Abram learned some things from it, but it was not something that was necessary for his perfection. It does not seem that God was very involved in leading Abram to that area.

Now in Christianity, one is either moving forward, digressing off to the side, or being swept backward. There is no standing still. When Abram returns to Bethel, he has much more understanding, and with it he is able to point to a further separation of his kindred Lot.

The different focus in each of these men’s lives is very clearly seen. As I said before, I think that Lot was a good man, a good man carnally, but his focus was in this world. When the opportunity arose from which he could comfortably ease himself out from Uncle Abraham, he took it and departed. The situation arose when there was conflict between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot, and Abram felt very badly about this, and he did not want to have that conflict going on. He was a man of peace, and he made this proposition to Lot and Lot jumped at it.

Now let us recapitulate before we go on, because I want to give you another reason why I think Abraham made a mistake in going down to Egypt. Did you notice whenever you read through Genesis 12:10, that there was no mention of an altar, no mention of worship, no mention of prayer, no

mention of walking with God, no mention of communion with God. God is mentioned only in plaguing Pharaoh for having taking Sarai into his harem. To me, the absence of these things is indicative of Abram's closeness to God then. And it is only after he leaves Egypt and he gets back into the land of promise in Bethel, which means "house of God," that an altar and calling on God is mentioned, all of those in Genesis 13:3-4.

It may seem unimportant, but he was off the track for a while. The chapter then closes with Mamre, which means "vision," and Hebron, which is even better in its meaning, Hebron means "join together," it means "fellowship," which is indicative of the state of Abraham's relationship with God. I think what God is showing us is that there is little or no fellowship with Him when one is in a state or condition of worldliness.

Have you ever had a friend or relative or whatever who has been in prison? How much fellowship can you have with someone in prison? I have visited prisons very frequently, and even to get inside of them is a trial. There is almost no fellowship with people who are in prison, I mean literally in prison. Virtually every person who I have ever visited in prison has been so dying for contact with someone on the outside they will do almost anything in order to have contact with people on the outside.

Now just reverse the situation where it is God who is on the outside and the person has imprisoned themselves in the world. See, God is showing us that there is little or no fellowship with someone who is in Egypt, who is in straitness, who is besieged, who is in prison. You have to be free. I hope you have understanding with what I am getting at.

If a person sees little or no difference between Pharaoh's kingdom and God's Kingdom, and they are not agreed enough to be walking with God, some repentance and turning around, which is what Abraham did, is in order. He got back on the track once again in the Promised Land.

Turn with me to Exodus 8:25. This episode occurred following the fourth plague. It was following the third plague that God said that He would make a difference between Egypt and Goshen.

Exodus 8:23 “I will make a difference between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall be.”

Then the swarms of flies came. And Pharaoh reacted.

Exodus 8:25-27 Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God in the land.” And Moses said, “It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us? We will go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He will command us.”

I mentioned just a little bit earlier that principle in regard to Lot and Abraham, and also in regard to Egypt and Abraham, is that righteousness and evil do not mix. The world and God’s way do not mix and that if there is not a going out as God shows here in type, then there will be an expulsion because the two do not agree with one another. The two ways, the two principles, the two spirits are diametrically opposed to one another. They are an abomination to each other.

That is why Moses, when he was told by Pharaoh that they could sacrifice to their God in the land of Egypt, refused because he knew that what they would be doing, what they would be practicing as part in their worship of God would be such an abomination to the Egyptians that something bad was going to happen. There would be a lot of bloodshed, there would be expulsion, there would be a lot of hard and difficult things to endure. Moses understood this principle. The church and the world are so opposed to one another, that they are an abomination to one another.

Let us pursue this a little bit further. Go back with me to Galatians 5. I am doing this because I want you to see a major reason why Lot chose to do what he did, and why God says there has to be a leaving of this world.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Paul is showing here that the two spirits are in deep and irreconcilable conflict. The way Paul uses the words here is that the flesh does no good and does not desire good, whereas the Spirit does no evil and indeed opposes anything that will displease God. In addition to that, the flesh keeps us from doing the good that we want to do, as the last part of that verse says, and it must be overcome.

The flesh will be subdued as we grow in grace, but it will never be eliminated as long as we are in the flesh. So, we cannot afford to be passive in this war. If we are passive, brethren, we are going to be swept away. If we put forth just a little bit of effort it is very likely we are going to digress back into the world.

Jesus said the Kingdom of God is taken by force. He said violent men press into it, implying that they take it by force. In other words there has to be a great deal of effort and energy expended, with the help of the Spirit of God, in order to keep the flesh, human nature, from dragging us, sweeping us away back into evil. The two cannot abide with one another, and if we allow them to abide with one another the first thing you know we are going to be enveloped right back in to prison, right back into the confusion. We cannot afford to be passive in this war. We must be consciously choosing God's way or we are going to be swept away by human nature.

Now again back in Exodus 8. What was the particular abomination that was in question here? Israel sacrificed a bull and a lamb, and it was the command of God and they looked upon it that way. It did not in anyway affect their conscience, their sensibilities, their sense of right and wrong to do it that way. However, the Egyptians worshipped the bull and they cannot understand killing it and it is an abomination to them. Now in these simple pictures or terminologies God is showing that the carnal minds just does not see things the same way that the mind of God sees them. It does not see them in the correct intent.

We are getting right back to the thought from the very beginning of this study when I said to you that what set Abraham and the other servants of God apart is that they saw the intent. That was the reality. The reality was not literally the land itself; the reality was not literally the Temple itself. They saw the intent that God had within them and so they were able to direct and conduct their lives with the intent in mind, rather than the literal building or the literal land. So, the intent of God meant more to them.

The Egyptian does not see things that way at all, and so it is an abomination to them. It is the same way today. Nothing has changed in this regard. The world does not understand, it ridicules, even hates what we do, and maybe what we do not do. If the church, or us as individuals, allows Egypt, the world to impact on us in this way, we cease to worship God.

I think that it is interesting that righteousness and sin both produce a separation. But righteousness will eventually produce unity, but sin, though there may be a unity in sin, it is always going to end up destroying, and it is going to produce the ultimate in separation, which is death.

Let us go to Jeremiah 44 and we will look briefly at an example of a people who allowed Egypt to creep into their life, and then when the opportunity arose, they fled into Egypt in order to save their lives. I think that it is a vivid example of the way the carnal mind looks, perceives, the circumstances, the events that it is going through.

This story begins quite a bit earlier, but we will just pick it up very briefly in chapter 42. Nebuchadnezzar is sweeping down from the north and conquering one city after another, one land after another. Judah has fallen, a small group of people have escaped, and they are wondering what to do, where to go, what should they do with their lives. So, this group of people appeal to Jeremiah the prophet and ask him to pray to God to ask Him for guidance as to what they should do.

What we find in chapter 42 (we are not going to go through the whole thing), but if you have a New King James, it says in the subtitle “The Flight to Egypt Forbidden.” God’s response is, “No, you’ll be safe in the land, stay right here. I’ll allow you to put some roots down. Nebuchadnezzar will allow

you to be, everything will be alright. But don't go down into Egypt." God knew what was going to happen, that Nebuchadnezzar just was not going to stop, that he was going to go down into Egypt and he was going to conquer that area as well. You are much safer staying here people, where the war is essentially over, you can be safe here under Nebuchadnezzar, yes, but that's better than going down into Egypt and dying.

Well they refused the advice from God through Jeremiah and they went down into Egypt anyway.

Jeremiah 44:1 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who dwell in the land of Egypt, who dwell at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying, . . .

Then begins a recounting of why they were in this predicament of being down in Egypt in the first place. Let us pick it up in verses 13-19.

Jeremiah 44:13 "For I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, . . .

Big deal, you see, you ran away from that kind of thing, and now here it is, it is chasing you and you are going to get it anyway.

Jeremiah 44:14-17 . . . so that none of the remnant of Judah who have gone into the land of Egypt to dwell there shall escape or survive, lest they return to the land of Judah, to which they desire to return and dwell. For none shall return except those who escape.' " Then all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense to other gods, with all the women who stood by, a great multitude, and all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying: "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you! But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem.

They could have had their lives. They could have been living reasonably well up in their own homeland. Boy, human nature is never satisfied, is it. Just look at the way they look at this. They heard what Jeremiah said. Jeremiah told them that the very reason you are here is because you invited Egypt into your lives while you were in Judah. And they were practicing these things, these abominations while they were in the land of Judah. Now look at the reason. Meanwhile they were sacrificing to the queen of heaven and pouring out their drink offerings to her.

Jeremiah 44:17 For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble.

“I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.” See, the carnal mind sees that which is physical. It does not see, does not understand, it does not comprehend the spiritual nor its intent. Now you can be sure that when Jeremiah was in Judah, before Nebuchadnezzar got there, he was telling these people why Nebuchadnezzar was going to conquer them. They did not repent there, they did not see it, because their bellies were full. They misjudged their state, their condition, as being one of having God’s favor simply because they had plenty to eat, clothes on their back, and a house to live in.

Jeremiah 44:18 But since we stopped burning incense . . .

See, it was stopped, cut off, because the warfare prohibited it.

Jeremiah 44:18-19 . . . to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine.” The women also said, “And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make cakes for her, to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands’ permission?”

A vivid example to me of the people who allowed Egypt—the world—to creep into their worship of God and they began to misjudge terribly the situation because they were focusing on the wrong things.

Now back to Genesis 13. Look at what God reports about Lot.

Genesis 13:10 And Lot lifted 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.

He looked out at Sodom and Gomorrah, the fertile plain, and he saw Egypt. You see, right there, was Sodom's attractiveness to Lot. It was like the land of Egypt.

I also think that it is interesting to note that Lot did not separate from Abram while they were in Egypt. I think that it is probably because there were enough diversions there, especially to satisfy Lot's taste, to keep them from getting into one another's hair. But when they were once again in a state where they had to rub shoulders, trouble arose. Abraham's faith, his righteousness, was too much for Lot to take. I am sure that it convicted him, it angered him so much that when the opportunity presented itself, he quickly took what undoubtedly, carnally, looked so good to him, it appealed to him, and off he went for it.

He should have deferred to the patriarch. But even though Abram offered it to him, he should have said, "No Abram, I cannot do that. You are the patriarch, the land is promised to you, you do with it as it pleases you and I will take whatever you decree." But it shows the mind of the man and what a difference there was spiritually between Abram and Lot. Lot's focus was on the here and now, Abram's focus was on the Kingdom of God. See, the relationship with God meant so much to him that he was not going to purposely put himself back into the world.

I think what happened is that Lot chose to hide himself in Sodom, I mean hide himself because Abram's character, Abram's righteousness, Abram's faith was convicting him and it was something that he did not want to be around. So rather than searching his own weaknesses in the presence of Abram and overcoming them, he took off for Sodom. Much easier to live there.

Abram was a man of faith. He was content to appear weak in the mountains with God, rather than appear strong without Him down in the strongholds of evil there in Sodom. He chose a more lonely path, but he certainly chose a better path.

Genesis 13:11-12 Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom.

Now if we would go back through those verses again, we would find that Lot saw, Lot chose, Lot journeyed, Lot took up residence. By sight, by self-will, he makes his home back in the evil unclean world.

Then Lot leaves, and then the Lord appears and He commands Abram to do the same things that Lot did in verse 10. He said, “Lift up your eyes.”

Notice the changes that have occurred in the promise.

Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.

Just the land that He will show him. Now Abram is in the land:

Genesis 12:7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.”

First I show, now I will give.

Genesis 13:14 And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: . . .

Now I think that Abram sees clearly that Lot is not intended to be an heir, it is very clear in his mind, God reinforces it by appearing, and Lot has separated from him.

Genesis 13:14-15 “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.

It is not just given to the descendants; it is given forever. And now the promise involves eternal life. So, then He turns and says,

Genesis 13:17-18 Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.” Then Abram moved his tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre [which means vision], which are in Hebron [which means fellowship], and built an altar there to the Lord [which indicates worship].

God commanded Abram to walk. It indicates learning by experience on this pilgrimage. Learning by experience that I am with you, that I am fellowshiping with you, and that I will provide for you.