

(Genesis) 26 - -- the Lure of the Invisible and Abram's Choice

by S. Lewis Johnson

The sermon explores Abram's faith journey, the significance of his choices, and the importance of returning to God through repentance and worship.

Duration: 52:22

Scripture: Genesis 13:7, Psalm 105:14

Topics: "Abram"

Description

In this sermon on the book of Genesis, the preacher focuses on the story of Abram and his journey back to the holy land after facing difficulties in Egypt. Despite Abram's previous failures and humiliation, God shows him mercy and restores him to divine fellowship. As Abram returns to the land, strife arises between his and Lot's herdsmen over the land. The preacher emphasizes that strife is a common occurrence among human beings, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Transcript

The scripture reading for today is Genesis chapter 13. So if you have your Bibles with you, turn with me to Genesis chapter 13. I want to read the entire chapter.

You remember the context. Abram has been given his great promises after the vision in Ur of the Chaldees. He has finally reached the land, entered into the land, found a famine in the land, left the land evidently without asking the Lord concerning the divine directions, went down into Egypt, there was humiliated because of the deception that he sought to practice against Pharaoh in connection with Sarah, his wife.

And now being forced out of the land of Egypt, sent home by the heathen Pharaoh, Abram retraces his way back to the land, back to the beginning of the deepest relationship that he had enjoyed with the Lord. So we begin reading at verse 1. So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him and lot with him. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold.

Completely prepared for inflation. Lots of gold, silver. And he went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning between Bethel and Ai.

Now if you'll look over on the other page, Genesis chapter 12 verse 8, there you read, then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. So Moses refers to this.

Abram has made his way back now to the place where he had been in his first penetration of the land. Verse 4. To the place of the altar which he had made there formerly and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. Now Lot who went with Abram also had flocks and herds and tents and the land could not sustain them while dwelling together for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together.

And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Trouble down on the ranch and the difficulty was pasturage for the livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.

Then Abram said to Lot, Please let there be no strife between you and me nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If to the left then I will go to the right or if to the right then I will go to the left.

And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan that it was well watered everywhere. This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zohar.

So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan while Lot settled in the cities of the valley and moved his tents as far as Sodom.

Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord and it's obvious that Moses makes a great deal over that. He singles that out for special attention in order to draw our attention to the implications of the choice of Lot. And the Lord said to Abram after Lot had separated from him, Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are northward and southward and eastward and westward for all the land which you see.

I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can be numbered. We often make these comments because it's often misunderstood that when we speak in the Bible of the grace of God and the grace of God in his choice of us, there are many who do not understand this.

I was sitting at table after the first message this morning just a few moments ago in which a lady who's been attending the chapel for a number of years now commented upon the fact that she had grown up in an evangelical church and did not know anything about the doctrines of election and how much it had come to mean to her. But often when doctrines such as this are mentioned, the doctrine of the grace of God, his sovereign grace in his work in our hearts, and that he passes by others, ones are inclined to be very critical and say, Well, evidently the kind of God that is proclaimed there is a kind of God who has just a few little groups of people clustered together in heaven, in all the vastness of heaven, not realizing that there are many other people up there beside them. You've heard the stories.

But you see that the biblical account is quite contrary to that. The biblical account proclaims the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God in his activity in the hearts of the saints, but at the same time lets us know that

the numbers in heaven are going to be so great that they cannot be numbered. We read here they are to be Abram's descendants as the dust of the earth.

And so if you can number the dust of the earth, then you can number the number of the saints of God who shall be in heaven throughout all eternity. We do not proclaim a God who saves a few, but he saves such vast numbers of people, not all, but such vast numbers of people that they cannot be numbered. They come from every tribe, kindred, tongue, and nation.

We read in the last book of the Bible. So when we talk about the grace of God, it is wonderful grace not only in its special salvation of us, but also in the breadth and amplitude of its effects. Now we read, The Lord said to Abram, Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth, for I will give it to you.

Put your feet on it, Abram. Tangible. Then Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron.

And there he built an altar to the Lord. May God bless this reading of his word. Our subject for this morning in the exposition of the book of Genesis is the lure of the invisible and Abram's wise choice.

In our last study of the book of Genesis, in the latter part of Genesis chapter 12, we saw that Abram went down into Egypt and there, having deceived Pharaoh, he was humiliated when the deception was discovered, and then he was sent out. It was a shameful way for the great example of faith, that which Abraham is, to live, and consequently it is obvious that Abram did not appear to great advantage in the latter part of that chapter. But nevertheless, in spite of that, it became a singular instance of sovereign mercy to the undeserving, because by the sovereign providence of God, Abram and Sarah and Lot and their family were sent out of Egypt back into the land.

Abram's experience is referred to in passages in the Old Testament, and one of them is Psalm 105 verses 14 and 15, a text that I referred to last Sunday morning. He, that is God, permitted no man to oppress them, and he reproveth kings for their sakes. Do not touch my anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm, the psalmist wrote.

And then he also wrote in Psalm 103 and verse 10 in a text that we sometimes quote, he has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. We generally speaking have applied that to the fact that he has justified us in spite of our sinning, in spite of the guilt and condemnation of our sins, and of course that is true. But it is also true that in the Christian life we find great manifestations of the mercy of God in his providence toward us when we have failed him.

And that appears to be the case in Abram's descent into Egypt when the famine came in the land. It's interesting to me too that Pharaoh was so anxious to get Sarah and Abram out of Egypt that he did not even bother to retrieve from them the dowry that he had given to Abram for his marriage to Sarah. Such is the delivering power of God.

But this property that Abram acquired in the land of Egypt would contribute to the new problem that he faced. For when he came back into the land, a dispute arose over the question of the properties that he and Lot possessed. And when the difficulties arose between the two groups of herdsmen or the two groups of shepherds, there arose the temptation to Abraham to self-assertion.

And it is that that we shall look at particularly when we look at this event, because Abram then was faced with the decision, shall I do what I wish to do, or shall I permit Lot to have first choice of the territory? I

think that we have here an illustration of the truth that is expressed in one of Paul's statements which means a lot to me. I think as a matter of fact that this statement that the Apostle makes in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 17 and 18 is, contains the principle by which Abram was to live his life, the principle by which we are to live our lives too. But that text says, For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. Might have seemed to Abraham that this whole enterprise of leaving Ur of the Chaldees, of then proceeding north to Haran, finally coming into the land, and then finding in the land famine, and now further difficulties between the herdsmen of Lot and Abram. It might have seemed to Abram that everything was going wrong and perhaps it would have been well if he had not come back, come into the land at all.

Perhaps he should have stayed right there in Ur of the Chaldees. Well, we shall see that the experiences of Abram, of course, lead him to different convictions later, but I can imagine that he might have thought at this time that everything might well have been a mistake. When we turn now to the 13th chapter and we read of the account of Abram's return, of the difficulties that faced him there and of the decision that was made.

Let me say just a word about Lot. Lot is a rather significant character, and I think that occasionally Lot's... the influence of Lot and the place of Lot is not fully understood. Now, Lot has sometimes been likened to Plaubal.

Plaubal, remember, was one of those that, with Christian, began to make their way toward the Celestial City. Remember right in the beginning, it was Obstinate and Plaubal. And as Christian, with the book in his hand, made his way to the Celestial City, talking about the glories of the Celestial City, Obstinate, as his name suggests, did not respond.

But Plaubal was the kind of person who did respond. Now, you'll never find Plaubal praying. As a matter of fact, when Plaubal is presented in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, he's presented without any burden on his back at all.

Plaubal is the kind of person who is attracted by the good things that he was hearing from Christian, as the Word of God was referred to. And so consequently, in the midst of their acquaintance, Plaubal finally makes the comment that he intends, or that he's very much attracted to going to the land. And then he says he intends to go.

And he goes largely because of the things that he hears about the Celestial City, the glories and the beauties of heaven. A Plaubal, it seems to me, is the kind of person who does not really have an understanding of spiritual things at all, but nevertheless he's a hanger-on. And because of the strength of testimony of some much stronger character, he's carried along.

There are lots of Plaubals among our young people. There are lots of Plaubals among husbands. And there are lots of Plaubals among wives.

They really don't have any great conviction concerning spiritual things at all, but they're attracted by the glories of heaven and the joys of the redeemed. But as far as an understanding of their own need and of the cross of Christ and of the experience of having the burden of sin roll off of their back, they don't know

anything about that. But they tag along.

Our evangelical churches eventually have numbers of them. And as the years go by, more and more, mother had a great testimony and so the children follow along, but no real experience of the fundamental despair and then redemption that mother had. Or father, who's had the great experience with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And because of the strength of the testimony of father, this young Plaubal follows along, entranced by the joys of heaven and the joys of knowing the Lord, but not really having entered into it personally. Well, there are many ways in which Lot was like that, but there was one way in which he was different. Lot, the New Testament tells us, was a righteous man.

The New Testament tells us that he vexed his righteous soul because of the things that happened in the gate of Sodom. He lived in the midst of these men who were wicked sinners, exceedingly wicked sinners, and he was unhappy over it because he really truly had put his trust in the Lord God Jehovah. But at the same time, he was really moved by the material things, as we shall see.

Mr. Meyer says that he was simply an echo, a dim afterglow, a chip on the bosom of a mighty current. And because of the great things that were happening in the heroic faith of Abram, he was fascinated and followed along largely in the trail and tracks of Abram. Well, there was some reality in Lot's life, but we shall see that there was an awful lot of unreality.

Now Abram's restoration to divine fellowship is set forth for us in the first four verses of this thirteenth chapter. We've said that Abram's life represents a long series of events in which he's challenged to live up to the vision that was given him by God in the beginning. Now when the famine came, after he came into the land, he was defeated by the famine and failed and went down to Egypt.

Sovereign mercy delivered him, however, because God has certain purposes in mind for Abram. But now he faces a new difficulty. But before he faces his difficulty, he makes a pilgrimage.

Now remember, a pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place. That's the way we would define it in our dictionary. And so Abram is making his journey back to the holy land, and we are told here that he went back as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning between Bethel and Ai.

In other words, he retraced his steps, having left the land when the famine came, having disobeyed the Lord, having gone into the land of Egypt without a word of inquiry as to whether it was the Lord's will. Having been humiliated, he now makes his way back and makes his way back right to the place where he had been, even to the very altar that he had made there formerly, and there he calls on the name of the Lord. I think it's rather interesting that he went back to that place and not to Shechem, where he had received the vision of the Lord and the additional promises.

And perhaps the reason why he did not go back to Shechem was because, guided by the providence of God, there needed to be prominent in his life a recognition of his sin and of his disobedience. And so when he came back to the place where he had been at the beginning, when things were right, when he was really enjoying the life with the Lord, it was a reminder to him of the need of repentance and confession. And there around the altar, he made his repentance and confession and began to call on the name of the Lord.

It's not an accident that Bible teachers have often used the expression about saints who have wandered from the path of fellowship with the Lord back to Bethel, because that is a beautiful geographical picture of what is necessary in the spiritual realm. In our own Christian lives, when we have been disobedient, when we have wandered from the will of God, when we have turned from the vision that was given us when we became Christians, it is necessary that we reflect upon our situation, come to repentance over our sin and disobedience, confess our sin before the Lord and receive the forgiveness and begin our life from that spiritual place. So the geographical, the topographical is an illustration of the spiritual experience necessary for the saints, and so it is back to Bethel, back to the place of fellowship, back to the place of communion after repentance and confession.

So Abram is there and now he has resumed his worship. Tremendous theological truths expressed by altar, we've already referred to those, I just mention them again only briefly. Remember, the altar which looms so large in Abram's life is a recognition of sin.

The very fact that someone needed to bring an animal and sacrifice the animal upon the altar suggested the sin of the individual who brought the animal. So consequently, the altar suggests sin. It suggests, incidentally, a sin so heinous that it demands death for the animal must die.

And I don't think we're stretching it at all when we talk about sin in the sense of total depravity or total inability, by which we mean, of course, that sin has touched all aspects of our being. Not every aspect as much as it may test, affect every aspect of our being, but it has touched every aspect of our being. Our inability is total.

We cannot come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ apart from divine enablement. No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him. No man can, Jesus said, sin.

It also, of course, suggests sacrifice for altars are places where sacrifices were made. It suggests then death, an animal dying, and there is no forgiveness of sins apart from sacrifice. They were taught right from the beginning that.

And we are taught that in the New Testament in the fullest sense when the Lord Jesus Christ is offered as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. It was also a substitution because there on the altar an animal was offered in order that fellowship might be obtained between the offerer and the Lord God. And so the animal dies in the place of the offerer.

The animal is a substitute, and it is a valid substitution. Not a possible substitution, but a valid substitution that is effective, effective in the right removal of sins so that when the Lord Jesus dies as the substitutionary sacrifice, he truly substitutes for those for whom he dies. The substitution is effective.

If it's not effective, it's not a substitution. No need to talk about substitutionary sacrifice if the Lord Jesus Christ's substitution is not effective for those for whom he dies. So it is substitution.

And, of course, it is penal substitution because the animal dies representative of the fact that the Lord Jesus died under the judgment of God for our sins. He was the just, but he died for the unjust. When he cried out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? He was.

Being, having been made sin for us, he was making it possible for us to become the righteousness of God in him. It was, therefore, a satisfaction of the claims of a holy God against men when Jesus died. All of this represented by that little statement, he came back to the place of the altar, the place that reminds us of

our sin, the place that reminds us of sacrifice as the way to approach God, a substitutionary sacrifice, a penal sacrifice that satisfies the holiness and righteousness of God, so that when we rely upon what Christ has done, we can know the forgiveness of sins.

Objectively, apart from us, Christ has died for us. And consequently, our future is secure. We don't look within ourselves for our hope.

We look out of ourselves to the cross of Christ, and there know that through him we have the forgiveness of sins. Isn't that great? Isn't it tremendous to know that we have the forgiveness of sins that satisfies God? He's pleased with what the Son has done for us. Now of course it was the place of worship, because it is only at the place of the altar that our worship is acceptable to God.

We have no right to come to God apart from the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. And every time we get down upon our knees and pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are saying, we do not come to God except through the sacrifice that he offered. Prayers addressed to God which are not addressed to God through Christ, through the sacrifice, are prayers that are unacceptable to the triune God in heaven.

They are in actuality insults. If the individual knows about the cross of Christ and rejects it, it is just as if you were saying, I do not find Jesus Christ necessary, the one in whom the Father is well pleased. I want to come on the basis of my own merits.

Well, Abram, while he may not have known all of the theology that you and I know, he knew enough to know that he was not to come to God except through the sacrifice that rested upon the altar. And there he called on the name of the Lord. Well, when a person comes back to the relationship with the Lord that he once enjoyed after repentance and confession, will everything be wonderful thereafter? Well, no.

Of course not. After renewals come the tests again. You can see this in our Lord's life.

After the great experience of the baptism and the Holy Spirit coming upon him, preparing him for his messianic ministry, marking him out as the king who is going to suffer, the next thing that we read in the life of our Lord Jesus is that the Holy Spirit came, drove him out into the wilderness in order that there he might be tested by the devil. So after the renewals come the tests. After Elijah entered into the presence of Ahab and announced the great message that God had given him to Ahab, then he was told to go out and sit by a brook to be fed by unclean birds that didn't even feed their own young, much less a human being.

After renewals, after great victories in the spiritual life, there always come the tests. And here is the test. And this time it's right within his own family.

And Abram will learn that if one is to walk with God, it's not enough to leave Ur of the Chaldees, it's not enough to leave Haran, an incomplete disobedience, if that is what Haran represents, and it's not enough to leave Egypt, the land of the world, for the land of promise, it's also necessary upon occasion to leave members of one's own family if there is incomplete separation in them. And so Lot, the whirling, represents a principal alien to the fullness of spiritual life. And sooner or later the world and the spirit will conflict.

And the world will not let a spiritual Christian be a spiritual Christian, nor will God allow a spiritual Christian to be a spiritual Christian in fellowship with the world. Neither one will be happy over such an association. As David sang, but know that the Lord has set apart the godly man for himself.

F. B. Meyer said it's not easy. Or the manufacture of saints is not child's play. How true that is.

God's experiences through which he puts us are sometimes very severe. And Abram now must learn from a simple little incident some things, and so must Lot. We read in the seventh verse, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock.

I have a good friend who is a Baptist minister. He says, there is the beginning of the Baptist church, and there was strife. Well, I'd like to say, in case you think that's a partisan remark, that that's the beginning of the church.

Whether Baptist or Presbyterian or Methodist or Independent, if you are talking about strife, because strife exists constantly among human beings. Strife. Now the strife was very simple.

It was strife over the land. And evidently, since Abram had large numbers of livestock and properties, and Lot did too, the shepherds of the respective flocks began to debate with one another over the use of the property. Now Abram's response to this is really a model of selfless magnanimity, a very practical kind of response.

If Abram failed in connection with the famine, he certainly succeeded in connection with the strife. But I think that one of the reasons that Abram was successful here is obviously to be traced to his faith. Because after all, he had already renounced everything.

When he came out of the War of the Chaldees, ideally he had renounced everything and came into this land not really knowing where he was going to finally settle down. So if you have already renounced everything, well then of course when a strife comes that involves just a few little things, you can see how it was possible for him to meet it. Not in the lust of the flesh or the lust of the eyes or the pride of life.

Now Abram saw that this would cause continual difficulty between himself and Lot and between the whole of the family. And so he wanted to settle it permanently and radically. And his suggestion is a most magnanimous one.

In fact, H. C. Leupold has said that one might entitle a sermon on this section, The Magnanimity of Faith. And Abram certainly had magnanimous faith here. For we read, when the strife came, he said, Please, let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers.

Isn't the whole land before you? Please, separate from me. If I go to the left, if to the left, then I will go to the right. Or if to the right, then I will go to the left.

Now there is a very important principle here, and it has to do with incompatibility in the church. I want to say something about this by way of application. What's to be done when people simply cannot get along with one another in the church of Jesus Christ because of basic differences of opinion, honestly held, but which cannot at the moment be reconciled? What shall we do? Now you must remember this, and I'm sure you know all of this, that when people hold different opinions, when they hold different ideas, when they hold different doctrines, they react to circumstances in different ways.

It is obvious that if a person believes something, and in a particular situation the application of that belief demands a particular type of action, and someone else believes something that is contrary, when that particular action, when that particular event takes place, they will react differently. Our ideas have certain

consequences. And so here is a case in which there are two men, they are believing men so far as we can tell, but strife has come.

Now it is obvious, as the account will demonstrate in a moment, that Lot's conception of things is different from Abram's. Ambrose once said, it is said, divide in order that friendship may abide, a procedure which Dalich called a wretched and practicable rule. Well, it's more practicable than we realize.

And I think that what is set forth here is of some significance for us. When the time comes when two brothers cannot agree upon a principle, and they honestly hold their differences, and they have discussed these differences, then the time has come to part in Christian love. And that is the action that Abram took.

He said, Lot, the whole land is before us. Take your choice. If you go to the right, I'll go to the left.

If you want the left, I'll go to the right. But it's obvious that we're not going to be able to get along. Now there is a great deal of wisdom in this.

And I think also as long as we remember that discussion should be undertaken, and even after separation the possibility of reconciliation is entertained, that this is the biblical principle that we are to follow. Now in this case, they parted. Now there are some texts the Lord Jesus uses that are rather interesting.

Let me cite them. They are texts that look very much alike, but they teach different things. The Lord Jesus once said, He who is not with me is against me.

Now what he meant by that was simply this, that the person who does not agree concerning the nature of the being of the Lord Jesus, he who is not with me, that person is against him. In other words, if we do not recognize that our Lord Jesus Christ is the God-man, the second person of the blessed Trinity who has offered the once and for all sacrifice for sins, if we cannot agree on that point, we are not with Christ. He who is not with me in my person, he is really against me.

It is not possible to be with him, or it is not possible to be near neutral. You are either with him or you are against him, so far as his person is concerned. If you do not really hold that he is what the scriptures say he is, you are against him.

You are not neutral. But now there is another statement the Lord made, which in the outward might sound as much the same thing. He also said, He who is not against us is for us.

Now that is an interesting statement, isn't it? He who is not against us is for us. The disciples had questioned whether individuals who were doing the work of the Lord but were not doing it in their way were really following the Lord. And the Lord Jesus said, He who is not against us is for us.

In other words, there are different ways of doing the Lord's work, ways that might not be totally satisfactory to some Christians, but if they are not against the testimony to our Lord in Scripture, then they are for us. So he who is not against us is for us. I think in this case we have something that really bears on that particular point.

In the case of Lot and Abram, both were believers, but their viewpoints were quite different, and the time had come for them to separate. Now the choice that follows is very interesting. Abram's words, I say, are a model illustration of the works that faith produces, because his words are very selfless and magnanimous.

They are wise and they are courteous. And remember, too, that Abraham had the right to choose, because he was the chief of the clan. He was the one to whom the promises had been given, but he renounces the right of choice, first choice, which belonged to him, and suggested that Lot take the first choice.

Now what did Lot do? Well, he looked out into the distance, into the vicinity of Jericho, the northern end of the Dead Sea, and there he saw land that reminded him of what his ancestors had said about the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, it also reminded him of the land in Egypt, the fertile alluvial plains of Egypt. And seeing the rich luxuriance of all of that land, he made his choice.

Now I think it would be unfair to accuse Lot of total moral degeneracy, which some of the commentators seem anxious to do. But you'll notice this, he did not ask for direction from the Lord. So far as we know, he did not say, he did not call upon the name of the Lord, he did not lift his eyes toward heaven and ask the Lord for wisdom and guidance, but he looked out and saw that beautifully fertile land and said, that's what I would like to have.

He never thought of the influence that that decision might have upon his family and upon his children. And the result was, of course, as we shall read later on in the book of Genesis, that by dwelling in the gate of Sodom, while he became a prominent man in the city, the result was catastrophic for the children of Lot. There is a great deal of important practical advice for Christian believers in this decision that Lot made.

He made a choice that was determined by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The men of Sodom, the text says, were sinners before the Lord exceedingly. Now the application of this to modern Christian life and its choices, I'm sure, is almost self-evident to you.

How many modern believers choose to live in areas of great pleasantness but of barren opportunities for Christian fellowship and Christian service? This often happens, incidentally, to people who are getting ready to retire. It's very salient. They will often pick a place that is lovely, pleasant, the kind of place that you would think, what a beautiful place to retire.

And you've often said, is there a Christian church nearby? Well, that's one of the difficulties. No, unfortunately, there's no real Christian church there. But I can live by tapes, perhaps.

Is there opportunity for Christian witness, fellowship? No. I'm sure that if you will think about your own friends, the experiences that you yourself have had, the temptations that you have had, I'm sure you can think of many who have apparently made decisions that were governed by the same principle that governed Lot's decision. How many believers rush into high society, the highest society to which they're able in order to make a good match for their daughters? Or in order to enable their son to make a faster buck than they might have if they stuck with the Christians that they know? How many remain in an unbelieving church with the claim that they shall be able to have a witness there? After all, should not salt be scattered among the putrefaction? Should not the light shine in darkness? Didn't Daniel--this is the scriptural answer--did not Daniel find himself in Babylon? Yes, Daniel found himself in Babylon, but he was Daniel.

And he was also there by the will of God. And there are very few Daniels that stay in unbelieving churches in order to have a witness there. History indicates that the influence is almost always the other way.

How many are there who, in their business, operate their business on worldly principles, willing to take in partners in order to have an infusion of capital into their business? And thus, looking upon things from the standpoint of the eyes of the flesh, fall into the trap of Lot. In religious movements, there are always hangers-on, worldly people, Lots. And then, of course, there are those that are the mixed multitude.

There is a great lesson in Lot's choice. Now, I want you to notice Abram's choice. Now, Abram's consolation comes from the Lord.

He has, in magnanimity, said, Lot, you take what you like. Now, we read in verse 14. We had already read that Lot lifted up his eyes in verse 10.

Now, in Abram's case, the Lord said to Abram after Lot had separated from him, now, Abram, you lift up your eyes. And in the one case, Lot lifted up his eyes. In the other case, having given Lot the first choice, now God says to Abram, Abram, lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, north, south, east, and west.

I'm going to give the whole thing to you. Included in it was Lot's land, incidentally, which is what happens when we leave the choice to the Lord. So the choice was left with the Lord, and as a result, the covenantal promises are beautifully expanded.

There is a text in Matthew that reads, Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or farms, for my name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life. And Abram is the inheritor of wide lands because of the sovereign grace of God, and humanly speaking, because of the way in which he looked upon the things of this life. These promises, I suggest to you, if you have an opportunity, read the bulletin, because I've tried to expand just a little bit, pointed out that they expanded geographically in verse 14 and 15, then numerically in verse 16.

And finally, experientially, Abram is asked to arise and walk through the land in its length and its breadth, for it's to be given to him. And the chapter concludes on the note of Abram moving around the land, but eventually coming to Hebron, which he made the center of his movements, and the chapter concludes with the words, And there he built an altar to the Lord. Now notice again, characteristic of the life of Abram is the tent.

He knows that in this life here there is no certain dwelling place for the believer. He looks toward the celestial city. There is the altar, prominent in his life is the ministry of atonement and reconciliation, and all of those great truths by which he is related to the Lord, and then the promises, the word of God.

So the tent, the altar, the promises, characteristic of this great man of faith. One cannot reflect upon this account of the experiences of the patriarch without noticing that the secret of his triumph over the strife with Lot lay in Abram's ability, a God-given ability to apply faith in the circumstances of life. You know, it is very important that we know the theology of the word of God.

It was necessary for Abram to have those promises from the Lord. It was necessary for him to realize that fundamentally before him true spiritual life exists in following the vision that had been given to him. But we must remember that in the daily affairs of life, it is the application of these principles to the experiences of life that make for the life that pleases God.

And so consequently, Abram applied faith to the circumstances of life. He really came to, by the grace of God, realize that the things that are eternal are those invisible things, and consequently those invisible

things determined his actions, even in just such a case as a strife between the shepherds of the two flocks. In other words, the lure of the invisible was upon him, and he must bow to it and decide in the experiences of life based upon that.

Occasionally we find it very difficult to realize that faith is the way by which we are to live. One of the reasons why faith is the way by which we are to live is because it is only through faith that we come into touch with reality. Or we think, well, the real thing is the visible thing.

The real thing is the material thing. Well, that of course is real, material, visible. But let me assure you that reality is not simply the visible and the material.

To come to touch or to come into grips with the reality of things, the spiritual, invisible realities--after all, God is real, but invisible--to come into touch with them, we can only do it through faith. Faith becomes the means of knowledge, which is found in the revelation, in the Word of God. And so Abram, in faith, finding true knowledge in the revelation given to him, acts realistically.

Lot doesn't. He doesn't act realistically. He acts unrealistically, short-sightedly, near-sightedly.

Thus, the worldly man's actions. Finally, if we may discern clearly the working of sovereign grace in Abram's deliverance from his sinful journey to Egypt, we surely see his majestic hand again in his triumph over the problem of strife amid this company of his followers. And these great and new mercies that God has manifested to him leave him in the end of his experience building an altar to the Lord and calling upon the name of the Lord.

May God help us in the experiences of life that come to us as Christians, enable us to face them in the light of the promises that have been given to us. May God enable us to apply the things that we know from the Word of God to the daily experiences of life. If you're here today and you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, of course, your first responsibility is to recognize that he has offered a sacrifice for sinners, to flee to the cross of Christ receiving the forgiveness of sins that he offers to sinners, and the new life rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins, justification, sonship, and the other blessings that belong to those who know the Lord.

May God help you to come. If you do not know him, let's stand for the benediction. Father, we are grateful to thee for these lessons from the life of Abraham.

For so often our own decisions are made in the light of worldly principles. We know how often it is that we are influenced by the visible and the material. Enable us, O God, to see things realistically.

Enable us to realize that it is the things that are not seen that are the eternal things. Enable us in the faith of our great example, Abraham, to walk with thee. If there should be some here who do not know the Lord Jesus, we ask, Lord, that thou give them no rest until they rest in Christ.

Give them the sense of their own sin and also a knowledge of the saving work of the Lord Jesus, and bring them to him. May grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit go with us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/s-lewis-johnson/genesis-26-tthe-lure-of-the-invisible-and-abrams-choice/>

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