

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 14

Chapter 13:5-18

Constrained Land

Genesis 13:5 Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together.

Abram had settled in the area of Bethel/Ai after returning from Egypt as indicated in Genesis 13:1-4. Abram's entire party had made the journey to Egypt and back to Bethel/Ai and included his nephew, Lot, the subject of this story. No one knows the time that had expired between verse 4 and verse 5. The next time indicator occurs in Genesis 16 with the birth of Ishmael when Abram was 86 years old. Therefore, the events of Genesis 13:5 and Genesis 16:15 occurred during an eleven year window of time between Abram's leaving Haran and Ishmael's birth.

Regardless of the number of years, the allotted land that the Canaanites allowed Abram and Lot to use was not enough to provide for the flocks and herds.

Strife and Canaanite and Perizzite

Genesis 13:7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.

The loyalty between the men of Abram and Lot was strained, indicating that Abram was not the assumed leader of all the people in the party. The sentence, "**Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land**" is just a reminder to the reader that Abram and Lot were visitors in Canaan Land, not landowners. Canaan Land was divided among the descendants of Canaan who were called Canaanites. Periz was one of the sons of Canaan and his tribe was called the Perizzites. Because of this reference, the general area of the Perizzite tribe included Bethel/Ai.

Two things can be discerned from the strange statement "**Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land**" in the middle of this story. First, although the Perizzites were kind enough to allow Abram and his followers to live on the land, the Canaanite tribes had their own flocks and the land restricted to Abram could not provide for their needs. Second, Abram must have been concerned about the witness of his party in the presence of their host tribe. Abram did not want the Perizzites to see his house arguing among themselves.

Abram's Offer to Lot

Genesis 13:8 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. ⁹ "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."

Abram pointed out that there was plenty of land, but someone would have to move his following to a new location. Abram was the head of the clan and rightfully could have instructed Lot to leave with his followers and designated where they were to settle, but he allowed Lot to choose where he wanted to live.

Lot's Decision

Genesis 13:10 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 Zoar. ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other.

Lot made the choice and he chose the Jordan River Valley although it was not called that at the time. Notice that the passage says, "**before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.**" This phrase indicates the location of the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah; these two villages were in the valley located on the Jordan River. At that time, the Dead Sea did not exist, and the Jordan River Valley continued all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba.³⁸ It was a beautiful valley and the area next to the Jordan River was plush and green all the way to Zoar, a village on a hill overlooking the Jordan Valley. Even though the Jordan River, as we know it today, flowed all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba, a section of the valley was called by another name in Abram's day, the Valley of Siddim, or the Valley of Salt. Lot moved down the Jordan River to settle in the Valley of Siddim and Abram returned to Bethel/Ai.



Map 16: The Land of Canaan without the Dead Sea before the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

³⁸ As it is known today.

Abram Canaan, Lot Sodom

Genesis 13:12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. ¹³Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD.

With Abram back in Bethel/Ai, Lot began to move further down the Jordan River valley and finally decided to set his tents in the village of Sodom. We must pause and look at the Hebrew words for “wicked” and “sinners” in reference to the men of Sodom. The Hebrew is *rain* for wicked and it means to “break apart.” It indicates that the men of Sodom abundantly broke the established order of God’s basic principles of right and wrong. The Hebrew word *chattim* is used for sinners and it means to “miss the mark.” The Hebrew *ish* is translated as “men” and means males. These men were exceedingly broken in their off target way of life. The issue that stands out in this passage is that Lot willingly chose to pitch his tents among the wicked males of Sodom; he could have continued on his journey or settled back up the river, but Lot was lured to this sinful village for some reason. Did he not have the same values as Abram? Had he not learned from Abram’s relationship with the LORD? Was Lot tempted by the sin of Sodom? We do not know!

Abram’s Blessing of Descendants

Genesis 13:14 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; ¹⁵for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. ¹⁶"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 also be numbered. ¹⁷"Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you."

With Lot and his clan removed from Abram, the LORD intervened in Abram’s life once again. Why did the LORD wait until Lot was gone? Perhaps it was because Abram should have left him in Haran! Probably not! Lot’s life and actions are central to the next story in Genesis in which a great moral lesson will be taught.

The LORD told Abram to look north, south, east and west to see all the land that will belong to his descendants one day. How many descendants will Abram have? Uncountable! Then the LORD told Abram to walk over all the land that will one day belong to his family.

Oaks of Mamre in Hebron

Genesis 13:18 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.

After walking over all the land that the LORD promised to give him, Abram established his home among the oaks of Mamre in the village area of Hebron. Who was Mamre? He was a descendent of Amor, a son of Canaan, and a member of the Amorite tribe. Mamre had two brothers, Eschol and Ener as we will discover later in Genesis. Until his death, Abram was extremely close to Mamre. His name means “grazing land” or “the place of feeding.” The milk of a mother for her child comes from the mammary glands of the breast, a term derived from the Hebrew Mamre. Abram pitched his tent among Mamre’s oak trees, obviously with his permission. To pinpoint the location of Mamre, the Scripture says the oaks “are in Hebron.” The village is about 24 miles south of Jerusalem and 20 miles west of the Dead Sea as seen in the map; however, at the time of this story in Genesis 13, the Dead Sea did not exist. The Dead Sea was formed the year of Isaac’s birth when Abram was about 100 years old.

Once in Hebron, it was time to worship the LORD again; therefore, Abram built an altar just as he did in Shechem and Bethel. In general, this new altar would remain as Abram’s main place of worship for the rest of his life and the oaks of Mamre would be his home.



Map 17: Location of Hebron where Abram settled. Lot lived in Sodom in the Jordan Valley due east of Abram about 20 miles away from Hebron. The Dead Sea pictured in this modern map did not exist at this time in the Genesis 13 story.