



MESSAGE/SERIES:

BIBLICAL BEGINNINGS/ Genesis 13

“Return to Bethel”

DATE: May 17, 2020

SCRIPTURE FOR THIS WEEK:

(These verses will help you understand themes within as you read our core text as scripture proves scripture)

Genesis 13, Hebrews 11:10, Isaiah 30:15-16, Genesis 4:7, Revelations 2:4-5, Galatians 3:16, 28, Romans 4:11, Hebrews 10:24-25, Genesis 12:7

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

[GENESIS 13]

Genesis 13:1–18 (ESV)

Abram and Lot Separate

13 So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.

² Now **Abram was very rich** in livestock, in silver, and in gold. ³ And **he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴ to the place where he had made an altar at the first.** And there Abram **called upon the name of the Lord.**

⁵ And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, ⁶ so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; **for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together,** ⁷ and there was strife between the herdsmen of

Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.

*⁸ Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? **Separate yourself from me.** If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." ¹⁰ And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. ¹² **Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.** ¹³ Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.*

*¹⁴ The Lord said to Abram, **after Lot had separated from him**, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, ¹⁵ for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. ¹⁷ Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." ¹⁸ So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.*

BACKGROUND & OTHER STUDY HELPS:

[Bethel]- "The patriarchal narratives portray Bethel as a sacred place associated with religious activities. In two instances Genesis records that Abraham offered a sacrifice to Yahweh at a site between Bethel and Ai (Gen 12:8; 13:3–4). Bethel holds a particularly prominent role in the narratives concerning Jacob: In Genesis 28:10–22 Jacob experiences a vision at Bethel and sets up a pillar (or massebah) there to mark it as a sacred place (see also Gen 31:13). Many years later, he returns to Bethel, erects an altar to God (a bamah), and names the place El-Bethel (Gen 35:1–8; see also Gen 35:15–16)."

Maura Sala, "Bethel North of Jerusalem," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

“Worship at Bethel. The religious center at Bethel was intimately connected with bull imagery (2 Kgs 10:29), a legacy of the Canaanite worship of Baal at the site (Na’aman, “Beth-aven, Bethel,” 19–21). The prophets Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos condemned the sanctuary at Bethel and the heresy and idolatry connected to it (Jer 48:13; Hos 10:15; 12:4; Amos 3:14; 4:4; 5:5, 6; 7:10, 13; Pfeiffer, *Das Heiligtum von Bethel*). In particular, Amos prophesied judgment on “the altars of Bethel” (e.g., Amos 3:14).”

Maura Sala, “Bethel North of Jerusalem,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

“Substantial temples from the Canaanite period have been uncovered at Bethel, whose ruins lie partly under the modern village of Beitin. Israel briefly kept the Ark of the Covenant at Bethel (Judg. 20:26–27), an important city during the period of the judges.

These traditions and Bethel’s strategic position on the southern extremity of Israel’s border prompted Jeroboam I to choose Bethel as a national shrine. As in Dan, Jeroboam erected a temple and placed within it a golden calf (1 Kgs. 12:29–33). Unfortunately, no trace of this structure has been located. Jeroboam instituted festivals and sacrifices at Bethel on an unprecedented scale. Bethel’s proximity to Jerusalem (eleven miles north of Jerusalem) made it a natural rival to Solomon’s temple. Prophets, both true and false, often preached at Bethel (1 Kgs. 13:1–10). In his travels Elijah encountered a group of prophets at Bethel (2 Kgs. 2:2–4), while Amos’ fiery words drew the rebuke of Amaziah, the priest at Bethel (Amos 7:10–13). True prophets often condemned Bethel as the center of idolatry (Amos 3:14; 5:5–6; Hos. 10:15). Amos sarcastically parodied the corrupt worship practices at Bethel (Amos 4:4), and Hosea substituted the name Beth-aven, “House of evil,” for Bethel in his scathing denunciations of religion gone terribly wrong (Hos. 5:8–9; 10:5).”

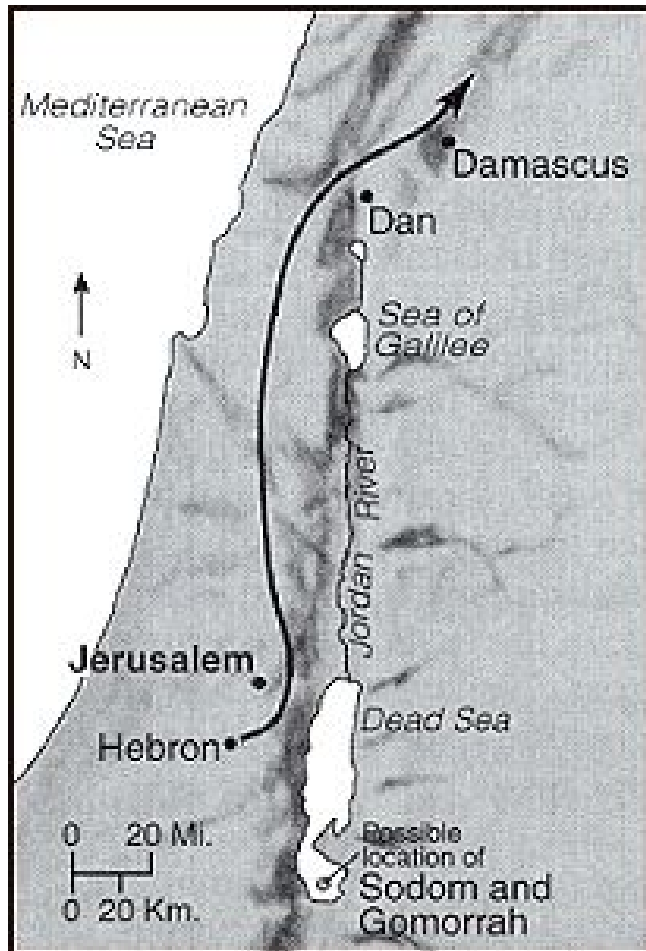
Thomas V. Brisco, *Holman Bible Atlas*, Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 120.

[THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ALTARS] “Because they marked the intersection of existential boundaries, altars could assume a significance beyond their role as a place of sacrifice. The Pentateuch contains many references to the construction of altars that functioned more as memorials and shrines. The phrase “X built an altar there to Yahweh” occurs frequently, generally with no report that sacrifices were offered on it. Noah constructed an altar to Yahweh after the *flood and offered sacrifice on it as an act of thanksgiving and worship (Gen 8:20). However, there is no mention of sacrifice in the stories that report the construction of altars at Moreh (Gen 12:7), Mamre (Gen 13:18), Beer-sheba (Gen 26:25), Shechem (Gen 33:20) and at sites in the environs of Bethel (Gen 12:8; 35:7). Instead, the stories intimate that the altars were constructed for various purposes. Abram constructed the altars at Moreh and Mamre to confirm the

divine blessings of descendants and land (Gen 12:7; 13:18). Isaac and Jacob built altars to mark the sites of theophanies (Gen 26:25; 35:7), and the stories connected with the events emphasize the transmission of the patriarchal promises and blessings. Jacob erected an altar in the field of Hamor to establish possession of a plot of ground in Canaan (Gen 33:20), thereby marking his claim to it. Similarly, Moses commemorated Israel's victory over the Amalekites by constructing an altar (Ex 17:15). These instances reveal that altars functioned in diverse ways beyond their association with sacrifice: as **reminders** of divine promises, **claims to property**, and **memorials of divine encounters and great events.**"

L. D. Hawk, "Altars," ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 36.

[POSSIBLE LOCATION OF SODOM]



Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Mamre (Place). "Important oak grove near which Abraham lived, and named for an Amorite who helped him defeat Chedorlaomer and rescue Lot (Gn

14:13, 24). Abraham erected an altar under the oak of Mamre (13:18). Abraham was sitting by the sacred tree when he welcomed three mysterious guests (ch 18). Mamre is also a possible site for the scene of Abrahamic covenant ceremonies (ch 15). Isaac and Jacob also lived there (35:27).”

Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Mamre (Place),” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1384.

“Hebron-Mamre was the primary settlement of Abram and Isaac (e.g., 18:1; 35:27; 37:14); it was especially important as the burial site for the patriarchal family in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre (23:2, 19; 25:9; 49:31; 50:13).”

K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, vol. 1B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 140.

[HEBRON] “Hebron was located about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Hebron factors in the biblical narratives from the patriarchal period and the monarchy. Abram was often in the region of Hebron, and many of the patriarchs and matriarchs were buried there, including Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob. David was anointed king at Hebron (2 Sam 2:4), and the city was his capital for the first seven and a half years of his reign over Judah (2 Sam 5:4–5). Perhaps attempting to follow David’s example, Absalom declared himself king in Hebron, starting a revolt against his father David (2 Sam 15:7–12).”

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Ge 13:18.

OUTLINE:

I. (v1-4) THE ALTAR OF REPENTANCE

Do you remember that place where Jesus made himself known to you? It wasn't just a place it was a special moment in time. In a spiritual sense we can return to those special places by doing what He commanded the first time you were there...

A. (v1-2) “So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. Now **Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.**”

1. God had blessed Abram throughout his life

2. God would bless God Abram in the future
 - a) *There is nothing wrong with money/things as long as we manage them as God's and do not make them idols*
- B. (v3-4) ³ *And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴to the place where he had made an altar at the first...*
1. The Blessings he gained from Egypt
 - a) *could have caused him to drift further from God*
 - b) *Could have been a temptation to seek more help and stuff from the world*
 2. Abram finally had sour belly over his sin and was ready to return to Bethel
 - a) (1 Corinthians 13:6) *“Love doesn't rejoice in deception and sin but **“rejoices with the truth”***
 - (1) We must be sick of the sin and our actions against God in order to get back to Bethel (the place we once worshipped the God who revealed himself to us)
 3. To return to Bethel we must be prepared to repent of our sins before the Lord and begin again to do the last things he told us to do
 - a) *Abram called upon the name of the Lord and trust Him once again with everything*
 - b) *Abram's heart missed the sweet fellowship with the Lord and He knew where to go*
 - (1) The Altar at Bethel was an Altar that marked God's visible presence in His life
 - (a) *What circumstances and places in your life are reminders of God's sweet presence in your life*
 - (2) The Altar at Bethel was an Altar of thanksgiving and worship
 - (a) *Abram heard the Lord's voice and His promises and responded with worship and thankfulness in (Genesis 12:7)*
- C. (v4) *“...and there Abram **called on the name of the Lord.**”*
1. Meaning Abram *had stopped calling on the name of the Lord* in Egypt

2. Meaning Abram was not asking God for help as he should have when the circumstances got crazy the first time (Genesis 12:10)
 - a) *“Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.” (Genesis 12:10)*
 - (1) When we see things too big for us do we run to the Lord or act in our own means
 - (a) ****Our means are always limited understanding and lackluster in effect***
 - (2) Abram finally sees the problem was he needed to return to where the Lord met Him
 - (a) *ask Him for the answers*
 - (b) *for forgiveness of his sins*
 - (c) *Be prepared to obey His commands again*

II. (v5-7) THE INTERSECTION OF SEPARATION

Once you have Returned to Bethel some folks are going to have to go. Some of the people that have to go are people you love, but they are not thinking like you are and they don't have the sour belly yet... they have the full belly and they are going back for more of the same. Take your blessings and separate or you will end up right back where He brought you from...

A. (v5-7) *“⁵ And **Lot**, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, ⁶ so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. ⁷ and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.”*

1. Many times the blessings of God force a separation within the family of God
 - a) *As God blessed churches there ought to be a sending out of people and resources to hurting churches*
 - (1) To help their people **revitalization** and become effective again
 - (2) To help a people **replant/** start over in order to honor God

(3) And sometimes it's time to **plant a new ministry** where a community needs a bible believing and teaching church

(a) When blessings pile up it is best to divide the

(b) resources to reach more people (not build bigger buildings)

2. Many times the effects of previous **sinful lifestyle amongst the people of God causes a separation** as different perspectives and desires in ministry are not able to function in the same local body. Lot was still partial to the lifestyle in Egypt.

a) Separating from one another

(1) can enable the healthy church to thrive

(2) and also give God opportunity to deal with the other viewpoints or allow competing but un sinful preferences to become effective in a new culture/environment

(3) Also offers temptation for the parting body to be drawn to practices that will make sin inevitable

(a) Lot had been under Abram's discipleship and tutelage; what would he do on his own

III. (v8-13) THE PLACE OF DECISION

When the decisions come in life we must stand on God's word and where there is no sin we do not live by preference alone. By making the three applications we can make God honoring choices...

(1) Is it sin- If so Don't do it

(2) Is it expedient or helpful in the mission God put before me- *if not don't waste God's time and resources, and*

(3) Does it impact my witness in a negative way where I am planted to serve... There must be another way,

A. Abram determined that the strife could not continue and also honor God

1. We must deal with strife amongst believers (Unresolved conflict prevents worship)

- a) *Matthew 5:23-24 (prevents acceptance of our offering and worship)*
- b) *1 Peter 3:7 (Hinders communication with God)*

B. Many times God causes the blessing to multiply in order that ministry would have opportunity to multiply

IV. (v14-18) THE ALTAR OF DECLARATION

When we finally return to the Altar we left we may once again declare to ourselves and the enemy just what God has promised.

- A. *(v14-15) “The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, ¹⁵ for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever...” (God speaks again/reaffirming His promises)*
 - 1. We cannot return to Bethel with the same responses when we left
 - a) *The return must be about God’s presence and obedience*
 - 2. When we separate and focus on the Lord He will again restate the mission and promises to us
 - 3. Once we return, Many times God will give us vision to the promises as we are faithful (God showed him all the land He had promised)
 - B. *(v18) “So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there **he built an altar to the Lord.**”*
 - 1. This altar was an altar built declaring God was true and granting His promises so this time he settled there!
 - 2. An Altar of declaration and an altar of worship
 - 3. An Altar that state a new a courageous phase of life for Abram and His descendants
 - a) We have to believe what God has said to us and it is in those places that we drive a stake/build and altar to mark the spot of dedication to the path before us.
 - b) This location would be the burial grounds of the patriarchal family and therefore a place of final ministry for some
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[Interactive Application]

1. What does the Altar at Bethel represent for Abram? (Type of Altar)

2. What does the Altar at Mamre represent for Abram? (Type of Altar)

3. Lot and Abram had to separate. How much of the separation was dictated by God and how much of it was sinful response by Lot or Abram?

4. Why did Lot pick the land that he did? How much of it had to do with the places and lives they had lived before?

-----Message from Pastor Michael-----

Church,

Much like Abram and Lot we have a choice to return to Bethel (that place God revealed himself to us). How will we approach Bethel? Can the approach be anything like before or does the return demand a new humility and confidence? How have you dealt with the past several months. Have you ended up in Egypt deceived? Have you been on your way back to Bethel to serve Him with your whole heart? Are you headed back to Bethel because there is nowhere else to turn? If you are going back to the place where He last made himself real to you... Approach with humility and a willingness to part with those who contradict what God has said to you and get in the way of the mission He commands. Life is short so focus and bow your head to receive the vision of the next leg as you submit to this time and place.

Love in Christ,
Pastor Michael

