

Third Revelation - Obedience - Genesis 13:1-18¹

Before the Lesson - Have the poster (from lesson 1, also found at the end of this lesson plan) or the words from that poster written on a board for the Information session.

Fellowship Question: (Use one of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

How much walking do you do on a typical day?

Do you have an “obedience school” story, or a story of trying to train a pet to obey?

Information - At the conclusion of our last session, Abram and his family were leaving Egypt. They had gone there to live through a famine. Abram schemed a way to save his life by introducing Sarai as his sister.

However, this plan put the covenant that Abram had with God at risk. The land Abram was promised was left behind. The woman who seemingly would bear Abram’s children was given to Pharaoh as a wife (and probable child-bearer). Abram and Sarai and Lot were expelled from Egypt by a righteous Pharaoh, angry that Abram and Sarai had conspired to lie to him which led to a plague that threatened Egypt.

So, we begin a new chapter (literally and figuratively).

- Have a class member read Genesis 13:1-7.

Abram makes a stop in Bethel (“house of God”), the location of his second revelation from God and where he had built a second altar to God.

“It is interesting to note that while in Egypt, Abram built no altar to his God, nor did he call on the name of the Lord. After wandering in Egypt, away from the promise, away from the responsibility of walking in the ways of God, he returned to his original commitments to God. Bethel became the place where he could rededicate himself to God’s ways.”²

At some time, we may realize that we have “outgrown” a previous religious site, or institution, or belief. We do not tear down that altar. We can acknowledge the impact that event or place or understanding held for us. We can celebrate the good that we experienced for our personal spiritual journey there. Or, if it was a bad experience, we can celebrate what we learned and how we grew through it. Then, we move on.

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2023. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² Miguel A. De La Torre, *Genesis*, Belief Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 155.

Has that happened to you? Can I get a witness?

[Give time for class members to share personal stories of “altars” they still respect or are grateful for, but that they have left behind in their spiritual journey.]

They did not remain in Bethel. But they did make a little stop. Maybe it was a pit stop for the flocks and herds. Abram and Lot realized that there was not enough space here for all their families and material wealth.

“In reality, each clan consisted of many individuals, enough for Abram to raise an army of 318 fighters from among his own clan (14:14). Hence two large clans with numerous livestock were competing with local inhabitants for scarce natural resources.”³

Abram and Lot, as family heads, need to come to a new arrangement. In a way, the land is at risk as Abram’s and Lot’s shepherds are fighting against one another.

- Have a class member read Genesis 13:8-13.

What are your impressions about Abram’s offer and Lot’s decision?

“This is only the second report of direct speech of Abram. The first, his address to Sarai as they are about to enter Egypt, reveals a man fearful about his own survival. Here we get a very different image of Abram as the reasonable peacemaker and as a man conscious of family bonds in alien surroundings. The language in which he addresses Lot is clear, firm, and polite.”⁴

“Abraham is presented as a marvelous model of faithfulness. As the older uncle, he might have preempted the good land. But because he believes the promise, he does not doubt that he will finally receive the land God wants him to have... In contrast to the calculating self-serving of 12:10-20, here Abraham is magnanimous in the extreme. Whereas his inability to trust the promise had made him fearful in the preceding tale, here his trust of the promise makes him gracious and generous. His practice of the promise enables him to be a source of life for Lot (one of the nations, cf. 12:3b) and permits blessings to come upon both of them.”⁵

“Lot chooses what seems to be the best; but he will end up with the worst. That the people of Sodom, according to the text, were vicious and great sinners against Yahweh should have raised concerns, leading Lot to move more cautiously, but instead he pitches his tents on the town’s outskirts. With time, the lure of the city wears away at his resolve and he and his family soon make their home within the wicked city’s midst.”⁶

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 54.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 130f.

⁶ De La Torre, 156.

Now, we have the third of seven revelations to Abram.

- Have a class member read Genesis 13:14-18.

“Abram’s tent is pitched high up in the hill country...He can see great distances. So this is a promise of much land, assuming good eye-sight – but he must walk the great distances seen, and under peculiar circumstances. The original audience would have understood what God wanted: to walk around a land’s perimeter was to confirm it as personal property. But there can be no legal purpose to Abram’s walking, since there are no witnesses. And we find out it will be four hundred years down the road before his children come to ‘own’ the land. So for the most part this is a symbolic walking – a promissory sort of stroll.”⁷

“In the third revelation it is entirely a matter of land, of ‘earth,’ that even ‘the dust of the earth’ necessarily becomes a metaphor for the increase of population; it is only in connection with the land that the people will be able to fulfill their task.”⁸

After walking, he builds a third altar.

[Point to the italicized words on the poster/board from lesson 1 to demonstrate how Abram’s faith is progressing.]

In the first revelation, God told Abram to leave his homeland. Abram had the faith to *believe* in the Voice.

In the second revelation, Abram sees God and sees land – land that God promises to give him and his descendants. Abram moves in his faith journey to *trust* the Voice.

In this third revelation, sight is again important. As is action.

This action of walking was also an act of faith. It is an act of *obedience*.

Transformational Exercise

Sometimes an act of faith looks nonsensical at best or insane at worst.

Here are some examples:

- People get arrested when they march to protest bad laws or bad government.
- People go on mission trips when they could have been on relaxing vacations.
- People follow an urge, a nudge, a direction that they take to be from the Holy Spirit.
- People choose careers based on ethics or “calling” rather than salary and perks.

⁷ Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven’t Heard* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 63.

⁸ Martin Buber, *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 38

Can you think of examples that have inspired your faith?

Abram's faith is growing. What are some markers you can identify of that growth? (He is less self-centered. He takes actions that demonstrate faith in God keeping the promise. He continues building altars – God was here.)

“As the challenges or tests become progressively more difficult, God's trust in Abram grows, just as Abram's trust in God grows. Abram appears to be learning partnership. And, at the very least, God is making changes in accommodating Abram's growth.”⁹

[Close in a prayer something like this: *God of Abram and Sarai, Give us the faith to act in ways that you lead - even when these ways seem nonsensical or risky. Give us the faith to obey you in spite of a lack of evidence that your promises will be fulfilled in our lifetimes. Amen.*]

⁹ Borgman, 64.

Abraham's Faith Journey

Belief

Trust

Obedience

Partnership

Intimacy

Righteousness

Stewardship