

Recipe for Disaster, Recipe for Honor
Read Genesis 13

There is little dissimilarity between Lot and Abraham at the beginning of our story. They are both descendants of Terah of Ur (Genesis 11:26-27). Terah is a descendant of Shem, first born son of Noah, who had been chosen from among three brothers to be the ancestor of the coming Messiah. In other words, Lot and Abraham are in the Messianic genealogy and hence they have the same Godly pedigree. Additionally, the two of them have left their country and relatives to come to a land which God had chosen. And God has blessed them with such an abundance of possessions that “the land could not sustain them while dwelling together” (Gen. 13:6).

Yet, at the conclusions of their stories, there is a great disparity. Abraham dies “a ripe old age,” a man who has been “satisfied with life” and therefore, he is “gathered with his people” (25:8). On the other hand, at the completion of Lot’s narrative, Lot has fled the burning city of Sodom, lost his wife and all his possessions, and unwittingly committed incest with his two daughters. What transpired to create such a contrast between the two men?

The first evidence of a difference between Lot and Abraham occurs when animosity is ignited between their herdsmen; there is not enough land for the two families. Abraham is conciliatory and suggests, “Please let there be no strife between you and me...for we are brothers” (Gen. 13:8). He offers to Lot the privilege of choosing either the northern part of Canaan (to the left of Abraham) or the southern part of Canaan (to Abraham’s right). In order to make the most favorable decision, Lot “lifted up his eyes” and what he sees is “all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere...like the garden of the LORD” (v. 10). Consequently, Lot chooses neither the northern nor the southern region. He “chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan,” the eastern portion of Canaan where Sodom and Gomorrah lay.

When the author narrates that “Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom,” he reveals foreboding information—“the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD” (13:12 and 13). Both the choice Lot makes to go east (the same direction traveled by Adam and Eve, Cain, and the people of Babel) and the decision Lot makes to set up his tent in the region of Sodom are the essential ingredients of a recipe for disaster.

On the contrary, at each juncture in his travels, Abraham customarily erects altars to worship Yahweh. The author presents this information in brackets that encircle the story of Lot and Abraham in Genesis 13:3 and 18 (at the beginning and conclusion of the narrative). These brackets, as with other brackets used by the authors in Scripture, indicate how the author wants us to read the story within.

Psalms 103 illustrates this principle of bracketing which is the second key to dynamic Bible study. The Psalm opens and closes with the words “Bless the LORD, O my soul.” Thus, we are to address blessings to the LORD as we read the itemized descriptive attributes of God listed within the boundaries of the brackets.

Likewise, parallel terms are placed at the front and rear of the narrative of Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13:3-18). In Genesis 13:3 and 4 we are informed that Abraham returned “where his tent had been at the beginning” at “the place of the altar which he had made formerly” in order to repeat his call “on the name of the LORD.” Some of the

same terms are repeated at the end of the chapter: “Then Abram moved his **tent** and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre...and there he built an **altar** to **the LORD**” (v. 18). These are the ingredients that result in honor as Yahweh indicates when He states to Abraham, “Now lift up your eyes and look...for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever” (vv. 14-15).

Thus, despite the common origins of Lot and Abraham, the divergent choices they make during their lifetime lead to a very different ending. Lot’s choices were a recipe for disaster, while Abraham’s choices were a recipe for honor.