

## Controversy in Canaan

Genesis 13: 5-18

No doubt Abraham was thankful to have left Egypt behind, and is now enjoying the land of Canaan again. He has regained his focus and seems intent on serving the Lord. However, as is typically the case, trouble and unrest are never far away. God had richly blessed Abraham and his nephew, Lot. These men, along with their possessions, are traveling together in Canaan. A moment of conflict arose that required immediate attention. Abraham knew the conflict needed to be resolved in a timely manner to avoid damage to family relations.

While this passage reveals what appears to be a minor problem in Abraham's life, his wisdom in handling the situation reveals needed guidance for believers today. As we serve the Lord, contention and debate will inevitably arise. How we react to these seasons often dictate the outcome, and have lasting effects. As we consider the [details](#) of this moment in Abraham's life, I trust we can gain insight that will aid us in our walk with the Lord. I want to preach on the thought: [Controversy in Canaan](#).

**I. A Developing Crisis** (5-7) – Here we discover the details surrounding the crisis that had developed in Canaan. While Abraham and Lot may not have been directly involved, left unhandled, the situation would have implications on their relationship as well. Notice:

**A. The Challenge** (5-6) – [And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.](#) <sup>[6]</sup> [And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.](#) These men had been blessed abundantly of God. As they journeyed together their herds and wealth continued to grow. Eventually they reached a point where the land could not support all that each man possessed. This led to a conflict concerning whose cattle would graze where and which herds were allowed to water first or at which well. This began to create a major problem.

- The contention was really between those who managed the flocks instead of between Abraham and Lot. However, a guiding principle remains. Each manager believed his flocks always deserved the best grazing and priority to the wells. Little consideration was given to the needs of the other. Unfortunately we see this much too often in our day, and even among the church.

**B. The Controversy** (7a) – [And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle.](#) As the herds and herdsmen of Abraham and Lot continued to dwell together, tensions began to rise. It wasn't long until great [strife](#) developed between them. Strife

means “*controversy, to dispute, or quarrel; a term that was later used in reference to a legal controversy.*” Rather than being content with their blessings, strife began to surface.

- Strife is dangerous among God’s people. Often we find situations very similar to those described in the text. It really isn’t about a particular need; it is simply resentment toward others. Some have a problem accepting the fact that God may be willing to bless something other than what they are involved in or promoting. Churches seem to develop cliques that are very narrow minded in their acceptance or appreciation of others.
- There is no place for resentment among the body of Christ. We are all working together. I can’t do it all and neither can you. We need to learn to let others do those things God has called them to do and support them rather than resenting them. Service unto the Lord is not a competition. We are not here to see who can shine the brightest. We are here to serve the Lord in unity and love!

**C. The Canaanites** (7b) – *and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.* Here we find that Abraham and Lot were not alone in Canaan. The Canaanites and Perizzites also dwelt in the land. If Abraham lived no differently than the rest of the world, what kind of witness would that be? This crisis had to be resolved. It would eventually have a negative impact on Abraham’s witness as well as those around him. If he and Lot allowed this crisis to continue, the world would view them and their God no differently than other people or gods.

- Do you realize the world is watching us? They know more about us and this church than you realize. I am tired of the accusations of the world concerning the church. We are different! There has been a change in those who are saved. We need to let the world know that living for the Lord is worthwhile. Each of us has a reputation to uphold and protect. How can we expect to win the lost to Christ when we allow resentment and strife to dwell among us?

**II. A Deliberate Choice** (8-9) – Something had to be done before this crisis got out of hand. Abraham made a deliberate choice in handling the situation. Notice:

**A. The Recognition** (8) – *And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.* Abraham realized there was a problem. He wanted to seek a resolution. He was not determined to have his way or none. Abraham was sensitive to the needs and desires of Lot as well. He was sensitive to the direction of the Lord.

- The church could use more sensitivity in our day. Many are not considerate of the needs of others. They are determined to have their way even if it is not in the best interest of the church. They are simply unwilling to compromise their desires or demands for anyone. We need to develop a sensitive spirit toward the Lord. We need to learn to seek God in everything we do. Pray about things before you act. Seek God's will and His wisdom about circumstances and preferences.

**B. The Separation** (9a) – *Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me.*

Abraham made a hard choice. He loved Lot and desired to fellowship with him, but he knew the situation demanded separation. They had accumulated so much that they could no longer dwell together without controversy. Separation was the only way.

- Now, don't misunderstand me; I am in no way advocating separation among God's people. We don't need separation; we need to come together in a spirit of unity. However, there are some things that we need to separate ourselves from. Separate yourself from the urge to condemn or seek fault in others. Separate yourself from those who only have negative thoughts concerning the church. Separate yourself from the "rumor mill" and the desire to gossip. Do not allow yourself to become a slave to negativity and fault finding. If you can't change it, avoid it.

**C. The Submission** (9b) – *if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.* Keep in mind that it was Abraham that God came to in Ur. Lot was a recipient of the blessings of Abraham. It would have been easy for Abraham to have made his choice and offer Lot what was left, but he didn't. Abram allowed Lot to have first choice of the land. He told Lot to choose and he would be satisfied with what remained.

- Is there not a tremendous lesson for all of us in that? We live in a "me" centered society. It is even that way in the church. Most of us are determined to have our way regardless of what others desire. What happened to serving others? What happened to a desire to see the church grow and prosper, even if it came at a price for us? We need to get to the place that we realize we are here to please the Lord and serve Him, not to satisfy ourselves.

**III. A Devoted Change** (14-18) – On the surface it may have appeared that Abram had lost due to his choice, but actually he gained much. Consider:

**A. Abraham's Allotment** (14-16) – Here we discover the blessing God had reserved for Abraham. We see:

**1. The Provision (14-15)** – *And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: <sup>[15]</sup> For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.* God told him to look around. As far as his eye could see, that is what God had reserved for him. In sacrificing a little, God gave much in return. God can do the same for us. We may feel as if we are the one doing all the giving, but God can enlarge our coasts by being obedient and seeking Him.

**2. The Promise (16)** – *And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.* The blessings Abraham would receive would not be limited to his life only. He would be blessed with a family that outnumbered the sands of the sea, and they too would be blessed because of his obedience.

- Do you desire something of value to be left for our children? Do you want Fellowship to remain a place where God is worshipped, lives are changed, and people find help for their souls? If so, seek God and live for Him. We may not always understand all He is doing, but if we will trust Him, future generations will benefit from our faithfulness.

**B. Abraham's Contentment (17)** – *Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.* God allowed Abram to walk over the land. He showed him all that he would receive. No doubt this put his mind at ease. He followed God and he was blessed for that.

- There is contentment in the Lord. He has the power to work in our lives and give us peace to follow Him. Our minds cannot comprehend all that we could receive if we would get our hearts right with the Lord. He has so much that He wants to provide, but many times we hinder that through disobedience.

**C. Abraham's Commitment (18)** – *Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.* In the previous chapter, Abraham had been to Egypt and lied about Sarah being his wife. He had strayed from the Lord. Here he had a decision to make concerning Lot and he chose wisely. Abraham immediately erected an altar to worship the Lord. He had not lost a thing; in fact he had gained much, including a new devotion unto the Lord.

**Conclusion:** Where are you in the journey today? Are you struggling while facing division and strife? The Lord wants us to enjoy abundant life in Him, but we must walk with Him in order to receive it. If there are needs, especially regarding salvation, come to Him today!