

Taking the Low Road

Genesis 13:10-11 HCSB Lot looked out and saw that the entire Jordan Valley as far as Zoar was well-watered everywhere like the LORD's garden and the land of Egypt. This was before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. (11) So Lot chose the entire Jordan Valley for himself. Then Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other.



¹Verse 2 of this same chapter describes Abram's wealth in terms of livestock and precious metals. We get a glimpse of some of this wealth in the account of some of the gifts Abram's servant gave to Abram's future daughter-in-law:

- **Genesis 24:22 HCSB** After the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing half a shekel, and for her wrists two bracelets weighing 10 shekels of gold.

Note: A shekel was about 2/5 ounce. Based on archeological digs, I'd guess this was a nose ring weighing about 8 grams.

- **Genesis 24:35 HCSB** "The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become rich. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys.
- **Genesis 24:53 HCSB** Then he brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave *them* to Rebekah. He also gave precious gifts to her brother and her mother.

The Holy Spirit, using Moses as a scribe, employed the Hebrew term *kābēd* (lit., "heavy") in 12:10 in the sense of "severe" in the description of the famine that drove Abram to travel to Egypt.

- **Genesis 12:10 HCSB** There was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine in the land was severe.

For those of you who attend the Thursday night Ironworks class, there is a term you might want to be familiar with. It is "*gezera shava*". *Gezera shava* is analogy by common term or similarity in phrase. I usually use it as one of a dozen or so principles to determine how to apply Old Covenant case history. Here is a good opportunity to see that principle applied in interpretation and application.

We see the same word, *kābēd* (lit., "heavy"), in 13:2 used along with money to give the sense of "wealthy". By using the same word in these two distinct ways, Moses is not only suggesting that the two accounts (12:10–13:1; 13:2–18) be read together but that comparisons be drawn between them (e.g. "see how in Egypt (the world) the famine is *kābēd* but in Canaan (God's Kingdom/d'vekut) Hashem's blessings are *kābēd*.")



¹ http://www.livius.org/a/belgium/hees/hees_treasure.JPG

²Abram had received the livestock from Pharaoh (Genesis 12:16), and it is reasonable to assume the same for the silver and gold since King Abimelech gave silver to Abram for the similar offense against Sarah (Genesis 20:16).

Abram's "livestock" (*miqneh* in Hebrew) included domesticated "sheep and cattle" (Genesis 12:16), which required bountiful grass and water. When you put all these with Lot's "flocks and herds" that we see in verse 5, the land simply could not supply sufficient grazing. Turn if you would to:

- **Genesis 12:8-9 HCSB** From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and worshiped Him. (9) Then Abram journeyed by stages to the Negev.

Here, we see Abraham's journey from Canaan toward Egypt described. Now go back to our text today and we see:

- **Genesis 13:3-4 HCSB** He went by stages from the Negev to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had formerly been, (4) to the site where he had built the altar. And Abram worshiped the LORD there.



³Abram retraced his steps from the Negev to Bethel and Ai where he again worshiped the Lord, presumably at or near the altar he first erected there. Do you notice that the narrative states twice that his return trip mirrored his earlier travels? That Abram should take such care indicated his desire to recover his experience with God; the fact that the old altar remained suggests the permanency of the promises.

The patriarch's newfound wealth did not distract him from his worship of the Lord; his generosity toward Lot (vv. 8–9) and his later confession of trust in the Lord's provision (Genesis 14:22–24) may reflect Abram's renewed faith as a consequence of his Egyptian experience.

I would like to pause a moment here and, using the hermeneutic principle of *binyan av* which is analogy by common theme or concept, draw a parallel if I may. As Abraham showed a lack of faith and discredited himself by turning to Egypt but found his faith and worship renewed as He returned to Canaan and God's will, so it was for the purpose of worship that the Lord delivered Israel from Egypt (Exodus 3:12; Acts 7:7).

- **Exodus 3:12 HCSB** He answered, "I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I have sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain."
- **Acts 7:7 HCSB** **I will judge the nation that they will serve as slaves, God said. After this, they will come out and worship Me in this place.**

That should give us some degree of insight into the purpose of our salvation; of our liberation from the shackles of spiritual Egypt. We were ransomed. We were redeemed from the devil's slave market. Praise God. However, we were bought for a reason. We are to be a worshipping people!

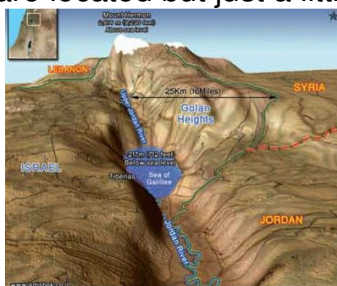
² <http://www.mo.nrcs.usda.gov/news/MOphotogallery/Livestock-Pasture/cattle%20and%20sheep.jpg>

³ <http://www.ebibleteacher.com/images/stonealt.jpg>

Abraham travelled to the area between Bethel and Ai, up on the ridge to the west of the Jordan Valley, northeast of Jerusalem. To give you a general sense of the location of our story, here's a map with both Bethel and Ai shown.⁴



Now, to give you some idea of the topography involved, here's a depiction of the same ridge line upon which Bethel and Ai are located but just a little further north.⁵



In all actuality, the difference is even MORE exaggerated since the Dead Sea is the lowest body of water on the earth, and the lowest point on the earth that is not hidden by the ocean! The Dead Sea is actually 400 meters lower than the Ocean's level!

So, Abraham and Lot are up on this ridge discussing the difficulties of coping with Hashem's blessings! May we all be cursed with such problems! He and Lot look down and eastward and Lot chooses to go down from the mountainous area into the lowlands. He travels east (which is always ominous as I'll explain in a second) and out of Canaan (which is even worse) separating himself from the man who'd been told "I'll bless all those who bless you."

The overflow of blessing for Abram in Egypt had benefited Lot according to the promises, "You will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2) and "I will bless those who bless you" (Genesis 12:3). Lot's decision in chap. 13 shows that separation from the patriarch led to the forfeiture of continued blessing and resulted in the opposite outcome (Genesis 19:30–38).

Abram advised their parting, so it is not the parting per se that caused Lot to forfeit the blessing. It was the circumstances under which Lot left that led to the forfeiture. He exhibited poor judgment by adopting a worldly, materialistic mindset. Chapter 13 indicates his disregard for the promissory land. Lot ignored Canaan for the deceptively attractive "cities of the plain"⁶; that the "cities of the plain" sat outside "Canaan" is clear from v. 12, a verse that draws a line between the two men.

- **Genesis 13:12 HCSB** Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but Lot lived in the cities of the valley and set up his tent near Sodom.

⁴ <http://www.keyway.ca/gif/bethel.gif>

⁵ http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_n7RlTmTdk-

[g/Sd8Xj0UY4BI/AAAAAAAAAu0/kVJAf7ZzFk/s400/Golan+topographical+map.bmp](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_n7RlTmTdk-g/Sd8Xj0UY4BI/AAAAAAAAAu0/kVJAf7ZzFk/s400/Golan+topographical+map.bmp)

⁶ Genesis 13:12; 19:29

That the geographical feature is key to the underlying message of the story is highlighted by the recurring word *yāshab* (Hebrew for “stayed/lived/inhabited/abide”).⁷ By this Moses not only draws the reader’s attention to the moral character of the place the nephew selected (vv. 10, 13) but underscores what drove the choice, e.g. materialism and the attraction of the fleshly senses.

Examples of the ominous nature of traveling eastward or outside of Canaan in the Bible:

Adam and Eve.

- [Genesis 3:24 HCSB](#) He drove man out, and east of the garden of Eden He stationed cherubim with a flaming, whirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life.

Cain.

- [Genesis 4:16 HCSB](#) Then Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Builders of the Tower of Babel.

- [Genesis 11:2](#) As people migrated eastward, they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.

Lot.

Lot’s choice of the cities in the “east” portends an unpromising consequence (v. 11).

- [Genesis 13:11 HCSB](#) So Lot chose the entire Jordan Valley for himself. Then Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other.

Esau.

Lot’s action is reminiscent of the folly of Esau, who treated lightly the promises (Genesis 25:34) and eventually lost the inheritance (Genesis 27:35). The geographical dislocation of Esau (Genesis 36:43–37:1) outside Canaan also contributes to the portrayal of his disqualification.

Ishmael.

To see the pattern that those who “leave Canaan” are rejected as potential heirs, consider what we see in the story of when Ishmael (the rejected son of the slave-woman⁸) was expelled and settled in the desert.⁹

Concubine sons.

The good Bible scholar must also take into account the removal of Abraham’s concubine’s sons, who also migrated east (Genesis 25:6).

- [Genesis 25:6 HCSB](#) And Abraham gave gifts to the sons of his concubines, but while he was still alive he sent them eastward, away from his son Isaac, to the land of the East.

Thus, we see that Genesis often signals ominous events by the geographical direction “east.”

Abram, on the other hand, “called on the name of the LORD” (v. 4) and resided in the land of Canaan (v. 18). By granting Lot first option on the coveted Canaan, the patriarch resisted any proprietary jealousy, leaving his future in the hands of the Lord. The spiritual disparity between Lot and Abram is implied by the description of Lot’s choice of the Jordan plain (vv. 10–13).

Lexical allusions (“looked and saw”; “well-watered”; “like the Lord’s garden”; “chose”) recall Eve’s attraction to the forbidden.

⁷ Strong’s #3427; vv. 6[2x], 7, 12, 18; also 19:1, 25, 29, 30

⁸ Galatians 4:22-31

⁹ 21:10, 20–21; 25:18

- **Genesis 3:6 HCSB** Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate *it*; she also gave *some* to her husband, *who was* with her, and he ate *it*.

It recalls to my mind at least the prohibited actions of the “sons of God”.

- **Genesis 6:1-2 HCSB** When mankind began to multiply on the earth and daughters were born to them, (2) the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were beautiful, and they took any they chose as wives for themselves.
- **Jude 1:6-7 HCSB** and He has kept, with eternal chains in darkness for the judgment of the great day, angels who did not keep their own position but deserted their proper dwelling. (7) In the same way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them committed sexual immorality and practiced perversions, just as they did, and serve as an example by undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

In Lot’s case, he chose the “forbidden” cities, but Abram waited on the Lord to present him Canaan. Of course, Lot’s life went downhill from that point on.

Derashot

Value relationships over personal material gain. Notice that Abraham was the one who was distressed over the quarreling while it does not seem to have troubled Lot in the least.

- **Proverbs 3:3-4 HCSB** Never let loyalty and faithfulness leave you. Tie them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. (4) Then you will find favor and high regard in the sight of God and man.

Value God’s will and direction even over your own common sense. Lot set an example which has been followed by innumerable people who have reached out for what they thought was an easy gain but instead got disaster.

- **Proverbs 3:5-8 HCSB** Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; (6) think about Him in all your ways, and He will guide you on the right paths. (7) Don’t consider yourself to be wise; fear the LORD and turn away from evil. (8) This will be healing for your body and strengthening for your bones.

Do whatever you can to stay in “Canaan” (God’s Kingdom and culture) and away from traveling “east” into the world.

- **Romans 12:2 HCSB** Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Allow your mind and heart to rest lightly on this world’s things and instead put the Kingdom of God first in your list of priorities.

- **Matthew 6:20-21 HCSB** *But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*
- **Matthew 6:31-33 HCSB** *So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ (32) For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.*

Develop a mindset that keeps you on the moral high ground and avoid descending into the world’s lush moral quagmires.

- **Deuteronomy 4:8-9 HCSB** And what great nation has righteous statutes and ordinances like this entire law I set before you today? (9) "Only be on your guard and diligently watch yourselves, so that you don’t forget the things your eyes have seen

and so that they don't slip from your mind as long as you live. Teach them to your children and your grandchildren.

Develop the mindset of a spiritual nomad and avoid putting down roots in the cities and culture of this world.

- **Hebrews 11:8-9 HCSB** By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went out to a place he was going to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, co-heirs of the same promise.
- **Hebrews 11:13 HCSB** These all died in faith without having received the promises, but they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.