

Abram Builds an Altar at Mamre

I was wondering when you were going to put up some kind of decoration,” said Jhamir to his roommate, Xavier. “Is that your hand?”

Xavier smiled. “Yes. It is.”

The two young men had been in their dorm room for two and a half weeks, and Xavier still had a box of belongings to unpack. He and Jhamir had hit it off and were quickly become friends. Xavier believed the two would be good roommates. Jhamir was from Chicago and the first of his family to go to college. He planned to major in mechanical engineering. Xavier was from Kansas City, Missouri, and he was a third-generation college student who planned to become a screenwriter.

The picture Jhamir was examining showed Xavier’s right hand—his writing hand—laying palm up on a piece of old wood. A nail had been graphically superimposed on his wrist, with blood oozing around it. The effect was to look like a closeup of a hand on a cross.

Xavier had created the image before coming to college, something he knew would remind him of his Savior. He wanted to honor God and to use the picture to remember that wherever he went, all his hard work and talent were dedicated to the Lord.

“It looks like your hand is on a cross,” said Jhamir. “That’s pretty cool.”

“It’s my way of honoring my Lord wherever I happen to be,” Xavier responded. “I’m glad you like it too.”

- 1.** *Why does God deserve our honor in all that we do?*
- 2.** *Do you find it easier to meet with God in a particular place? If so, where?*
- 3.** *How does trust in God help you to honor Him wherever you go?*

Abram Lets Lot Choose

Genesis 13:8-13 KJV

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.

9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: 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.

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

Genesis 13:8-13 NIV

⁸So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herd-ers and mine, for we are close relatives. ⁹Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

¹⁰Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)

¹¹So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: ¹²Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. ¹³Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

Abram is not willing to quarrel over land with his nephew. When Abram sees an issue between their hired hands,

his first response is to remind Lot of their familial connection. He diplomatically offers Lot the first choice of where to take his people. Abram's decision to let Lot choose where to reside shows his desire to make peace. And this is no ordinary plot of land. When God promised Abram land, He promised him an inheritance that would belong to his descendants forever. God would keep His promises.

After Lot looked around to inspect which direction was best, he discerned that the land to the east, Jordan toward Zoar, was better (vv. 10–11). The text says that Jordan toward Zoar was well-watered "like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt" (v. 10). While Lot's choice may seem like the right one, he actually chose poorly. A decision to separate from Abram, rather than follow him, would lead to Lot's loss of nearly everything, including his wife and wealth. His family line would survive only because he committed incest with his own daughters (Gen. 19:30–38).

Lot chose the land "toward the east." In Genesis, eastward movement is sometimes presented as movement away from God's presence. The text compares the land to "the garden of the LORD." Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden for their disobedience and placed on its east side, away from God's presence (Gen. 3:24). The land is also compared to Egypt, ironic given that Egypt would be inhospitable to Abram's descendants. Finally, the narrator mentions a subsequent destruction of Lot's wealth in verse 10: "This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah."

Through Lot's choice, God spared Abram and gave him the land that was better suited for his inheritance. Though it seemed like Abram and Lot were in control, God was the one working all things for His glory and Abram's good. Lot's chosen land was not what it seemed. While it had well-watered soil, the people in the land were wicked and sinning against God. Abram stayed in the land of Canaan, but Lot chose to live in the land of Sodom.

4. *Why does Abram let Lot choose the “best” plot of land?*

5. *Why does Lot choose to settle in the land to the east?*

6. *What does the story of Abram and Lot teach us about honoring God?*

Abram Builds an Altar at Mamre

Genesis 13:14–18 KJV

14 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:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

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.

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

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.

Genesis 13:14–18 NIV

¹⁴The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. ¹⁵All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. ¹⁶I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

¹⁷Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”

¹⁸So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

God called Abram’s family out of the land of Ur to bring them to the land of Caanan. In Genesis 12:1–2, God said “Go” and made a promise that He would bless Abram. Verses 14–17 show God’s continued blessings for

him. Once he is alone after Lot has departed, God makes a specific promise of territory in the land of Canaan. God will give all that his eyes can see and wherever his feet can walk (vv. 14, 17). God also reiterates an even greater promise, that Abram shall have future children, so many that they will be like particles of dust (v. 16). Lot was not going to be Abram's heir; God had a much better plan. Isaac will be the child of promise from God.

In response to God's great provision and promise, Abram moved his tent to Mamre at Hebron (v. 18). Abram comes to a grove of "great trees" at Mamre. Ironically, despite Lot's selfish attempt to choose the well-watered place when he left Abram, God brings Abram to a home with plenty of water—springs and wells and enough to support large trees and vegetation. In gratitude to God's provision, Abram constructs an altar for God. An altar is not only a place of sacrifice but also a monument, a place of remembrance.

By building an altar, Abram was marking the significance of this particular place. The altar was evidence of God's provision—visual evidence for all to see. God would appear to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre, where he and Sarah offer hospitality to three heavenly visitors (Gen. 18:1–15). Abraham and Sarah will be buried in a cave near their home in this place (Gen. 23:19; 25:9). And when the Israelites return, Hebron will be the place where David is anointed as king (2 Sam. 5:3).

No matter where Abram went, God remained faithful and kept His promises. When the land to the east seemed better, God was able to provide a home. Even though Abram and Sarai were too old to have children, God would soon bless them with a child and a large family. God is always faithful to His promises.

- 7.** *What promises to Abram does God make (vv. 14–17)?*
- 8.** *How does God show faithfulness to Abram?*
- 9.** *Why does Abram build an altar?*

Wherever

Christina's church observed that she honored God by being generous with her time. When something needed to be done, she did it. She was an encouraging person. Work was another story. There, she was like any other employee, complaining and grumbling about her supervisor. She'd take supplies from the office. She often returned late from her lunch break. Her coworkers didn't know about her faith. They certainly didn't see Jesus through her actions.

James demonstrated his love for God at work. But he struggled to honor the Lord when he went out to the sports bar with old friends. James joined them in shouting and cussing at the game. He became so absorbed in the game that he'd drink too much and would have to be driven home.

Sherri honored God in almost all places and times. But she was like a different person on vacation. When she went on an excursion and met handsome men, Sherri was careful not to mention her faith. She was focused on enjoying herself, and Sherri's behavior changed.

Christina, James, and Sherri loved the Lord and knew how to honor Him in certain environments. But they didn't understand that honoring God isn't like changing clothes.

In every place and with every action, we are either pointing others to God, or, to something else. That something else is usually ourselves. We can try to make ourselves the center; or we can choose to live like Jesus, who was never too busy to consider the needs of others.

10. *What can make it difficult to honor God in various situations?*

11. *Why is it important to honor God wherever you are?*

12. *What can you do to remind yourself to honor God wherever you are?*

Is It a Lifestyle?

Do you compartmentalize your life? Do you act one way at church, but you let another side show to the people at work? Are there occasions when you use coarse language to run others down? Do you forget to be gracious? Jesus died for our sins that we might be transformed and live a life that honors Him, wherever and whenever. God doesn't want us to compartmentalize our lives but to intentionally honor Him by how we live each day.

► *What can you do throughout your day to intentionally honor Him? Write two things you will do this next week to honor God.*

KEY VERSE

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. —Genesis 13:18 KJV

So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives." —Genesis 13:18 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 2 through September 8

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Romans 8:18–28—Sighs Too Deep for Words.
- Tue.** Psalm 34:11–22—God Hears Our Cry for Help.
- Wed.** Nehemiah 12:27–30, 44–47—Celebrate with Rejoicing, Thanksgiving, and Singing.
- Thu.** 2 Chronicles 7:12–22—Bring Your Requests Before God.
- Fri.** Luke 11:1–13—Lord, Teach Us to Pray.
- Sat.** 1 Kings 8:22–24, 27–30, 37–43—God the Promise Keeper.
- Sun.** 1 Kings 8:44–53—Hear Our Plea and Grant Compassion.