

A TRAGIC BLUNDER

Genesis 13:1-13

Haran died when his son, Lot, was a youth of tender years. Lot was then taken into the family of his uncle, Abraham, who seems to have acted toward him as an affectionate father. Together they left their native hills, became companions in wandering and went down into Egypt, because Abraham did not trust God for the necessities of life.

While they were in Egypt, Abraham became a very wealthy man, and Lot shared in his riches. They got rich outside the will of God. This is the first time that riches are mentioned in the Bible. Here for the first time, though not the last one, wealth proved to be a source of trouble and vexation among relatives. Almost universally wealth is considered as a source of happiness and for that reason it is sought most eagerly. But, wealth is much more often a source of trouble and vexation than of comfort and satisfaction. Contentions have arisen in many families over the distribution of wealth. Many families have spent years in love and harmony until the time arrived for them to share the possessions that had been bequeathed to them. Not for the first time in human experiences, nor the last one, did prosperity prove to be more difficult than adversity.

After their return from Egypt into Canaan, and they became stationary, they soon discovered that the land was unable to furnish their herds of cattle and flocks of sheep with sufficient pasture and water. Consequently, it was not long until the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot quarreled over the insufficient pasture and water. Wise and statesmanlike Abraham was unwilling for this quarreling to continue.

Abraham took Lot out on a hilltop from whence they could get a wide view of the surrounding country, and where they could talk things over. Knowing that the existing state of affairs was untimely, unseemly, unwise, unrighteous, and unnecessary, Abraham suggested to Lot that the wise thing for them to do, to avoid strife and in the interest of peace, was for them to part company and each go to his own domain. He made it clear that brethren and worshipers of God must not indulge in quarreling. How much better it is to avoid contention and strife rather than to be a participant in it! Abraham's conduct on this occasion was such as became his exalted character. It was conciliatory. Knowing the value and blessedness of peace, Abraham refused to participate in contention because he knew that no man could tell when or how it would terminate. Standing in the superior relationship of an uncle, while Lot was only a nephew and an attendant, Abraham might well have claimed the deference and submission that were due to him. But, instead of asserting his rights, he was ready to concede to Lot. Since circumstances demanded that he and Lot separate, he wanted them to do so in the proper manner and in the right spirit. He said, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren."

Entirely free of any spirit of strife, Abraham generously waived his rights and cheerfully conceded to Lot whatever portion of the land he chose to take. With a generosity and magnanimity that is very captivating, Abraham left the whole decision with Lot saying, in substance, "Lot, choose the part of the country that you want and I will take what is left." There was not a trait of selfishness shown in Abraham's attitude or conduct. Most people insist on having their rights, but Abraham was willing to give up his rights for the sake of peace.

Instead of replying, "It is not for me to choose. You take your choice, and give me what is right," Lot was glad for an opportunity to take advantage of the privilege of increasing his wealth. Instead of seeking God's guidance when he made his choice, greedy Lot looked upon the magnificent well-watered Jordan Valley and the fine pasture lands adjacent to Sodom with its business and social opportunities, thought of the financial advantages he would have there and of the social opportunities that he and his family would have in Sodom, Lot decided to pitch his tent toward that wicked city. Lot made the terrible mistake of choosing on the basis of worldly rather than spiritual standards. Since earthly prosperity was all that occupied his mind, he did not consider the welfare of his soul. Lot's motive in making his choice was to advance his worldly interests. How much better it would have been had Lot considered the welfare of the soul instead of earthly prosperity!

Any choices that take in nothing but the seen and temporal are foolish and fatal. Lot made the tragic mistake of taking into account his own worldly circumstances, the suitability of the Jordan Valley to permit the gratification of his ambition to become rich, and his desire to excel his uncle in worldly possessions. When he pitched his tent toward Sodom, Lot faced in the wrong direction. The outcome of any life is a matter of the direction in which it faces. Naturally, when anybody goes in the wrong direction he cannot expect to arrive at the right destination.

In making his choice Lot did not think of God. He completely ignored God, which was the most foolish thing he could have done. His one controlling motive in making his choice was money-making. Ignoring God's will and resolving to make money was far-seeing and shrewd from the viewpoint of man, but it was short-sighted and foolish from God's viewpoint. Christ called the man a fool who lived to make money, and then added, "So is he that is rich towards God." In other words, the Lord of glory says the man who puts money before God is a fool. Lot's choice was not only a foolish and colossal blunder, but it was extremely costly.

Lot looked at everything from the viewpoint of its monetary value. He permitted covetousness to capture the citadel of his heart. He did not count the cost of making money. Lot deliberately chose to give his life to the pursuit of mammon. As a result, he acquired property, popularity, prominence, and position. But, remember that Lot lost the peace and contentment that results from seeking God's guidance and walking with Him. He had the sad experience of seeing his property go up in smoke and down in ashes. Because he sought to achieve his selfish desires, Lot failed to win the smile of God's approval. He made money, but he lost everything else, and then lost all his money. If Lot had only stopped to count the cost of that move, he would never have made it. What benefits Lot was losing, and what dangers he was able to rush into, he did not consider. His earthly prosperity was all that occupied his mind. He did not consider the welfare of his soul or of the souls of his family. His selfish choice was deeply reprehensible, and yet there are so many today who pursue the same heedless and pernicious course.

It is always tragic and disastrous to ignore the will of God in the making of choices. When any man sets himself up against the will of God he always finds unrest of soul, regardless of how prosperous he may be. The most tragic blunder that Lot ever made was that of deciding to move into the rich and fertile Jordan Valley. Lot made money there, but how it did cost him to do it. If he had only stopped to count the cost of that move, he never would have made it. Lot was quite

proud of his daughters, but they were ruined because he moved into Sodom. What a price to pay for business prosperity! What a price to pay for any kind of a life, however great and glorious and splendid, that would ruin his children! Lot never was able to get those children back to the place where they were when they moved into the city. Lot lost his influence over the members of his own household. What a sad situation in any life when one's own kindred have lost confidence in him and when they laugh at his testimony, as was the case with Lot.

Tragedy upon tragedy followed selfish and disobedient Lot. The lives of his married children were destroyed when the city burned. He witnessed the sudden and terrible death of his wife, who disobeyed God, and who turned to a pillar of salt and was spoken of by the Lord Jesus as a warning to others of the danger of loving this present evil world. His two single daughters became mothers by their own father, while he was intoxicated. Moab and Ammon had a curse pronounced upon them. Could you think of a more costly course or a worse ending for a man's family than that? That is what Lot's choice of making money his chief aim in life cost him and his family.

Lot had won the fruitful plain of the Jordan Valley, but his loss was far greater than his gain. If he had stayed in the place of separation from sin, God would have blessed and prospered him. It is far better to do as Abraham did and to reap his reward than it is to choose as Lot did and suffer his loss.