

Turn Again

And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace. (Gen 19:27,28)

Surely, it was a long stare of despair and grief. The smoke and stench of death filled the entire sky as he looked down upon the plain where the lush pasture and busy cities had been just the day before. Never had he been so disappointed, so crushed in heart.

What had, to this point, been an amazing walk of faith turned sour. Faith subsided in the wake of sadness. Abraham turned away.

And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. (Gen 20:1,2)

Abraham left the land of promise heading south and west of the scene of this horrific disaster. We know where Kadesh was as well as Shur so if Gerar was between them as the scripture indicates this would place it in the northern Sinai. Many map makers erroneously place it further north between Gaza and Beersheba. This location is coincident with the Tell Abu Hurayrah or Tell Haror but there is no definitive agreement among archeologists and even the ancient

Eusebius placed it further south. The point being that Abraham was headed back toward Egypt.

Now, many commentators assert that Abraham was simply falling into an old pattern in forsaking Sarah, but that doesn't take into account what had happened just before this. You see, the Lord had just visited Abraham in person. Perhaps only a few days or weeks previously, He'd eaten a meal at Abraham's camp and told him that Sarah would have his child in nine months or so. Sarah laughed in disbelief – remember? Yet, Abraham acted here in Gerar as if that promise meant nothing. It was as though he just didn't care anymore.

But God protected Sarah, and Abimelech being warned, did not touch her. Though the king bestowed many gifts upon Abraham as recompense for the error, the patriarch was exposed as a spinner of the truth. Yet, there was still seemingly no conviction. He simply made a lame excuse for his lie and in the process, indicted God as the one to blame – he said God made him a "wanderer" ...

"There is a terrible meaning in this verb wander which Abraham uses. The Hebrew word occurs exactly fifty times in Scripture and never in a good sense. It is used of animals going astray, of a drunken man reeling, or staggering, of sinful seduction, of a prophet's lies causing the people to err, of the path of a lying heart. Six other words are translated wander, any one of which Abraham might have used, but he used the worst word available." (Barnhouse)

"Abraham is also, indirectly, blaming God for the problem; when

God called me to wander from my father's house is a way of saying that God sent him out on this dangerous journey upon which Abraham had to protect himself." (Guzik) This infers that he didn't believe God would protect him.

"Also, it is interesting to see that Abraham "accepts" these gifts, when he had refused gifts from a pagan king previously (Genesis 14:21-24) because he wanted no one to think that a man had made him rich. Here, because of Abraham's compromise, he finds it hard to re-claim that same high moral ground!" (Guzik)

Wow! The father of our faith acted as though he had none and furthermore, as though he was pointing the finger at God as being to blame for his poor attitude. Why?? No cell phones. What?? Bear with me. I'm not intending to treat this serious issue lightly.

You see, Abraham dearly loved Lot. In fact, it's easy to imagine him thinking of Lot as the son he never had. It is evident that our hero of the faith took his nephew under wing after Lot's father died back in Ur. For years, they had roamed the unfamiliar land of promise together. Not long before, Abraham had risked everything to rescue his loved one from the hands of several hostile armies and just a few days or weeks ago, he had gone way out on a limb negotiating with God for Lot's preservation as the Lord was about to destroy Sodom.

God seemed intent on depriving Abraham of a parental relationship. He told Abraham to send his son Ishmael away and then in what was a seemingly crushing disappointment, God destroyed

Sodom and Abraham's beloved Lot. Wait a minute, you may think. Lot was saved out of Sodom; God specifically saved him because of Abraham's intercession! (And Ishmael was fine as well.)

That's right. But, I strongly believe that Abraham did not know that until much later. No cell phones. There was no way for him to know. Recall, Lot headed like a banshee for the hills of Moab and hid out in a cave. Meanwhile, Abraham behaved, as we've discussed, like his heart was broken. He acted as though he felt that God was not Who he thought He was, perhaps He was just uncaring, perhaps untrustworthy. You see, it's quite possible that he was misjudging the faithfulness and goodness of God based upon what he could see with the eyes and his limited understanding of God's plan. The Lord was in the process of stretching his faith big-time, but Abraham didn't know that. All he could see was that virtually all the people he loved were taken from him – his brother Nahor, his mother and father Terah, his son Ishmael, his nephew/son Lot and family. And following God's leading seemed to be leading nowhere.

Maybe you can identify with dear Abraham here. I can. But know this -- that God is absolutely faithful and good in spite of what your senses and feelings may press upon you. Abraham couldn't see it but Lot was safe. So was Sarah. And just as He promised, she gave birth to Abraham's son Isaac just nine months later.

When our son, Gabe, went home to be with the Lord, a few of his friends, like Abraham, stumbled in their faith. Some felt they couldn't

trust God like they'd believed. A few were just so hurt they lost hope. But like Lot, Gabe is safe in God's care and one day they will know that.

The walk of faith is not without some stumbling along the way. We're not told how or why or when, but between this sad episode in his life and Genesis 22 father Abraham turned again toward heaven, toward the faith that brought him righteous standing with God. It likely took time, but eventually, his faith in God became so strong, the Lord could test him with the command to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Moriah. And Abraham never flinched. He had complete trust in God. What a turn around!

In 1993 Gerald Sittser, a professor at Whitworth College was driving home from a family outing. In the car was his mother, wife of 20 years and four children. A drunk driver swerved across the center line and hit them head on. In an instant he lost his wife, his two year old daughter and his mother. In his book, *A Grace Disguised*, Sittser shares some insights from his painful journey:

"The accident itself bewilders me today as much as it did three years ago. Much good has come out of it, but all the good in the world will never make the accident itself good. It remains a horrible, tragic and evil event to me. Yet the grief I feel is sweet as well as bitter. I still have a sorrowful soul; yet I wake up each morning joyful, eager for what the new day will bring. Never have I felt as much pain as I have in the last three years; yet never have I experienced as much pleasure in simply being alive ... never have I felt so broken; yet never have I felt

so whole . . . Never have I been so aware of my weaknesses and vulnerability; yet never have I been so content and felt so strong ... Above all, I have become aware of the power of God's grace and my need for it. My soul has grown because it has been awakened to the goodness and love of God. God has been present in my life these past three years. God will continue to be present to the end of my life and through all eternity. God is growing my soul, making it bigger and filling it with himself. My life is being transformed." (Joel Smith)

Perhaps, some tragedy has impacted your walk with the Lord and you're reading this thinking, 'Maybe God's there but He's not there for me.' Perhaps, you've turned away from Him ever so slightly or even 180 degrees. You may know you're off course but agony has birthed apathy. If that's you or someone you know, take heart. Remember, you don't have a 'cell phone' either – that is, you just don't have all the facts. If you'll turn again to your heavenly Father, what looks and feels like absolute disaster will one day be shown to you in a whole new light. Don't give up. One day soon, the heavens will open and the Son of God will appear. He will make all things right.

If you've fallen away, don't be condemned. Turn again from Egypt. Do not sacrifice what God has promised upon the altar of disappointment. Turn again and know that heaven will cheer you on, God will smile, and you will know that your Savior is indeed worthy to be trusted, to be loved and followed forever.