

extreme":⁴⁷ "Is not the whole land before you? Kindly part from me: If you go north, I will go south; and if you go south, I will go north" (13:9). Abram's magnanimity is enormously important and instructive: "His trust [in God's] promise makes him gracious and generous."⁴⁸ Abram believes what God has told him—the land will one day belong to him and his descendants—but he does not insist that the promise must be fulfilled in its entirety at the present moment.

Some modern Jewish thinkers insist that the religious person "discerns in every divine pledge man's obligation to bring about its fulfillment, in every promise a specific norm."⁴⁹ But Genesis 13 has other ideas, emphasizing instead that sometimes the appropriate religious posture is patience and a willingness to wait. Abram understands that, ultimately, the land is a gift,⁵⁰ not an earthly possession—and so he refuses to grasp it too tightly.

The land has been promised to Abram by God, and yet he is willing to let go of part of it in the interest of peace. Abram treasures the land, but he trusts in God so deeply and values family concord so highly that he lets go of precisely what is so precious to him. Strikingly, Bible scholar Victor Hamilton notes, Abram "is prepared to sacrifice what has been promised to him, as he will later willingly offer Isaac who has been promised to him."⁵¹ Jon Levenson insightfully adds: "Since Abraham is finally again promised the lands he ceded to Lot, the chapter has a certain parallel with the *Akedah*, in which Abraham gets back him whom he gave up and receives anew the promises that depend on the would-be offering."⁵²

Immediately after Abram and Lot part ways, God reiterates the promise of land and even intensifies it. Abram is to receive "the whole land . . . through its length and its breadth." And now it is Abram himself, and not just his descendants, who will inherit the land (Gen. 13:14–17). Bible scholar Gordon Wenham observes that "the reiteration of the promises puts the divine seal of approval on Abraham's treatment of Lot."⁵³

What is the nature of the gap between Abram's character and Lot's? When Abram returns from Egypt newly "very rich with cattle, silver, and gold" (Gen. 13:2), the Torah tells us that "he proceeded by stages

from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been formerly, between Bethel and Ai, the site of the altar that he had built there at first; and there Abram invoked the Lord by name" (13:3–4). By indicating that Abram returned to his familiar routine—the same home and the same devotion to God—the text hints that Abram has returned home unchanged by his newfound wealth; he is the same person now as he was before he grew prosperous.⁵⁴ The fact that Abram invokes God's name is telling, since Lot evinces no signs of piety or gratitude to God.⁵⁵ Moreover, when Abram offers Lot whichever part of the land he wants, Lot chooses the area near Sodom, which is beyond the borders of the Promised Land. Abram amasses wealth and remains pious and humble, ever aware of the fact that what he has been given is a gift; Lot amasses wealth and hungrily seeks out more, so much so that he leaves the Promised Land in search of a place he finds materially more appealing. Lot thus anticipates the decision of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, who similarly choose to dwell outside the land because they are drawn to "cattle country."⁵⁶ In an understated way, the Torah even ties the two stories together: The land inhabited by Reuben and Gad borders on the home of the Ammonites and the Moabites, Lot's descendants.⁵⁷ Reuben and Gad, too, are Lot's (spiritual) descendants. Lot's decision demonstrates just how alluringly deceptive appearances can be and how blinded we can be by our own acquisitiveness: "Lot looked about him and saw how well watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it—this was before the Lord had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—all the way to Zoar, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt" (Gen. 13:10). Lot sees how beautiful the land near Sodom is, but pays no attention at all to the character of its inhabitants. Note the narrator's ominous warning in our verse, as well as the Torah's simple declaration that "the inhabitants of Sodom were wicked sinners against the Lord" (13:13). "Dazzled by the surface appearance of prosperity, he pays no heed to the moral depravity of his future neighbors."⁵⁸ Lot sees that the land in the valley is reminiscent of Egypt, but given Abram and Sarai's recent experience there, this should not necessarily be an attraction.