

## ABRAM AND LOT

*Genesis 13:1-13; 14:1-16*

In addition to the chapters assigned, the teacher should read Genesis 11, 12, 18, and 19, which cover the story of Lot. Familiarity with a map of the journey, and with the location of the cities mentioned in the Holy Land is also important. Archaeologists are uncertain as to the exact location of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but it is beginning to seem probable that they may be found in an area now covered by part of the Dead Sea, which was in Bible times part of the plain of Jordan.

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### Doctrinal Points

*When we are tempted, the Lord always manages to warn us in some way.*

*From chapter 12 of Genesis on, the Word is in general true history as well as parable.*

*We should examine our thoughts to see if they are based on heavenly or on worldly principles.*

*A life of willing obedience to the Lord leads toward heaven.*

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### Notes for Parents

Abram, or Abraham as he was later renamed by the Lord, was a man chosen by the Lord as the founder of the Jewish Church. The church raised up among the few good people who remained after the Most Ancient Church perished (those described by the story of Noah) was called the Ancient Church. As you read in chapters 10 and 11 of Genesis, it continued for many generations, but eventually it also became corrupt. Its people were not destroyed like those of the earlier church, but they became hostile to each other and were scattered all over the earth. This is described in the symbolic story of the Tower of Babel. It was among these people that idolatry arose. Recorded history begins in this period

and finds men selfish and warlike and worshipers of idols. But even among these people there were some individuals who were better than others. They, too, were idolaters and had lost all knowledge of true worship, but they believed in a God and wished to obey Him rather than to follow their own desires. Such a man was Abram.

Abram was called by the Lord to leave his home in Ur of Chaldea and go to the land of Canaan, which is called the Holy Land. He obeyed, taking with him his immediate family, which included his orphaned nephew Lot. Some of them stopped halfway—as some of us stop halfway in our progress from natural selfish living to a state of heavenly living—but Lot went on with Abram. Read the story in chapter 12. The lesson begins as they were about to settle in permanent homes in the Holy Land. We see that, although Abram and Lot did not quarrel, their herdmen did, and Abram gave Lot his choice of the part of the country in which he wished to settle. Lot's choice of the low valley of the Jordan, because it looked pleasant and easy to live in, led him into many difficulties. Read with your children this week chapters 15 through 21 and see how Abram prospered while Lot failed even though Abram and later the Lord did their best to save him.

We all have choices to make every day, and we are often tempted to make Lot's choice of the way which looks easiest and most pleasant, without stopping to think of the temptations and dangers which the easy path so often brings with it. Yet we all admire people who are willing to do the hard things. And we know what we mean when we say of a person that he is "going downhill." Children should be taught that the easy way is not necessarily the right way, and that strength is gained—in mental and spiritual things as well as in physical ones—by measuring up to difficult tasks as they come to us.

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### Primary

The whole story of Lot can be told very simply, with emphasis on Abram's

kindness to him, on the Lord's blessing of Abram because of his obedience, and on the Lord's merciful provision for the rescue and protection of Lot, even after he made a foolish choice. Be sure the children learn the names of Abram and Lot and the fact that the "children of Israel" about whom they will hear so much were descendants of Abram, and that the descendants of Lot were the Moabites and the Ammonites who became enemies of Israel. Explain also that Abram's name was later changed to *Abraham*, and that he is usually referred to as Abraham.

How was Noah saved from the flood?

When the rain was over, what two birds did he send out to see if the ground was dry?

How many times did he send out the dove?

What was the first thing Noah did when he came out of the ark?

A whole race of people was built up from the descendants of Noah.

For a time they lived well, but after a while they again forgot the Lord and began to go their own selfish ways.

But the Lord had promised not to destroy mankind again; so this time He scattered them over the face of the earth.

The story of this is told in the first nine verses of chapter 11 of Genesis.

It is called the story of the Tower of Babel.

But again the Lord found a man who would obey Him.

The man's name was Abram. At first he lived in a city called Ur, but the Lord told him to take his family and everything he had and travel to the land of Canaan, because this was to be his home and the home of his children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Canaan was a long way from Ur, but Abram obeyed the Lord. He took his wife with him. Her name was Sarai. And he also took his nephew Lot, whose father was dead. Abram's brother Nahor and his family and old Terah, the father of Abram and Nahor, went, too, but they did not go all the way. They stopped at a place which they called Haran after Lot's father.

When Abram and Sarai and Lot reached the land of Canaan, one of the first places they stopped was Bethel. You will often hear of Bethel in our lessons. Do you remember what was the very first thing Noah did when he came out of the ark after the flood? He built an altar and worshiped the Lord. Abram did the very same thing at Bethel, because he was so grateful to the Lord for bringing

them safely into the promised land.

Then Abram went farther south in the land of Canaan and then, because there was a famine in the land, they had to go down into Egypt for a while. A famine is a time when food is so scarce that people cannot get enough to eat. While Abram lived in Egypt, the Lord helped him and he became very rich “in cattle, in silver, and in gold.”

When they came back to the land of Canaan, where did they go first?

There Abram worshiped the Lord again.

What trouble did Abram and Lot have?

How did Abram settle the difficulty?

Lot went to live near Sodom and very soon began to have troubles. Once Abram had to go down and save him when the people of Sodom were carried away by their enemies, and later the Lord had to send two angels to save Lot when Sodom was destroyed because of its wickedness. When we have a choice to make, we should be more careful, shouldn't we?

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### Junior

Have the class study a map and look up all the Bible references in the notes. Emphasize the fact that this is the beginning of true history in the Bible as well as the beginning of a third church. The important lesson is, of course, the foolishness of choosing the thing which looks easy and pleasant without stopping to think whether or not it is the right thing. Stress the importance of avoiding bad companions.

How did the people of the Most Ancient Church destroy themselves?

Why was it that Noah could be saved?

What was the first thing Noah did when he came out of the ark?

What did the Lord promise?

What does Swedenborg call the church which then grew up?

The people of the Ancient Church, like those of the Most Ancient Church, lived at peace with each other for a long time and were very happy and very wise, especially in spiritual knowledge. But as time went on, they began to be proud of their wisdom and to think that they were wise of themselves and did not need to

learn of the Lord. Then they began to have differences of opinion, and each one thought everyone else ought to agree with him because he believed himself to be wise. Finally they could no longer live together in peace and were scattered all over the earth. Read Genesis 11:1-9. This is the familiar story of the Tower of Babel, but with what you have learned you can understand that it is a picture of the condition of the people in the end of the Ancient Church. The tower they were trying to build was begun in the valley—way down on the level of their own minds—and they imagined they could reach up to heaven in that way. All sorts of strange ideas and beliefs grew up, and men began to worship idols which they themselves made. Our history books go back to this time, because it was at this time that men began to try to preserve records of their own greatness, and history depends on these records for its knowledge. So our history books do not tell about the Golden and Silver Ages.

With chapter twelve of the Bible we begin to study about individuals who really lived and did the things the stories tell about. We have seen that Adam and Noah were names which described whole generations of people. But Abram and Lot were individuals. Look at a map and find Ur of Chaldea, where they lived. They were idolaters like all the people around them, but they were men who meant to be good and to do what God wanted them to do, and not just to have their own way. So the Lord could use them to begin another church on earth, which was to become the Jewish Church. Abram, or Abraham as he was later named by the Lord, was chosen because he was always willing to obey the Lord, even though he had many false ideas about God in his mind just as his father and ancestors in Chaldea had.

Abram was told by the Lord to leave Ur and travel to the land of Canaan, and the Lord promised to make of him there “a great nation,” and to bless him. Abram obeyed, even though the journey was a long one and the new land was unknown to him. He took with him his wife Sarai, his father Terah, his brother Nahor, and his nephew Lot (whose father Haran had died). Look at your map

and see how they had to go way up to the north to avoid traveling across the desert. Find the place called Haran. This place was named for Lot's father, and it was also called the "city of Nahor" because Nahor and his family decided to settle there and not go on to the land of Canaan. Terah also stayed there and died before Abram went on. But Lot continued with Abram. When they reached Canaan, which we know as the "Holy Land," they stopped first at Shechem and then at Bethel, and at each of these places Abram built an altar and worshiped the Lord. Then they went toward the south and, because there was a famine in the land, they went down into Egypt and stayed there for some time. And the Lord blessed both of them and made them rich.

But now that they were about to settle in the land which had been promised to Abram, they found that they would not be able to live together. Our story tells us that their herdsmen quarreled about where their herds and flocks should graze. We all know that quarreling is wrong, and yet we are tempted to quarrel even sometimes with friends. It is selfishness which causes quarrels. Abram refused to quarrel with Lot.

What did he propose?

By being generous he proved himself the better man, and the Lord did not let him lose by his kindness. Find Bethel on your map. It is on very high ground and from it you can see a long distance in both directions. It was a good place to make the choice of land.

What part of the land did Lot choose?

He chose it because it looked like good pasture for his flocks. He did not stop to think or to look ahead. We often choose the things that look best on the outside, without stopping to think.

What is mentioned in our reading from chapter 13 which suggests a possible danger in Lot's choice?

In chapter 14 we learn that this was a very real danger.

How was Lot taken captive?

Who saved him and brought him back?

When we choose to live with bad companions, we are very likely

to get into trouble just as Lot did. At first our friends step in and save us from the consequences of our foolishness. But each time we make the wrong choice, it is harder for us to be saved. Lot went on living in the low plain, and after a while he came to live in the very gate of Sodom. If you will read chapter 19, you will find that Sodom and Gomorrah had become so wicked that they were to be destroyed, and the Lord sent two angels to warn Lot and lead him out of Sodom. Even then he was not willing to go up into the mountains, as the angels advised him to do. You see that after Lot separated himself from Abram, he became weaker and weaker in character. Every time we choose to do what we know is not just what we ought to do, we grow a little weaker. Lot's descendants, the Moabites and Ammonites, were enemies of the Jews all through their history.

Can you see something of what this story means in its inner, spiritual sense? It means that when we choose to turn away from what we know the Lord wants us to do—the mountains always picture states near to the Lord—and choose to live for what we can get for ourselves—the low plain—just because that looks easiest and most pleasant, we are headed for trouble. And it means that we should be careful to keep good company and not imagine we are strong enough to go with bad companions without doing as they do. The story of Lot is written in the Bible by the Lord to serve as a warning to us.

Can you think of a sentence in the Lord's Prayer which we ought to say to ourselves when we are inclined to do as Lot did?

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### Intermediate

Trace in general outline the correspondence of the story of Abram's journey through his return from Egypt. Then take up the correspondence of Abram and Lot with reference to our individual lives, and follow through with Lot's choice and its consequences.

Just as selfishness crept into the Most Ancient Church and gradually destroyed it, so pride in their own intelligence and knowledge crept into the Ancient Church. Gradually people forgot what

the correspondences they had learned really meant; they came to worship as idols the images of animals and birds and fish which originally they had made to remind them of spiritual things. In this way many conflicting beliefs arose, and people quarreled and became enemies, and had to move away from each other. Recorded history begins with this state of the world, and therefore people imagine that men, to start with, were idol-worshippers and savages. The story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) pictures this final breaking up of the Ancient Church.

But the Lord had promised that people would never again be allowed to separate themselves completely from Him and so destroy themselves. As before, He was able to find a few people whose intentions remained good, even though they were also idol-worshippers. Abram and his family were such people.

From chapter 12 of Genesis on, the Bible story is in general—and in most of its particulars—true history as well as inspired parable with a spiritual meaning within the letter. Abram was a man who was willing to obey the Lord in all things, and he was chosen to be the father of the next church, the Jewish Church. This was not a celestial church like the Most Ancient, or a spiritual church like the Ancient, but a church on the natural plane of life only. Obedience to the letter of the law was its requirement. When we have passed out of our babyhood—but are still very little children—all we know about right and wrong is that we must obey our parents. Abram pictures this stage in our life. This—obedience—is the beginning of the development of a heavenly character. If we do not learn to obey, we cannot be heavenly people. But there must be continual progress. Abram was called to leave his home, Ur of Chaldea, and go to the land of Canaan, which came to be called the “Holy Land,” and which represents heaven or a heavenly character. So we are called by the Lord to leave our natural selfish inclinations and fit ourselves to live in heaven.

Abram’s journey is described in Genesis 12:1-10. He stopped for a time at Haran, and his brother Nahor stayed there. Then Abram went on into the Holy Land, and stopped first at Shechem



and then at Bethel, building an altar in each place. Then because of a famine, he went to Egypt where he became very rich. All through the Bible the land of Egypt pictures the part of our minds in which we store up facts—Swedenborg calls them “memory-knowledges.” At every step of our progress, material as well as spiritual, we find that we need more knowledge before we can go on. The gaining of this knowledge is pictured by going down into Egypt; and we shall find that many people in the Bible went down into Egypt at some point in their lives. Coming back to the Holy Land is trying to use our new knowledge in the service of the Lord.

Our story for today teaches us a very important lesson. Lot was Abram’s own nephew. He had spent all his early life traveling to the Holy Land under Abram’s protection, and had gone down into Egypt with him and had come back rich. Yet Lot’s descendants, the Moabites and the Ammonites, were to become bitter enemies of Abram’s descendants, the Israelites. The first germ of this enmity developed in the story we are studying now.

There is something in us which, like Abram, is ready to accept whatever state of life the Lord gives us and to use all the learning we acquire in His service. That is why Abram came back from Egypt rich not only in cattle (affections for useful deeds on the natural plane), but also in silver and gold (truth and goodness). But there is also in us something which, like Lot, is not at first bad, but which loves the easy and pleasant places of life. Lot also had herds and flocks, but it is not said that he had silver and gold. Lot is good and safe so long as he remains with Abram, but when the herdmen of the two (which picture particular objectives—spiritual with Abram and worldly with Lot) began to quarrel, a separation had to be made. Lot chose to live in the valley of the Jordan because it looked fertile and pleasant. The valley represents the lower plane of our lives, the plane of sense enjoyment. The valley in itself was not evil, nor is sense enjoyment evil; but temptations lurk there, and when we deliberately choose to spend our lives on that plane, we find ourselves exposed to the influence of evils of all kinds (pictured by the wicked cities of Sodom and

Gomorrah).

Sodom and Gomorrah picture selfishness and the falsity that goes with it. Selfishness and worldliness create jealousy and quarrels, and these often bring trouble to the innocent as well as to the guilty. This is why we should keep away from bad companions. Lot soon got into trouble because he chose to live too near to Sodom. The story of this first trouble and of Abram's rescue of Lot is told in the second part of our assignment.

But Lot did not learn his lesson. He still chose to live in the plain, and in chapter 19 we find him living in the very gate of Sodom. He still means to be good; so when Sodom and Gomorrah are about to be destroyed for their wickedness, the Lord sends two angels to warn Lot and, because Lot received them gladly and heeded their warning, they could lead him out of Sodom in time. We need to know that the word translated *angel* really means "messenger." Those who warn us of danger and try to keep us from doing wrong are the Lord's angels, too; and when we are tempted, the Lord always does manage to warn us through our parents, our teachers, our friends, or our conscience, If we welcome this advice and heed it, we can be saved.

We should know also the meaning of the well-known story of Lot's wife, who looked back after they were led out of Sodom and was turned into a pillar of salt. Have we ever recognized that something we have been doing is wrong and made up our minds to stop it, and then started thinking how pleasant it was and thus lost our good resolutions? This is Lot's wife looking back at Sodom. Salt in its good sense is the wish to do as truth teaches; in its bad sense it is the acceptance of a truth without the desire to live according to it. The pillar of salt into which Lot's wife was turned is set up in the Bible as a warning to all of us. When we make up our minds to do right, we must go straight forward and not let ourselves look back longingly at the old ways. Read Luke 9:62 and 17:28-32. "Remember Lot's wife" is a good verse to remember.

The choice which Abram offered Lot is presented to us over and over again in the Bible, as it is in life. Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20

and Matthew 6:19-21. One way lie earthly delights, the other way heavenly treasures. Both may be enjoyed so long as Lot is led by Abram. Abram settled in Hebron, a high place in the southern part of the Holy Land, and built his final altar there. A life of willing obedience to the Lord leads toward heaven.

*Basic Correspondences*

the land of Canaan = a heavenly state  
Egypt = a state of natural learning,  
or memory-knowledge  
a valley = the plane of natural living

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**Senior**

With this class it is well to emphasize the way in which the natural tendency to worldliness grows upon us. They will find it prevalent in their environment and need to recognize its dangers and to be on their guard against it. The New Church differs from some of the other churches in its attitude toward external pleasures. Call special attention to the passage from the writing of Swedenborg quoted at the end of this lesson, which states the principle involved. Urge them to examine their recreations and pleasures to be sure that they are such as “agree perfectly with celestial things,” that is, that they do not detract from their love to the Lord and the neighbor.

We have observed how when the Most Ancient Church became wholly evil, the Lord separated from the others the few who still retained a desire to serve Him, and formed them into a new church termed the Ancient Church, one of a different character and on a lower level of spiritual life than its predecessor. This Ancient Church, described in the story of Noah and his descendants, in time also perverted the revelation given to it, ascribing their knowledge of spiritual things to themselves and using it for selfish purposes. In the early days of this church men had set up images of animals and birds and other natural objects to call to their minds the spiritual realities which they represented. As the church declined, these images came to be worshiped as idols, and many degraded forms of worship sprang up. Because of their different beliefs and their pride in their own intelligence, they could no

longer live together in peace, and gradually their descendants were scattered all over the face of the earth. The dispersion of the remnants of this church is symbolically described in the familiar story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). It is in this condition that recorded history finds the human race, and some historians have assumed that man's original state was one of idolatry and mutual hostility, not realizing that these things were the result of a long decline. In the Bible story true history begins after the period described by the Tower of Babel, so that from now on we are reading about actual individuals. But this history was guided by Divine Providence, and its record in the Word was inspired, so that it has a continuous inner meaning just as the early chapters of Genesis have.

The new church to be established out of the good remnant of the Ancient Church was to be on a still lower level. We recognize that in each of us there are three planes of life: the will, the understanding, and the outward conduct. The Most Ancient Church was connected with the Lord through the will, as we have seen, and the Ancient Church was led through the understanding. The third church, the Jewish Church, was to be governed wholly by the principle of obedience in the outward conduct. Indeed, Swedenborg tells us that it was not a real church at all since it had no "internal," but only the representative of a church. Yet so long as it remained faithful to the laws and statutes laid down for its observance, it served to keep the connection between the Lord and man, since these laws and statutes were correspondences of spiritual realities.

Abram was chosen by the Lord to be the father of the Jewish Church because he was a man who was willing to obey to the letter whatever commands he received from the Lord. He was called to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees and his father's house, and go to the Holy Land—Canaan—where it was promised him that he should prosper and become a great nation.

In our own individual lives the great symbol stories of the first eleven chapters of Genesis describe the states which are in us by

heredity. We are gifted with will and understanding, but both of these are naturally selfish. Men do not like to believe this; they like to imagine that they are born good and that other people are responsible for the evils which develop in them. But we should know better. No one has to teach a child to be selfish, to want his own way, to strike, to rebel against order. We are born selfish and the Lord has to teach us, through our parents and teachers first and later through the Word, what the true way of life is, and how to live it. At a very early age we, like Abram, are called to leave our natural inheritance and begin the long journey to the Holy Land of heavenly living. The whole period of Abram describes our childhood states.

We saw in the Creation story that in each of us there is an internal and an external side to our being—the heavens and the earth. With reference to the development of our outward lives, Abram pictures the internal and Lot the external man. Lot was Abram's nephew. He left Ur with Abram, traveled with him to Canaan, went down to Egypt with him, and returned to the Holy Land very rich. Then the herdmen of Abram and Lot began to quarrel over pastureland for their herds. As very little children we are not conscious for a time of any distinction between our higher and our lower wants. But there soon comes a day when we have to choose between obeying our parents and having something we think we want. There is a contest within us between the principle of doing right and the principle of doing what pleases us at the moment. These opposing principles are the "herdmen" of Abram and of Lot. The Lord permits the separation of the higher and the lower in us, but in the story of Abram and Lot He points out to us just what the dangers are when the worldly side of us separates itself from the direction of the higher or internal man. Lot chose the low plain of the Jordan because it looked pleasant and fertile, just as we often choose to live for external pleasures and success. But in this plain were the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which represent selfishness in the will and the falsities in the understanding which go with this selfishness. Lot was first involved

in the war which the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were waging; he was taken captive and had to be rescued by Abram. So we are likely to become involved in the rivalries and jealousies of worldly ambition. And later in the story (chapter 19) when the wicked cities were to be destroyed, Lot was found living in the very gate of Sodom, and was delivered only by being led out by the two angel visitors. Even then, his wife—his affection—looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt as a warning to all who, having undertaken to lead a new life, look back longingly at the delights of the old life (Luke 17:31-33). Salt represents the fact that truth is of no value unless it is obeyed (see Matthew 5:13). Lot refused even then to go into the mountains as the angels advised him to do, and his descendants became enemies of the Israelites, just as the thoughts and desires which spring from our worldly choices continue to be stumbling-blocks in the path of our spiritual progress all our lives.



### Adult

You may be surprised to find that some of the class know nothing of Lot except that Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt. This incident has proved so striking and controversial that it is important to see it as one of the last results of Lot's original choice, and so get it into its proper proportion to the rest of the story. As to the incident itself, there is no more reason to doubt it than to doubt any other miracle in the Scriptures. If the class is bent upon discussing it, be sure they realize that it is logically inconsistent to accept the Lord's miracles in the New Testament and refuse to accept the miracles in the Old Testament, just as it is logically inconsistent to accept the visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Paul and refuse to accept Swedenborg's visions.

We have seen that the people of the Ancient Church—the Silver Age—were led by truth. Their great interest was in learning truths, and they had access to the knowledge of the Most Ancient people, which had been preserved and handed down to them. Thus they knew correspondence of the things of nature with spiritual things, and this study was their greatest delight. From our own little knowledge of correspondences we can imagine what wide variety

of interest this study must have had, and we can see how, as Swedenborg tells us (AC 1285), the people of that time could have developed a wide variety of forms of worship, depending upon their particular interests and points of view. Yet as long as they were in charity, that is, as long as they worshiped from love to the Lord and the neighbor, they were in perfect harmony as to doctrine. This is what is meant in the story of the Tower of Babel by their being “of one language and of one speech.” When people are working with a common interest and without thought of self, they easily understand one another. They “speak the same language,” and variety in knowledge and point of view adds to the harmony of their efforts. But again the love of self crept in, and the Ancient Church came to its end and its people were literally as well as spiritually scattered over the face of the earth. Most of the pagan religions in the world are perversions of beliefs handed down by tradition from the scattered remnants of the Ancient Church.

Up to this point our lessons have been on the portion of the Word copied by Moses from the Ancient Word, and we have not been dealing with historical fact in the letter. Swedenborg tells us (AC 1140, 1343) that the first person mentioned in the Word who is a historical personage as well as a representative figure is Eber (Genesis 11:14), from whom the Hebrews took their name. He tells us (AC 1343) that Eber constituted a second Ancient Church, which came to an end in idolatrous worship in Terah, the father of Abram, and that Abram signifies a third Ancient Church (AC 1360), from or in which the Lord instituted the Jewish Church. The second Ancient Church, like the first, recognized spiritual things and knew that its forms of worship had their value from their correspondence. It was in this church that sacrifices were instituted.\* But as it degenerated, the knowledge of the spiritual meaning of the various acts of worship was lost, until they came to regard their images and sacrifices as holy in themselves and became idolaters, knowing nothing of love for the Lord and the

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\*See, however, Genesis 8:20.

neighbor or of heaven and eternal life. So the Lord and the angels could no longer be present with men in their interiors, because they no longer had any internal thought. There could no longer be any real church on earth, because all real worship is internal. Still the Lord had to keep His contact with men to keep them alive and to save those whose intentions were good, and He instituted the Jewish Church, which was not a real church at all, but only the representative of a church. It is said of the Jewish priests who “offer gifts according to the law” that they “serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5). The Hebrew nation was chosen by the Lord for this purpose, not because they were a peculiarly religious people but because they were a wholly external people and could be led, through hope of reward and fear of punishment, to carry on worship of Jehovah according to the particular forms which would correspondentially represent true worship and so—through correspondence—keep the connection between earth and heaven which could no longer be maintained through the minds and hearts of men. Their history could be directed by the Lord so that it could be recorded in words which, by correspondence, would express heavenly things and the divine life itself.

The fundamental principle of the Jewish Church was recognition of the necessity of obeying the commands of God. Abram lived in Ur of Chaldea, and he and his people were idolaters; but apparently he above others was inclined to absolute obedience. When he was called by the Lord to leave his country and his father’s people and take the long journey to Canaan, he obeyed. And throughout the story he obeyed unhesitatingly when the Lord spoke to him. He represents in us the beginning of the development of spiritual life. This beginning—when we are very little children—lies in obedience, first to our parents and then to the precepts of right conduct which have been taught us.

Abram did not leave Ur alone. He took with him his wife Sarai, his father Terah, his brother Nahor, his nephew Lot—whose father had died in Ur—their families, and all their servants, cattle, and



possessions. We start our journey of life just where we are by heredity, and must take with us all our qualities, all our abilities, and all our weaknesses. Abram's father died before he reached the land of Canaan, and his brother Nahor and his family stopped half-way and settled in Haran (also called the city of Nahor). There are in us tendencies which, while not evil, are "simple." We say we have "outgrown" them. Yet they remain in our background and we go back to them from time to time for renewal of our early simple faith. These are represented by Nahor. But Lot went all the way with Abram.

Each plane of our minds has its internal and its external. Abram pictures the internal man in its early state, and Lot the external or sensuous man. We are all perfectly familiar in our own experience with the struggle between higher and lower motives and principles. Lot chose to live in the low but inviting valley of present satisfaction, and Abram dwelt in the mountains of the Lord's promise.

In the fertile valley of the Jordan, Lot's choice, were the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot went to live near Sodom. Because of this he was captured and carried away when the four kings from the Tigris-Euphrates valley came over to make war on the five kings of the Jordan valley. This pictures our early temptation to do as others do. At first the childhood habit of obedience, like Abram, is near enough to be aroused and strong enough to go after us and bring us back to a good state. But temptations increase. In chapter 19 we find Lot living in the very gate of Sodom when it was about to be destroyed for its wickedness. We are familiar with the story of the angels who came to Lot to lead him out of Sodom. Even then, we recall, Lot refused to go to the mountain and chose to live in the little city of Zoar, and the Lord permitted him to make his choice. Lot was saved, but his two sons, Moab and Ammon, born to him after this escape, fathered the Moabites and Ammonites, who represent the evils and falsities that result when men live in the externals or worship without the internals. They were enemies of Israel for generations. All Lot's troubles began when his herdmen quarreled with Abram's herd-

men, at which time he separated from Abram and went to live in the valley.

And what of Lot's wife who disobeyed the command of the angels and looked back toward Sodom? To look back or turn back means to recede from good once we have seen and undertaken it. When we make up our minds to do the right thing, we should go forward with it steadily and not dally with thoughts of the pleasures of the course from which we have turned. Salt in a good sense represents the affection of truth or the desire to live according to the truth. When this is lost, the salt has lost its savor. It was an old custom, coming from a knowledge of this correspondence, to sow a conquered city with salt. We should be able to learn from past experience not to "look back." The pillar of salt into which Lot's wife was turned stands as a perpetual warning. The Lord Himself said, "Remember Lot's wife."

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#### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 1547: "Lot represents sensuous things, by which is meant the external man and its pleasures that pertain to sensuous things, thus those things which are outermost, and which are wont to captivate man in his childhood, and draw him away from goods. For so far as a man indulges the pleasures that originate from cupidities, he is drawn away from the celestial things that are of love and charity; because in those pleasures there is love from self and from the world, with which celestial love cannot agree. There are, however, pleasures that agree perfectly with celestial things, and that likewise appear similar in external form . . . But the pleasures that originate from cupidities are to be restrained and wiped out, because they block the way to celestial things. It is these pleasures, and not others, that are treated of in this chapter—by Lot, in that he separated himself from Abraham."

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#### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What two men is our lesson about today? *Abram, Lot*
- J. Where did Abram and Lot come from? *Ur, Chaldea*
- J. Why did they leave Ur? *the Lord told them to*
- P. What did Abram do at the first two places where he stopped in Canaan?  
*built altars*

- J. To what other country did he and Lot go before they settled in Canaan?  
*Egypt*
- P. What happened in Egypt? *they became rich*
- J. Where did they go first when they came back? *Bethel*
- J. What difficulty came up between them? *herdmen quarreled*
- J. What offer did Abram make to Lot? *choice of land*
- P. What part of the country did Lot choose? *valley*
- J. Why did he choose it? *good pasture*
- J. What danger was there which he did not think about? *Sodom*
- J. Into what trouble did he fall? *captured in war*
- J. How was he saved? *Abram*
- I. In our lives what does Lot's choice picture? *doing whatever pleases us at the moment*
- I. What are meant by the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? *selfishness, worldly thinking*
- S. Does this mean that we should avoid all the pleasures of the senses?  
*no, but should be kept in proper perspective*
- S. How can we tell what pleasures are innocent? *not harmful, and in harmony with goals of spiritual life*