

READ

Genesis 13

REFLECT

Coming off a short stint in Egypt, where he and Sarai had gone because of a famine, Abram traveled back to the very same altar he established when they moved to the promised land the first time. There he worshipped God once again, but that's when things began to unravel. After leaving Egypt, where he'd been given incredible wealth because of the Pharaoh's infatuation with his wife, he ended up with too much stuff. Lot, his nephew, also had a huge flock and the land couldn't support them both. It caused problems between their herders, presumably about which flocks had rights to what areas, and so Abram and Lot decided to split up. To make the split as amicable as possible, Abram allowed Lot to choose where he wanted to go. Lot, of course, chose the best land – the very fertile Jordan river valley, a place where his flocks would have plenty to eat and his wealth could grow. He set up shop for himself near Sodom, and we read that it was an evil place, a bit of foreshadowing of what's to come. Abram settled in Canaan where God once again reiterated the covenant promise – innumerable descendants. A new metaphor is used to describe just how many there would be, Abram's progeny would be uncountable just like specks of dust of the earth. Abram's response to once again hearing God's promise was to set up another altar. This altar was also at an oak tree, the oaks of Mamre, just as his previous altar was (the oak of Moreh). It's telling that Abram's response to hearing God's promise each time is worship – and not just a singular act of worship, but the creation of a center of worship he could return to again and again. While we know that Abram had his flaws, he was also committed to his God and thankful for God's continued activity in his life. Abram would continue to worship at the altar set up at the oaks of Mamre and it would become a place central to his life and death.

REACT

- Abram and Lot needed to split up because of family infighting – think about the fights you've experienced in your own family. What has been the root cause? How did each party respond to the fight? Was an amicable solution found? If not, and this fight is still playing out, how might one be found?
- The driving force behind Abram and Lot's fight was stuff – they each had too much and it got in the way of their ability to maintain a healthy relationship with one another. Our own culture suffers from this same problem – we often put our stuff before our relationships. Are there times you've valued a belonging over a relationship? What led to that choice, and have you ever thought you made the wrong choice?

RESPOND

Creating a sacred place: Time and time again, Abram responded to hearing God's promises by creating a sacred space he could worship. His chosen locations were at trees, but sacred places can be anywhere. Consider your own life – where is a special place that you can create your own altar? You might think of an altar as a very specific kind of religious place, like the communion table in the church, but it's really any place where one might offer worship – so it can be anything! For you it might be at a special tree in your yard or a candle on your night stand, it doesn't need to be complicated. This week, set up a place where you can go to get away from the complications of life and just be with God in prayer, worshipping the God who gives us life and who keeps the promises made to us.