

ABRAHAM

An All-In Life

Prioritizing God

Devotional

Genesis 13

There is a point along the Continental Divide high in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado at which the waters of a small stream separate. It would not seem to matter much whether a drop of water goes to the left or to the right. But the outcome of those drops of water is totally different. One drop goes to the west and eventually flows into the Colorado River and empties into the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean. Another drop goes east until it flows into the Mississippi River and dumps into the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. Two drops of water, two entirely different destinations, but one small turning point that determines the outcome.

Many choices in life are like that. At the time they don't seem significant. But those choices set in motion a series of events which shape your life and the lives of your children and grandchildren after you. If we could share how we all came to know Christ as Savior, I would guess that many of you chose to go somewhere where you met someone who started talking to you, which led to a chain of events resulting in your salvation. The original choice wasn't a big deal, but the outcome was life-changing. Or if we all shared how we met our mates, many of the stories would begin with seemingly insignificant decisions to attend some social event. That decision led to a relationship which forever affected our lives, not to mention our children's lives.

Sometimes people make unwise choices which aren't momentous in themselves, but they lead to tragedies: A teenager chooses to ride with a friend who has been drinking, resulting in a serious accident and the loss of life. A girl decides to have a drink at a party, resulting in her letting down her inhibitions. She ends up pregnant or with a venereal disease. Since seemingly small decisions can have such momentous consequences, how can we protect ourselves from making wrong choices? The story of Lot's choice (Gen. 13:5-18) teaches a crucial lesson about life's choices:

Since choices often result in eternally significant consequences, we must choose in line with God's principles.¹

¹ Sermon excerpt by Steven Cole entitled "Choices, Consequences" found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-28-choices-consequences-genesis-135-18>

Open it

1. Apart from Jesus and your spouse, what choice or decision stands out as one that served you well?

Read it

Genesis 13

Explore it

2. How is Abram described at the beginning of the chapter?
3. What happened that caused Abram and Lot to consider separating?
4. What did Abram offer Lot?
5. What did Lot choose?
6. What did God say to Abram and what does Abram do in response to this at the end of the chapter?

Apply it

FAMILY FEUD

Up to this point in the story, we haven't heard much about Abram's nephew, Lot. We learned earlier that Lot's father died many years before and that Lot had likely latched onto Abram as a surrogate. The Lord had told Abram to leave all his extended family behind, but he didn't. And it had cost him. Because of his father, Terah, the trek to Canaan had gotten bogged down in Haran. Thus far, however, Lot hadn't caused any problems. When Abram prospered, Lot benefited as well: "Lot, who was traveling with Abram, had also become very wealthy with flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and many tents" (Genesis 13: 5). Don't overlook the specific mention of his many tents. This will be a significant detail later in the story. But prosperity brought its own challenges. Expanding flocks and herds require increasing amounts of food and water. The land may not have fully recovered from the earlier famine, so available resources could not sustain both men's livestock. Besides that, they had to contend with the existing inhabitants, the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

All the elements necessary for family conflict were stacked like dry kindling just waiting for a match. The sense of entitlement that comes with affluence doesn't respond well to limited resources. The fear of loss combined with the thrill of acquiring more can become all-consuming, and before long, wealth changes from a blessing to an idol. It was at this point that the vegetation and water became insufficient to feed both men's livestock, and Abram's and Lot's servants began to clash.²

7. What is it about family conflict that makes it more painful than other conflicts? How can Christians navigate these conflicts in such a way that honors God?

8. It seems that Lot had made a pattern of following and living off of Abram even though he was a grown man himself. How do we distinguish between helping someone get on their feet and enabling irresponsibility and laziness?

² Swindoll, Charles R.. Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith (Kindle Locations 568-580). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE? (Genesis 13:1-4)

Genesis 13 is the first mention of wealth in the Bible. Wealth can be a blessing, but we need to recognize something that isn't said very often in our prosperous culture: Wealth is a dangerous blessing! Increased wealth always results in increased potential either for evil or for good. To whom much is given, much shall be required (Luke 12:48). When your income increases, so does your accountability to God.³

9. Do you see yourself as financially rich? Why or why not? How does one go about determining this?

10. Steve Cole says that "Increased wealth always results in increased potential either for good or evil." How have you been tempted to use your increased wealth for evil and in what ways have you used it for good?

JEOPARDY? (Genesis 13:5-7)

This conflict between Abraham and Lot arose because of the physical blessings they received. Each of them possessed many flocks, servants, and herds. This put a strain on the land and caused strife between the herdsmen (v. 7). Verse 6 tells us "their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together."

Many of us tend to think more is always better. If we had more money or time or friends, we would be happier and at peace. But rarely is that the case! We tend to put joy on hold until we obtain some goal that we think we must achieve. But we get there only to find out that we desire even more or what we pursued isn't all we hoped it would be. Men often pursue a promotion only to find themselves getting home much later, sleeping less, and devoting less time to their family and church. Conflict can arise over having much.⁴

11. Is it necessarily wrong for Christians to desire a better lifestyle? How do we determine when enough is enough when it comes to our finances and possessions?

³ Sermon excerpt by Steven Cole entitled "Choices, Consequences" found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-28-choices-consequences-genesis-135-18>

⁴ Sermon excerpt from Greg Breazeale found @ <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/sermon-power-contentment-abraham-lot-genesis-13>

12. What things are you tempted to accumulate for yourself? What does that say about you and your relationship with God?

13. Read James 4:1-3. What does this passage teach us about our accumulation of things that can cause strife with others? When have you seen this passage come to life around you?

LET'S MAKE A DEAL (Genesis 13:8-9)

Abraham offered a solution to this problem that revealed his heart. "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me," he said, "or between your herdsmen and mine for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you?" (13:8-9). Abraham was wise enough to know that they had no choice but to part company, and yet he made Lot a magnanimous offer. "If you go to the left," he said, then, "I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left" (13:9). Abraham knew this was the only way unity could be restored between them. What an unselfish, generous spirit. Abraham certainly knew that God had blessed Lot because of him. Yet he was willing to put Lot on an equal footing, to offer him a choice that could definitely allow his nephew to end up with a better deal.

In making this offer, Abraham was not naive in terms of what the stakes were. He knew what lay eastward toward Jordan, a virtual "garden of the LORD" (13:10). He was well aware he might end up with the least desirable land. But his love for Lot, his desire for unity and peace, and his concern about his personal witness in a pagan community seemed more important to Abraham than his own material welfare. Abraham was still a long way from where he ought to be spiritually, but at this moment in his life he was not the man he once was.⁵

14. What does Abram's offer say about how he viewed life and God? What was his main priority?

⁵ Getz, Gene A.. Men of Character: Abraham (Kindle Locations 953-958). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

15. When have you allowed growing your possession portfolio impact relationships around you? What can we learn about resolving conflict from Abram's offer to Lot?

PRESS YOUR LUCK (Genesis 13:10-13)

*Lot's selection of the most fertile territory reveals his true character. He should have said, "Uncle Abram, I owe you a great debt of gratitude. In fact, I owe you everything! You brought me on this journey when you should have left me in Ur, and today I am a wealthy man because of you. Since you have been so gracious to me, I insist that you take the best land. God will take care of me either way." But Lot chose greed over gratitude. He chose wealth over family. He chose to trust himself rather than God. **Truth be told, most of us are more like Lot than Abram.** Our society encourages greed. I regularly encounter wonderful exceptions, but it's a tragedy that generous people are the exception rather than the rule. We who are blessed with this world's goods too easily forget those who are in need. And we who have less usually envy those who have much. To make matters more confusing, envy makes us believe we're perpetually in the "poor" category.⁶*

16. Lot chose the immediate over the long term. How are we tempted to do the same things? What does Matthew 6:19-21 remind us of what should govern all our purchases and pursuits?

17. In 1 John 2:15-17 we are warned about falling in love with the world. How could this passage have served Lot well? What do we know about Sodom that would make it such an attractive place? What would it cost Lot in the end?

⁶ Swindoll, Charles R.. Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith (Kindle Locations 608-615). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Ambrose of Milan comments, "Let us not then choose that which is more pleasing at first sight but that which is truly better" (On Abraham 2.6.35). A seemingly good choice made in haste can lead to spiritual disaster.⁷

18. When have you made a decision that was attractive at first glance only to be disastrous in the end? What warning signs did you miss along the way?

THE PRICE IS RIGHT (Genesis 13:14-18)

Lot's choice of Sodom was based on what would bring him quick gratification, but he didn't take into account God's promise to Abram about the land. After Lot moved to Sodom, the Lord reaffirmed His promise to Abram and even expanded on it (13:14-17). F. B. Meyer says that God wanted Abram "to feel as free in the land as if the title deeds were actually in his hands" (Abraham [Christian Literature Crusade], p. 50). God wanted to give Abram a graphic picture of what it means to possess by faith what God had promised, even though it wouldn't be an actuality in Abram's lifetime. The apostle Paul described it, "as having nothing yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10).

As believers we are to live by faith in the promises of God. When we face decisions, we take God into account and make those decisions in line with His promises and principles, not the immediate gratification of the flesh. We deny ungodliness and worldly desires in light of the blessed hope of Christ's return (Titus 2:11-13), trusting that His promises concerning eternity are true.⁸

19. What promises has God made to believers that should help us find victory over greed and the pursuit of riches in this world? (List them and look at them!!) How are these promised blessings better than anything that money can buy?

⁷ Ligonier Ministries Devotional entitled "Abram Settled" found @ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/abram-settled/>

⁸ Sermon excerpt by Steven Cole entitled "Choices, Consequences" found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-28-choices-consequences-genesis-135-18>

I frequently interact with wealthy people, and my observations have taught me that the best remedy for the disease of greed is generosity. Generosity goes against our nature, it forces us out of our comfort zones, it prompts us to see the needs of others, and it encourages us to rely upon God's provision. There's nothing wrong with saving for a rainy day; in fact, I wholeheartedly encourage good financial planning. But generous giving will help us keep our desire for acquisition in balance. I like Richard Foster's penetrating advice in his book Money, Sex and Power.

"Without question, money has taken on a sacred character in our world, and it would do us good to find ways to defame it, defile it, and trample it under our feet. So step on it. Yell at it. Laugh at it. List it way down on the scale of values— certainly far below friendship and cheerful surroundings. And engage in the most profane act of all— give it away."⁹

20. Abraham defeated greed by making God first and being generous. In what ways are you being generous toward others and God? What priorities need to change so that you might live more open handed with the finances and possessions that God has given you?

⁹ Swindoll, Charles R.. Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith (Kindle Locations 622-624). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups