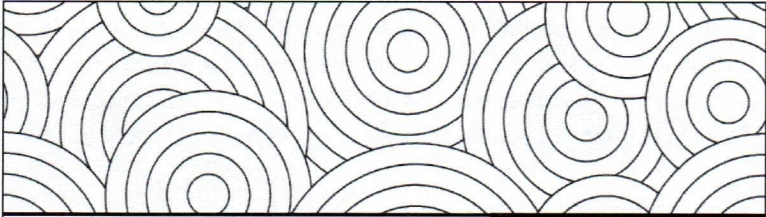


LESSON 10

ABRAM AND LOT

GENESIS 13:1-18



OPEN IT UP

Lot was Abram's nephew and apparently traveled with his uncle in the hopes of inheriting Abram's great wealth. In fact, the idea of Abram's heir is a minor theme in his life. First, Lot appears to have been the heir. Then Eliezer of Damascus, a household servant, became Abram's heir (Genesis 15:2). Then Ishmael, as a natural child, would have qualified as Abram's heir (16:15). Finally, Isaac was born, the child of promise God intended all along (21:3). Lot disqualifies himself here by choosing to leave Abram's house. The other potential candidates would not have the choice but would be otherwise superseded by divine providence.

ABRAM AT BETHEL • GENESIS 13:1-4

Returning from Egypt, Abram first lingered in the "South" (Genesis 13:1). The term translated *South* is the Hebrew word *negev*, the name by which the region still goes to this day. In Abram's time, this was a well-watered and hospitable place, although it is largely desert today. However, since it was technically outside Abram's promised land of Canaan, he returns to settle in Bethel (verse 3). As we mentioned in

the last lesson, Bethel is the later name of the place that would have been known as Luz in Abram's day (28:19).

Again Abram settles near the "altar" he had previously constructed in Bethel (Genesis 12:8). This was a place Abram regarded as sacred, as later generations of Israelites would. In fact, the tabernacle's location at Shiloh was very near Bethel (1 Samuel 10:3), and Jeroboam, the first king of Israel in the divided kingdom era, marked Bethel as its sacred site in the south, even building a golden calf to be worshiped there (1 Kings 12:29). Although these are not all faithful examples of godly worship, they prove how closely associated with sacred space the town of Bethel was. But what should we expect from a town whose name literally means "house of God"?

CONFLICT • GENESIS 13:5-9

Conflict comes from a number of circumstances. First, conflict can come from a lack of resources. People who are poor can face a number of hardships due to their poverty. But conflict can come to the rich too. I once knew of a family who had won the lottery, and it ruined their lives. Everyone sought to take advantage of their wealth, and they ended up expressing the wish that they would have never become millionaires. Although God's blessings had fallen on both Abram and Lot, their wealth eventually drove the men apart.

Wealth was defined in the biblical world by the possessions one had, namely animals and slaves. Job's wealth is described in exactly these terms as "seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East" (Job 1:3). The "flocks and herds" of Abram and Lot proved too great for the land between Bethel and Ai to support (Genesis 13:5). So their wealth became a source of division.

A second source of conflict is recorded here. Scripture states, "And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock" (Genesis 13:7). Sometimes division grows not because of *you* but because of those close to you. It is possible to be the victim of conflict without being responsible for the conflict. We may think of Abigail, who had the misfortune of marrying

a fool (the name *Nabal* [*nāvāl* in Hebrew] means “fool”). She was constantly embarrassed by his choices and was drawn into conflicts she did not create (1 Samuel 25:24–35). In this case, Abram and Lot are drawn into a conflict they did not want but were forced to resolve.

Abram and Lot reached a compromise. All conflicts can be settled with compromise. But one element is essential: both sides must seek peace. Unfortunately, too often, one side wants *more* than the other—wants to *win* the conflict rather than resolve it. Abram sought peace and made a very generous offer: “Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren” (Genesis 13:8). Two lessons are taught here. First, strife is undesirable. Paul advises Timothy, “But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife” (2 Timothy 2:23). Arguments lead only to greater tensions that eventually bear hatred and strife. Proverbs advises, “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins” (Proverbs 10:12). Christians are to “pursue the things which make for peace” (Romans 14:19), understanding the “peacemakers” are “blessed” (Matthew 5:9).

Second, Abram appeals to the union of brotherhood: “for we are brethren” (Genesis 13:8). We ought to “pursue peace with all people” (Hebrews 12:14) but especially with our brethren. Among the things the Lord hates is “one who sows discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:19). Psalm 133:1 declares, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” There is a special bond between members of a family—whether physical or spiritual. Too often, we allow external considerations to threaten our internal harmony.

Abram then gives Lot his pick (Genesis 13:9). Whichever direction he chooses to go, Abram will go the opposite way. The key to solving all conflict is humility. The word *humility* is derived directly from Latin (*humilitas*), which literally means “lowness.” In order to be humble, I must lower myself, allowing others to tower over me in positions of dominance. This is hard to do. Abram was willing to lower himself to someone who was his social inferior. Why? To keep the peace and heal the conflict. Proverbs 29:23 states, “A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.” The humble earn the respect of others and receive the rewards of God (James 4:10).

CHOICES • GENESIS 13:10-18

The choices we make in a single moment can impact us for the rest of our lives. Lot was given a choice, and he took the best for himself (Genesis 13:10–11). There was nothing necessarily wrong with this choice, and the text does not censure him for it. But he obviously made the choice to enrich himself materially, not considering the spiritual challenges that might arise from moving into the area. Seek an education and a profession that will make you a better person, not a richer person. Seek a lifestyle that will honor God rather than bring you honor. Wealth and status may come to you, but make sure God is the cause of it. With God at the center of your decisions, your heart will always be in the right place. An ominous statement leaves us understanding Lot made a poor choice: “But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD” (verse 13).

With Lot choosing to move east, God again spoke to Abram, informing him that the entire land, as far as his eye could see, would belong to his descendants (Genesis 13:14–15). The land promise is reinforced with the people promise—Abram’s descendants would be “as the dust of the earth” (verse 16). For someone advanced in years and still with no child, this promise must have seemed hard to believe. But Abram repeated his familiar practice of building an altar to return thanks for God’s blessing (verse 18).

WRAP IT UP

At the beginning of the chapter, it seems Lot is Abram's heir. That changes when Lot chooses to leave the family of Abram to establish his own life. So, yet again, Abram and Sarai are in search of another heir to fulfill their dreams of offspring and to satisfy God's promises. In his late seventies or early eighties at this point, Abram still has no sign of the child on whom all the promises depend.

**THINK ON IT**

1. Why was the promise of an heir so important? How does the Bible keep the reader guessing about the identity of this heir?
2. What associations does Bethel have? Why is this place so important in the Bible?
3. What created the conflict between the shepherds of Abram and Lot? How do these sources of conflict appear in our world today?
4. What are some steps Abram sought to compromise with Lot? How can we apply principles of conflict management to challenging situations today?
5. List some major choices you will need to make within the next five to seven years. Consider how these choices might affect the rest of your life.