

## Navigating Family Conflict

### Session 2

October 20, 2024

### Abraham and Lot: Family Rights

**The Point:** Trust God when challenged over your rights or possessions.

**Session Passage:** Genesis 13:5-11,14-18

#### Genesis 13:5-8

**Connection to the Point.** The abundance of Abram's and Lot's livestock with scarce natural resources caused a problem,

**Setting.** Abram had obediently responded to the Lord's call to leave his land (security), relatives (community), and father's house (identity) (Gen. 12:1-4). The writer of Hebrews identifies this obedience as an act of faith (Heb. 11:8-10). At age seventy-five Abram left Haran with his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot. When they arrived in Canaan, Abram journeyed from place to place as a pilgrim and built altars to the Lord (Gen. 12:5-9). He faced a test in the form of a severe famine in the land. Abram failed the famine test by going to Egypt where he attempted to pass off Sarai as his sister (vv. 10-20). The patriarch then returned to Canaan to the site between Bethel and Ai where he had previously built an altar. There he renewed his commitment to the Lord (13:1-4).

**Lot** (v. 5). Lot's name means "concealed." He was the son of Haran, Abram's brother who had died in Ur of the Chaldeans (11:28). Lot journeyed with his uncle Abram from the city of Haran to Canaan. Upon returning to Canaan from a period in Egypt during a time of famine, Abram and Lot camped between Bethel and Ai (13:3-5). Both men possessed huge herds and flocks by this time. Both the Moabites and the Ammonites descended from Lot through his incestuous relationships with his daughters (chap. 19).

**Land** (v. 6). Abram and Lot had reached the promised land, later described as a good, spacious land flowing with milk and honey (see Ex. 3:8). However, the men had flocks and herds so large that the land where they camped could not support them both. This area is sometimes designated the central mountainous region. During the summer months the patriarchs found relief from the heat as well as good grazing land for herds and flocks in the higher elevations of the mountains.

**SupportBear** (v. 6). The Hebrew verb occurs in the Old Testament with three separate meanings: (1) "to lift up"; (2) "to carry, bear, or support"; and (3) "to take or take away." The second category of meanings is used especially of bearing the guilt or punishment for sin (Lev. 5:1). In Genesis 13:6 the verb conveys the literal meaning of the land's inability to sustain both Abram's and Lot's numerous herds and flocks.

**StayedDwell together** (v. 6). The verb basically means "to sit, remain" or "to dwell." The verb is used with both the Lord and human beings as its subject. For example in Psalm 9:11 David praised the Lord "whowhich dwellsethenthroned in Zion." Used of human beings, the term can be divided into four categories of meaning: (1) to sit; (2) to stay, linger, or remain; (3) to dwell in a house, city, territory, or land; and (4) to designate a place, city, or country being inhabited. In Genesis 13:6 the verb depicts the families of Abram and Lot with their wealth remaining or staying camped in close proximity to one another in the promised land of Canaan. The term rendered *together* derives from a root meaning "to be united." Significant usage of the term appears in Genesis 22:6,8 to depict the unity between Abraham and Isaac as they journeyed together to the place of sacrifice.

**So many possessionsPossessions were so greatSubstance was great** (v. 6). Genesis 13:2 records that Abram had become a man of considerable wealth in livestock, silver, and gold. He had accumulated some wealth while living in Haran (12:5). Abram also had acquired flocks, herds, donkeys, camels, and slaves in Egypt (v. 16). The Hebrew word translated *possessions* *substance* might also be rendered "estate." It designates a wide variety of property, including all kinds of movable possessions, cattle as well as other domestic animals, and supplies and stores. It can also refer to booty

taken in battle. The Old Testament reveals that both the possession of wealth (2 Chron. 32:27-29) and deprivation of this wealth (21:12-14) occurred according to the Lord's will and pleasure.

**Quarreling Strife** (v. 7). This term can designate either physical or verbal combat. It is used of human disputes in court (Prov. 25:8-9). In some contexts some Bible scholars view the term as depicting a "case" or lawsuit the Lord had with His covenant people. He brought them into court on the charges of breaking their covenant with Him by rampant breaches of the Ten Commandments (Hos. 4:1-4). In Genesis 13:7 the term identifies the conflict between Abram's and Lot's herdsmen over the shortage of good grazing land. Repeated strife would occur between Lot's descendants (Moab and Ammon) and Abram's descendants.

**Herdsmen Herders** (vv. 7-8). Herdsmen were responsible for providing grazing land and water for the livestock in their charge. Their duties included caring for wounded animals and searching for lost ones. Herders played a significant role because wealth in the patriarchal period was largely measured in terms of livestock owned.

**Canaanites . . . Perizzites** (v. 7). *Canaanites* generally designates the inhabitants of Canaan, the promised land. Canaan descended from Ham, one of Noah's three sons (9:18). The term became a common noun meaning "merchants" (Isa. 23:8). *Perizzites*, meaning "rustic," were one of the people groups who opposed the Israelites' entry into Canaan. Their name suggests they lived in open country in contrast to the Canaanites who dwelled in walled encampments.

### **Genesis 13:9-11**

**Connection to the Point.** Although Abram "outranked" Lot, he allowed Lot to choose which land he would take.

**Whole land** (v. 9). In Genesis 15:18-21, the Lord outlined the boundaries of the promised land as stretching from the Brookwadiriver of Egypt to the Euphrates River. However, the Scripture identifies Israel's later basic land area as stretching only from Dan to Beersheba (2 Sam. 24:2-8, see the reference to the "wholeentireall the land" in v. 8). At times the nation of Israel included land east of the Jordan River (vv. 5-6).

**Entire Whole All the plain of the Jordan** (v. 10). This phrase refers to the Jordan Valley. The Jordan Valley proper designates a strip of land between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. It is approximately seventy miles long. The Hebrew term rendered *plain* literally means "circle." It probably refers to the large round plain where the waters of the Jordan empty into the Dead Sea.

**Zoar** (v. 10). The location of this city, whose name means "small," has not yet been identified. It is also called Bela in Genesis 14:2,8. The king of Zoar was a member of a coalition of five kings who warred against a group of four kings in the Siddim Valley. Abram later rescued his nephew Lot who had been captured by the four kings in the conflict (14:13-16). Lot escaped to Zoar when the Lord rained burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah (19:22-23).

**Well watered** (v. 10). This term along with "the Lord's garden of the Lord" emphasizes the beauty of the plain and helps explain Lot's attraction to it. The land's beauty not only attracted Lot but also distracted him from the evil that lay in wait there. This positive description also stands in visual contrast to the pillar of smoke Abram witnessed ascending from the plain after the Lord demolished Sodom and Gomorrah (19:28). The Hebrew word rendered *well watered* derives from a verb meaning "to give to drink" or "to irrigate" and can also mean "irrigation" or "drink." Additionally it identifies the occupation of cupbearer or wine taster who served kings in ancient times, a position of trust and responsibility (see Neh. 1:11).

**The Lord's garden of the Lord** (v. 10). This phrase designates the garden of Eden and stamped a location as idyllic or perfect. The Hebrew verb from which the noun *garden* derives means "to put a shield about" or "to protect." The basic idea is to shield from danger, and it is used only to refer to the protective care or guardianship of the Lord. In the Old Testament a garden designated a plot of ground protected by a hedge or wall. People cultivated flowers, fruits, and

vegetables in these areas that often were irrigated. Gardens provided a respite from the stifling summer heat. Kings typically possessed elaborate gardens. Such areas might also serve as burial places. The destruction of gardens could represent the Lord's judgment (Amos 4:9). The expression *the Lord's garden of the Lord* became a symbol for land covered with lush vegetation.

**Destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah** (v. 10). Genesis 19 describes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. These two cities of the patriarchal period were in close proximity to one another both geographically and culturally. Although their exact location remains unknown, they apparently lay near the Dead Sea. The two cities became notorious for their wickedness (13:13). Abram and his nephew Lot had separated because the land was unable to support the livestock of both men when they remained together. Abram gave Lot first choice of the land. Lot chose to set up his tent near Sodom (v. 12). Lot may have become a prominent citizen in Sodom because his sitting in the gateway suggests he played an influential role in the community (19:1). In any case Abraham pleaded with the Lord to spare Sodom because of Lot's presence there. However, not even ten righteous persons could be found in Sodom. Therefore the Lord rained fire on Sodom and Gomorrah after bringing Lot and his family out of Sodom (vv. 24-25). Our term *sodomy* reflects the perverse lusts of Sodom's male inhabitants (vv. 4-9). However Sodom, as well as Gomorrah, was guilty of a full gamut of sins (Ezek. 16:49-50).

**Journeyed eastward****Set out toward the east** (v. 11). This phrase identifies the direction of Lot's movement after separating from Abram. In the ancient Near Eastern world, the primary reference point was east rather than north. The Hebrew word translated *east* derives from a verb meaning "to precede" or "to go before." Thus the direction "in front of" a person was east. For example, in Genesis 2:14 the Tigris River is described as running "east of Assyria." That phrase in the Hebrew text more literally reads "in front of Assyria." The Hebrew expression rendered "sunrising" also sometimes expressed the direction east (Deut. 4:41,47 compare CSBNIV and KJV). The designation *east* possesses both positive and negative connotations in the Scripture. On the one hand, Eden is located in the east (Gen. 2:8). On the other hand, Scripture records that Cain, after murdering Abel, went "east of Eden" (4:16). That phrase is associated with departure from God.

### **Genesis 13:14-18**

**Connection to the Point.** God promised the land to Abram, even the land Lot had chosen for himself.

**Setting.** After separating from one another, Abram remained in Canaan, the promised land. Lot, however, set up his tent near the wicked city of Sodom, a decision that would result in devastating consequences for him and his family (vv. 12-13).

**Your offspring****Thy seed** (v. 15). The primary meaning of the Hebrew word rendered *offspringseed* comes from the field of agriculture. The term's most important theological meaning concerns its reference to the offspringseed of the promised line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Beginning with Genesis 3:15, the term is regularly used to designate the entire line of descendants. The word is flexible enough to denote one person (Christ) or many individuals in an entire line of natural or spiritual descendants. With the birth of the promised son Isaac to Abraham and Sarah, the Lord was fulfilling His promise of a multitude of descendants (21:1-7). When the Lord called Abram to leave his land and his father's house, He promised to make the patriarch into a great nation (12:2). The Lord repeated that promise of multiplied descendants on other occasions (13:16; 15:3-6; 17:3-6; 22:17).

**Give . . . for ever** (v. 15). The Lord not only promised Abram innumerable offspring but also the land of Canaan as a permanent possession. In the covenant with Abram recorded in Genesis 15 the Lord delineated the boundaries of that land as running from the Brookwadiriver of Egypt to the Euphrates River (15:18-21). Bible scholars have identified the Brookwadiriver of Egypt with an Egyptian river running just south of the Gaza strip, possibly near the modern-day site of El Arish. In any case the Brookwadiriver of Egypt became a familiar landmark for Canaan's southwestern border (Num. 34:5; Josh. 15:4,47; 1 Kings 8:65). The land area depicted in Genesis 15:18-21 apparently became the ideal standard. The

writer of 1 Kings equated Israel's possession of this area with the golden age of Solomon's rule (1 Kings 4:21). However, even Solomon did not fully dispossess the previous populations of this land mass. Because of their unfaithfulness to the Lord, the nations of Israel and Judah later fell to the Assyrians and Babylonians respectively. The Lord, however, has proved faithful to His promise of the land to Abraham's descendants allowing the Jewish people to return to this area at various times throughout history, even into modern times.

**All the land that you see which thou seest** (v. 15). Standing in the desert land of the ancient Near East, an individual could see great distances. The Lord described the promised land in terms of all the land Abram could see (v. 15) as well as all the land he could walk on (v. 17). Walking through the land signified the patriarch's claim to legal ownership of it.

**Like as the dust of the earth** (v. 16). Although Abram and Sarai were childless in their aging years, the Lord promised to make Abram's offspring *like as the dust of the earth*. Thus, the patriarch would have so many descendants that they could not be counted. The Lord elsewhere compared Abram's numerous descendants with the countless stars in the sky and the innumerable grains of sand on the seashore (15:4-5; 22:17; 26:4). The phrase *dust of the earth* also ties together the promise of the land with the promise of a multitude of descendants.

**Oaks Great trees of Mamre at Hebron In the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron** (v. 18). This reference introduces a cluster of sites that played a significant role in patriarchal history. Mamre was apparently named after an Amorite (Mamre) who assisted Abram in defeating a coalition of kings who had captured Abram's nephew Lot (14:1-24). Mamre was well-known for its oak trees. The site was located about two miles north of Hebron. Hebron means "association" or "league." It was a major city in the hill country of Judah located approximately nineteen miles south of Jerusalem. After separating from Lot, Abram moved to Hebron. Abraham purchased the field of Machpelah and its cave near Hebron and Mamre as a burial site for his family (23:16-20). The cave became the burial place for Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah. David made Hebron his capital before moving it to Jerusalem (1 Kings 2:11).

**Built there an altar** (v. 18). This Hebrew term for *altar* derives from a verb meaning "to slaughter" or "to slaughter for sacrifice." An altar was a place of sacrifice. While worshipers commonly sacrificed animals, they also might offer fruit, grain, wine, or incense on altars. In the early Old Testament period, altars might be made of stones (Josh. 8:31), earth (Ex. 20:24), wood and bronze (38:1-2), and wood and gold (30:1-6). The simplest kind of altar, and perhaps the oldest type in the Old Testament, was built of earth. Worshipers might build such an altar of mud-brick or simply heap up a roughly shaped mound of dirt. The most commonly mentioned altar in the Scriptures is the stone altar. It is also the most frequent type found in excavations of the biblical region of Israel. Such an altar might consist of a single large stone or formed by stacking a pile of unhewn stones. Worship of the Lord characterized Abraham's life as indicated by his building altars as he moved from place to place.