

Genesis 13 (2011)

One day a father brought home a new stuffed animal for his infant son. He has received the gift from a coworker, but since he had three other young children at home, he was concerned about giving the baby a present while having nothing for the other children. Finally, he had a bright idea. He would teach his children a lesson about obedience by bringing them to understand that their baby brother baby deserved the gift.

So as the father held his infant son in his arms, he called his other children to his side. As they gathered around him, he showed them the stuffed toy while their eyes lit up and six little hands rose skyward begging for the toy. Then the father proceeded to ask:

"Who is the most obedient?"

Since the other three children were frequently guilty of giving their mother grief, the father assumed his older children would have no trouble identifying their baby brother as the most obedient in the group.

Instead, the three children stared back at their father in silence, none wishing to lose a chance at the toy. The father decided he needed to be more specific in his question.

He then asked, "Who never talks back to mother?" Certainly the children could acknowledge that the baby had never said a word to his mother, he reckoned.

To his dismay, the kids stood stone faced again, unwilling to give the father what he wanted and each holding out hope for the toy.

Finally, the exasperated father asked, "Who here does everything mother says, never talks back, and can't do anything for himself?"

Finally, the three small voices answered in unison, "Okay, dad, you get the toy."

- Obedience is the call placed upon every person of faith
 - We've been watching this man Abram begin his walk of obedience with the Lord Who called Abram into faith
 - And Abram is such a fascinating and profitable study for believers because we can so identify with this man's walk

- Of how he was called out of obscurity into faith, sent in a new direction, challenged along the way, and ultimately made to grow in obedience and holiness
 - The story of how Abram became Abraham, so to speak
- And the key to understanding this story is to recognize how God marries together His own faithfulness to His promises with Abram's obedience to God's call
 - God will show His children His kindness by blessing us in many ways as a result of His love for us and His promises to us
 - And God is faithful to remain with us and even to bless us though we are faithless at times (2 Tim 2:13)
 - But God will also withhold His blessing to some degree when we do not demonstrate obedience to His word
- God calls Himself the perfect Father (Matt 5:48)
 - So as a perfect Father, He must at times withhold the full measure of His blessing for us as a matter of discipline
 - So that by that discipline, He might reprove us and cause us to grow in our walk of holiness, so that we might please Him more

[Heb. 12:7](#) It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

[Heb. 12:8](#) But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

[Heb. 12:9](#) Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

[Heb. 12:10](#) For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

[Heb. 12:11](#) All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- Last week we finished Chapter 12 watching Abram leaving Egypt with a measure of God's blessing despite Abram's disobedience in leaving the land
 - Abram was not the obedient man God called him to be
 - Yet God was faithful to His promises to Abram and He blessed Abram despite Abram's mistakes

- I wonder how much God will be prepared to bless Abram once he returns to the Land and is fully obedient
 - Let's find out

Gen. 13:1 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him.

- Chapter 13 picks up where Chapter 12 left off...Abram and family leaving Egypt to return to Canaan
 - Moses describes Abram's route back into the Negev
 - And he describes Abram's traveling party
 - And for the first time in a while, we are reminded that Lot is still traveling with Abram
 - Apparently, Lot has never left Abram's side throughout his time in Canaan and into Egypt
 - Moses mentions Lot again to remind us that even as Abram obeys the Lord and returns to Canaan, there is still one more step of obedience Abram must take
 - Back in Chapter 12, God spoke to Abram and instructed him concerning his travels to the Promised Land
 - Abram was to leave his country and his relatives
 - Abram was called by God to separate from his past world, his past associations, his past dependencies, even his past identity
 - Everything Abram had, everything he knew, and everything he was must come to an end
 - And in their place, God would give Abram something new and better
 - A new country, a new family, a new inheritance, a new name, a new Father's House
 - That call to separate didn't mean leaving behind his wife, since she has literally become one flesh with Abram

- He could no more leave Sarai than he could leave behind his own arm
- But everyone else was supposed to stay in Ur
- Yet here in Chapter 13 we still find Abram bringing along a member of his family – Lot
 - We asked the question in Chapter 12 whether Abram was right to include Lot in his trip, and here we seem to find our answer
 - Moses calls our attention to the presence of Lot and tells us how they finally came to separate

[Gen. 13:2](#) Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold.

[Gen. 13:3](#) He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai,

[Gen. 13:4](#) to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

- Abram departs Egypt a rich man
 - We don't know how much wealth Abram had when he left Haran
 - But we know he leaves Egypt a very wealthy man
 - This is the first mention of wealth in the Bible
 - And interestingly, his wealth has moved from merely cattle and servants to include precious commodities
 - Abram is now receiving wealth from the people around him
 - God promised Abram that he would be blessed and the material aspect of that blessing is clearly taken hold
 - Still, wealth brings its own kind of challenges and burdens
 - And those burdens become evident soon enough
 - Next we're told Abram ventures away from the Negev, away from the border of Egypt, back to the heart of the land
 - Why does Abram go back into the land?
 - Moses hasn't told us that the famine is over

- And we know Abram left when the Pharaoh kicked him out of Egypt, not because the famine ended
- So Abram left due to famine, but he's going back despite the continuing famine
 - His step of obedience to return under pressure from the Pharaoh means that he is prepared to live by faith
- He isn't less worried about finding food
 - But he must have reasoned that if God was able to make him rich in another country, surely God could sustain him in his own country
- His behavior supports this view
 - Moses says Abram goes "as far as" Bethel, which is roughly geographical center in the land of Canaan
 - The place where Abram had been "at the beginning"
 - This is the place Abram arrived when he entered the land, when he was still depending on God
- Abram returned physically to the land, but he also returned spiritually to God, walking in obedience again
 - Look at v.4...Abram seeks out the altar set up previously
 - We can sense his repentance, his recognition that he had walked away from the Lord and needed to return
 - And so he walks to Bethel and calls upon the Lord
 - Here's what obedience looks like
 - It means following the Lord
 - But it also means having the humility to return to Him and to call upon His name when we know we've strayed
 - Obedience is not perfection; it's persistence
- God has shown His faithfulness even in the midst of Abram's disobedience
 - And now Abram has returned to the altar at Bethel to renew his walk of faith

- And yet Abram isn't done with his test and trials
- God had set forth the expectation that Abram leave behind his family if he is to receive what God has promised
 - And as long as Lot is with Abram, he stands in the way of God blessing Abram to the fullest extent

[Gen. 13:5](#) Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents.

[Gen. 13:6](#) And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together.

[Gen. 13:7](#) And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.

- We begin this next section with confirmation that Lot was an adult with his own household
 - He has flocks and herds and tents
 - We don't hear about his family but we could easily assume that Lot brought family with him, probably from Haran
 - And now his wealth is competing with Abram
 - Since the famine is still likely ongoing, it makes sense that the two herds would be in competition for limited resources
 - By taking the two facts together, we begin to see why God may have brought the famine in the first place
 - God brought a famine to put pressure on Lot and Abram to separate
 - After all, since Abram wouldn't separate voluntarily, God would bring it about another way
 - But since Abram fled to Egypt he simply delayed the inevitable, and brought misery upon himself
 - So they decide that they must separate
 - In fact, their herdsmen were fighting over available land
 - And Moses adds that the competition wasn't merely between Abram and Lot, since Canaan was a large place

- It was also the Canaanite herds competing for land
 - So it made sense for Abram and Lot to separate and live in different places
- Isn't it interesting that Abram's decision to include his nephew Lot, against God's instructions, has now led to this conflict
 - And this is just the beginning of the conflict
 - Lot will continue to be a thorn in Abram's side even after they separate
 - A good reminder of how our failures to follow God have lasting consequences

[Gen. 13:8](#) So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers.

[Gen. 13:9](#) "Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left."

[Gen. 13:10](#) Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere – this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah – like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar.

[Gen. 13:11](#) So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other.

[Gen. 13:12](#) Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom.

[Gen. 13:13](#) Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD.

- Abram is generous in allowing Lot to choose first
 - As the patriarch, he could have chosen first
 - But Abram willingly turns it over to Lot, allowing Lot to choose whatever he wanted
 - Can we see our wealth in that way? Something temporary...something we can let go of when necessary?
 - It's been said that it's sheer madness to live in want, in order to be wealthy when we die
 - Jesus taught that we must see what we have as something temporary we use to further God's purposes and our own position in the Kingdom

- That would have been Abram's attitude here
 - Clearly, Abram didn't believe he needed to cling to the land God promised
 - He invited his nephew to take any of it
 - What allowed Abram to respond that way? Wouldn't we expect him to hold on tightly to that land?
- Abram knew that his inheritance wasn't this land, but a future land yet to be revealed
 - So he could freely allow Lot to take whatever he wanted, caring little for whatever he might lose because it was no real loss
 - Because Abram knew he would lose it all when he died anyway
 - And then receive it all in his resurrected life
 - What freedom comes when we understand the eternal nature of our life in Christ!
 - No more worry about money or wealth
 - God will provide, we don't need to keep up with the Joneses, and we win when we die
- So Abram and Lot separate when Lot chooses the land he will occupy
 - In v.10 Lot lifts up his eyes and sees the valley of Jordan
 - He notices that it is well-watered, like the garden of God, like Egypt
 - Did Moses include enough warning signs for you??
 - First, which direction is Lot headed?
 - East...a clear warning sign since east is associated with sin
 - Secondly, notice the similarity between the language in this verse with Genesis 3:6
 - In Gen. 3, the woman saw that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes
 - Here Lot lifted his eyes and saw the delight of the valley

- As we learned in Gen. 3, the eye is often the chief offender of our flesh in drawing us away from obedience
- The eye draws us to lust rather than to trust and here we see Lot following Woman's pattern
- Thirdly, Lot likes this valley because Moses writes that it reminds him of Egypt
 - And we remember from last week that Egypt is a picture in Scripture of the sinful, unbelieving world
 - And so the reference to Egypt draws our attention to Lot's state of heart, a man longing for the world he left in Egypt
 - Not a man intent on following God
- Finally, Moses adds a parenthetical reference to Sodom and Gomorrah
 - The story of these evil cities has yet to be told in Genesis, of course, but they were infamous in Moses' day
 - Just as they are today, yet Lot is attracted to them
- So Lot is clearly a polar opposite of Abram
 - While Abram has returned to the land and rededicated himself to following God, Lot is running headlong into sin
 - Is it any wonder that God called Abram to separate himself from his family?
 - And why God has brought the famine to pressure the men to separate?
 - Only now can we understand the good and wise decision God was making in producing a famine
 - Remember that when you face a trial and wonder how God could love us and bring calamity
- So Lot moves eastward and settles in his tent outside the city of Sodom
 - And Abram is now finally separated from his family

- For the first time since God called him, Abram stands wholly in obedience to the calling God gave
- And so what does God do in response?

[Gen. 13:14](#) The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward;

[Gen. 13:15](#) for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever.

[Gen. 13:16](#) "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.

[Gen. 13:17](#) "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you."

[Gen. 13:18](#) Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.

- For the third time, the Lord speaks to Abram concerning His promises
 - But the timing of this moment is important
 - Moses records that God's appearing happened after Lot departed
 - God draws a clear connection to the events of the parting
 - In fact, Lot had lifted his eyes to see a sinful Sodom and found it pleasing
 - But now Abram's obedience step of separating from Lot pleases God and causes God to instruct Abram to raise his eyes as well
 - And to look not just eastward, but in all directions
 - All this land as far as he could see and beyond would be his and his descendants
 - Consider the contrast:
 - Lot used his eyes to find something that pleased himself, and it led him into sin
 - Abram allowed God to direct his eyes, and it led to obedience and a far greater inheritance
 - This is a consistent testimony of Scripture

- We have a choice of following God or following our own desires
 - Our own desires may lead us into very satisfying and comfortable living
 - But it will bring sin and consequences
 - Or we can allow the Lord to set our eyes on the better things and receive an eternal inheritance
- I mentioned that each time God appears to Abram, He reveals a little more concerning His promises
 - And in this revelation, God explains that all this land would be both Abram's and his descendants
 - In v.15 my English translation says they will own the land "forever"
 - That word in Hebrew is *ad olam*, which literally means "for an age"
 - This reflects that the Messianic Kingdom is only 1,000 years, which is the time Israel will have this land
 - And then the age will give way to a new age in which the world is replaced and something entirely new arrives (Revelation 21-22)
 - Finally, God elaborates that Abram's descendants would be too numerous to count
 - Abram has heard he will have "descendants" already, but now God tells him that these descendants would be too numerous to count
 - Having heard this promise multiple times, we imagine Abram is getting anxious to see kids come along
- Then once more, God instructs Abram to walk the entire land he has received, to come to know the magnificence of God's generosity
 - Yet all the while, Abram understands that this inheritance won't be his until after he returns with the Lord