

The faith journey of any man, woman or child on this side of the Fall will always trend like a roller-coaster ride. We are going to have incredible moments of experiencing God's presence, feeling confident in our faith as we submit to God in obedience, and then we are going to have...other times. We will all endure times when our faith feels small, times when we fall out of obedience for any number of reasons, times when God seems distant--when we wonder if we are too far gone for God's redemption. Faith is never a straight line, and Abram's faith story is a perfect example.

Last week we left Abram and Sarai in Egypt in an embarrassing mess. Today we will pick story as we read the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis together. Please stand and let us read the Word of the LORD:

So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.

<sup>2</sup>Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. <sup>3</sup>And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, <sup>4</sup>to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, <sup>6</sup>so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, <sup>7</sup>and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.

<sup>8</sup>Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. <sup>9</sup>Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." <sup>10</sup>And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup>So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup>Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. <sup>13</sup>Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

<sup>14</sup>The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, <sup>15</sup>for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. <sup>16</sup>I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. <sup>17</sup>Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." <sup>18</sup>So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

We will be unpacking this story under four subheadings: 1) The Return to Faith; 2) An Ironic Test; 3) The Fruit of Repentance; and 4) Lift Up Your Eyes.

### **I. The Return to Faith**

As we return to the narrative, Abram is in the middle of the mess he made when he failed to trust the promises and provision of God. The fear of famine led Abram out of the land God promised, away from the altar where he called upon the name of the LORD, and that same faithless fear led him to employ deception. As a result, his beautiful wife, Sarai, was swept up into Pharaoh's harem, and Abram was left outside Pharaoh's palace with his fancy female donkeys and no bride. Mercifully, God demonstrated His covenant faithfulness by sending brutal

plagues against Pharaoh and his household, which led to a stern tongue-lashing from Pharaoh who promptly returned Sarai and deported Abram's family out of Egypt.

So, as we return to the narrative, Abram and Sarai are on their way back to Bethel. Church, can you imagine that donkey ride home? Awkard.

Now, before we get into the narrative, I must ask: can you relate with Abram? Most of us can relate with making a huge mess of our lives in ways that affected the people we love, and if you know what that's like, you know Abram has some very important decisions to make. What to do now that he made such a mess? How to repair the relationships that have been damaged? What is required to make things right with God? Where does he go from here?

As embarrassing as Abram's story is in Egypt, what comes next serves as a beautiful picture of repentance following a failure of faith. We read in vss. 1-4: So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. 2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. 3 And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, 4 to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.

First, note that Abram returns...he repents. Abram remembers the promises of God. He remembers those times of intimacy with God when he worshipped in Bethel. So, upon making a mess of things in Egypt, Abram repents...he returns to his first love, back to the altar in Bethel where he first called upon the name of the LORD.

Church, when we've made a mess of things through our failure to trust God, when we've hurt others with our sinful choices and deception, the very first choice we must make comes to this: we either repent, own our mess, confess our sin, and throw ourselves at the mercy of God...or we double-down and insist that we have not sinned. Now, take this point to heart, because as I understand the scriptures, this is the turning point when it comes to your character and even your salvation. For us to be reconciled to God and those we sin against, repentance is required. Please note: Repentance is not some general acknowledgement that "nobody's perfect." Repentance requires that we confess our sin and acknowledge that our sin brought about devastating consequences. Repentance is allowing the painful reality of our sin to break our hearts to the extent that we hate our sin...not just the consequences of our sin.

Here's what I can tell you with all certainty: if you are unable or unwilling to confess your sin and the devastating consequences of your sin, you are NOT a Christian and your soul is in peril. Jesus said multiple times that if we refuse to repent, we will perish<sup>1</sup>, and there can be no repentance where there is no confession of sin. Proverbs 28:13 says, "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." James writes, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."<sup>2</sup> There is never healing in you, or in those you hurt, without the confession of sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 13:3,5

<sup>2</sup> James 5:16

John wrote in 1 John 1:8-10: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar...

General apologies mean absolutely nothing to those who have been hurt by your sin. Healing comes only when we apologize and confess our sin with a sincere and contrite heart.

So, let me ask you a question: Do you ever truly confess your sin, or do you find a way to blame others? Too many of us fixate on the sins of others to the degree that we never accept responsibility for our own mess; yet every time we hide or deny our sinful behavior, we make God out to be a liar, and the truth is not in us. I hope you will take some time to reflect on the seriousness of this question. Do you ever confess your sins? There can be no repentance where there is no confession of sin.

Note that Abram makes no effort to justify his choices and behavior. Instead, he repents; he returns; and Abram calls upon the name of the LORD. How do we know that he confessed his sin and truly repented of his choices that led to a lot of painful outcomes in Egypt? Well, we're fixing to find out because the next testing of Abram's faith is right around the corner. Let's see what happens next.

## **II. A New and Ironic Test**

In case you missed this important detail, let us revisit vs. 2: Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

Thanks to the immense dowry that Pharaoh gave to Abram when he took Sarai to be his wife, Abram returns to Bethel spiritually humbled but materially wealthy. And Abram's wealth has allowed his nephew Lot to prosper as well. Ironically, they now have SO much wealth in terms of livestock that it has created some issues. In vss. 5-7 we read: And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, 6 so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, 7 and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.

Now, I hope you are enjoying the *rich* irony of this story. Think about it: the first testing of Abram's faith comes in the form of famine. Now, following his season of repentance, the next testing of Abram's faith will come as a consequence of tremendous wealth.

I suspect some of you are scoffing under your breath, as though being wealthy would be any real test to your faith; but should that come as any surprise? I don't think so. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup> Remember the story of the rich ruler<sup>4</sup> who chose his wealth over following Jesus? Believe it or not, wealth is often a far greater challenge to our faith than "famine." Why? Well, look what happens here in Genesis 13.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 19:24

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 19:16-26

Because of their great wealth, Abram and Lot can no longer occupy the same property. The vast herds owned by Abram and Lot are competing for limited pasture and access to water. Their employees are becoming hostile toward each other. This land issue is exacerbated by the presence of the pre-existing Canaanites and Perizzites who also live in the land and are competing for the same resources. Consequently, Abram and Lot will have to part ways, and this is often the curse of extravagant wealth: isolation. Think about it.

When we face times of “famine”, we move towards our people. We move towards our family, our neighbors, our friends, and our community. “Famines” of many kinds will often draw people closer together as they lean on each other to meet great needs. Famines rarely lead to isolation, but great wealth almost always leads to isolation. People with great wealth regularly move away from other people because they can afford to! Their great wealth leads them to travel more, so they spend less time with their friends and neighbors. Their great wealth also creates distrust in relationships because so many people in their lives, including their own family members, are often jockeying for a “piece of the pie.” I’m not asking you to feel sorry for the wealthy, but we should acknowledge that wealth can serve as a great test to a person’s faith. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:10 that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

So, Abram and Lot are both rich. Their wealth has caused conflict. So, how does Abram handle this new test of his faith in God? Let us now look to...

### **III. The Fruit of Repentance**

In case you forgot, Abram is Lot’s uncle. Abram and Sarai basically adopted Lot after Abram’s brother, Haran, passed away. So, here’s the situation: Abram is the patriarch of the family and has been ever since the death of his father. Lot is in a subordinate position to Abram in the family; so, given there is not enough room for their herds to co-exist, we would anticipate Abram telling Lot to gather up his sheep and get the flock out of here! But that’s not what happens. Look at vss. 8-9: Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.”

Abram does the unthinkable: he lovingly appeals to the relationship as family, and he de-escalates the conflict by generously deferring the choice of prime land to his nephew.

Church, please appreciate the cultural absurdity of this moment. I guarantee the first audience of Israelites to hear this story broke out in loud indignation and/or admiration. For Abram to defer the first choice of land to his nephew was absolutely unheard of within the ancient patriarchal society. By deferring to his nephew, Abram is setting aside the entitlement that comes with his patriarchy and is essentially becoming the subordinate to Lot. Abram is clearly trusting that God will provide regardless of the land he ends up living on.

Abram’s behavior and decision demonstrates a change of heart from what we saw earlier in Egypt. Whereas the fear of famine and the fear of death formerly led Abram to be unfaithful and deceitful, we now see Abram’s faith shine brilliant. Abram trusts the providence and provision of

God, and his faith is manifests itself in humble generosity! This is the evidence of a changed heart that John the Baptist referred to as “fruit keeping with repentance.”<sup>5</sup> The evidence of a restored heart is clear for all to see. Abram has grown from his failure in Egypt. He has returned to a posture of faith, humility, and a deep confidence in God, regardless of the land he dwells in.

Sadly, that is not the case with Abram’s nephew. Though the Apostle Peter refers to Lot as a “righteous man”<sup>6</sup>, we are about to see what greed can do to any man.

#### **IV. Lift Up Your Eyes**

Wealth is a tricky subject in the Bible, and the church’s relationship to wealth has been complicated throughout church history. For the first 600 years of church history, the greatest heroes of the faith (with the exception of Augustine) were those who gave up all their worldly possessions and lived very ascetic, impoverished lives of prayer and service. To this day we still marvel at believers who set aside wealth to live among and serve the poor like Mother Theresa (show image)<sup>7</sup> and many others. On the other hand, we find stories in the Bible where God entrusts tremendous wealth to heroes of the faith like Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, and others. Though Jesus had no place to lay his head, many of the women who traveled with and supported Jesus were women of great wealth, as was the faithful disciple known as Joseph of Arimathea. So how are we to view the relationship of wealth and faith?

I would sum it up this way: Biblically speaking, wealthy people fall into one of two camps. Either you have wealth, or wealth has you. I think you’ll see both camps represented as we pick up the narrative in vs. 11-13: 10 And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. 12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

Lot and Abram are standing about 3,000 feet above sea level (show pic)<sup>8</sup>. From the region of Bethel, one can get a bird’s eye view in almost every direction. Abram says, “Choose the land you want to occupy...you can take whatever land you desire.”

Now, we don’t know much about Lot, but we do know he has been tagging along with Abram ever since they left Haran. He has witnessed Abram’s life of worship and obedience; he has also witnessed Abram’s lack of faith in Egypt. Lot has been drawn in by the current of Abram’s faith journey, but we get the sense that Lot has yet to have a sincere relationship with God himself.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 3:8

<sup>6</sup> 2 Peter 2:7

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[https://res.cloudinary.com/aenetworks/image/upload/c\\_fill,ar\\_2,w\\_1080,h\\_540,g\\_auto/dpr\\_auto/f\\_auto/q\\_auto:eco/v1/mother-theresa-GettyImages-863357110?\\_a=BAVAZGID0](https://res.cloudinary.com/aenetworks/image/upload/c_fill,ar_2,w_1080,h_540,g_auto/dpr_auto/f_auto/q_auto:eco/v1/mother-theresa-GettyImages-863357110?_a=BAVAZGID0)

<sup>8</sup>

<https://i0.wp.com/uasvbible.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Abram-and-Lot-Genesis-13-historical-background.jpg?fit=1794%2C1022&ssl=1>

F.B. Meyers compares Lot to the character called *Pliable* (show pic<sup>9</sup>) in *Pilgrim's Progress*<sup>10</sup> who had a fickle faith with no roots or staying power.

How do we know that? Well, Lot doesn't lift his eyes up to heaven to seek the LORD before choosing land; instead, Lot lifts up his eyes to greedily assess the rich, fertile grounds of the Jordan Valley. Lot reveals an unquenchable appetite for 'more,' and his greed will lead him to knowingly pitch his tent just outside of Sodom, the Sin City of the ancient world. Note that, like the story of Cain, the description of a man heading "east" is foreboding, for Moses writes "this was before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah". Any spiritually discerning person would have known better than to pitch his tent in Sodom, but such was the greed that drove the young man to acquire more. Lot did not simply have wealth; the greed for wealth had Lot. And that will come to a sad end as many of you know.

One writer put it this way: "Lot would have chosen heaven over hell; but he would not have chosen heaven over earth." Do you see what he's saying?

When our desire for the things of this world is so strong that we would compromise our souls and give little thought to God's will and intentions for our lives, we no longer own wealth...our wealth owns us. Sadly, very few people can have great wealth without the wealth taking over their lives and compromising their souls.

In this story, however, Abram represents a man blessed with tremendous wealth, and yet the wealth does not own Abram. He has held it loosely. He has been willing to give up privilege and power, to trust God with the land decision, and to believe God for a future he cannot see.

Abram has once again demonstrated a sincere faith in God. And so God comes to Abram after Lot departs and says: "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. 17 Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." 18 So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

Whereas Lot greedily lifted up his eyes and fixed his heart on what was seen, God calls faithful Abram to lift up his eyes as an act of obedience, to look upon the unseen. God reveals the vision of what He will do through Abram. He promises to grant the land in every direction to the descendants of Abram. He promises more descendants than could be counted in a hundred lifetimes. He commands Abram to walk the land with the assurance that wherever his foot touches the ground, that land will be given to him. And once again, Abram believes the promises of the LORD. He leaves Bethel in the north and walks south, claiming the land in faith until he gets to the southern region at Hebron, where he once again builds an altar unto the LORD.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://assets.answersingenesis.org/img/articles/tpp/pliable.jpg>

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by James Boice, *Genesis Vol. 2*, 481.

Faithful Abram has returned to His first love, and his faith is once again evident in his obedience and his worship.

Church, when the unseen promises of heaven still capture your heart more than your possessions, when obedience directs your steps, when you prioritize faithfulness over finance, you are living in a healthy relationship with your wealth. Abram was rich in possessions, but his heart belonged to God, not to his possessions. Abram had learned a painful lesson in Egypt, and for now, Abram's heart has returned fully to the LORD. He believes God, even though he doesn't own any land, he has no children, and his wife is barren. This is the journey of faith we have all been called to: to trust God and to devote our hearts to the unseen treasures of heaven above and over all the treasures of the earth.

Now, how does this story point us back to Jesus? Well, let us once again return to the wilderness where Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights in Luke 4. We read in vs. 5ff: And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus may have been standing on the same or a very similar mountain as Abram and Lot in Genesis 13. Jesus faces the same temptation as Lot, but the devil shows Jesus EVERY kingdom of the entire world...kingdoms that rightfully belonged to Jesus who was with God and was God in the beginning<sup>11</sup>!

But, like faithful Abram, Jesus set aside His rightful position and authority. As Paul writes in Philippians 2, "Though He was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Church, can you see the Gospel in this story?

Lot longs to fill the hunger in his soul with the acquisition of land, the wealth of this world, which the text said reminded him of the Garden of Eden! Don't miss that.

Listen: Every human soul aches for that time before sin; that place where we are deeply satisfied, known, safe, and at home in this world. But here's the truth: there is nothing in this world that can satisfy the deepest longing of our fallen hearts. No amount of land, no amount of wealth, no amount of security, no amount of power or position, no sexual conquest, no accomplishment or status.

Our hearts will never be satisfied in the treasures of this world; our hearts will only ever find rest in HIM...in the One who created us; and the One who died in our place.

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<sup>11</sup> John 1:1-2

Friends, lift up your eyes! Fix your hearts not on what can be seen, but on the unseen promises of God! Place your faith in God's Word, regardless of the way things look right now. Believe the words of our Savior when He said, "Come unto me, all of you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."<sup>12</sup> Return to your first love, confess your sin, experience our Lord's unmerited grace, and be renewed by the transforming of your mind. Let go of the things of this world, worship God and rest, knowing that God is faithful.

Let us close by reading together Hebrews 12:1-3: Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Will you pray with me?

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 11:28