

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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FAMILY FEUD

Genesis 13

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INTRODUCTION: As a pastor and military chaplain, I've had a thousand talks with people about their problems. The common denominator among those conversations is relationship struggles. Occasionally, someone speaks with me about a career decision or something else, but most of the time when people want to have a private conversation, it's over a relationship issue. In today's sermon, that's exactly what we have: a relationship concern. Let's look at the scripture to see how two men handled relationship conflicts among their people.

Here are the three points to my message today:

- Excess caused conflict.
- Abram valued peace over conflict.
- God confirmed Canaan was his best for Abram.

First, a little review: Abram was a man God called to set out on a journey of faith. Abram was already well-to-do but he and his wife had no children. God told him he'd make Abram the father of a great nation. As he traveled, Abram stopped to build altars and worship God. At one stop, God told him the land he saw was the land that he would give to his descendants who would number so many they'd be impossible to count.

Abram and his relationship with God was growing until a famine came. He decided to take a detour and go to Egypt where there was plenty of food. During the whole detour in Egypt there was no sign at all of Abram worshiping God, seeking God, praying, or anything. He gets himself and Sarai in a fix and God intervenes. He is expelled from Egypt.

There were two takeaways from my last message about Abram: The first was that if

Abram had just trusted God during the famine and continued his journey, he would have run into the oasis called Kadesh-Barnea. A second takeaway I shared with you was that Abram returned to the place where he had last worshipped God.

APPLICATION: The application is clear: If you are following God's will, you will run into difficult times, but stay the course. If you find you've taken a detour out of God's will, return to the last place where you know you were in his will. If we could learn these two principles, we could save a lot of time and prevent unnecessary personal pain.

EXPLANATION: The old song "Come Thou Fount" says "Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." Isaiah 53 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way..." Abram learned that wandering his own way did nothing but delay what God wanted for him.

In today's message a new person comes on the scene. He's been mentioned before but not much has been said about him. And that is Lot, the nephew of Abram. In the narrative, Lot has been with Abram on the whole journey so far. Lot had his own people, livestock, and servants. As they traveled, both Abram's and Lot's households and possessions grew to the point that they were interfering with each other.

EXCESS CAUSED CONFLICT

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 13:1-7

So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ² Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

³ From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴ and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

⁵ Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents.

⁶ But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. ⁷ And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

EXPLANATION: One person wrote that Abram and Lot were like two brothers who'd gotten too old to share the same bedroom. Clearly a lot of time had passed since they left their homeland. As nomadic people, they had gotten along. Even when faced with famine and during the detour through Egypt, they had gotten along. The idea of being a large nomadic family strikes me as having its own share of problems. Yet as far as we know, they all got along. So what happened? What was the catalyst that caused this family to part ways? Stuff. The scripture says the land could not support them because their possessions were so great.

Clearly, they had more than they needed. They had survived very well up until this point, so why didn't they divest themselves of some of that stuff and preserve the family unity? That's a good question and I do not have an answer, other than they both determined that splitting up because of their growing wealth was better than saving the family. When they first set out on their journey, they didn't consider the day would come when they could no longer live together.

ILLUSTRATION: Excess can cause stress. Most of us think life will be better when we get that yet-one-more-thing we really want. And once we have it, we start all over with our thinking that life will be better when we get that yet-one-more-thing. Years ago, when I was leading youth ministry, a young man came to see me in my office. He was stressed out about something. He had a used truck and he said "it just never seems to end. I am going to have to get new wheels, then I'll have to get the windows tinted, then I'll have to get a new stereo." He went on talking about all the amenities he thought he just had to have. He had calculated his pay from his high school job and concluded there was no end in sight. I listened and suggested he didn't really need any of it, but it was too late. He had allowed himself to be brainwashed.

Yes, excess can cause stress. I saw part of a program on TV where a woman was paying rent on multiple storage units but had forgotten what she had in storage. She was having trouble paying her bills because of the amount of rent she was paying for storage.

Two weeks ago, I got a call from a friend. He had called family members over a matter of an inheritance that needed to be discussed. In no time, they all contacted

lawyers instead of having the simple family discussion he wanted to have. They all became greedy, but what he hadn't told them was the amount of the inheritance was not much. In fact, they'll probably spend more on lawyers. Excess can cause conflict.

ABRAM VALUED PEACE OVER CONFLICT

EXPLANATION: Reading this as an armchair quarterback, it's easy for me to say Abram and Lot could have averted the whole mess they were about to get into, if they had just downsized to match their earlier days together. But they didn't think like that. In fact, I don't think anyone thought like that back then, so who am I to point the finger at them?

What we have is a dilemma, and something had to be done. Abram was the peacemaker and wanted to save the family relationship. Look at verse 8.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 13:8-11

So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

¹⁰ Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company.

Abram wasn't any dummy. He knew that Lot was going to pick the best-looking land. Abram had learned from his detour in Egypt that what looks best isn't always the best. He knew it would have been better to stay in the desert than to go to Egypt where all the food was. He had learned a great lesson: God would be faithful. Giving the better land to Lot was nothing to Abram. He'd come a long way with his faith in God. He knew God would provide. He also wanted peace at all cost.

Abram was OK with Lot taking the greener pastures near the cities where he could buy and sell and get richer. Abram was OK with going in the other direction which wasn't as green and wasn't as civilized. Why? Because it would bring peace.

APPLICATION: Have you ever had high aspirations for healing in a relationship? In fact, your aspirations were so high, you had conversations with yourself as you imagined the best-case scenarios of working things out? And then maybe, after a while, reality hit and you became OK with letting the other person have the greener pasture if it would bring peace. Abram valued peace over conflict even if he got the lesser end of the deal.

GOD CONFIRMED CANAAN WAS HIS BEST FOR ABRAM

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 13:12-18

Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. [And now we have a foreboding statement:] ¹³ Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD. [Here is our first hint that Lot made the wrong choice.]

But what did God tell Abram? ¹⁴ *The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. ¹⁵ All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. ¹⁷ Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.” ¹⁸ So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.*

Lot went his own way and Abram his. Let’s contrast these two men:

- Abram worshipped God, and in turn we have this dynamic interaction between him and God. On the other hand, we have no record of Lot building an altar or calling on the name of the Lord. Nothing.
- Abram’s faith was growing. Lot had no faith in God that we know of.
- Abram was now without his long-time nephew and companion. Would he make it without Lot? Yes. Lot was now on his own land and was without his long-time uncle and companion. Would he make it on his own? No.
- Abram lived in the forest. Lot lived near the city.
- God confirmed Canaan was where Abram was to be. God confirmed nothing with Lot.

EXPLANATION: I thought a lot about this passage of scripture. Why didn't Abram ask God about how he should handle the situation? It seems that Abram would have had a definite word from the Lord about which land he should have. I mean, after all, God promised Abram he'd be the father of a great nation. Abram had blown it before. It seems rather risky for him to do it the way he did it, doesn't it?

Why didn't Abram say to Lot something like this, which would have been one hundred percent acceptable in that day: "Nephew, we've been together a long time. It's best we part ways. I am older and have led us on this long journey. You've been with me all the way, but really, I was the one leading. I really deserve the better-looking land, so I am going to go this way and you can have Canaan. It's yours, take it." In all likelihood, Lot would have done just what his uncle said.

The reason Abram didn't seek God in advance was because God had already given him the land! You see, Abram had been there before. He'd already seen it. In the previous chapter, God told him "to your offspring I will give this land." When he and Lot were looking down at the land before them, on one side was Canaan -- countryside that looked good -- and on the other side was the plain of Jordan -- countryside that looked much better. I believe at this point Abram knew the mind of God. He knew Lot would pick the better-looking land. And in turn, Abram would get the land that God had already promised him.

CONCLUSION: Who are you going to be? Are you going to be Abram and step out in faith and allow your faith to grow? Or are you going to be the tagalong Lot, merely following in the shadows of Uncle Abram, with no faith of your own? We'll see how Lot's choice didn't work out well for him.

Will you be mesmerized by the better-looking deal like Lot was? Or will you remain faithful to God's instruction like Abram was?

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