

So much “stuff” happens even after Christ is in us, yes, even after the blessing of God’s grace is upon us—and, if you’re like many Christians, you work to discern God’s purposes in those less-than-perfect circumstances. Along those lines, let’s take a look at God’s covenant with Abraham which first appears in Genesis 12:1-3. Remember, Abraham’s name had not yet changed, so the reference here is to “Abram.”

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

This covenant is what theologians like to call an unconditional covenant—that means that one party to the covenant will perform what is called for regardless of the actions of the other party. In this case, God will honor His covenant. Period.

What happened next is pretty interesting. Remember, God instructed Abram to go from his country, his relatives, and his father’s house. But Abram had a nephew named Lot who was an orphan by Abram’s brother Haran. And in the very next verse after the covenant was first detailed, Lot departed with Abram. That’s captured here in Genesis 12:4: “So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.”

So, was this inclusion of Abram’s nephew Lot in the departing party a lack on Abraham’s part in not fully following God’s instructions to “go from your relatives and your father’s house?” A number of theologians seem to think so, and a simple reading seems to validate that. But wait! Remember the report about Abram in Hebrews 11: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” So, God says in the New Testament that Abraham *was truly obedient*. And even if Abram might have faltered in his handling of Lot, then that would seem to simply be evidence of God’s grace in the midst of Abram’s overall obedience!

OK, several initial observations are important here in considering the first part of Genesis chapter 12. First, Abram honored his nephew Lot’s apparent desire to go with him. Second, Lot was not part of God’s covenant with Abram—that covenant was spoken to “you,” and “you” clearly meant “Abram”—and that also contemplated Sarai, who was the wife whom Abram had cleaved to. And third, Abram’s allowing Lot to go with him became a key stimulus for several troubles plaguing Abram and his descendants.

So let’s pick up the story now as the narrative of Genesis chapter 12 continues. Abram, Sarai, and Lot left together with possessions and people. And, as they were traveling through the land of Canaan where the Canaanites dwelled, the Lord spoke to Abram and indicated that the very land of Canaan would be given to Abram’s offspring. ...And what a major takeaway that is!

Have you been blessed by finding this type of event to be true in your life? Like this story of Abram, our Father in heaven sometimes blesses us so much that He waits to also give a fullness of the blessing to our children, grandchildren, and beyond. So, we get the privilege to operate *now* in a faith that also can manifest in blessings *well beyond ourselves*. Abram’s response to that was to truly revel in God and His mighty blessings, building an altar at Bethel and calling upon the name of the Lord!

Hey, have you ever kinda, sorta tried to preempt the Lord in his promises—yes, His legitimate promises—and, before God’s perfect timing manifested, you tried to obtain all the events and results that you think are very much needing to happen *now*? For some Christians, this is one of the most frustrating dimensions in their walk with Jesus. Of course, we say we believe that God’s timing is perfect! But have you heard the rather sarcastic saying that some Christian comedians follow that with? “Yes, God’s timing is perfect, but He misses a bunch of chances to be early!” ...But right here, Abram didn’t grumble or complain—he worshiped! And after Abram’s worship at Bethel, his crew trekked on past Canaan to the Negev desert.

But there was a famine in the land, and a fertile Egypt was the answer! But when they arrived, Abram feared for his life and convinced Sarai to pose solely as his sister. You know that story—Pharaoh’s house was afflicted because of this deception, and Pharaoh expelled Abram and his entourage out of Egypt.

So, Abram and the crew returned to the Bethel area. And, wonder of wonders, Abram and Lot were both prospering so greatly that the land couldn’t support the both of them...and there was strife between the herdsmen of both men. We don’t really know the essence of the relationship between Abram and Lot. But given the fact that Lot’s father and grandfather were dead, surely Abram was what we would call a bit of a “father figure” to Lot. And Abram responded to this situation like a champion...like a spiritually and emotionally secure follower of God. Here’s the story, right from the Bible.

“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. 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.’ 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.) So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.” (Genesis 13:8-13) Here’s a blunt recap: Lot selfishly took what he perceived to be the much better deal.

But this is key: Lot was finally separated from Abram, *then* God’s response was in the very next verse. “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, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. 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. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” (Genesis 13:14-17) This covenantal detail about Abram’s countless offspring and their inheritance of the land was providentially delivered to Abram *after Lot was gone*. Tell me, isn’t the wisdom of God evident here...in His waiting to deliver this message after the greedy Lot departed? For sure, God understands both the upsides and the downsides of family dynamics!

And you likely know the stories in the Bible that followed: that Abram had to rescue Lot from the land and people resulting from his supposedly better choice, and even later Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed while Lot’s wife longingly looked back and became a pillar of salt. And Lot’s descendants birthed through incest with his daughters—the Ammonites and the Moabites—were trouble for Abram’s descendants.

Here are some takeaways for us today. First, even with our good intentions, efforts on behalf of family can delay or sidetrack God’s best for us! Second, even with our good intentions, family members can make poor choices that look attractive to them at the moment, and we may well pay a significant price in helping to redeem those decisions. And third, when we are children of the promise—as both Abraham *was* and we *are*—God will remain faithful to His promises, even when we respond in a less-than-perfect way!

In a previous episode, we spoke of Abraham’s amazing “occupying obedience.” Again—Hebrews 11:8! But Abram was not perfect, of course, and his desire to help a foolish nephew carried a high price. In an era when “family values” can easily be raised to the status of idolatry, this is vital for Christians to remember.

Jesus taught that He didn’t come to bring families together, but that families would be separated on His account. A cultural context of this teaching was the powerful *paterfamilias* model of the Roman empire, where patriarchs had near-absolute control, for example putting a newborn child to death if desired. Still, Abram did nobly help his nephew Lot—even when it was a risky diversion. All the while, God was faithful to Abram in the grandest covenant the world had ever seen up to that time. There are important lessons for us to reflect upon in the Abram and Lot story, aren’t there? Yes, a “Lot” of troubles. Much to ponder...

A&A: Application & Action

1. So, did Abraham make the correct choice in allowing Lot to accompany him out of his country? Be clearly Biblical in your thinking.
2. Are you deliberately petitioning God for intergenerational blessings operating within the New Covenant that you likely won't see bear fruit in your lifetime here on earth, i.e., only to be revealed in heaven? Give examples. ...If not, why not?
3. Have you ever been tempted to allocate time and treasure to family issues that were unworthy in light of God's priorities? Did you succumb to that temptation? Have you now developed accountability mechanisms or the spiritual depth to handle this kind of situation well? Be specific.