

“CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES” **(Genesis 13:1-18)**

Today I want to talk to you about choices and the consequences that follow choices. It is estimated that we make about 35,000 decisions a day, which is pretty astounding. I think half of those decisions are used up when you go to a place like Subway. By the time you get to the cash register you’ve had to choose what sandwich you want, what bread you want, what meat you want, what veggies and toppings you want, what sauces you want, and if you want a soft drink and cookie to go with it. I don’t know if anyone has coined the phrase “decision fatigue,” but there seem to be no end of decisions.

As Americans living in 2022, we have about as much freedom to choose as any other time period in history – which is an incredible blessing – but along with the privilege of being able to choose comes the responsibility to choose wisely.

Every choice we make – either good or bad – carries a consequence. The little choices we make every day may not seem like a big deal, but each choice contributes to the overall trajectory of our lives. You’ve probably heard about the butterfly effect where the small flap of a butterfly somewhere in the world creates waves that travels to another part of the globe and eventually becomes a tsunami or hurricane. It’s the same effect as when you throw a rock in the water and it creates a ripple that spreads out across the water.

That’s why history is so fascinating and important, because we get to observe the decisions that others have made – both good and bad – and learn from them. One of the values of the Old Testament is because it is filled with stories of real-life people who made choices that impacted generations after them, and each of these stories are written as examples of what to do and not do. One of the most powerful stories of choices and consequences is the story of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 13. In this story Abraham represents those who make choices based on *faith*, and Lot represents those who make choices based on *sight*. Abraham’s decisions result in *blessing*, and Lot’s decisions result in *ruin*.

For the past couple of weeks, we’ve been studying the life of Abraham, and we’ve seen how God called him to leave his home in Ur, and everything he’s known, and go to a land God would show him. God promised to make from Abraham a great nation with many descendants, and to bless the world through him.

Abraham headed west and God led him to the land of Canaan, and God said, “This is it – this is the land I’ve promised you – look around, it’s all yours.” Sometime after arriving in the land a famine struck. Instead of waiting on the Lord and trusting Him for direction, Abraham hastily ran to Egypt for help. Last week we saw how he got into all kinds of trouble in Egypt, and put the promise of God’s blessing in jeopardy when Pharaoh tried to take Sarah as his wife. God intervened on his behalf, and he and Sarah got out of Egypt alive and returned to the Promised Land.

We pick up the story in 13:1-5... “So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. 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 and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the Lord.”

Abraham basically retraces the route he took down to Egypt, and returns to the land God promised him. He makes his way back to Bethel where he had earlier encamped and built an altar. Bethel means “the house of God” and was a special place where Abraham worshipped and communed with God. While in Egypt, Abraham was out of God’s will and away from fellowship with God. But now he’s back, and he “calls on the name of the Lord,” acknowledging his trust in the Lord.

It’s a great picture of what we are to do after we have failed the Lord. Revelation 2:5 says, “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.” Remember where you were before falling, repent and confess your sin to the Lord, and return to doing those things you did when you were in fellowship with the Lord. Remember, repent, and return.

Over the course of time Abraham had become very wealthy, and part of his wealth came from all the gifts Pharaoh gave him in Egypt as part of his marriage proposal to Sarah. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “wealth” means “heavy.” Abraham’s wealth was nice, but it was also heavy. It was a burden. And it will lead to problems.

Verse 5 says, “Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents.” We first read about Lot in chapter 11, and there we find out that he is the nephew of Abraham. When Lot’s father, Haran, died, Abraham became something of a surrogate father to Lot. Since Abraham did not have any children at this point, Abraham likely viewed Lot as his heir. Everywhere Abraham went, Lot followed. Because Lot was a part of Abraham’s family, he was blessed along with Abraham, and this included having many flocks and herds and tents.

Verses 6-7 says, “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. And quarreling arose between Abram’s herders and Lot’s. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.”

Many people live with the illusion that having more – more money, more possessions, more property – will solve all their problems and make them happy. But every study, every survey, every personal testimony says otherwise. While wealth has its benefits, it also brings a host of problems. 1 Timothy 6:10 says that those who are eager to gain wealth “pierce themselves with many griefs.” Having more money and more things means that you have more to worry about – more to protect – more to repair. I read recently that once a person has a basic, livable wage – enough to pay the bills, have some savings, and have a little left to enjoy some things – that anything above that makes no difference in how happy you are.

In this case, the flocks and herds and possessions of Abraham and Lot were so great – so heavy – that there was not enough pastureland for both. The conflict led to quarreling... “Your sheep wandered over to our field and eat all our grass”... “Yeah, well your cows are chewing up all our grazing land”... and a feud breaks out between the two parties.

How many conflicts have arisen over money, whether its family members going to war over an inheritance, or business partners taking each other to court over money? I read one time about group of five co-workers at a Waffle House in Alabama who agreed to all buy lottery tickets and if one of them won, they would split the money. Lo and behold, one woman in the pool won several million dollars, but claimed that she had made no deal with the other four.

The other four took her to court and lost, and along the way they almost went bankrupt paying for legal fees. The lady who won brought a brand-new house, but was forced to live like a hermit after being shunned by her friends for her selfishness. Money can pierce people with many griefs.

The dispute over the land leads to a big decision. How are these two family members going to deal with this problem? What they decide will have huge ramifications for years to come. As the leader of the clan, Abraham steps up in verses 8-9 says to Lot, “Let’s not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. 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.”

Abraham, as the elder statesman, takes the high road. He has seniority over Lot and could say, “I’m the patriarch of the family and I’ll decide how to divide up the land – after all, I’m the one God promised the land to.” Abraham has every right to exercise his rights and pick whatever land he wants to, but he doesn’t. He says to Lot, “We’re family, and our family bond is far more important than land. Let’s not let this divide us. You decide which land you want, and I will take the other land.”

There’s a lot to be learned here about conflict resolution and the decisions we make in the heat of the moment. Abraham put relationships above rights. He’s a great example of Romans 12:18, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Because we have the peace of God in our hearts, we have the capacity and obligation to live in peace with everyone – whether it’s in your family, at church, at work – do whatever you can to foster peace.

Philippians 2:3-4 says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” In the heat of conflict, our natural impulse is to think first about ourselves – how does this affect me, what do I get out of this, how does this serve my interests? But God’s Word says to think the opposite – how does this affect them, how can I serve them?

If anyone had rights it was our Lord Jesus. As the creator of the universe, sitting at the right hand of the Father in glory, he could have looked at His rebellious creation and left us to our own self-destruction. He possessed all power and glory, yet 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” Jesus looked not to His own interests, but to our interests – and because He was willing to humble Himself, become poor, and die on the cross, we have been made spiritually rich. He did everything possible to bring peace between sinful creation and a holy God.

But the question remains: What made Abraham take the high road, to be selfless and generous, and give up his rights? The simple answer, as we’ll see throughout his life, is that he lived by faith. And because he lived by faith, he was able to hold the things of this world loosely. That’s why he lived in tents his whole life. Hebrews 11:9-10 says, “By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”

Abraham’s attitude is... “I really don’t care what land I live on – I’ll be content if I go to the right or to the left. It really doesn’t matter because this world is not my home, I’m just passing through.” Once you adopt this attitude it changes your whole perspective on life, and you begin to filter all your decisions through the lens of eternity.

Abraham also based his decision on absolute trust in God... “God promised to bless me, and whatever land I get, I’ll trust Him to take care of me.” Trusting God frees you from worry, and it takes away the pressure in making decisions. When you’re faced with a choice, you pray about it, you wait on the Lord, and you leave it in His hands. Because Abraham lived with an eternal perspective and trusted God, he was able to hold the things of this world loosely – he did not demand his rights – and he did not put land in front of his relationship with Lot.

You can picture Abraham and Lot standing on a high peak near Bethel – which stands about 2800 feet in elevation – and Uncle Abraham says to Lot, “You choose... if you go to the left, I will go to the right; If you go to the right, I will go to the left.” Verses 10-13 says, “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.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.”

The decision-making process between Abraham and Lot could not be more stark. Abraham bases his decision on *faith*, and Lot bases his on *sight*. Abraham bases his on *eternal values*, and Lot on *temporal values*. Abraham takes the *long view*, Lot takes the *short-term view*. Don’t miss the phrase that says, “Lot looked around and saw.” We’ve seen that phrase before, back in chapter 3 when Eve looked at the fruit on the tree, and saw that it was good and pleasing to the eye. We see the phrase when Esau sees the delicious stew his brother Jacob is making, and in a hasty decision gives Jacob his inheritance to get it. We see it in Joshua 7 where Achan, sees a bar of gold and some silver and steals it despite God’s clear command to not take any of the spoils of victory. We see it on the evening David is walking on the balcony of his palace and sees Bathsheba and makes the fateful decision to send for her and commit adultery.

Be careful little eye what you see. Advertisers spend billions of dollars trying to lure you into buying their products, and they know the way to go that is through the eyes. You see something, you covet it, you desire it, and then you take it. Unlike his uncle, Lot based his decision on sight – on what he could see and sense and touch purely from an earthly, temporal perspective.

Lot looks towards the east and sees paradise. He sees the Jordan River valley that is well-watered with palm trees and lots of rich pastureland. It reminds him of Egypt and the fertile land around the Nile River. It was even like the garden of Eden – heaven on earth. His eyes are captivated by what he sees and he says, “I’ll take that land.” He doesn’t defer to Abraham and say, “Everything I have is because of you – you decide.” Lot looks to his own interests. He doesn’t put his trust in God, but in the earthly paradise he sees before him.

What Lot doesn’t see, or chooses to ignore, is that the land he chooses also happens to be where the city of Sodom is – the city that has become synonymous with evil and depravity. Lot doesn’t factor into his decision making the moral corruption of the people living there and what that will mean for him and his family. All he sees is bigger herds, bigger flocks, and more prosperity.

Satan is the master of deception. He dresses up sin to look desirable and good, but hides the consequences of pain and destruction. Wise people – who walk by faith – are able to see beyond the surface appearance of things and evaluate it for what it really is. They are able to evaluate the long-term consequences of their choices and not give in to immediate gratification.

Verse 11 says Lot chooses the whole plain of Jordan and sets out toward the east. Don't miss that. Every time someone moves east in the book of Genesis, they're moving away from God. In chapter 3 after Adam and Eve sinned and we're removed from the garden, they moved "east of Eden." In chapter 4 Cain moved east to wander apart from God. In chapter 11 people moved east to Babel where they built a tower in rebellion against God. To move to the east is to move away from God – away from His presence and His blessing – and to live independently from Him. That's the symbolism here.

Verse 12 says, "Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom." What's interesting, as you look at the life of Lot, is his progression towards Sodom. First, he looks toward Sodom – he sees the whole area around Sodom and is attracted to it. Second, he moves towards Sodom – instead of consulting the Lord and counting the cost of what he's about to do, he goes towards Sodom. Third, verse 12 says he moves near Sodom – he takes up residence in the cities of the plain and pitches his tent there. Fourth, we read later in chapter 19 that he moves into Sodom and "sits" at the gate of the city – which means he becomes a leader in Sodom.

Believers who stray from the Lord do not do so overnight – it's gradual – they drift. Like Lot, they have been under God's blessing and in fellowship with Him, but they become distracted by the world and its comforts and pleasures – and they move towards the world – they stop going to church, stop fellowship with other believers, stop praying – and before they know it, they're living in Sodom – and in time anyone looking at them would not see any difference between them and an unbeliever.

What's amazing about Lot is that 2 Peter 2:7-8 describes him as a righteous man – he was a believer – but it says his soul was tormented by the depravity he saw around him. You get the idea that he never felt quite at home in Sodom.

Charles Spurgeon used to say, "If you're going to be saved, be saved 100 percent." The most miserable person in the world is the half-committed Christian, who is just enough in the world to be miserable in God and just enough into God that they are miserable in the world. You have to make up your mind – am I going to pitch my tent in Sodom and be pulled in the direction of the world, or am I going to go all in for God and be separate from the world?

Choices have consequences, and the choice Lot makes to move to Sodom will haunt him for decades. The biggest consequence is what it does to his family. While he was tormented by the wickedness of Sodom, his wife and daughters were seduced by it. When God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's wife will famously turn her head to look back and turns to a pillar of salt. She was so captivated by the lifestyle and trappings of Sodom that she couldn't leave.

Lot's daughters were also corrupted by Sodom, and in chapter 19 we read the sordid story of how they get their father drunk and sleep with him in order to preserve their family line. Their plan works and one daughter gives birth to Moab, and the other to Ammon – and they and their descendants will become archenemies with Israel for centuries to come. If Lot had only known, when he stood atop that mountain and looked down on the valley, what his choices would lead to, he would have never moved in the direction of Sodom.

But, as they say, we make our choices and we have to live with our choices. We can't undo our decisions, but what we can do is decide – starting today – to make choices based on faith, to make choices that are made with an eternal perspective, and to make choices that trust God for the outcome.

On the flip side, good choices also have consequences, and the choice of Abraham to seek peace and be content with whatever land he received was honored and rewarded by God. Verses 14-18 says, “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. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. 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. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.’ 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.”

While Lot’s choices lead to ruin, Abraham’s choices lead to blessing. He trusts God to take care of him, and God does so by reaffirming His promise of land and many descendants. There’s a wonderful principle here we need to always remember: Whatever we give up in this world, we get it back in the next world. Abraham gave up his rights to the land, and God says, “I’m going to give it all back to you – all the land you see around you is yours.” In ancient culture you claimed a piece of land by walking on it. God says, “Go walk the length and breadth of the land and claim it as your own.”

Abraham would only live so long on the earth, but long after he’s gone his descendants would continue to possess the land. In the meantime, Abraham is going to live in tents. He’s a pilgrim. He’s going to enjoy this present world, but he’s not going to become attached to it like Lot does.

God also renews His promise of many descendants, saying they will be like the “dust of the earth,” so many it’s impossible to count. Abraham has to take God at His word since Sarah is barren and unable to have children. We know the rest of the story – how God does provide a son named Isaac many years later – but in the meantime, Abraham will have to wait and trust God for how and when that will happen.

We make choices everyday – some small, some big – but all of which determine the trajectory our lives will take. We are to do what Abraham did...

- We put relationships before possessions.
- We trust God and seek His wisdom. We pray, we seek godly counsel, and we wait for God’s leading and direction. We don’t sweat it. God is in control. We cast all of our cares on Him.
- And we make all our decisions based on an eternal perspective. We ask, “What are the long-term consequences of this choice?” We avoid making choices that bring immediate gratification but long-term pain, and instead make choices that bring long-term blessing.

Every choice we make shapes our destiny and provides an opportunity to deepen our trust in God. So choose wisely!