

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Decision That Led to Disaster

Genesis 13:1–13

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Tests of faith don't always come in the form of adversities—like the “severe famine” that struck Abraham and his family (Genesis 12:10). Sometimes tests come during times of prosperity when the wind is at our backs and everything is going our way. In easy, breezy days like these, we can let down our guard and allow overconfidence, greed, moral compromise, and pride to invade our character. We become less dependent on God and more distracted by worldly comforts. Staying faithful to God during periods of plenty can be much more difficult than during hardship.

Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle once wrote, “Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man; but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity.”¹ Many a soul has sunk under the weight of riches and the temptations that prosperity brings.

During the famine, Abraham failed the test of *adversity*. He acted in the flesh and fled to Egypt rather than trust in God's promise. But those days of deprivation were behind him. Now he was back in Canaan with his nephew Lot enjoying God's blessings of fame and wealth—just as God had promised (12:2). How would he respond to the test of *prosperity*? Had he learned his lesson? Would he trust in God this time?

Thankfully, the answer is yes! As we'll see in this study, Abraham stood well when tested by prosperity—but Lot, now he was a different story.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As you begin your study, gather a few tools, such as a good study Bible with a set of maps and a Bible dictionary. We recommend *The Swindoll Study Bible* and *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, which can be purchased at the Insight for Living Ministries online store. Also, pause for a moment of prayer as you open yourself to hear God's voice through the words of Scripture.

Quotable

It's important that we realize the value of bringing the Lord, our God, into our decisions through life.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: The Conflict that Required a Solution

Open your Bible and read Genesis 13:1–7. *Observation* in the *Searching the Scriptures* method is taking a close look at the words of the text. As you read, write down the answers to the following questions.

What happened? Specifically, note what Abraham did when he returned from Egypt—something he had neglected to do *before* going to Egypt (Genesis 13:4).

Where did the action take place? Name the places in the text, and locate them on your map of the time period in the back of your study Bible. Additional maps are available at Bible.org. Find the map, “*Old Testament Map 2—The Travels of the Patriarchs.*”



Searching the Scriptures Tool—Correlation

By comparing other passages about Bethel, we can gain insight into Abraham's heart for worship. Bethel is the setting of many stories in the Old Testament. Look up “Bethel” in your Bible dictionary, and note the rich history of this site. The Lord appeared to Jacob in a dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:13–19); the people of Israel came to Bethel to sit in the Lord's presence (Judges 21:2); Samuel judged the people at Bethel (1 Samuel 7:15–16). According to Bible scholar Thomas L. Constable, “Bethel receives more mention in the Old Testament than any other city but Jerusalem. This indicates its importance in biblical history.”²

Abraham's worship at Bethel left a lasting spiritual legacy to his offspring. What does this insight tell you about the role of worship in your spiritual legacy?



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In His covenant, God promised Abraham: “I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others” (Genesis 12:2). Keeping His promise, God made Abraham “very rich in livestock, silver, and gold” (13:2). In the Hebrew text, the word for *rich* means, literally, “heavy” and is related to the Hebrew word for glory, honor, or greatness. Abraham was “heavy” with wealth, or we might say, he was *loaded*!

What other observations can you make in Genesis 13:1–7?

Abraham’s blessings overflowed into Lot’s lap. Lot became wealthy too—in fact, so wealthy that the land could not support his flocks and the flocks of his rich uncle. Abraham and Lot’s herdsmen took to fisticuffs over blades of grass! Prosperity’s test had begun.



Interpretation: A Decision of Tragic Consequences

Interpretation is digging out the meaning of a text, and in this case, we enter the inner chambers of Abraham and Lot’s character to expose the nature of *grace* versus *greed*.

Read Genesis 13:8–13, and fill in the following chart, recording evidence of grace in Abraham and greed in Lot.

Evidence of Grace in Abraham Genesis 13:8–9	Evidence of Greed in Lot Genesis 13:10–13



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Abraham's *kind appeal* ("Let's not allow this conflict to come between us"), *greathearted reminder* ("After all, we are close relatives!"), *unselfish offer* ("Take your choice"), and *willingness* ("If you prefer the land on the right, then I'll go to the left") reveal his gracious spirit.

What do you think influenced Abraham to be so gracious? As you consider possible answers, reflect on Abraham's experience so far: God chose him in Ur; gave him a covenant; promised him a lineage, land, and blessing; taught him to trust Him in Egypt; and communed with Abraham through worship. How might all these experiences contribute to Abraham's expression of grace toward Lot?

On the other hand, no record exists of Lot building an altar, praying, or even asking his uncle for advice. There's no forethought or consideration of the consequences. He didn't even show gratitude to his elder uncle, who had right of first choice. Instead, Lot looked longingly at Jordan's green paradise and "chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley" (Genesis 13:11).

How Lot made his decision reveals *what* about his character?

Can you find additional insights as you reflect on Abraham's character versus Lot's character?

Could Lot have worked out a way to stay near Abraham . . . his link to God and blessing? We'll never know. Instead, he pitched his tents near Sodom. Jordan's greener grass enticed him to lead his family into the pit of evil . . . and into disaster when, later, God destroyed the twin cities of sin, Sodom and Gomorrah.



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Application: When We're Faced with Similar Decisions

Every decision, at least in some way, shapes our destiny. And the consequences don't just impact us; they impact those we love who trustingly follow us. Four warning flags wave over Lot's tragic decision as lessons for us facing similar decisions.

First, *always look beyond the benefits promised by the opportunity*. Like children, who see and suddenly want, immature adults fail to consider the long-range results of their decisions. If you're making a destiny-forming decision, how does this principle of looking beyond the immediate gratification guide you?

Second, *never underestimate the impact of negative consequences*. Perhaps Lot could have been spared disaster if he had closely examined the *pros and cons* of taking his family to Sodom. Use the space below to make an honest and accurate pros-and-cons list to guide your decision.

Third, *forget about pleasing only yourself*. Self-centeredness is the twin of instant gratification. If you choose only for yourself, others will suffer and relationships will fail. Read Philippians 2:3–5, and apply its teaching to your situation.



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Fourth, *remember with greater independence comes freedom and a need for stronger discipline.* Perhaps Abraham remembered his selfish actions in Egypt, and this memory influenced him to subdue his natural desires and give first choice to Lot. Wise people govern their freedoms with accountability. How about you? Are you learning from your mistakes? How can the need for accountability help you through your decisions?

The more we consider what's at stake in our decisions, particularly the major ones, the more dependent we are on God's guidance. Conclude by seeking the Lord's counsel with the hopeful words of James 1:5 in your heart: "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you."



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, life gets so complicated, and it's difficult amid the mess to think clearly. For that reason, I'm grateful for the counsel of Your Word and the hope that it offers as I embrace Your truth. Anchor me to Your thoughts and Your will. Help me get beyond pleasing my own ego, and guide me away from the alluring but deadly valleys of this world to the lofty heights of living in Your presence. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (New York: Appleton, 1841), 223.
2. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Genesis," in *Dr. Constable's Expository Notes*, 2017 ed., 226, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/genesis.pdf>, accessed Nov. 1, 2017.



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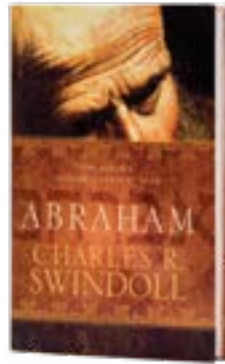
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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