

## Chapter 4: The Conciliation of Abram

*Genesis 13:1–18*

Abram's journey to Egypt was a failure of faith. The patriarch doubted Yahweh's promises, so he conspired to take matters into his own hands. In spite of Abram's faithlessness, Yahweh nevertheless rescued both Abram and Sarai out of their captivity in Egypt. As Abram returns from Egypt into the land of Canaan, many new questions may be entering his mind. How will this affect his relationship with Yahweh moving forward? Was this a one-time intervention, so that Abram needs to look out for himself moving forward? Is Abram now on some kind of probation? What if he fails to live by faith again in the future? In fact, Abram does not need to wait long for these questions to culminate in Genesis 13 when he encounters conflict between his herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. In the midst of this strife, can Abram still trust Yahweh to walk by faith, or has his sin left him on his own?

As we follow our forefather Abram in his footsteps of faith, we find in this story that Abram's footsteps lead him through the fallout that comes from failures. When we fail to obey Yahweh, faith becomes increasingly complicated, since we do not know how much our sin will affect our relationship with God moving forward. On the one hand, sin does complicate matters, and we must endure more of the consequences for our sins than we would prefer to face. On the other hand, God has no desire to rub our noses in our failures. Rather, he longs for us to repent, turn again to him wholeheartedly, and learn from our sins by trusting him more, not less. Furthermore, God wants us to learn from every failure that walking by sight is alluring, but we never really find what we are searching for when we trust our eyes more than God's promises. Instead, God wants us to learn the lesson that Abram discovers in this passage: *God gives us by faith what we forfeit by sight.*

### **Facing the Fallout (Gen. 13:1–7)**

Genesis 13 opens in the immediate aftermath of Abram's disastrous episode in Egypt. We find Abram departing from Egypt to return to the land that Yahweh had promised to give to his offspring:

[1] 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. (Gen. 13:1–2)

While we did not read about Lot's presence in Genesis 12:10–20, we now discover that Lot went with Abram, and Lot is now returning with Abram (Gen. 13:1). Lot will play an important part in the story to follow, so the narrator wants to alert us to his presence as the patriarchal family returns to the land of Canaan. Additionally, we find that Abram has become "very rich" in both livestock and in the precious metals of silver and gold (Gen. 13:2). Abram gained at least some of this livestock

while in Egypt from Pharaoh in exchange for his wife (Gen. 12:16), but he also came out of Haran with a good amount of “possessions” (Gen. 12:4). The specific mention of silver and gold is one more element that foreshadows the eventual exodus from Egypt, since the Israelites “plundered the Egyptians” by asking for silver and gold as back-payment for their labor (Ex. 12:35–36).<sup>1</sup>

### Repentance and Renewal through Worship

As Abram returns to Canaan, he retraces his original steps in the land of Canaan (cf. Gen. 12:4–9). After crossing the border of Egypt to enter into Negeb in southern Canaan (Gen. 13:1; cf. Gen. 12:9), Abram continues on to the location he sojourned before departing for the Negeb, between Bethel and Ai (Gen. 13:3; cf. Gen. 12:8):

[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. (Gen. 13:3–4)

This return to the area between Bethel and Ai is more than a sentimental nostalgia. The narrator tells us specifically that Abram returns “to the place where he had made an altar at the first” and that, when Abram returns to that altar, “there Abram called upon the name of the LORD” (Gen. 13:4). Abram is returning to worship in a spot where he worshiped before his sin in the land of Egypt.

By this pilgrimage to Bethel and Ai, we learn that Abram is not deceived by his great wealth. The word for “rich” in Genesis 13:2 is the same word used to describe the “severe” famine (Gen. 12:10) that prompted Abram to go down into the land of Egypt.<sup>2</sup> So, if Abram was tempted to doubt God’s promises by his severe lack during the famine, then Abram might now perhaps be tempted toward prideful neglect of God’s promises by his severe wealth. Indeed, we will see that the temptation to cling to wealth will be central to the dispute with Lot in the remainder of this chapter. Nevertheless, Abram’s great riches do not cause him to forget Yahweh. Instead, Abram presses directly toward the last altar he built to call upon and proclaim the name of Yahweh there.<sup>3</sup>

What then, does Abram hope to accomplish by this worship? Gordon Wenham observes that Genesis 13:3b–4 “are a detailed and repetitive reminder of 12:8. By its very fullness and the twofold reference to ‘the beginning/the first time,’ the narrator is surely suggesting that Abram is trying to recapture his previous experience of God.”<sup>4</sup> Is Abram trying to whitewash his sin in Egypt, pretending that he has done nothing wrong? Or, is he worshiping as an act of repentance and contrition? The text of Genesis does not explicitly mention any kind of repentance, but Abram is now renewing and restoring the practices of worship that he did not engage in even once while he was in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Abram literally and figuratively turns 180 degrees, retracing his steps that led him astray in Egypt, and returning to the place where he worshiped Yahweh. It is probably accurate, then, to understand this worship as Abram’s repentance for his failure in Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

Iain Duguid wisely notes that “Good people, people of faith, fail just as others do. The difference is that when they *fail*, they do not *fall*, because they return to the Lord in repentance, calling on his name and seeking forgiveness.”<sup>7</sup> Abram has many major challenges awaiting him, but he can do nothing until he finds reconciliation in his relationship with Yahweh. In this, Abram is not presuming on Yahweh’s kindness. Instead, Abram is doing what he failed to do when he went down to Egypt: trusting in Yahweh’s promises to bless Abram. God recognizes that we are frail, foolish

sinners who choose to go our own way when we are left to ourselves. Abram is a man who lived most of his first seventy-five years of life worshiping idols (cf. Gen. 12:4; Josh. 24:2), so he understands this lesson better than most. When God calls us to follow him, he demands our faithfulness; however, he also makes provisions for our forgiveness when we fail to live up to the high calling he gives to us. By returning to his old altar, the implication is that Abram is laying hold of those provisions for failure by worshiping through sacrifice. God's people under the old covenant offer sacrifices because they are looking forward in faith to the once-for-all, atoning sacrifice of God's own Son on the cross. We must follow the general example of Abram in the way that he repents from sin by worshiping God through sacrifice. The difference, though, is that we should follow Abram's pattern not by offering *new* sacrifices, but by returning to the *old* altar of our Lord's cross.

### Troubles from Riches

After Abram reconciles with Yahweh through worship, he discovers a new need: reconciliation with his nephew Lot:

[5] 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. (Gen. 13:5–7)

Thus far, Lot has been a blessing to Abram as a nephew and a companion, journeying with Abram through Ur, Haran, Shechem, Bethel and Ai, the Negeb, Egypt, and now back into Canaan. Abram dearly loves Lot, which will become clearer from Abram's reaction in Genesis 14 when Lot is taken into Babylonian captivity.<sup>8</sup> We should remember, then, that when Yahweh originally called Abram, he promised to bless all those who bless Abram (Gen. 12:3). So, it is not surprising that Lot has been enriched during this time that he has blessed Abram by his presence; however, we do not explicitly learn when, where, and how Lot acquires his great wealth.<sup>9</sup>

Lot's wealth is not a problem in itself; however, Lot's wealth *combined* with Abram's wealth becomes too much for the land of Canaan to support (Gen. 13:6). The wealth of Abram and Lot consists largely in livestock that need to eat grass and to drink water, which exist in limited supply in any given area. Abram's son Isaac will face the same problem with the Philistines (Gen. 26:12–22), and Abram's grandson Jacob will experience this with his brother Esau (Gen. 36:6–7).<sup>10</sup> While the riches of the patriarchs are certainly blessings, the Scriptures clearly describe the great troubles that wealth can bring (e.g., Prov. 15:6; 23:4; 28:11; Matt. 6:24; Mark 10:17–25; Luke 12:13–21; 1 Tim. 6:10; Jas. 5:5).

### The Second Failure of the Land

This story is a warning against trusting in riches rather than God, but it is also much more than that. In two consecutive stories, we read about a major failure of the Promised Land to support Abram. In Genesis 12:10, the land of Canaan experienced a severe famine, and now the land of Canaan cannot support the wealth of Lot in addition to Abram. Once again, Abram faces all the

same questions that prompted him to disobey God’s instructions by going down into Egypt: Is this land really worth it? Are God’s promises actually good? Derek Kidner writes, “With the promised land failing him again (6), this time with what must have seemed a permanent inadequacy, the common-sense course was to abandon it for something more fertile.”<sup>11</sup> Judged by sight, the land outside of Canaan, near Sodom and Gomorrah will appear to be an obviously preferable choice (Gen. 13:10–12). Allen Ross adds, though, that “the luxuriant quality of the land over by the Jordan [near Sodom and Gomorrah] provided a subtle test, for although it appeared to be the better land, it veiled deeper problems for the one who would go that way.”<sup>12</sup> These doubts were concerning before Abram faithlessly went down to Egypt. Now, in the fallout after Abram’s failure, these questions take on new dimensions: Will Yahweh protect and provide for Abram after his sin?

### Strife with Lot

The ongoing challenges of trying to navigate joint custody of the land causes strife and contention between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot (Gen. 13:7). These challenges are much bigger than a simple real estate dispute, since Satan will stir up division and dissension within the church of God over any matter whatsoever.<sup>13</sup> Strife among God’s people is never good, but this strife is especially problematic in light of the fact that “the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land” (Gen. 13:7; cf. Gen. 12:6). Practically speaking, the presence of these tribes suggests one of the reasons that the resources of the land were limited: not only is the land supporting the livestock of Abram and Lot, but the original inhabitants of the land probably possess the best parts for grazing.<sup>14</sup> Still, this word also sounds a serious warning, as God’s people are quarreling even though they are surrounded on every side by their enemies.<sup>15</sup> Abram and Lot must address this situation before they jeopardize their wealth, their futures, and even their lives. Not only is the goodness of the land in doubt, but so is the safety of Abram, Sarai, and Lot. In the previous narrative, Abram’s doubts about the land and his safety prompted him to sin by going down to Egypt. What will he do now?

### Forfeiting the Farm (Gen. 13:8–13)

As the leader within the clan, Abram initiates an attempt toward peace with Lot and their respective herdsmen:

[8] 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.” (Gen. 13:8–9)

In Genesis 13:7, the narrator told us that there was *strife* (*rib*) between the herdsmen of Abram and those of Lot. Now, when Abram implores Lot for there to be no strife between them, he uses a slightly different form of the word for *strife*: *meribah*. Making this observation, Allen Ross writes:

These words must have struck a responsive note in the hearts of Israel when they read them in conjunction with what happened in the wilderness at Meribah (Exod. 17:1–7). In that desolate spot was no water to drink, and so the people strove with the Lord before Moses

smote the rock. Forever the names Massa (“testing”) and Meribah (“striving”) were to become ominous names because the people out of unbelief provoked the Lord and were sent to wander in the wilderness until they died.<sup>16</sup>

Abram, then, is seeking to avoid the *meribah* in which Israel rebelled against Yahweh. Before we hear any of the rest of Abram’s plan, we already hear a glimmer of hope that Abram will avoid the future failure of the nation that will arise from his offspring.

### The Conciliation of Abram

The ESV translation smooths out the last words in Genesis 13:8. More literally, we might translate Abram’s words like this: “Please, let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are *men, brothers* [ESV: *kinsmen*].” This is the only place in the Bible where the words “men, brothers” are set side-by-side like this, and the sense seems to be, “Men should not quarrel, let alone brothers.”<sup>17</sup> Wisely, Abram starts by appealing to their commonality not only as human beings, but even as brethren. Abram is Lot’s uncle (cf. Gen. 11:27), but after the death of Lot’s father (cf. Gen. 11:28), Abram seems to adopt Lot as a son, whether in a full legal sense, or perhaps merely to become Lot’s functional father-figure. Subsequently, Lot travels with Abram and Sarai everywhere they go in the way that a son might travel with his parents. Certainly, as Lot grows older and acquires his own great wealth, his relationship with his uncle Abram changes. Nevertheless, the two are still more than relatives; they are brethren.

These words are not mere rhetoric for Abram. Next, Abram continues to seek peace by offering Lot to pick the land of his choosing: “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” (Gen. 13:9). Yahweh has promised that *Abram* and Abram’s offspring will inherit the land; nevertheless, Abram sacrificially defers to Lot’s choice about where to dwell as they await the fulfillment of Lot’s promise.<sup>18</sup> By this conciliatory act, Victor Hamilton observes that Abram “is prepared to sacrifice what has been promised to him, as he will later willingly offer Isaac who had been promised to him.”<sup>19</sup>

### Giving Away the Farm

On the surface, we might admire Abram’s offer as incredibly generous. Before we too quickly praise Abram for his magnanimity in deferring to Lot, we should recognize that this act would have shocked the first readers of this story in the days of Moses. John Sailhamer explains why:

Abraham’s separation from Lot also carries on the theme of “the promise in jeopardy.” As the story reads, Abraham is on the verge of giving the Promised Land to Lot (“If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left,” 13:9). What is particularly striking about Abraham’s offer is that, in a subsequent narrative (19:37–38), Lot is shown to be the father of the Ammonites and the Moabites. Abraham is about to hand the Promised Land over to the same people who, in the author’s own day (e.g., Nu 22–25) and throughout Israel’s subsequent history (Dt 23:3–6; Ezr 9:1), were the primary obstacle to the fulfillment of the promise. Because of Abraham, the promise now teeters on the whim of the father of the Moabites.<sup>20</sup>

Abram is giving away the farm to the Ammonites and the Moabites, some of the greatest enemies of God's people? Is this land even Abram's to give away in the first place? How should we evaluate what Abram does here in light of the contention over the land that will happen in the future between Israel and their semi-related enemies?

Certainly, the narratives of Abram and Lot are setting up the eventual estrangement between the descendants of both men. Yahweh's plagues against Egypt (Gen. 12:10–20) directly foreshadowed the future plagues that Yahweh will pour out on Egypt during the days of Moses, but this story seems to interact with future narratives differently. This is not so much direct typology. Instead, this story functions as something of an explanation of the origins behind the (much greater) strife between Abram's and Lot's descendants. So, in the immediate context, we should not compare this story with the far-future rocky relationship between Israel and the Moabites and Ammonites. Rather, we should contrast Abram's faith here with his faithlessness in Egypt. Abram went down to Egypt and lied about his marriage to Sarai because he walked by sight, not by faith. He saw famine and a threat to his own life in his wife's beauty, so he doubted God's promises about the land and about blessing Abram. Now that the land and Abram's safety are once again in peril, Abram must once again choose whether he will walk by sight or by faith.

This time, Abram walks by faith. In Egypt, Abram did not believe that the land could provide for him, nor that Yahweh would protect him in Egypt, so he took matters into his own hands. Here, Abram relinquishes control over his circumstances altogether by offering Lot the first choice of the land: "By faith he had already renounced everything; he could afford to refresh the choice: and by faith he had opted for the unseen; he had no need to judge, as Lot did, 'by the sight of his eyes.'"<sup>21</sup> The ball is no longer in Abram's court, but in Yahweh's. What will Yahweh do to preserve the promises he has made to Abram?

### The Greedy Eyes of Lot

Abram has learned his lesson, repented (Gen. 13:4), and begun again to walk by faith. Lot, however, continues to walk by sight. In response to Abram's offer, notice the emphasis on what Lot can *see* as he evaluates his options:

[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. (Gen. 13:10–13)

As Lot *lifts up his eyes*, he *sees* the well-watered land of the Jordan Valley. By sight, the land appears beautiful, holding out the promise of living in something like Yahweh's own garden of Eden.

Nevertheless, the text emphasizes in at least seven different ways that "Things are not necessarily as good as they look (cf. 1 Sam 16:7)."<sup>22</sup> First, the description of how Lot "saw that" echoes the way in which the woman "*saw that* the [forbidden] tree was good for food" (Gen. 3:6), and the way that

the sons of God “*saw that* the daughters of men were attractive” (Gen. 6:2). In both of these cases, the phrase “*saw that*” reflects covetous human self-judgment contrary to God’s will.<sup>23</sup> After they “*saw that*” their respective temptations were good and attractive, they *took* for themselves what was forbidden. Lot is about to do the same thing. Second, we read that this land is “like the land of Egypt.” Abram and Lot have just returned from Egypt after a disastrous sojourn there, and now Lot wants to go back to a place that is “like the land of Egypt”? Shockingly, the later Israelites will also desire to return to Egypt on the brink of taking possession of the land of Canaan (Num. 14:1–4).

Third, this land is “in the direction of Zoar.” This detail is ominous, since Zoar is the city to which Lot flees during the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:18–23).<sup>24</sup> Fourth, the text makes the looming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah explicit (Gen. 13:10), reminding us that Lot’s decision will soon go down in flames. Fifth, “Lot journeyed east” (Gen. 13:11). We have read three times already about eastward journeying, and the circumstances have always been evil.<sup>25</sup> Initially, Adam and Eve journeyed east after they were expelled from the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24), as did their son Cain after his exile for murdering Abel (Gen. 4:16). Later on, the Babylonians were journeying east before they settled in the plains of Shinar to build their wicked tower (Gen. 11:2). It seems that Babel is the primary comparison, since Lot’s *separation* (*parad*; Gen. 13:11) from Abram matches the *separation* of the nations after Yahweh’s judgment against Babel (*parad*; Gen. 10:32; ESV: “spread abroad”). Sodom and Gomorrah, then, is the new “city of the east,” the new center of wickedness and rebellion against Yahweh, the new Babel.<sup>26</sup>

Sixth, the language that “Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved as far as Sodom,” especially in contrast with how “Abram settled in the land of Canaan” (Gen. 13:12), strongly suggests that Lot has departed outside the borders of Canaan.<sup>27</sup> Lot stays *near* to the land of Canaan, but, unlike Abram, he moves out of the Promised Land. Abram sinfully departed from the land of Canaan to go down to Egypt, and now Lot sinfully departs from the land of Canaan to go down to a place *like* Egypt, outside of Canaan across the Jordan River, and near to the doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He knows the promises that Yahweh made to Abram, but, rather than seeking to remain near Abram in the land that Yahweh promised to give to Abram, Lot takes his chances in another land. Seventh, most explicitly, the narrator tells us, “Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD” (Gen. 13:13). Piling up descriptions to say that these people were *wicked*, and *great sinners* who offended Yahweh (“against the LORD”) makes for unusually strong language: “Few passages in Genesis describe the wickedness of a people so strongly.”<sup>28</sup> John Calvin summarizes this frightening section well: “Lot, when he fancied that he was dwelling in paradise, was nearly plunged into the depths of hell.”<sup>29</sup>

### Be Careful, Little Eyes

There is an important connection between this scene and the life of Jesus. After Jesus’ baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted by Satan. While there, “the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me’” (Matt. 4:8–9; cf. Luke 4:5–7). Satan’s strategy was to *show* Jesus the kingdoms of the earth, in the hopes that by *seeing* these kingdoms, Jesus might sin. Instead, Jesus rightly refused to worship Satan. In this temptation, “Satan was offering Jesus the Promised Land without the cross. All the kingdoms of the earth were on the table, and Jesus walked away.”<sup>30</sup> Rather than following what his eyes can see, Jesus follows what his

Father has *told* him about his mission. Jesus will indeed inherit all the kingdoms of the earth (Ps. 2:8), but not in the way that Satan holds them out to him.

In the same way, we must guard what our eyes see. Certainly, this involves avoiding lustful gazing (Matt. 5:28–29), but this principle involves much more than that as well. We must take care to avoid gazing at anything that will inflame our desires away from what God has spoken to us in his word. Indeed, it has been plausibly suggested that one of the reasons Yahweh forbids the making of any graven images to worship (Ex. 20:4) has to do with our weak propensity toward being drawn away by sight. Rather, “The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking.”<sup>31</sup> In an age of endless visual stimulation, from our televisions to our smartphones, Satan can draw us into all kinds of sin and temptation without saying a word. Be careful, little eyes, what you see!

### Finding by Faith (Gen. 13:14–18)

In the previous narrative, Abram nearly lost everything when he walked by sight. When Abram returned to Canaan from Egypt, he was rich, but loaded down by shame over his failure. This time, when Abram willingly forfeits the good that he can see, he finds what he is seeking by faith. This narrative, then, ends on an entirely different note than the previous one:

[14] 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, [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.” (Gen. 13:14–17)

In the same way that Lot separated from Abram after *lifting up* his eyes and *seeing* (Gen. 13:9–11), Yahweh uses the same verbs to tell Abram to *lift up* his eyes and *see*.<sup>32</sup> There is a rare gentleness in these instructions that we might capture in English by adding the word “Please” to Yahweh’s instructions to Abram: “Please, lift up your eyes....”<sup>33</sup> This time, Abram does not fixate on one area, especially not an area outside of the land of Canaan, as Lot did. Instead, Abram is to gaze all around him, looking in *every* direction from his central point in the land of Canaan near Bethel and Ai (Gen. 13:3). What does Abram see as he looks around? We have already read what Abram sees: “the Canaanites and the Perizzites...dwelling in the land” (Gen. 13:7). Everywhere Abram turns, he sees a land that is *not* his, since it is already in the possession of other people.

### Reiterating the Promises

Nevertheless, in spite of what Abram sees, Yahweh reaffirms his promises to Abram: “all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever” (Gen. 13:15). Yahweh promised something similar to Abram in Genesis 12:7: “To your offspring I will give this land.” In Genesis 13:15, Yahweh expands the definition of the land (“all the land that you see”), he specifies that he will also give the land to Abram (not just “your offspring”), and he insists that he will give the land “forever.”<sup>34</sup> Then, Yahweh declares that he will make Abram’s offspring “as the dust of the earth,”



because of its innumerable, immense multitude (Gen. 13:16).<sup>35</sup> Who can count the particles of dust on the earth? Who, then, will be able to number Abram's offspring, especially as that offspring eventually expands to include Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:16–18; Gal. 3:7, 29)?<sup>36</sup> Abram has heard these promises before, but now, in the moment of need and despair as he sees his beloved nephew separating from him, this word must certainly minister to him in a way that Yahweh's promises did not earlier.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, this "reiteration of the promises puts the divine seal of approval on Abram's treatment of Lot."<sup>38</sup>

### Walking by Faith

Finally, Yahweh instructs Abram not only to *see* the land, but to *walk* through the length and breadth of the land, "for I will give it to you" (Gen. 13:17). We may observe here that, even though Abram seemingly offered to give away the farm by granting Lot the first choice, God has preserved his promises. The father of the Moabites and Ammonites will not take possession of the land, since Lot departs from the land of Canaan. "God's promise is secure, in spite of Abraham."<sup>39</sup> Abram does not take matters into his own hands, but he trusts in Yahweh's promises. Then, within the sovereign plan of God, Lot's greedy choice removes him from the land, clearing the way for Abram to take possession of all of it.<sup>40</sup> When Abram tried to protect God's promises by going down deceptively to Egypt, he nearly lost his wife. But, when Abram entrusts his future to God as he seeks to resolve his strife with Lot peacefully, God accomplishes exactly what he said that he would do. God wants us to trust him not because he wants to deprive us, but because he knows better than we do how to give us the good gifts that he promises to give to us.

The grammar of the instruction to "walk through" the land, or to "walk to and fro" in the length and breadth of the land, is important. In Hebrew, this is the Hithpael form of the verb *walk*, and it usually represents an assertion of dominion over the area where someone "walks to and fro."<sup>41</sup> So, Yahweh God walked to and fro to assert his dominion in the garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned (Gen. 3:8), and the victorious Israelites will eventually "walk to and fro" to claim their dominion over the conquered land of Canaan (Josh. 18:8). Here, Yahweh is instructing Abram to take "symbolic appropriation of the land."<sup>42</sup> From now on, everywhere Abram goes will take on "new purpose, almost equivalent to conquest, since everywhere he walks will be given to him and his family."<sup>43</sup> Abram relinquished personal control over the situation regarding the land, and Yahweh now invites him to take possession of the land, albeit only symbolically for now.

Accordingly, Abram takes Yahweh at his word: "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" (Gen. 13:18). Whereas Lot moved east (following the example of fallen Adam and Eve, Cain, and the Babylonians), Abram moves south and settles in Hebron.<sup>44</sup> When he arrives, Abram builds another altar to Yahweh. Abram continues living as a wandering pilgrim in the land, dwelling in tents while building permanent altars to Yahweh.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Abram is also taking possession of the land underneath his feet. Even if the rest of the world does not yet recognize his claims, the land of Canaan already belongs to Abram by promise.

### Discussion Questions

1. What does your relationship with God look like after you have fallen into sin? Do you worry that

he won't take your repentance seriously? Are you concerned that God may have lost interest? Do you doubt whether God will indeed forgive you? What does Abram's worship during the fallout of his own sin teach us about repentance and renewal?

2. Where do you find it difficult to seek peace? Why does God value peace among his people? Are there areas of life where you feel that seeking peace will require you to lose something that you are not willing to give up? Is there someone with whom you need to seek reconciliation or to make peace today?

3. Why do you think there are so many warnings about living by sight in the Bible? Why do we go so far astray when we trust in what we see? What makes what we *see* more compelling than what we *hear* from God in his word? How might we, like Abram, learn from our failures? How do we grow in learning how to walk by faith?

4. Do you believe that God will give you by faith what you forfeit by sight? What about your own limitations leads you to *distrust* your own ability to provide yourself with joy, satisfaction, comfort, and safety? What about God's character and track record gives you confidence that you can trust him with your joy, satisfaction, comfort, and safety?

## Notes

1. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 296.
2. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 390.
3. Calvin, *Genesis*, 367–68. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xix.i.html>>
4. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 296.
5. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 390.
6. Kidner, *Genesis*, 128.
7. Duguid, *Living in the Gap Between Promise and Reality*, 31.
8. Calvin, *Genesis*, 369. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xix.i.html>>
9. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 390.
10. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 296.
11. Kidner, *Genesis*, 128.
12. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 281.
13. Calvin, *Genesis*, 370–71. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xix.i.html>>
14. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 285.
15. Calvin, *Genesis*, 371. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xix.i.html>>
16. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 285–86.
17. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 297.
18. Calvin, *Genesis*, 372. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xix.i.html>>
19. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 392.
20. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 143.
21. Kidner, *Genesis*, 129.
22. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 297.

23. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 392.
24. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 144.
25. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 297.
26. On these connections between Babel and Sodom in Genesis, see Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 144.
27. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 393.
28. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 287.
29. Calvin, *Genesis*, 373. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xix.i.html>>
30. Duguid, *Living in the Gap Between Promise and Reality*, 38.
31. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 9.
32. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 298.
33. “Yahweh asks Abram to look as far as possible in all four directions. Many translators ignore the small Hebrew particle *nā’* in the divine speech, but it is reflected in our translation as *please*, which is its normal English equivalent. It occurs many times in the OT, some sixty times in Genesis alone. But only four times in the entire OT does God use the word in addressing a human being: here; 15:5; 22:2; Exod. 11:2. In each of these four passages God asks somebody to do something that transcends human comprehension: have faith that a son will be born to one of advanced age (15:5); sacrifice an only son (22:2); ask former Egyptian masters for parting gifts (Exod. 11:2). In this passage Yahweh asks Abram to exercise faith that the land, as far as Abram’s eye can see in any direction, will one day be his.” (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 394.)
34. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 298.
35. Calvin, *Genesis*, 375–76. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xix.i.html>>
36. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 300.
37. “Up until this point, it is all right that he had no children to succeed him, but now since his nephew, who was like his own son, has departed, he had to be extremely grieved, for he could have thought: ‘Alas, God has removed me from the land of my birth. He wanted me to renounce all my relatives and friends. I have come into an unknown land. I am surrounded on all sides by wicked people who are snapping at my heels like barking dogs. I had only a nephew to depend on, and now I must be deprived of him.’ We see then how God has said nothing new to Abraham, but he has made application of the promise he had given him for his particular use in the time of need.
- “That point is very useful, for God’s promises, seized out of the air, so to speak, are cold and have no great power over us. But when we see them turned to our use, they take on significance. Example. When it is said that God’s children are heirs of this world (cf. Rom. 8:17), we receive it generally, but it does not touch us to the quick unless we are going through a time of need. Sometimes we will be led from one place to another and not know where to plant our feet before we are immediately chased away and can find no small corner in the world to receive us. At that time, then, upon seeing we are thus rejected everywhere, we can appreciate both the meaning of the promise that we are heirs of the world and the fact that God is bringing us—if we are patient—to the reality and letting us enjoy his promise. That is how it will become meaningful for us. That is how it will exercise its power over us.” (Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapter 11:5–20:7*, 200–01.)
38. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 300.
39. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 143.
40. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 393.
41. “A special nuance of [the verb *walk*] occurs with the [Hithpael] stem, which views walking or stepping as tantamount to the exercise of sovereignty. Whether this is expressed in literal or metaphorical terms, the symbolism of dominion remains the same.” (Eugene H. Merrill, “*הלך*,” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 1, ed. Willem VanGemeren, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1034.)

42. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 298.
43. Walton, *Genesis*, 415.
44. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 298.
45. Kidner, *Genesis*, 129.