

Title: Division of the Land

Prologue: Fear overwhelms faith, but faith overcomes fear.

A prologue is a literary device that has been in use for centuries. It is an introduction to a story which gives basic details of the situation in which the story is set. The prologue is given before the story actually starts. That way the reader (or listener, or watcher) has a better initial understanding of what is happening when the story begins. We encounter prologues all the time but don't necessarily recognize them. I have an example for you. Raise your hand if you know what story this is the prologue for – don't say the title, just raise your hand.

"It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. During the battle, Rebel spies managed to steal secret plans to the Empire's ultimate weapon, the DEATH STAR, an armored space station with enough power to destroy an entire planet. Pursued by the Empire's sinister agents, Princess Leia races home aboard her starship, ..." (Star Wars, Episode IV, A New Hope) I skipped the opening words, "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away ..." on purpose – it made it too easy for you. And the finish? "... custodian of the stolen plans that can save her people and restore freedom to the galaxy ..." You may remember – the yellow words which roll upward and disappear into the distance. While the music by John Williams becomes part of what may be stored permanently in your brain – ta-da-da taaa daaa ta-da-da taaa daaa ta-da-da taaa daaa etc.

All right, you get the idea. Now let's go back in time further than 1977, when the first Star Wars movie was released. Here's my prologue. We're going back in time about 4,000 years, to the setting of Genesis, chapter 13. It's around 2,000 BC when verse 1 takes place. (**READ** verse 1)

If you have read chapter 12 or you heard Wes' message last week, you know that this wasn't Abram's first visit to Negev. Years before, when Abram lived far to the northeast, the LORD told Abram to go to a new place which He, the Lord, would show him. So Abram and his companions set out. That group of nomads included Sarai his wife, Lot his nephew, and servants who were part of his household. After travelling about 400 miles southward, they came to a place where the LORD said, "To your descendants I will give this land. **Was this place in Egypt?** (No.) **Where was it?** (What we know as Israel.) **So did the LORD then tell Abram to go on to Egypt?** (No.) **So why did he go there?** (A famine came.) **Was there something to fear with a famine?** Possibly. **What happens in stores when there are rumors of shortages?** (Empty shelves.) "What if the markets are empty? What if these Canaanites won't sell their food us – to strangers from another land? What if our animals have no food? What if I can't get food for my family and the servants?" All these questions are fearful possibilities. But we don't see Abram calling on the name of the LORD. Perhaps he thought that Egypt could provide the food that the Lord wasn't providing. So off they went.

Then we see Abram do something odd when he arrived in Egypt. He told Sarai to pretend she was his -- ??? That's right, his sister. **Why did he do this?** Yes, he was afraid they would kill him to have her. We clearly see that fear, not faith, was in control of his thinking and his actions. But even though Pharaoh ultimately learned the truth and kicked him out of Egypt for his deception, Abram left in safety, and in possession of greater wealth. (**READ** verse 2) God's grace was evident in his life. Notice what happened next in verses 3 and 4. (**READ**) He returned to some roots he had previously put down near Bethel. And what were those roots? He went back to the place where he had lived at the beginning of his first time in this Promised Land. There he had built an altar to the LORD, where he had then worshipped and prayed to his LORD. I think we'll see in the verses ahead that Abram's reemerging faith seems to have started overcoming his fear. (**READ** prologue sentence again.) We will now see what I have called the theme of Genesis chap 13.

Theme: Living in trust, harmony, and worship in the Promised Land

I. Return to the Promised Land (13:1-7)

A. Abram left Egypt and returned to Canaan (vv 1-4)

I hope the prologue has given you a better feel for the spiritual conditions in Abram's life that first preceded, then accompanied his return to the Promised Land.

B. Abram and Lot had both gained significant possessions (vv 2,5)

Look at verses 2 and 5. (**READ**) We see here some of the main items that defined wealth 4,000 years ago. Livestock, precious metals, and tents. But I think there was one more not listed here. **Any ideas on what that item was?** I think it was land. At this point, Abram could only speculate how much land the Lord was giving him and how that land would be used, but we're about to see an interesting development involving the land.

C. Their wealth brought conflict (vv 6-7)

Human nature and human history tell us that wealth can easily bring conflict, frequently violent conflict, between those who have it and those who don't. And sometimes it even brings conflict between those who both have it. It's an old, old story. Look at verses 6 and 7. (**READ**)

Now it wasn't that there wasn't enough land. Abram's family had likely always lived pretty close together, as their culture expected. But this particular area in the Promised Land had limited water and/or grass and forage for the two herds, so there wasn't enough to care properly for all of their many animals. The two groups of herdsmen initiated the conflict, since they would have had the primary responsibility for the well-being of the animals. We don't get the details of their strife. Did fist fights break out? Did they play mean tricks on each other? Did they resort to an ancient version of paper, rock, and scissors to decide which flock got to eat that day?

We don't know the actual details of their strife, but we do know that there was a

II. Resolution of the Conflict (13:8-13) (Proverbs 14:21; Colossians 4:6)

A. Abram took the lead in bringing resolution (vv 8-9)

A true leader takes the initiative to pursue conflict resolution. Again, ...

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This principle is just as valid today as it was 4,000 years ago.

Dad, mom, oldest sibling, manager in a business or organization, church leader –

1. His purpose was to eliminate strife (v 8) (READ)

Notice that he sought common ground. (I know, I know. Common ground was the problem. All their animals were grazing on it.) But he said – “we are brothers” – in the same family!! Identifying any common ground the adversaries might have is a great place to start out in conflict resolution. But Abram's next step was a big one. He was willing to bow out of the conflict for it to be resolved. Matthew Henry said that “It is a noble thing to yield for the sake of peace. It is the conquest of self and of pride.” And so, ...

2. Abram encouraged Lot to choose his preferred area (v 9) (READ)

He didn't exercise his right as the family patriarch to mandate a solution. Lot was free to make his choice – no strings or conditions attached.

As I reflected on these two verses, one word came to mind – grace. Though the Hebrew word for “grace” isn't found here, I believe the principles of biblical grace are seen. “Grace” in Hebrew is “hane”. The adjective form of the word is “hanoon”, which means “gracious”. In the Psalms, these words are expressed 23 times by those who were seeking the grace of God in their life, and 12 times in describing God's character or nature. The meanings of these words for “grace” aren't surprising. Favor, mercy, or blessing shown by one to another; benefit being given without consideration of worthiness in the recipient; typically given by one with greater resources to one who has less. These meanings also apply to the words “grace” and “gracious” in the New Testament, where the Greek word is “charis”.

Now it is certainly true that the vast majority of times that the words “grace” and “gracious” are used in Scripture, they are being used to describe God's nature or His actions. But there are also instances where they refer to the actions of God's people toward others. Proverbs 14:21 says, “He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor.” And Colossians 4:6, “Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.” God's people are called to be gracious toward one another, and toward all others.

Getting back to Abram, I see this gracious act toward Lot as an indication that he had come back into a proper walk with God as part of his return to the land which God had promised him. David Guzik comments that Abram seems to have grown in his walk with God, trusting Him for provision anywhere in this Promised Land. In contrast, we're about to see Lot walking by sight, not by faith.

B. Lot chose the most attractive (vv 10-11a) (READ)

The Jordan Valley was beautiful. Greenery everywhere. To the north, the Sea of Galilee emptied into the Jordan River, benefiting the valley's agriculture and, of course, the raising of livestock. Lot thought it looked like a great choice. He even mentally compared it to what the Garden of Eden must have looked like. Of course, it wasn't really quite up to that standard. Archeologists have discovered what Lot couldn't see at a distance. Verse 10 describes it as well watered due to the effect of an extensive irrigation system which would have required the cost of manual labor and maintenance for those benefitting from it.

1. Geographic separation ended the strife (vv 11b-12) (READ)

So we see that the two families began to live in proximity, but not sharing the same physical space, so the conflict ceased.

2. The most physically attractive may not be the best choice (v 13) (READ)

Uh-oh. Neighborhood trouble. There are storm clouds on the horizon of Lot's life. In a few more weeks of Equip, we'll get unfortunate insight into the moral condition of the male residents. But the principle is true in many different life situations. Countless men and women through the ages have painfully discovered this truth in choosing a spouse. For a biblical example, see the story of a king and his queen in Esther, chapter 1. But there are lots of decisions in life where this principle can show up. For one of my personal examples, ask me about the sad story of our 1972 Buick Skylark. It was a brand-new car that I ordered after seeing a beautiful photograph of one in a sales catalogue. There was no test drive, and I made no effort to find any Consumer Reports-type guidance on its quality or lack thereof. But getting back to Genesis 13,

III. More Detail Given About Land and People (vv 14-18)

A. Abram was told to use his eyes and legs to survey (vv 14, 17) (READ)

The Lord's instruction to look at the land in all directions reminds me of shopping for land in East Texas by using the internet. You see a few photos and get a description of the map location, utilities availability, and deed restrictions, but there might be a hazardous waste dump a half acre away. None of those things were issues for Abram, but he still wouldn't know what this gift from God was all about until he had walked a fair portion of it.

B. This gift from God is permanent (v 15b) (READ)

This bold promise of land as a gift from God repeated the one He made when Abram first entered the land – “To your descendants I will give this land” (ch 12, vs 7), except this time, the word “forever” was added. John MacArthur’s study notes referred to this as a “perpetual deed”. There have been many periods of uncertainty about the ownership of this land over the past 40 centuries, but Israel’s declaration to become an independent state in 1948 has made the world’s questions and claims about true ownership a moot point for the past 77 years. We can only watch in amazement when the anti-Semitic mobs chant “From the River to the Sea”, calling for the eradication of all Jews and their nation. God created that land and He owns that land. He can give it to whoever He wants, for as long as He wants. And 4,000 years ago, He gave it to Abram and his descendants to be theirs forever. “From the River to the Sea”. Such ignorance. Such hatred. Such arrogance. What a dark, ungodly mindset these protesters must have.

C. Abram’s descendants will be innumerable (v 16) (READ) (Romans 4:16)

Living in El Paso for years provided some unique experiences, like dust storms in the spring of every year. Sometimes it seemed like half the dirt in Arizona and New Mexico was blowing past in the high velocity wind. I’d never thought about trying to count dust until I came upon this verse. But dust is made up of extremely small particles, of which there is a finite amount. So they could theoretically be counted. But just like the total number of hairs on the heads of all living human beings at a given instant in time, only God could give you the number. The purpose of God’s language? To impress upon Abram that the number of his offspring would be so vast that no one would ever know how many people are in his family tree. And the unknown total has gotten even greater over the past 2,000 years, since all believers have received Abraham as their spiritual father. (See Romans 4:16.)

D. He built altar #3 in his new location (v 18) (READ)

Still living as a nomad, Abram moved south, but he gives us the positive impression that he was continuing to worship and serve the One True God. Every one of us who knows Christ as Savior are being led (and sometimes being pushed) along the path of sanctification – getting to know the Lord more intimately, and learning how to live in more Christ-like ways. So we can identify with the spiritual bumps in the road of Abram’s life thus far. His greatest learning opportunities were still ahead, but we have seen him making progress in becoming a man of great faith!

Personal Implications:

- Are there situations in your life right now that are producing fear in your mind and heart? If so, is this fear beginning to overwhelm your faith? Then follow Abram's example and call on the name of the Lord, so that His help and your faith will overcome your fear!!!
- For some people hearing these words, their greatest fear is death. Yes, the process can be fearsome for any person, but a greater fear is not knowing what lies beyond physical death. There are many human ideas about what happens to the human soul after death, but the truth of God's Word says that it is appointed that every person will die, and after that comes judgment by God for personal sin. Jesus, the Son of God, has made a promise that anyone who will trust Him for forgiveness of his or her sins will be forgiven. Completely forgiven. He took the penalty for your sins when He died on the cross. He has risen from the dead and has the authority of God to offer you eternal life with God. Talk to the Lord about this. You need the forgiveness and the eternal life and the freedom from the fear of death He has promised to those who will trust Him.
- There's a lot of conflict going on in the world. What about your world? Do you have an unresolved conflict with someone in your life? Why don't you consider following Abram's example? Call on the name of the Lord – pray, asking the Lord to lead you toward a resolution. Remember that it may require some humility. If you have said or done something you shouldn't have, acknowledge that to the person and ask for forgiveness. Be gracious in proposing a solution to the problem. Resolution must be a higher priority than protecting "your rights". Be consciously trusting the Lord throughout this process.
- Job wanted to avoid the problem of his heart following his eyes. (See Job 31:7.) May you develop healthy skepticism. If you are a parent, help your children develop healthy skepticism. Don't be like Lot. That which looks really good may be so, but be careful. It may also produce regret if it's really not what it appears to be.