

# FAMILY MATTERS, MATTER

An Uncle And A Nephew

Genesis 11-13

by

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**W**hy should we study a topic like this? I can think of several important reasons:

- We all have relatives, at least the last time I checked.
- We all have relatives who are, at times, difficult (No family is immune, at least not until we reach heaven, right? Should you sit there saying, “Not me, man. No way. Our family always gets along,” I’d conclude you are probably in some form of dysfunctional denial.)
- The subversive (can we say “sinister?”), sinful activity of difficult relatives challenges your Christian walk, leaving you with a decision of responding in a godly or ungodly fashion. Surely, you know what I am talking about.
- If you don’t learn how to respond and deal with difficult relatives then not only will your life be miserable, but they may just do some major damage you’ll never recover from.
- Family members and relatives can, and do, make unbelievable, jaw-dropping moral decisions which, in turn, almost force you to take a stand of sorts. What will you do when, not if, this occurs?
- If you learn how to properly interact with difficult relatives you will, as a Christian, be in a better position to impact people outside of your family for Christ. Put differently, if the lost world sees and hears a smack down match going on all the time in your “Christian” family, then how will you ever build a bridge to them? It would be difficult, if not impossible. Finding health and healing in these settings, then, is of paramount spiritual importance.
- After a year and half study diving deep into the theological depths of Daniel, it is prudent and timely to come to the surface and address what going on at this level of life.

I think those are enough reasons to venture into these turbulent, tossing waters, don’t you?

As we head out into this highly pragmatic topic, I want to give you a few things to think about right up front.

- Victory with difficult family relatives can be achieved with the most difficult family members. Note, I said “most.” Some are so unreasonable,

so caustic, and so volatile you may never make headway with them. I know, I've seen and dealt with them. But for the most part I'd say if you will implement God's principles for handling these situations you'll get wonderful results, eventually.

- The stories about difficult relatives I will share will always be anonymous, and if they bare any resemblance to you or your life, take no offense because your life story is probably not unique. Translated, I don't plan on talking about you, but perhaps others like you. Talking about real-life difficult family members is important for our growth because it will be better equip you to know how to be Christ to them.

Enough said. Let's set sail ... and you might want to hold onto the handrail because the sea might get a bit bumpy!

One of the best ways you can learn God's mind on this matter is to study biblical families, who, like you, had plenty of relational ups and downs. Take the positive and negative spiritual concepts you glean from their lives and use them as a teaching template for your life. As you know, the Old Testament has more of these types of stories than you could possibly study in a lifetime, so we will isolate just a few choice ones for our purposes. And just in case you need a biblical reference to support this course, I'd direct your attention to Paul's words to the Corinthians:

“Now these things [i.e., Israel in the wilderness with Moses] happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved” (1 Cor. 10:6).

From this we can easily construct a living principle: *The lives of Old Testament characters can teach us how to live for God when we study them.*

Searching through the pages of the first testament, one can't help but drop anchor and study the life of how an aged uncle and his nephew got along. Their names? Abraham and Lot. Where's their story found? In the book of Genesis chapters 11 through 19. Read these chapters in one sitting and you'll quickly see how their relationship can assist us in answering the question before us . . .

## How Do You Deal With Difficult Relatives (Gen. 11-13)?

To answer this question in light of the relationship between Abraham and Lot, I propose we head in four directions: (1) The Family Past (Genesis 11:24-32), (2) The Family Problem (Genesis 13:1-7), (3) The Family Performance (Genesis 13:8-13), and (4) The Family Promise (Genesis 13:14-18). We'll treat these in the order presented, concluding with practical insights designed to equip you for godlier living. And, yes, it is humanly possible to cover more than one biblical chapter in one sermon . . . just in case you were wondering what was going on.

### The Family Past (Gen. 11:24-32)

You can't adequately understand the problem this family had with one of its members until you first take a brief step back in time to see who was who, and where they came

from. Genesis chapter 11 gives us the genealogy of Noah's son, Shem. This genealogy is very important because through this godly family line will come the father of the Israelite nation (Abraham) and ultimately the Savior and Messiah, Jesus Christ.

<sup>22</sup> Serug lived thirty years, and became the father of Nahor; <sup>23</sup> and Serug lived two hundred years after he became the father of Nahor, and he had *other* sons and daughters. <sup>24</sup> Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah; <sup>25</sup> and Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and he had *other* sons and daughters. <sup>26</sup> Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. <sup>27</sup> Now these are *the records of* the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. <sup>28</sup> Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. <sup>29</sup> Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. <sup>30</sup> Sarai was barren; she had no child. <sup>31</sup> Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. <sup>32</sup> The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran."

Terah had three sons: Abram (later called *Abraham* by God), Nahor, and Haran. Haran died while the family lived in the godless (this is the first instance of a son from a godly line dying before his father did), polytheistic Ur, located in what is now modern day Iraq. Abram is placed first in this list because he was probably the firstborn. Terah was 70 when he became a father (11:26) and was 205 when he died (11:32), at which time Abram was around 75 years old (12:4). Do the math and you'll discover that Terah was 130 years old when Abraham was born, meaning Abraham wasn't the firstborn. And here is the key: *He was the uncle and the head of his dead brother's son, Lot.* Read that important point again if you need too. Perhaps through a series of tragic, trying life circumstances you have inherited a certain family member, a Lot, as it were. It happens and that is what gives this historical narrative so much believability. And we know how it works out in life. You step up to the plate to help the family at large, and, well, it comes back to bite you. Anyway, back to the story.

Further, from what we read in Genesis 12, God had specifically called Abraham to leave his homeland and head, by total faith, to a new land which God would give him. And leave he did, with some family members in tow. They stopped in Haran, which was located in what is now Syria, based upon the wishes of Terah. He eventually died there, and Abraham went on, at the ripe old age of 75 (Gen. 12:4), to make it to the land of promise, Israel. And every step of the way you continue to read that where he went Lot, his nephew went with him (11:31; 12:4; 13:1).

Ever had a family member who seemed to tag along with you, someone you just couldn't seem to shake? Why did Lot, the grown man, tag along? Scripture doesn't really say, but we can conjecture based upon what we learn of him later. He probably liked the lucrative leftovers he received from Abraham's life, don't you think? What's

most interesting is Abraham never told Lot to get lost. Never. He gladly accepted him, cared for, and protected him. Question, how are you treating that Lot in your life, that family member who seems to sap off your hard work?

One more thing I want you to realize about the past of this family. God had specifically promised to abundantly bless Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). He would be the father of the Israelite nation, and he, unbeknownst to him, would be the *father* of the Messiah. This is another important point to note because every great work of God in a family always meets with opposition. Did you get that? Did it register? You might need to read that again. *When God is going to do something great in and through a godly family, you can bank on the fact that opposition won't just be external. No. Many times it is first internal, from someone you'd least expect it from, you've been more than gracious to, or who has eaten at your table and enjoyed your close fellowship.* This is what happened to Abraham. No sooner did he get a personal visit from God Almighty, than the Adversary started working overtime in the life of one family member. His name we'll never forget. It's was Lot.

All of this, of course, should make you ask yourself, In light of the family difficulty I am facing right now, what is God preparing me to do for Him in the future? Remember, Abraham's family line came through Noah's son, Shem, the son through which the Messiah would eventually come. God had big plans for this genetic line, however, He had to hone and shape the leaders of the family as He sovereignly worked out His messianic plan. Your family line is important as well to God, and He has great plans in store for you. Trust His leadership as you deal with your Lot.

We all have family trees with negative and positive sides, do we not? We all have aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, and so on who have either been used by God or Satan, who have either lived for God or for themselves. It's that simple, isn't it? Just when you were recovering from a divorce, a loss of a business, or just when God gave you a great, precise personal revelation from His Word is when an immediately family member or relative can all of a sudden show up and want in on the action. When this happens to you, and it will (that's not being pessimistic, but realistic), remember you're in good company who've left you with an example to follow.

## The Family Problem (Gen. 13:1-12)

All of our work up this point now leads us to a real life family problem. First, we will read Genesis 13 and then we will come back and make some pertinent observations.

<sup>1</sup> So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him. <sup>2</sup> Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. <sup>3</sup> He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, <sup>4</sup> to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. <sup>6</sup> And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together. <sup>7</sup> And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land. <sup>8</sup> So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between

you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. <sup>9</sup> Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if *to* the left, then I will go to the right; or if *to* the right, then I will go to the left.’ <sup>10</sup> Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere—*this was* before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. <sup>11</sup> So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup> Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. <sup>13</sup> Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD.”

Stop right there. Don’t read another word until you first understand what just happened.

Abraham and Lot did have a perplexing problem. God had blessed both of them with an inordinate amount of livestock; however, they were living in a hilly area of Palestine (Bethel and Ai) known for its rocks, not for its green, lush grass and abundant water. Hence, their herdsmen had a daily argument over grass and water rights. Moses, the author of the account, tacked on at this point that Canaanites and Perizzites were in the land (v. 7). Why? These were the godless, non-Christian inhabitants in the land, and I’m sure Abraham didn’t want the arguing to continue, for to do so would be to set a terrible example as followers of the unseen, great God.

Stop for a moment and ask yourself, What is your family problem? Abraham’s problem just arose naturally by definition of his close proximity to Lot. It’s not that Lot did anything mean-spirited or underhanded. His men and Abraham’s men just kept having words over whose herds should eat here and drink there, and whose herds should eat first and whose should eat second, and so on and so forth. The problem couldn’t have been more practical and logical, but it was a problem nonetheless. Perhaps you can relate because the family issue you are facing is has just naturally grown into an issue that someone needs to address. Who will do the addressing is the question? Abraham, the head of the family pecking order, took the wheel of the ship and made that executive decision in order to create peace. What will you do?

### The Family Performance (Gen. 13:8-13)

Abraham, being a godly man, proposed a solution. Somebody had to go to another geographical area. Now what is most interesting is it was his right to choose, not Lot’s. Why? He was the uncle, Lot was just the nephew. Remember our discussion in Genesis 11. It certainly comes into play here. God told you about the genealogy of Abraham so you’d see the godliness of his action here.

Abraham could have said, “Lot, as I see it, I going to exercise my right as the head of the clan and take the green pasture land over their near Sodom and Gomorrah, leaving you to make a go of it on this rocky, overly grazed land.” But he didn’t because he was a saint of the tallest order. Humbly, Abraham acquiesced and gave Lot the ability to take first dibs. Instead of saying, “Is not the whole land before me,” he said, “Is not the whole land before you?” What grace. What generosity. What a peacemaker. What an ingenious problem solver. Talk about a way to handle a family issue. Abraham selflessly and magnanimously handed everything to someone who didn’t deserve it.

I'm sure you're well aware that most families are waylaid by the tsunami called greed when given half the chance. When do you usually see it? Statistically, it occurs when money is up for grabs when a well-to-do family member checks out. One survey I read recently said that 47% of family feuds started over leftover cash from a parent's estate. The report added that 43% fought over real estate which was left to divvy up among the progenitors. Here's a story which might sound all too familiar:

...A week after my father was buried, the sale of a house (he owned half) was completed. The executor (my sister) then informed us that during my father's last days he supposedly signed a note leaving my other sister, his caretaker and co-executor, a much larger sum of money for taking care of him than we had verbally agreed upon, and that the executor had already cut a check for her. The rest of us have not yet to see any documents.... I would like to resolve this in some way without having to go to court — where can I find more information?<sup>1</sup>

Sad, isn't it? Some family members, who are supposed to love each other, who have spent Christmases together, who have gone on vacations together, who ate with each other at family reunions, who share the same blood, will in an instant fail to act like Abraham when financial opportunities are placed in front of them. That's when the claws come out, as they say.

Should you be in a problematic position like this, Abraham is the model to follow. He shows that a godly family member should always think of other family members first. It is the Christian thing to do. It is the higher, more holy road, but it's the right road. Abraham acted in this fashion because the author of Hebrews tells us his eye was on the heavenly city he was headed for (Hebrews 11). Earthly things just didn't matter that much to him, for he realized their temporal nature. That's why he did what he did with tag along Lot. His priorities were different, and his love was deeper for his nephew. Can you, will you go out and emulate Abraham? While you're thinking about how you will answer that question, let's venture a little further into the story.

How did Lot become a difficult relative? He became a difficult relative by what he chose to do with Abraham's gracious offer. Instead of saying, "Thanks, Uncle Abe, but that choice is yours, not mine," he greedily, and might I had, stupidly, grabbed what *he* wanted above all else. Mark the spiritual digression of Lot's demise: He "lifted up his eyes," he "chose," he "journeyed," he "separated," and finally he "settled" near Sodom (vv. 11-12). Lot's choice showed, for the first time in the narrative, what type of relative he really was. Until this livestock problem, he appeared as one with the family. When given the opportunity to take the barren land for the bountiful land, when he had the choice between the Mojave Desert or Atlantic City, he chose the later with all of its glitz, glamour, greed and godlessness. His bad choice, as we shall see in our next study, didn't just negatively impact Lot and his family, it touched Abraham and his family.

Sin always works like this, you know. Sin is never a private affair. Don't let the world dupe you. Sin is a contagion. Pragmatically, do you think surgeons wore masks

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Schoen, "When Siblings Fight Over a Late Parent's Will," *NBC News*, accessed April 19, 2017, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/14080187/ns/business-answer\\_desk/t/when-siblings-fight-over-late-parents-will/#.WPeBdU1lupo](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/14080187/ns/business-answer_desk/t/when-siblings-fight-over-late-parents-will/#.WPeBdU1lupo).

coated with salt to keep their germs from passing to you? Not necessarily, a recent article in *The Atlantic* states how surgeons wear these types of masks in order to protect them from infections you might be carrying.<sup>2</sup>

Lot's fatal mistake and affront to his godly family is one made all too often. Every family has a relative who has brought undue harm to the family because of their greedy, impulsive choices. They may have squandered an inheritance. They may have moved into an area they should have never taken up residence in. They may have started a business with someone they should have never aligned themselves with because of the person's shady track record. The list, as you know, is endless. The obvious point can't be missed: this type of family member is difficult because they walk by sight, not by faith, leaving in their wake shattered relationships. They're not thinking about God at all. They are thinking they know better than God. They think you are foolish and they are all-wise.

Think of Lot. It wasn't that his decision was inherently an evil decision. It just dripped of selfishness. He could have headed in any direction he wanted, but he willingly chose the lush area near Sodom and Gomorrah. No doubt, he must have rationalized his move based upon the common knowledge of the wickedness of these cities. He must have thought, "We'll just stay on the outskirts of town, carving out an existence in the green grass. The wickedness of those towns won't touch us." Right. I once lived near a couple of copper mine pits. Illegally buried barrels of strychnine eventually corroded and bled into the ground water, affecting everyone everywhere. If you park your tent near Sodom; don't be shocked when you get Sodom all over you. Lot should have known better, but his greed got the best of him.

Abraham, on the other hand, quietly sat back and let Lot make a bad decision. He didn't say, as far as we can tell, a thing to Lot. He didn't warn him. He didn't caution him. I wonder why? Could it be that Abraham knew who he was dealing with? Could it be that wise old Abraham knew greed when he saw it, and he probably saw it long before this episode? Could it be that Abraham knew there isn't any arguing with a fool when his mind is made up? I think so. Abraham did the right thing. He was lovingly gracious toward Lot, and then he was wise enough to let the nephew get a taste of the consequences of his greedy choice.

You, likewise, may be facing a choice today in your family. I don't know what it is, but you do. Question is, "How will you respond?" Will you be an Abraham to your relative? Will you be selfless, even sacrificial toward them? Will you be magnanimous? Will you put them first, as Christ would? Remember: Difficult relatives are a given. How you respond to them is not. Should you emulate Abraham's action recognize what is in store for you. We encounter it in the final episode of our story about Abraham.

## The Family Promise (Gen. 13:14-18)

No sooner did the dust settle from Lot's camels, than God came to Abraham with these words:

<sup>14</sup> The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Hingston, "Can Salted Doorknobs Prevent Superbug Infection?" *The Atlantic*, March, 3, 2017, accessed April 19, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/03/salt-vs-superbugs/518427/>.

southward and eastward and westward;<sup>15</sup> for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. <sup>16</sup> I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. <sup>17</sup> Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you. <sup>18</sup> Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.”

Consider the difference between the Uncle and the Nephew:

The Uncle	The Nephew
A Born Leader (v. 1)	A Born Follower (v. 1)
Extremely Wealthy (v. 2)	Wealthy (v. 6)
Worshipped God (vv. 3-4)	Worshipped Money
Selfless (vv. 5-9)	Selfish (v. 10)
Confronted Conflict (vv. 5-9)	Coddled Conflict (vv. 5-7)
Divine Blessing (vv. 14-18)	Earthly “Blessing” (vv. 10-13)

Lot lived for Lot and it gave him temporal enjoyment followed by perpetual pain. Abraham lived for God and God gave him temporal enjoyment on a far grander scale followed by perpetual bliss. I don’t know about you, but I’d choose the latter hands down. Trusting God and acting in a godlike fashion always leads to greater blessing, and many times that test of trust occurs within the arena of one’s relatives. Because Abraham did the higher, nobler thing where greedy Lot was concerned, the Lord rewarded him for his humility. No wonder King Solomon said this years later:

The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish (Proverbs 14:11).

In the long run, it is always more profitable to act like Jesus toward others, especially if they are family, because God will bless you eventually. Yes, it’s tough to say, “No, you first.” It’s even harder to say to an abrasive relative, “What can I do to make your life in this instance a little easier?” Yes, it’s difficult and demanding to act like Christ, but it is the only way to act as we make our pilgrimage to heaven. Anything less would be sin, wouldn’t it?

No, I’m not saying let a difficult relative get away with sinful or criminal activity. Not at all. What I am saying is the next time you have the opportunity to put them first, do so. In so doing, not only are you Christ to them, you just might, through your actions call a sinner back home to Jesus.



## Conclusion

Years ago I knew a lady who married three different men in her lifetime. She left the first one, along with the children and married a wealthy politician. Her life with him was lavish and luxurious, but one day he died, so she moved on.

Eventually, she married another man, a Marine Corp war hero from W.W.II. He, too, was well off. He owned a beautiful home and properties, and once she was his wife, all that was his was hers. In time, husband number three died, leaving her with everything.

Legally, she didn't have to give any of her third husband's children anything more than the will said, and she didn't. She wouldn't even let the poor adult children in the house after his death to collect his things and his coveted Silver Star and other assorted medals. She was a case study in family conflict.

Within time, most of her health went south as did her investments and the woman who once had accumulated much wealth had virtually any left. None of the children from any of the marriages would talk with her, save her firstborn son who did what he could to help her before she died. Let me give you a little more of his story. When his mother left his father, she placed him in a boarding home for his entire upbringing, while the daughter stayed with her. Do you think he had a little animosity towards her? No, not really, at least, not anymore. Now as a retiree and a Christian man he had a decision to make. Would he care for his mother as she slowly declined in a rest home near his home? Would he seek to be the hands and feet of Christ to a mother who once told me, "I left my son one dollar in my will."

I've often thought about that woman and wondered how difficult she made it for her family for so many years. Was she not Lot to them? Did she not pitch her tent toward Sodom? Indeed. The Lord grabbed her heart and her head eventually; however, there were many years where she created havoc on her family line.

Had you been her family member, what would be the Christian response? Take her to court? Verbally let her have it? Barge into the home anyway, taking what you wanted? No, I think in that situation an Abraham-type would have smiled and said, "Take what you want. My heavenly Father will take care of me." That, my friend, is the road this particular godly, though battered and disappointed man, took. I still marvel at his spiritual maturity.

Let me ask you, "Do you have a 'Lot' in your family, someone who is prone to make bad choices which only seem to benefit them, while hurting others? For you, Christian, I have but one question: Will you commit right now so say this to Jesus: "Lord, I ask you right now for the strength to treat my Lot in a sacrificial, selfless, magnanimous fashion?" I know it's unnatural. You're right. It's more than unnatural, its supernatural and the strength to do it will only come from God.

Conversely, perhaps you are Lot. It's time to wake up and grow up. You are always scheming about how you are going to get ahead. You are selfish without exception. You wrongly assume the grass over in Sodom is going to be inherently better than the grass where you are. You run rough shod over those who love you the most in your quest to better yourself. Is this you? If so, don't you think it's time to call a moving van and get out of Sodom? Don't you think it's time to come back to your family in

repentance and say, “My self-centered actions have caused you undo grief and woe. Will you forgive me?”

The lady I told you about did come clean, but she waited until the end of her life. By that time she had a truckload of guilt she'd been packing for many years, and boy was it a heavy load. Why wait that long? Why not restore relationships your conflict has fractured and watch God do a marvelous healing?