

Text: Genesis 13:1-14:17, 21-24

Title: Abram's Land and His Rescue of Lot

Truth: Abram was a man of generally good character.

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Introduction

Now that we have seen Abram's family history and the initial giving of the Abrahamic Covenant, we will learn about some more of his travels, his dealing with Lot, and his interactions with the peoples around him.

I. The Separation of Abram and Lot, 13:1-13

- A. I have stated the heading of this section from the standpoint of the narrative or storyline. But there is a more significant moral and spiritual lesson in this section.
- B. Abram left Egypt after the famine and the no-faith incident in which he lied about his wife to protect himself. Stopping to think about that for a second, he used his wife as protection. That is backwards! What an embarrassment that whole situation was. After all that was done, he came up through the southern end of Canaan, back to where he started and had constructed an altar to worship God (12:8, see also 12:7). He came northeast from Egypt near to where Bethel and Ai are located. This is somewhat north of modern Jerusalem, near to Ramallah in the West Bank.
- C. Abram was very rich, as was his nephew Lot (13:1-5). They were so wealthy in livestock that the land immediately around them could not support all their animals, so it became necessary to put some distance between themselves (13:5-9). This they did (13:10-12). Not only was the land itself strained, but the herdsmen of the two flocks began to quarrel, probably over grazing and water rights.
- D. This incident highlights the different character of Abram and Lot. First, about Abram. Notice in 13:8-9, Abram says basically to Lot two things: (1) we do not want to continue conflict and (2) take your choice of acreage. This shows the excellent character of Abram. First, he wanted to avoid unnecessary conflict. It was not appropriate for their workers to be striving with one another because Abram and Lot had no beef with each other. They are brothers and should not have conflict! We learn that **Abram is a man of peace**. He is not a fighter, not pugnacious, not looking for trouble or revenge.

Second, he graciously offers the first choice of grazing land to Lot. He was the older man, the “gray hair,” the patriarch. He was due the first dibs, but he willingly offered first choice to the younger man. Whatever you pick, Abram said, I will move in the other direction to put the needed space between us. **Abram’s attitude is one of selfless service toward another who does not inherently deserve it.**

E. Now, about Lot’s character: It seems that Lot made a wise business decision by selecting the green plain of the Jordan river valley to the east. But one problem is that he made it at the expense of his uncle Abram. A second problem is that it put him on a trajectory toward Sodom where the people were exceedingly wicked and sinful. They were not run of the mill sinners like everyone. A third problem with his choice is that he became entangled in the battle of the city states in chapter 14, and thus experienced collateral damage in their warfare. He could have avoided that had he not become involved with them.

I have said before that I cannot fault Lot for living in Sodom, *because we live there too*. Just living there does not mean Lot condoned all that went on there. Lot’s righteous soul was vexed daily (read 2 Peter 2:7-8). Just because we live in the United States where immorality runs rampant, or in the liberal city of Ann Arbor that does not acknowledge God—this does not mean we are sinful just for being where we are.

But I would improve my statement of “fault” by saying it this way: I cannot fault Lot for living in Sodom if that fact is held in isolation from anything else, but I can fault him for moving in that direction in the first place. Given that he had the freedom to choose where he pitched his tent, he should not have gone in the direction of that place. It was too morally dangerous. (He was not intending to go there as a missionary or pastor!) Wherever *we* are in our life, we ought to know that it is wrong to move in a direction *toward* sin. Instead, we should move away from it whenever we can to keep ourselves and our families safe.

F. Lot later moved into the city of Sodom (14:12) and then became one of its leaders (19:1). I would like to think he was opposing the bad direction of the city, but it appears that he did not have any significant impact. Similarly, our feeble efforts at using the machinery of government to change societal rot will invariably fail. Only the gospel changes the hearts of people to become righteous, and only a small number of people are truly transformed. Government has far less power than the gospel, and it will not succeed at making good people out of bad, moral out of immoral, just out of unjust.

- G. God now restates the covenant to Abram. God emphasized the promise of the land (13:14-15, 17) and the large number of descendants that Abram would eventually have (3:16). This promise is reiterated throughout the Old Testament (Gen. 15:18, 17:8, Psalm 72:8, Zech. 9:10, Ezekiel 47:13-48:35).
- H. Abram had built altars at Shechem in 12:7 and between Bethel and Ai in 12:8. 13:4 says that he came back to that altar and called on the name of the Lord. He was a worshipper of God. Now the text notes that he built an altar in Hebron as well (13:18). This location was south of Jerusalem, still in the modern West Bank. Clearly, **Abram was a man concerned with the atonement of sin and the proper worship of God.** He knew animal sacrifice was appropriate during that era for the right worship of God.

II. Battle of the Kings, 14:1-17, 21-24

- A. Chapter 14 describes how two confederations of city-states were at war with one another. On the one side were four kings including Chedorlaomer and on the other side were five kings including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. The four kings won the battle and subjugated the five kings for 12 years. What this means is that the losers paid some sort of tribute every year to the conquerors.
- B. The five-king group rebelled against the subjugation of the four kings. The next year, the four kings went to battle against several area cities. The five-king confederation joined the battle to finish throwing off the foreign power. But they did not prevail. They “fled” according to 14:10. The goods and some people of Sodom and Gomorrah were carried off by their enemies (14:10-12).
- C. Abram learned of this while he was in Hebron at the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite. He armed his servants—318 of them—and defeated the confederation that had taken his nephew hostage (vv. 13-16). The three brothers Mamre, Eschol, and Aner went with him. He had to travel as far north as Dan and beyond, which was at least 120 miles. He was able to return all the people and all the spoils to their original owners. This event shows **Abram was also just and courageous.** He was **valiant** even to help someone who had desired ease and was content to dwell with evil.
- D. We will study 14:18-20 about Melchizedek in another message.
- E. The king of Sodom, who had lost the original battle, came out to thank Abram (17). He offered Abram all the spoils from the battle in return for the people that Abram had saved (21) but Abram basically refused the

offer (22-24). He was a **man of integrity, benevolence, and generosity** as well as **free from covetousness** (an inordinate desire for wealth, or for another's possessions, one that outstrips one's love for God).

He did allow some remuneration—namely the food that the young men ate on the way, and some pay for the brothers who went with him to the battle. But he refused anything from them because he did not want them to be able to say that they were the source of Abram's riches. More importantly than any other character trait was this: he wanted God to have the honor of supplying all his wealth. God promised to bless Him. God could choose to do that through other humans, but Abram did not want his blessedness to be so directly attributable to people.

F. Notice that the entire episode is one in which the four kings treated Abram lightly by kidnapping his nephew. God cursed them so that they too felt the weight of God's covenant with Abram. This has happened repeatedly in world history: with Egypt, various oppressors in Judges, with several of Judah's kings, during the intertestamental period, and there are parallels even in modern history.

Conclusion

We do not find the gospel in every passage in the Bible. But what we do find, especially in the Old Testament, can give us wisdom that leads us to salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). Furthermore, what we find there reveals God's evaluation of different ways of living and can help us avoid "boneheaded" decisions like those made by Lot. Those decisions might seem right at the time but looking back we will see that they were stupid. Reading Scripture and thinking about what we read will help us gain godly experience without having to make so many of those bad decisions ourselves.

Take Abram's character as the main lesson: he was peaceable, generous, kind, a man of God-centered worship and integrity, and one who wanted God to be honored above all else. He recognized that the blessings in his life came from God. Where did this originate in Abram? No doubt it started with his relationship to God. He was a man of faith, and God blessed him in that faith. Each of us ought to look at our lives and see if we are like Abram.

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