

Life of Abraham

November 15, 2011

Genesis 14

If you remember, when we were studying Genesis 12 I said that there was a chapter missing, or an account missing, that Moses was not able to write. That is the record of how God would have met Abram's need if he had trusted the Lord and stayed in the promised land instead of going down into Egypt.

We have just the opposite in Genesis 14. This is a chapter that never would have been written if Lot had not left Abram, and moved into Sodom. All that we are told in chapter 13 was that when Abram gave Lot the first choice as to where he wanted to go to feed his livestock, is that he "pitched" his tent toward Sodom (Gen. 13: 12). But as we read down through chapter 14 we come to verse 12 which tells us that at this time he was dwelling in Sodom.

Otherwise, any person reading chapter 14 for the first time, would wonder, until he got down to verse 12, of what interest is it to us that we are being told about the war between the four kings that are mentioned in 14:1, and the war that they had with the five kings mentioned in 14:2. These kings were all kings of city states. The reason that Moses told us about this war that took place twelve years before is that one of the kings mentioned in 14:2 is Bera, king of Sodom, *and that is where Lot was at this time.*

The war that is mentioned in verses 1 and 2 had taken place, according to verse 4 twelve years before the time that Moses was telling us in this chapter. The four kings of verse 1 had been victorious in that war, but in the thirteenth year, the five kings revolted against Chedorlaomer, who was evidently the leader of the four victorious kings. The following year, the fourteenth, Chedorlaomer and the three kings who were with him took action .

Apparently there were other kings involved in the revolt which Chedorlaomer and his allies quelled. But eventually the four kings got down to the five, or which, remember, that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, were two of the original five.

Verses 10, 11, and 12 tell us only what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah because they are the two cities that are important to tell us what happened to Lot and his family.

The four kings stripped Sodom and Gomorrah of all of their supplies, and then went away. But for some reason they did the same to Lot and his family, but, in addition, took Lot and his family captives. Why, we do not know. But it may have been that Lot had been very active in leading the revolt. My father-in-law used to say, "If you do stupid things, you get stupid results." I don't know of a better way to describe Lot at this particular time in his life. In verse 12 Abram comes into the story again.

14:13 I want to point out to you that what is told us in verse 13 is evidence of the providence of God. This did not just happen by chance. This man's name is not given to us, but he was probably a citizen of Sodom. And he went to tell Abram what had happened. So he knew a little bit of Lot's previous history. It is interesting to have this encouragement for ourselves, as it must have been to Abram, that God always has a person who in an emergency, is able to meet, or help to meet, the needs of his people.

Here Abram is called, "Abram the Hebrew." There has been much discussion among expositors as to what this means, and why it is used here. Some feel that it is simply a recognition that Abram was a descendant of Eber. Even in English you can see the connection between the two names, Hebrew and Eber. But others have seen even a deeper meaning here. Others see in this an emphasis upon the fact that in Canaan, Abram was a foreign-

er. Some say that he was from the regions beyond. Still others a kind of a title, the man from the other side. It is interesting that this man who came to Abram, and who probably was a Sodomite, had heard of Abram, maybe even from Lot, but he knew that he was not a Canaanite, but a foreigner.

I think that we can say that his expression describes Abram with reference to Canaan the same way the NT describes us in our relationship with the world. We are “in the world,” but, when we are saved, we are no longer “of the world.” We look like other Americans, and we have responsibilities to our country, but we don’t really belong her. And we can thank God, and glorify Him, if there are people in America who recognize that there is something very different about us. We don’t fit any longer. We are citizens of heaven, and that is the way we need to live. So actually this was a compliment for Abraham. He was a man of God, a man of faith, and definitely not like the Canaanites. And people could evidently see it. There was a lot of difference between the idols of the Canaanites and the altar of Abram.

14:14 Verse 14 tells us that “Abram . . . armed his trained servants.” This means rather that *he brought them out, or drew them out*. As Calvin explained in his commentary, Abram had not trained them for war, but he had trained them to submit to his authority so that in a time of emergency like this they were prepared to obey Abram, and were inspired and strengthened by his faith, would fight courageously. There are times when we are called upon to take action by faith, and strengthened by the way in which we have learned to be obedient to the Lord.

14:15 Now we need to remember than Abram was not going against one king, but against four. He wisely divided his three hundred and eighteen servants into different groups, and pursued the enemy by night to Dan, which Griffith Thomas estimated was a distance of some 120 miles!

14:16 The battle apparently was not very long, but the victory was complete. There is no reference to any casualties that Abram’s servants suffered, so we can assume t that there were none. Abram and his servants recovered all of the goods that the kings had taken from Sodom, and all of the people who had been taken captive, including the women, and Lot. There was not the loss of a life of a single servant of Abram. It would be hard to find the record of a battle that was more complete in such a short time even in Scripture. What a testimony this was to the power of God, and to the grace of God, and to the wisdom of God, and as well, to the faith of Abram for which Abram would have given all of the glory to God.

14:17 Obviously the king of Sodom was not involved in this war at all. So he could take none of the credit for the victory. But what is most amazing is that this verse indicates the Chedorlamer and the three kings who were his allies, were all killed in this battle. This should be associated with what happened to the Pharaoh of Egypt when the Lord delivered Israel through the Red Sea as recorded for us in the book of Exodus. What Asaph wrote many years later in Psalm 75:6-7 is illustrated here:

6 For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south.

7 But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another.

Kings and presidents are inclined to feel that they have sovereign power, but when God gets ready to remove them, there is nothing that they can do about it. Even when they outnumber their enemies, as is obvious here in Genesis 14, they are defenseless in the presence of almighty God. But we must recognize that Abram did not go to war “on his own,” but that he was moved by the Spirit of God to do what he did.

But as we come to verse 18 a most amazing event takes place.

14:18 Another king suddenly appears. His name is Melchizedek. We are told that he was the king of Salem, which is the ancient name of the city which eventually became Jerusalem.. He has not been mentioned

up to this point in Genesis so all that we know about him at this point is the information given to us in this chapter. But he is to become one of the most important people to be mentioned in all of the Bible. And his name is linked to the Lord Jesus Christ in a way that surpasses that of any other person mentioned in Scripture! We read about him again in Psalm 110, and then he occupies a very important place in the NT book of Hebrews. But let us get acquainted with the details given about him here before we look at the other passages.

He brought “bread and wine” obviously for the refreshment of Abram and his men as they returned victoriously from the battle. But unlike any other king mentioned in the Bible, Melchizedek was “the priest of the most high God.”

14:19 Next we are told that he blessed Abram. And in what he said, he recognized that Abram belonged to the Lord, “the most high God,” and that he had been the human instrument which God has used to defeat the kings who had defeated Sodom. Abram belonged to the Lord. And the same is true of “heaven and earth.” God is “the Possessor” because He was the Maker, the Creator. Luther said on this point:

The world rejected Abram and, no doubt, many cursed him, but in the eyes of the most high God he was [the] divinely favored heir of all blessings which the promised Redeemer was to bring to the world.

This was no earthly blessing, but one that is divine and eternal (*Luther's Commentary on Genesis*, pp. 255, 256).

“The most high God” designates the Lord as the Supreme God over heaven and earth. None is greater than He. This title is used four times in this passage, in vv. 18, 19, 20, and 22. Its NT synonym is “the Highest” (Luke 1:32, 35).

14:20 After blessing Abram, Melchizedek said, “And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.” Comparing the two blessings, one for Abram, and the other for God, we must distinguish between the two blessings. In blessing Abram, Melchizedek was rejoicing with Abram that he had been so blessed by God. But in blessing God, he was praising God Who was the Source of Abram's blessing, and the One Who had give Abram the victory.

And then we are told that Abram gave Melchizedek “tithes of all,” that is, of all of the goods which Abram and his men had taken from the four kings, i.e., all that they had taken from Sodom.

From this verse we see the Melchizedek stood between Abram and God, blessing one and then the Other. Thus Melchizedek appears as a Mediator between the two. And he gave the glory for Abram's great victory over his enemies to the most high God.

14:21 Now we read in verse 17 that “the king of Sodom went ut to me [Abram] after his slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him.” But it is not until we get down to verse 21 that we learn that the king of Sodom got to him. In between, in verses 18, 19, and 20 we learn about what we can call *the intervention of God*. What do I mean by that?

I mean that the king of Sodom was going to suggest a compromise with Abram over the goods that Abram had retrieved from the four kings. And we have the compromise here in verse 21. In a way this was a very generous agreement that the king of Sodom suggested. Abram would be allowed to keep the goods; the people would be returned to the king. Actually Abram had every right to keep the goods because that was what was normally done in the wars that were fought in those days. Abram even had the right to keep the people. **But the sudden appearance of Melchizedek was for the purpose of preventing any compromise, or any relationship with the king of Sodom, which would take away from the Lord the glory for the victory which He had given to Abram.**

This is another evidence of the providence of God. As I said on Sunday night, the Devil is always looking for ways in which he can turn us away from God, even if it is just to give glory to someone else, or some thing else, and take it away from God. I repeat: We can't see the Devil. But we can see the damage that he does when it is too late if we are not always on guard against him. Stories like this in the book of Genesis are designed not only for us to see the power and grace of God, but to teach us that when God gives us a victory of any kind, the Devil seeks to step in to deceive us.

A NT illustration of this is Peter's confession of his love for the Lord. The Devil had gone to the Lord to request that he be able to sift Peter as wheat. Now farmers sift wheat to get rid of the chaff, but the Devil sifts us to get rid of our good intentions regarding the Lord. We think that nothing could make us deny the Lord. Peter felt that way. But when the Devil worked on him, Peter not only denied that he knew the Lord, *but he did it three times!* Oh, if we only can realize how weak we are, how faithful we would be in putting on the whole armor of God that we might stand against the wiles of the Devil – and then following that with intense, faithful prayer.

Well, this is one time when the Devil was defeated. Look at what the king of Sodom suggested in verse 21. What a temptation this was to Abram. It probably included all the spoil that he had taken from the four kings. Much wealth would have been involved. Even if the goods had just those which originally belong to Sodom. There must have been some time between verses 20 and 21. Because Abram was ready for the king of Sodom when he came.

Then look at Abram's response in verses 22 and 23.

14:22 Abram had taken an oath before the Lord. He was beyond taking even a part of the spoil. He was not going to take even a thread or a shoelatchet from the king of Sodom because he refused to do anything that would detract from the glory of God. The visit of the king of Salem had prepared Abram to be ready for the king of Sodom. That surely is the whole point of this story. Nothing can strengthen us and prepare us to be able to stand against temptation like meeting with a messenger from the Lord.

14:23 There is nothing more worthless and a thread to a shoe string. So Abram was beyond being tempted to take anything. And why? "Lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." Abram was jealous for the glory of God. He was more concerned about what was pleasing to God than he was about what was pleasing to the king of Sodom, or even what was pleasing to himself. He knew that the king of Sodom would boast about how generous he had been to Abram. Abram wanted others to know how good God had been to him.

14:24 The only exceptions Abram would allow was for three of his men, probably the men who faced the most danger, and who were the most helpful.

Additional Notes

As mentioned before Melchizedek is only mentioned in two other books of the Bible: Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7. Genesis 14 gives us the history. Psalm 110 gives us the prophecy. Hebrews 7 gives us the doctrine. When you put all three of these together, you can see that Melchizedek was a type of Christ. I take this from the statements in Hebrews 5:10 and 6:20 that Christ was a high priest "after the order of Melchizedek, and Hebrews 7:3 that Melchizedek was "made like unto the Son of God." Christ was both a priest and a king – and He still is! The bread and the wine which Melchizedek brought to Abraham typify the spiritual refreshment that we are to receive in observing the Lord's Supper. And as Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, so we give to the Lord to acknowledge His goodness to us, and the victorious life we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.