

Genesis 14

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[0 : 00] We're continuing in the story of Abraham, Abraham the man of faith, one of those in whose footsteps we walk.

We trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who was descended. In 2013, we've seen God calling Abram and making these amazing promises to him, and Abram left everything, left his homeland, his security, his background in worshiping idols, and left and obeyed to follow the one true God.

And then we saw trouble happens, a famine happens. And so, he went down to Egypt, and that was sort of a low point spiritually in his life when he was really driven by his fear instead of by faith in God.

But then last week, we saw that he returned to living a life of faith, sort of grasped hold of that, and lived by faith by being generous to his nephew, Lot, who was sort of causing trouble for him.

And Abraham said to Lot, look, I'll give you first dibs. You choose your land. Let's not have quarreling. And so, we saw him expressing generosity as an expression of faith.

[1 : 18] Tonight, we come to another test of Abram's faith in chapter 14. So, let's read the beginning of that chapter together. Chapter 14, starting at verse 1, In the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Ariok, king of Elassar, Cader-Leomer, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goyim, these kings made war with Bera, king of Sodom, Bersha, king of Gomorrah, Shunab, king of Adma, Shemaber, king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is Zoar.

And all these joined forces in the valley of Sidim, that is the Salt Sea. Twelve years they had served Cader-Leomer, but in the thirteenth year, they rebelled. In the fourteenth year, Cader-Leomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashtaroth-Carneim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shavah-Kiriatham, and the Horites in their hill country of Seir, as far as El-Paran on the border of the wilderness.

Then they turned back and came to An-Mishpat, that is Kadesh, and defeated all the country of the Amalekites and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon Tamar. Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Adma, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is Zoar, went out. And they joined battle in the valley of Sidim with Cader-Leomer, king of Elam, Tidal, king of Goyim, Amraphel, king of Shinar, and Ariok, king of Elassar, four kings against five. Now, the valley of Sidim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions and went their way. They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom and his possessions and went their way. Okay, so this is sort of the historical background.

If you notice, this is the story of Abram, but Abram's name doesn't appear in this story until verse 12. So briefly, what's going on? The king's names can be confusing, and I'm sure they're all unfamiliar. So let me sort of summarize and simplify. There are four Babylonian kings.

That's the first four in verse 1. Then there are five Canaanite kings that are listed in verse 2. Okay, so Babylon is sort of...the Babylonian kings are sort of coming from the northeast.

[3 : 37] The land of Canaan is sort of modern-day Israel and Palestine where Abram was. And so these Babylonian kings were coming down and sort of dominating the land of Canaan and the Canaanite kings.

And Caterleomer, he's sort of the big guy, the head honcho that everybody's afraid of. He's the Babylonian king who's sort of flexing his military muscles, coming down into Canaan and exercising his influence, right? Verse 3 says, for 12 years he dominated. Not, sorry, not verse 3. Verse 4, 12 years he dominated. Probably that means these other nations paid tribute to him.

The 13th year they rebelled, which probably means they stopped sending tribute. They didn't send a payment that year. And the 14th year, here he comes. He's not going to leave him alone. So he starts verse 5 through 7, basically describe him coming from the northeast, and he comes down the eastern side of Canaan and just starts defeating these nations one by one by one. So verse 5 through 7 lists six nations that he defeats, sort of one by one. He comes down the east, he goes across the south, he comes back up north, and then verse 8, these five kings... Now these five Canaanite kings are sort of kings of small cities, Sodom and Gomorrah and three other cities that are on the southeast end of the Dead Sea. And so they come out to fight Cader and Omer. They decide, we can't fight this battle alone. We're going to band together against this big guy who's oppressing us and dominating us. We're going to fight him. Now, of course, he has three allies with him, so it's five against four, but the four guys wipe him out. Cader and Omer defeats these five kings.

He takes everything, captures all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, takes everything with him, and he keeps going north, sort of back toward his homeland. He's just sort of gone on a rampage, and he's won battles against a total of eleven nations, and he's heading north and heading back home. So that's the situation. And then verse 12 is the first time Abram's mentioned in this passage.

[6 : 04] It says, they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, that is, Abram's nephew, who was dwelling in Sodom and his possessions and went their way. Now, in verse 13 through 16, we're going to see Abram's response to this situation. But before we go on, let me make one brief point. Cader Leomer is the guy who, if they had newspapers back then, or if they had Facebook newsfeeds, he would be on the front pages of the newspaper every day. He won another battle. And if you were on his side, you would think, yes, he's the conquering hero. And if you were not on his side, you would think, he's the terrible villain. He's destroying everything and terrorizing the world.

Right? But whichever side you're on, he would have been the one that everybody thought, he's the most important guy. He's determining the destiny of the world more than anyone else. Many people feared him. Some people loved him. Everybody thought their life depended on him. But in the bigger picture, he's actually not the most important person in this story. Okay? Apart from this chapter, we have no other historical documents that mention Cader Leomer. Everybody's forgotten about him, pretty much. The only reason he's here is because he's in a story about Abram.

And nobody's sitting around reading about all the victories of Cader Leomer or all the atrocities of Cader Leomer, however you will interpret it, and being inspired by him today. But here we are reading about Abram. And the story of Abram or Abraham continues to influence people 4,000 years later. So let me just make a brief point that the things that are most important to God, and even the things that will have the most lasting impact on history, are not necessarily the things that are on the front page of the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal or the New Haven Register or whatever you read. And the things that you see on your Facebook feed as trending, well, first of all, a lot of them are going to be gone in two weeks. And most of them will be gone by next year. And in the big picture, those aren't necessarily going to be the most important things in life. So let me just encourage you, as a side point, but don't be overly driven by whatever's on the front pages of the newspaper or on the top of your social media feed.

And the Bible doesn't say that you need to know everything that's going on in the world. The reality is you can't know everything that's going on in the world, and the news doesn't tell you about everything that's going on in the world because it might never tell you this story about Abram.

Now, the Bible does say that we need to love our neighbor as ourself. That is, our neighbor, that is particularly anyone whom we come into contact with. On a day-to-day basis, or have the opportunity to show love and speak truth and show concern and care for. So, as we go on to see what Abram's doing next, just remember that.

[9 : 17] That what seems most important isn't always what's most important in God's perspective. So, verse 13 to 16, we see Abram's response to this situation. And let me read these verses.

So then, one who had escaped, that is, one who had escaped from this battle, came and told Abram the Hebrew who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his kinsmen, and that's referring to Lot, his relative Lot, his nephew Lot, had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces against them by

night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the possessions and also brought back his kinsmen Lot with his possessions and the women and the people. Now, I always thought that last verse was a little weird, right? And the women and the people. I think the way you can understand it is all the possessions of Sodom, Lot and his possessions, and also the women in Lot's household, and all the other people from Sodom. So, anyway, that's just a verse that... I'm like, what does that verse mean? Anyway, so don't get distracted by that. Three aspects of Abram's character that we see here. Number one, we see Abram as a man of self-restraint when he was surrounded by conflict. If you notice,

Abram doesn't immediately jump into this war, even though it's happening not far from where he lives. And this seems to be a prudent course of action. The book of Proverbs has some proverbs on this.

Proverbs 26, 17 says, Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears. You ever grabbed a dog by the ears? I don't want to do that. Proverbs 20, verse 3, It is an honor for a person to keep aloof from strife, that is, keep your distance from strife, but every fool will be quarreling. So, Proverbs is saying it's not wise to immediately jump into every quarrel and every dispute that's happening around you. And if you notice, for a while, Abram doesn't get involved. However, we do see that Abram's prepared. He's prepared to take action to defend himself and to rescue a lot. So, he has three allies that are mentioned in verse 13, three Amorite allies, and he also has 318 trained men, right? If you notice, Abram's not just sort of sitting there naively thinking, oh, I'll be just fine. I don't need to do anything. I'm just going to let this battle go on around me and not take sides. Everything's going to be just fine. No, he's, I mean, he's obviously gone through the trouble of making alliances with people that he considers reliable and training up these men who could sort of be a military force for him.

And so, when the time comes, when Abram realizes, now I need to step in and take action, he's ready to go. So, we see his self-restraint first, and second, we see his loyalty. He's loyal to a relative in need.

[12:42] Right? It's when Lot gets... Lot and his family are taken captive that Abram steps in and says, I need to do something about this because I have promised to be loyal to Lot. Now, you might say, well, why would Abram... where had Abram promised that? Well, Lot's... back in chapter 12 or the end of chapter 11, it says that Lot was Abram's nephew and Lot's father had died. And so, Abram basically sort of adopted Lot into his family and took Lot with him where he was going. And the reason why they were separated is because in chapter 13, as we saw last week, there was so much fighting between Abram and Lot's herdsmen because they had so many sheep or cattle or whatever they were taking care of that Abram finally said, let's separate. Right? We need to have some distance between us so that we're not just fighting with each other all the time. And so, Abram said... and so, Abram and Lot sort of went their separate ways so that they could live in peace.

But Abram was still committed to protecting Lot in this situation. And realize a few things about Abram and Lot's relationship. First of all, Lot had not exactly been very helpful to Abram. Right? As I said, Abram sort of took him under his wing after Lot's father died. In the last chapter, Lot had caused trouble for Abram. Right? Abram took Lot under his wing. He protected him. He brought him with him. He provided for him. And then Lot's herdsmen, the people under Lot's leadership, who Lot could have told them, just quiet it down, they were causing trouble. Right? They were quarreling.

And then what we see here is Lot didn't just cause trouble for Abram, and then Abram said, okay, let's go our separate ways so we can live in peace. Lot caused trouble for himself. If you look back at chapter 13, verse 12 and 13, it said, Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now, the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

That's a little note in the story that sort of gives us a clue. Lot wasn't being very wise here. He wasn't being very wise about who he was getting close to and who he was sort of sort of intertwining his life with.

[15:10] And then in chapter 14, verse 12, we see Lot wasn't just living near Sodom. He had actually moved into the city of Sodom. Sort of even further, he's sort of drifting into danger. And then, and so when Cater Laomer takes Sodom and takes all the people with him and loots the town, Lot and his family are taken away with him, taken captive, and they're helpless.

But notice what Abram does, okay? Lot's caused trouble for Abram. Lot's got himself into trouble, but Abram doesn't leave Lot alone. Abram isn't like, forget him, I'm done with him. No, Abram's like, I am committed to him because I have promised to be loyal to him, and I'm going to keep my promise. I'm not going to just abandon him when he's in trouble. And one commentator points out that Abram's strategic interest, if you think about Abram as a military sort of...or his military forces, right? If you think about Abram's strategic interests, they would have been best served by doing nothing and allowing the Canaanite nations right around him to be defeated so they could be weaker and so potentially he could be stronger. So, it's actually sort of putting himself in a little bit of danger to go chasing after this guy who's defeated 11 different nations, and it's sort of putting himself...it's putting himself in danger to do that, but he does that because Abram is his brother's keeper, right? Unlike Cain earlier in Genesis who kills his brother, Abram is the one who protects his kinsmen and stands by him in a time of trouble, all right? So, that's...so we've seen his self-restraint, his loyalty, and third, we see his courage, right? What does Abram do? He leads forth his trained men, verse 14, three...and pursues them as far as Dan. That's over 120 miles, so that would have been a few days' journey. He attacks them by night, by surprise, defeats them, and drives them out of town, pursues them another 60 miles to Hobah. He recovers everything, all the possessions of Sodom, Lot and his possessions, the women of Lot's household, the people of Sodom. He recovers everything and brings them back home. And Abram's courageous in facing...in being willing to stand up to this guy who's just been knocking everybody off one by one. And Abram's courageous enough to stand up to him and say, I need to do this. This is the time that I need to stand up and take action and protect my relative and rescue him and his family. And he doesn't hesitate. He's courageous.

So, we see his self-restraint, his loyalty, and his courage, and all of these are connected to his trust in the Lord, right? Why is he self-restraint in the beginning, self-controlled? Because he trusts the Lord. He trusts, you know, God's in charge here. God's sovereign over everything, right? How is he loyal to his relative Lot? Because he knows that God has promised to be loyal to him. That was one of the promises God made to Abram. Whoever blesses you, I will bless, and whoever dishonors you, I will curse. God's like, I'm on your side. And Abram's like, okay, I'm going to be loyal to the people that you've called me to be loyal to. And Abram's courageous because, again, he trusts the Lord, right? So, all of these are connected to his faith in God.

[18:51] And then we come to the end of the passage, the last eight verses, and let's read these, which talk about sort of after Abram comes back, and we see two kings coming to meet him. So, verse 17, after Abram's return from the defeat of Cater-Laomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shabba, that is the king's valley, and Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself. But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich. I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten and the share of the men who went with me. Let Honor, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.

Right? So, Abram has courageously rescued Lot and his family, and not just Lot and his family, but it seems like a lot of the other people who are living in Sodom with Lot, and he's sort of bringing them back home, and two kings come to meet him. So, first, the king of Sodom comes to meet him, and the king of Sodom, as we'll see in this chapter as well as in the broader context of the story, is a wicked king. Do you notice the first thing he says to Abram in verse 21?

He says, give me. Those are the first words that come out of his mouth, give me. Now, he says, give me the person, give me the people, you take the stuff. Now, think about that. Think about what Abram has just done for him.

Abram has just rescued his whole city. That was completely where everyone in his city was taken away by a foreign nation, and the whole city was looted. And Abram went and rescued them all and brought them back. And the king of Sodom says, give me the people, you keep the stuff.

It's almost like the king of Sodom is trying to appear generous, like, okay, you keep the stuff. I'll be generous to you. You can keep all the stuff, but give me the people. He's dishonoring Abraham in

the way he approaches him. And look at Abram's response. What Abram says in verse 22 and 23 is he says, I don't want any of your stuff. He says, verse 24, he basically says, I only want to pay my guys what they deserve. The guys who work for me, who put their lives on the line, who worked hard, who did their job well, I want them to get their fair pay. I don't want any of your stuff. So, we see Abram's very careful about who he's going to ally with. You know, think about what could have happened if Abram said, okay, sure, I'll take your stuff. You take your people and go home, and I'll keep the loot. Well, one, the king of Sodom might resent him, right? The king of Sodom takes the people back home. Let's say he becomes powerful again, and he says, yeah, you rescued us just because you wanted to get our stuff. That's why you went and rescued all these people, because you just wanted all the loot from the city. You just wanted to make yourself rich.

[22 : 33] So, the king of Sodom might resent him or accuse him. The king of Sodom might also think, might also say, well, hey, Abram, I let you have all the stuff, so you owe me a favor in the future. If I need some help, you owe me. And Abram says, no way. I'm not going to put myself in a position where you owe me or where I owe you. Abram wants the king of Sodom to go his way with no further obligations or attachments. He says, I've made an oath to the Lord. I did this out of loyalty to God and not for my personal gain. I didn't go and rescue Lot and all the other people from Sodom to get the loot.

I did it out of loyalty to God. So, he refuses the king of Sodom's offer. But second, there's another king that approaches Abram who's a righteous king in contrast to the wicked king of Sodom, and his name is Melchizedek. That's actually what the word Melchizedek means.

Melchi means king, and Zedek means righteous. So, Melchizedek is just a compound word that means a righteous king. And notice how he approaches Abram very differently. First thing, he brings out bread and wine, right? Abram and his men have been traveling a long way. They've been, you know, they've fought a hard battle, and so Melchizedek comes to show them hospitality and to welcome them and to refresh them with a meal. So, he honors...he's hospitable. He's gracious. He honors Abram and his men, but he also blesses Abram, and he blesses God. Melchizedek reminds Abram that he won the battle because the Lord was with him. He didn't just win the battle because his forces were stronger, but his victory has come from the Lord. And Abram responds in a very interesting way in the end of verse 20. It says, Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Did you notice that? In the ancient world, giving someone a tenth of the spoils of war was an act of submission and self-dedication.

It was a way of saying, I'm yours, so I'm giving you the top of the heap. I'm giving you the first cut. I'm giving you the first fruit. So, the way of honoring someone and saying...and it's sort of almost like paying tribute to someone. And in the Old Testament, God required the Israelites to bring the first 10% of their produce to him as an act of submission and self-dedication to the Lord.

And it was collected by the priests in Israel. And Abram's doing sort of a similar thing. He's saying Melchizedek...he recognizes Melchizedek blesses him in the name of the Lord. Melchizedek reminds him and points him to the Lord. And so, Abram honors Melchizedek and says, you are a priest of the one true God. I'm going to honor you and honor God through honoring you.

[25 : 41] So, he's really offering...when he's giving the tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek, he's really giving an offering to God is effectively what he's doing. And he's sort of saying...he's offering that as an expression of devotion to God.

Now, we've seen a few characteristics of Abram. We've seen his self-restraint, his loyalty, his courage. Here we see his unselfish devotion to God. How do we become a person like this? Right? How do we...if Abram is an example of faith for us to, in some ways, emulate and follow? How do we become a person like this?

We'll look ahead just in chapter 15, verse 1. I'm not going to preach chapter 15, but I'm just going to read the first verse. It says, After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision and said, Fear not, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great.

It seems that after this great victory, Abram perhaps had a moment of fear and questioning and doubt again. And God comes right alongside to reassure him and say, I am your shield, your very great reward. And sometimes it's after the greatest spiritual victories that we can feel...that we can have a letdown, just like sort of our emotions tend to work that way, right? You have an emotional high, and then you sort of have a crash. And spiritually, sometimes it works the same way too, right? And there's a great spiritual victory, and then a period of perhaps depression or doubt or fear. And God comes to meet Abram in that moment and says, Don't fear. I am your shield and your very

great reward. And, you know, if we know that, that God is our shield and our very great reward, that's actually what helps us become the kind of person that Abram is here. You know, Abram was loyal to Lot, and so when Lot got in trouble,

Abram didn't draw back but went to great lengths to rescue him. And the Bible says that Jesus Christ has promised Himself to us. Jesus Christ is even greater than Abram, even more loyal than Abram was to Lot. Abram put his life on the line to rescue Lot...excuse me. But Jesus Christ laid down His life on the cross to rescue us. Jesus Christ has said to us, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you.

[28 : 13] I will never let you go. I will be loyal to you to the end. And if you know that, if you've received Him by faith as your Savior and Lord, if you know that He will be loyal to you tonight and every day going forward, then by His grace and by His Spirit working in us, we can become that kind of loyal and courageous and steadfast person that we see Abram being here.

If you...if you get...you know, if you're like Lot and you've sort of got yourself into trouble, encouragement here is Jesus Christ is even greater than Abram, and He will come to...He has come to rescue you. And if you're here tonight and you're hearing this message, you're not too far away, and you haven't gotten yourself into too much trouble, but there's a way for you to come back to Jesus and be...and for Him to come and find you and bring you home just like Abram did for Lot. Because Jesus is a righteous King. Jesus is, as Hebrews says, even greater than Melchizedek. He's that King and priest who is faithful to His promises. He is our shield. He is our reward. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank You for this story. We thank You that each story in the Bible has something to teach us. Lord, we thank You that You have given us these words of Scripture that we might benefit from them and be shaped by them into the people You're calling us to be. And we thank You for how this points us to Jesus Christ, our faithful and loyal rescuer, our Savior, who has laid down His life for us on the cross and who has brought us home safely and who will bring us home safely to His heavenly kingdom.

Lord, we pray that we would rest in You, and we pray that we would be strengthened by Your grace to be courageous and loyal and self-controlled, Lord, that You would strengthen us by the power of Your Spirit, even as we take the Lord's Supper together tonight. Now, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.