

Faith in Action  
Genesis 14  
January 6, 2008  
Stadium Village Church

We are currently in a sermon series entitled “Entering the Land” in which we are looking at the life of Abraham. The stories of Abraham are found in Genesis 12 through 25. In this five-week series, we will be focusing on a just a few parts of Abraham’s life. First of all, we should back up a little and review who Abraham was. If you remember from last week, Abraham, who at first was called simply Abram, was from the land of Ur. We think that Abram lived about 2100 years before Christ. We are not quite sure where Ur was located, but it may have been a city in what is present day Iraq. The city of Ur was maybe the largest city in the region at that time. The family had moved westward to a place called Haran – probably the location of a city still called by that name in what is now the country of Turkey. It was in Haran that God called Abram to leave his home and travel to a place where God would eventually show him. Abram and his wife Sarai, along with others in his family, traveled southward to what is now the country of Israel. They lived near the place that eventually became the city of Jerusalem.

Abram was probably the leader of a sizeable group of people who were nomadic. Their main occupation was herding animals – sheep, cattle, and the like. There were hundreds of people in his community – it was like a traveling city that made their living from herding animals. From last week’s message, we learned that he gained even more people and possessions when he spent some time in Egypt. In summary – Abram was like a king of a small nomadic tribe who was living in the land of Canaan (present day Israel and more). In this land, there were several small cities who each had a king with whom Abram had to deal with.

You may ask – why study this man called Abram or Abraham? What makes him so special? And, what difference does it make for us today? I think there are three important answers. First, Abram and his wife Sarai were the beginning of the nation of Israel. It would be their descendents who would live in this land and through whom Jesus Christ would eventually be born. The people of Israel at the time when Jesus lived on earth saw Abraham as their father. Secondly, Abraham is important in the people of the Islamic religion. Muslims believe that Abraham is the father of their religion as well. Thirdly, Abraham is an example to us as a person who believed in God and whose belief in God impacted the way he lived. We read in Romans 15:4

<sup>4</sup> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

What was written about Abraham was written to teach us, those who would follow much, much later. What happened to Abraham will help us as we go through this life as followers of God.

Last week Philip introduced us to Abram and the time when he went to Egypt. While in Egypt, he was afraid for his life because he thought that they would kill

him in order to take his wife Sarai. He and Sarai agreed to lie about things and say that they were brother and sister. If you remember, they found that God was faithful in protecting them and completely trustworthy.

This week we are looking at chapter 14 of Genesis. Abram and Sarai, their company of people, and some allies from the people called the Amorites were living near present day Jerusalem. However, Abram's nephew Lot and his family were not with them – they had separated ways and were living in the city of Sodom. There were several kings to the east who had attacked and conquered several cities to the west, including the city of Sodom where Lot was living. After a few years, the kings of the cities of the west tried to rebel but only to be defeated by the kings of the east. In the battle, the kings from the east came to the city of Sodom where Abram's nephew Lot and his family were living. They took Lot and his family and many valuable possessions from the city. Here is where we will pick up the story in verse 13.

Read Genesis 14:13-24.

This interesting and unique passage paints a picture of three main characters – we might refer to them as an obedient hero, a mysterious priest, and an ungrateful king.

An obedient hero – Compared to what we heard about him last week, Abram now seems like a hero who is not afraid to risk his life to do what needs to be done. In verses 14 and 15 we read that Abram took immediate action when he heard that his nephew had been taken captive. Abram was living near Jerusalem along with allies from among the Amorite people. He took 318 of his trained men and probably his allies as well and pursued the army that had taken his nephew Lot and his family, along with other people and goods from Sodom. They had to travel from near Jerusalem all the way to Dan and beyond. By means of a strategic, surprise attack, they defeated the enemy and rescued all the people and all the goods that had been taken from Sodom.

Abram readily made a decision to rescue his nephew Lot and his family, even if it meant putting his own life in danger and the lives of those in his company. It seems that he is beginning to realize that God is trustworthy. Abram will still fail and show his doubts later on in Genesis, but for now, he is acting in a way that shows that he understands God's power and trustworthiness. In these events we see that Abram's trust in God affected what he did with his life and what he did with his possessions.

Abram saw a need – his nephew and family were taken as prisoners – he made a plan to rescue this family who was lost, and he took action to save those who were lost. He spared no expense. How are we at doing in saving the lost? Do we act like Abram – see a need and in obedience to God, go to save the lost? Or am I content to stay where it is safe? Abram could have let things go. Lot had chosen to live in Sodom. We didn't read this, but in the previous chapter we are told that Abram and Lot separated – Abram let Lot chose where he wanted to go and Lot unwisely chose to live in Sodom. Abram could have thought – he got what he deserved – I knew that was not the wise thing to do. But Abram didn't seem to entertain that thought at all – instead, he risked his life to save Lot and his family.

What about us? We should be challenged to do the same – to trust God enough to obey His leading, even when it seems risky. And, like Abram pursuing his lost nephew and family, we should hear the call to pursue the lost, those who have not yet come to trust in God.

The second person of interest in this story is a mysterious priest. When Abram comes back home after rescuing Lot and his family, he is met by two kings: one, the king of Sodom and one, a king by the name of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was the king of a city called Salem, a city many believe eventually became known as Jerusalem. Melchizedek was also called a priest of the Most High God. We really know very little about Melchizedek – he is only mentioned here, and in two other places - Psalm 110 and Hebrews 5 - 7 – both of which refer to this event.

In Psalm 110 we read:

Ps 110:4 The LORD has sworn  
and will not change his mind:  
“You are a priest forever,  
in the order of Melchizedek.” (NIV)

And in Hebrews 7 we read:

Heb 7:1 This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him,

Heb 7:4 Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! (NIV)

What made Melchizedek so important? I believe the answer lies in what Melchizedek says to Abram and what Abram does in return. When they meet, Melchizedek blesses Abram saying:

“Blessed be Abram of God Most High  
Possessor of heaven and earth;  
And blessed by God Most High  
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” (NIV)

Melchizedek recognized that God had protected Abram and enabled him to gain back the people and possessions that had been stolen by the kings of the east – probably with a much smaller fighting force. Melchizedek realizes God’s blessing on Abram and pronounces a blessing on him. In Hebrews 7:7 it says that the lesser person is blessed by the greater – Melchizedek was greater in rank than Abram.

After Melchizedek blesses him, Abram gives a tithe, or one tenth, of the recaptured goods to Melchizedek. Again from Hebrews 7, it implies that Abram gave Melchizedek the top 10 percent – the best of all that had been regained from the enemy. In the culture of the day, this was a relatively common way of showing honor to both kings and to religious leaders that were above you. Abram recognized Melchizedek’s greatness and that he was worthy of honor. We are not told any more about Melchizedek – maybe Abram knew him for they lived fairly close together. But what makes this event interesting and important is Abram’s response to Melchizedek.

What does this tell us about how we should live as a follower of God, a disciple of Jesus? I believe that Abram demonstrated the use of possessions in worshiping God. Abram had just been blessed by God with victory over the attacking enemies, the recovery of Lot and his family, and the recovery of the possessions that had been stolen by the enemy. He could have kept all the possessions, but he first gave one-tenth to God as an offering of worship. In fact, the verses in Hebrews imply that Abram gave Melchizedek the best ten percent. But you can't just give material things to God – the only way to give it was to give it to the priest who was serving God. This is the first demonstration of giving a tithe, one-tenth, of one's income to God. This message then seen throughout the Bible.

A lesson for us – Giving a tenth is still a good principle to live by – it is putting God before everything else and showing that we are trusting in His provision. We are called to worship God with everything, including our possessions.

The third person of interest in this story is the king of Sodom. We are told that his name is Bera in verse 2, but his name is not mentioned again nor are we really given any more information about him. However, we can learn something about his character from what he does and says. First, he was one of the kings who fled before the enemy – not much of a courageous leader compared to Abram. Second, he seems to show contempt by the way he speaks to Abram. He says to Abram: "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself." It might seem that he was being gracious in letting Abram take the goods that were recovered, but there seems to be no expression of gratitude. In fact the first thing he says is "give me." One would think that the king of Sodom would nearly kiss the feet of Abram – he rescued his people and possessions. There seems to be a significant difference between Bera and Abram, maybe even contempt on the part of Bera.

However, Abram acts wisely with Bera - he returns the remaining goods to the King of Sodom, not to honor the king, but to keep his integrity. Abram probably realized two things. First, God was his provider – he didn't need to take possessions from a defeated king. God had shown himself to be faithful in protecting and providing for Abram. Second, if Abram had taken the goods from Bera, there would always be an issue between them. Later, Bera could say – Abram became rich because he took our possessions; or, Abram, you owe me because of what you took from me, and so on. Abram, wisely knew that it would be best to not be indebted to an evil king.

A lesson for us – Like Abram, we need to act with wisdom and integrity with those around us. We must avoid any attempt of making money in any way that is completely honest. We need to be cautious in making deals and agreements with others. And like Abram, we need to trust God to provide for our needs.

Summary challenge: 1) Plan and act on saving the lost – like Abram, we need to hear the call to pursue the lost and to go. 2) Worship God with our possessions – like Abram, we need to worship God with our possessions and give Him our best. 3) Act with integrity with those around us – like Abram, we need to act with wisdom and integrity with those around us.