

LESSON 11

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

CHAPTERS 13 & 14

INTRODUCTION

God had put Abraham's faith to the test. He had been called to leave his country, kindred and family to a land, which God had promised him. When he arrived in Canaan, the land was already inhabited by the Canaanites. Then a famine broke out in the land and he fled to Egypt. In Egypt, fearing for his own life because of Sarah his wife, he told a lie to protect himself. When Pharaoh found out, he could have executed him but God intervened. That action by Pharaoh would have thwarted His divine plan. Subsequently, Abraham returned to Canaan.

The events in chapters 13 and 14 showed that Abraham's faith had strengthened. His faith in the LORD had helped him to resolve a conflict with his nephew Lot. His victory against the four northern kings further increased his faith and trust in the LORD. These two chapters show how the LORD worked in and through Abraham to cause him to have faith in Him and to trust Him completely. The two chapters can be divided into the following sections:

- 1) Abraham returned from Egypt to Bethel a very rich man (13:1-4);
- 2) A conflict arose between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen (13:5-7).
- 3) Abraham generously settled strife with Lot (13:8-13);
- 4) The LORD encouraged Abraham by reaffirming His promise to Abraham (13:14-18);
- 5) Four northern kings also took Lot captive when they put down a rebellion by five southern kings (14:1-12);
- 6) Abraham rescued Lot from his captors (14:13-16);
- 7) Abraham met Melchizedek, the king of Salem, and the king of Sodom (14:17-24).

STUDY THE WORD

Abraham Returns to Canaan

Abraham returned from Egypt with Sarah, and his nephew, Lot, and with all his people and possessions. Contrary to general opinion, God's people can enjoy prosperity. Abraham returned to Canaan a very wealthy man. He went to the place where he had first built an altar unto the LORD, that was, Bethel. There he worshipped the LORD and called upon His Name. This second visit to Bethel suggests a renewal of his trust in God's promises and provisions after his bad experience in Egypt. His relationship with God had to be put right. Abraham was slowly but surely learning the way of faith.

Abraham Refrains from Striving with Lot

Once his relationship with God had been renewed, there arose strife between his herdsmen and Lot's. Abraham and Lot both grew very rich and the land was not able to support their livestock – sheep, cattle, herdsmen, and their tents. Moreover, the Canaanites and the Perizzites were living there too, probably settled in the more fertile plains. Once again, Abraham's faith was being put to the test. The implication that the land could not sustain them seemed to threaten God's promise of the land. How Abraham settled the dispute between him and Lot is most exemplary. Abraham behaved most unselfishly. He gave Lot the first choice of the stretches of land. As Lot's uncle and the Patriarch of the group, Abraham had the right to make his choice first. He had the right to settle anywhere he chose to, and to tell Lot to settle elsewhere. But he chose not to. Instead he let Lot choose first. The situation was touchy. It is significant that the text emphasizes Abraham's reason in solving the difficult situation. He would not strive with Lot. He told Lot *for we are brethren* (13:8). There should be no strife between them. Abraham treasured the common bond of their relationship. It meant something to him to the extent of sacrificing the better part of the land for his nephew. It was worth strengthening the bond. He cared for his nephew Lot. He was unlike Cain who killed his own brother. It is not proper for brethren to quarrel over such things. Abraham was learning the lesson of faith and trust in the LORD.

Lot saw that the plains of Jordan were well watered and fertile but they were near the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These two cities were like the Garden of Eden and like the land of Egypt. Lot and his family and servants could live a life of ease, comfort and convenience. Lot was guided more by sight and outward appearance of the place. Sight can be deceiving. How Eve was similarly deceived! He probably did not know that the Sodomites were wicked and sinful people. He was deceived by the appearance of the fertility of the land. Walking by sight in life can be dangerous and deceptive.

The Lord Encourages Abraham

Immediately, the LORD spoke to Abraham. The LORD reassured him by reiterating His promise to him. This time the LORD elaborated on His promise. The LORD urged him to claim the land as He had promised him: *Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee* (13:17). The LORD promised him *all the land* (13:15) and not part of it. The LORD also promised that his descendants would number as many as the dust of the earth (a hyperbolic expression meaning countless). Abraham now had to walk in faith believing that wherever he walked, that piece of real estate would be his and his descendants. In other words what Abraham needed to do was to claim by walking in faith and enjoy the gift that God promised him! Similarly, God relates with Christians in the New Testament in like

manner for we already have been blessed with spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). It behoves us to walk in faith and claim the gifts and blessings of God. Abraham responded by removing his tent and settled in the south in the plains of Mamre, in Hebron. There he built another altar unto the LORD. His faith in the LORD was increasing. He worshipped the LORD. It was appropriate and it intimates his claim of the area as the LORD's gift for him and his posterity.

The Kings of the North Declare War against the Kings of Sodom & Gomorrah

Another test of Abraham's faith was coming soon. The kings of the south had been subservient to the kings of the north. The southern kings had been paying tribute to their masters in the north. But after paying for twelve years, the five kings of the south rebelled by stopping to pay tribute money. This caused the kings of the north to attack the kings in the south. The northern kings were victorious and both the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were defeated. The victors plundered the twin cities. They took Lot captive. The Promised Land was being threatened by this sudden invasion from the north. An escapee of the war reported to Abraham that Lot was taken captive. The text states that Lot had dwelt *in* Sodom. Evidently, Lot had shifted from living *near* Sodom to living *in* Sodom. This could suggest that if Lot had not moved into Sodom, he might not have been captured and Abraham would not

have to be involved in the war.¹ But the wrath of man brings about praise of the LORD God Almighty (Psalm 76:10).

Abraham's response was once again magnanimous. He could have let the situation to remain as it was. But he did no such thing. Instead he mustered his trained men, three hundred and eighteen of them, and together with his three allies, Aner, Eschol and Mamre, he pursued the invaders. He defeated them and rescued Lot. Abraham used all the resources he had and all the help that was available to him. Trusting and believing in God's promises do not negate a believer's duty and responsibility from playing his natural and necessary part. Nevertheless, Abraham moved out in faith for God had promised him the land. Abraham needed to be strong and courageous and to act on the basis of his faith in God.

King Melchizedek Meets Abraham

The appearance of Melchizedek is unannounced. He is suddenly introduced as the king of Salem. His name is a compound of two words, meaning, "king" and "righteousness," hence the king of righteousness. And Salem was the ancient

¹ Notice that the Abraham was called "the Hebrew." This is the first time "Hebrew" is used here. Its meaning is "the one from beyond." It smacks of a derogatory term describing one who does not belong to the place or country. He is an outsider and unwelcome. The name "Hebrew" stuck, for Joseph was called a Hebrew (39:14) and by that time the name became to be used to refer to the descendants of Abraham as an ethnic group, the Hebrews.

name of Jerusalem.² The name Salem means “peace.” Linking these two ideas, “righteousness” and “peace,” there can only be peace when there is righteousness.³ He is described here as *the priest of the Most High God* (14:18). In the book of Hebrews Melchizedek is pictured as foreshadowing the Lord Jesus Christ as King and Priest of the Most High God.⁴

Melchizedek came out to meet Abraham and offered him *bread and wine*. The giving of refreshment was for the tired soldiers and also for them to celebrate their victory. The battle must have been fierce. He blessed Abraham in the name of the Most High God and ascribed Abraham’s victory to the Most High God, the Creator of heaven and earth (14:20). The fact that Abraham gave him tithes of all the goods, after Melchizedek blessed him, shows that he had found another brother who believed in the same God as he. The blessings Abraham received had inspired and encouraged him with regard to the promises of God to him. God’s promises to Abraham were sure and would be fulfilled in His time.

The King of Sodom Meets Abraham

The King of Sodom came out to meet Abraham. The King of Sodom was of

a different character than that of Melchizedek. He told Abraham to return his people to him and he would give the goods to him (14:21). He got the audacity to order Abraham, *give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself* (14:21). The two verbs, *give* and *take* are in the imperative mood. Abraham had defeated the invaders and rescued captives and the goods. At least, the king of Sodom should have shown some measure of appreciation and humility towards Abraham. Abraham’s men were tired after the war. Melchizedek behaved commendably well. But the king of Sodom behaved proudly by initiating a bargain. Once again Abraham’s true and good character emerged. Abraham had already made up in his mind to return the people together with their goods to the king of Sodom. Abraham clearly and categorically told the king of Sodom that he had himself looked up to the Most High God, the *possessor* of heaven and earth, for all needs and provisions (14:22). And he would not take as much as a shoe lace from him, meaning nothing, so that the king of Sodom could not boast that he had made Abraham rich. This attitude and action of Abraham demonstrated his love and loyalty to the LORD God. He had complete trust in the ability of the LORD to provide him for all his needs. While he allowed the others and his allies to take their share of the rewards he himself abstained. Abraham’s faith had come full circle. Each time the promises of God were threatened, he had fared well and his faith was strengthened.

² Psalm 76:2 *In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.* Zion is another name for Jerusalem.

³ Joyce G. Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis: 12-50*, p.47.

⁴ Hebrews 6:20 *Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

PRACTICAL VALUE

Abraham was very rich and he was a child of God. It means that a rich man can be a born-again child of God. But we need to heed the danger that in our desire to be rich, we might fall into temptation and snares, and compromise our faith (1 Timothy 6:9, 10). When we are rich we should acknowledge God's grace and goodness, and to appropriately return what He has given to us for the advancement of His kingdom. Abraham showed what he could do with the blessings that God had bestowed upon him. He used them to rescue his nephew Lot who was taken captive by the enemies.

When we make choices in life, we should not be attracted merely at what we see. Unlike Lot, we should consider other factors. While the plains were fertile with beautiful palm trees, the inhabitants in these places should be a more important factor to be seriously considered. Lot at first lived near the city of Sodom, and later he moved and lived in the city. The spiritual downward influence of such an action is most telling. We should be wiser and always make choices that would please God. What are the benefits of gaining and enjoying a lot of earthly things and lose the life, joy and peace God has intended for us? Let us be wise.

There will always be situations in life in which our faith in God will be tested. Famine happened in the land, and Abraham was tested. He was further tested when he feared for his life in Egypt. In these circumstances Abraham learned to have a faith and trust in the LORD God. We see this when he took his men, who were obviously much less in number than

the armies of the northern kings to rescue Lot and his family. While we should always have faith and trust in the LORD, we should learn from our mistakes by discerning the grace and mercy of God in delivering us from dire circumstances.

In these two chapters, Abraham showed some exemplary characteristics of his relation with Lot. He gave Lot the first choice of the land which God had promised him. He took second best. When Lot was taken captive, he risked his life and the lives of his men to rescue Lot. He could have taken a why-should-I-care attitude. But he did not, and in that he displayed a magnanimous heart. And the reason he gave was that he treated Lot as part of him – *for we be brethren*. Should we not do the same to our fellow Christian brethren? If we practise such Christ-like traits in the church, what a beautiful and wonderful community of believers it would be! Let's do it for it honours and glorifies God.

One more lesson we can learn is from Abraham's ways in dealing with others outside the kingdom of God. He would not take any booty, which he recovered from the war, and which belonged to the Sodomites. He returned everything to them although by virtue of the fact that he won the war he was entitled to take them. But he returned all to the king of Sodom saying that he could be charged that the king had enriched him. Abraham said that he had lifted his hand unto the LORD the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth. For this reason many Christians do not appeal to unbelievers for any form of help in the work of God. AMEN