



# *Believe*

STORIES OF FAITH  
FROM FATHER ABRAHAM

PART 1

WRITTEN BY DR. STEVE JONES

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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Review the context and big picture every week – The goal of a book study is not just to learn each individual lesson, but to build understanding of the Bible, how it fits together, and how to study it.

Try not to use this guide as a script. The purpose of this material isn't to give you exactly what to say. Rather it is to give you the content you need to structure and develop your own lessons. Teach as much as you feel is important for your class. Feel free to go off topic if your own study leads you to approach the passage in a slightly different direction.

Don't feel like you have to cover everything. There is a lot of material in each lesson. Some classes like to cover a lot of ground. Other classes like to camp on one point and drill deep. Start by teaching the Main Point, then teach the Main Bullet Points. Use the extra detail and discussion questions as you see fit. The goal is to generate discussion, specifically regarding life-application. So don't worry if you don't get all the way through a lesson.

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# LESSON 1 | THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

## GENESIS 12:1-3

Most people see the apparent division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments. But there is another important division to understand. It occurs in Genesis between chapters 11 and 12. The first eleven chapters of Genesis describe the creation of everything and the fall of man. It shows us the origin of the problem that humanity and all creation is in. In chapter 12, the story of God's great rescue plan begins. This plan culminates in the coming of Jesus, His death, and his resurrection. It is a plan that still waits for its final consummation when Jesus returns and all creation is restored. This grand plan starts with the call of one man, Abraham.

Another standard division people see in the Bible is between Law and Faith. They see the primary attribute of the Old Testament as the giving of the Law, so the focus of the Old Testament is on obedience, punishment, and judgment, while the New Testament emphasizes forgiveness, love, and grace. This division is misleading. The Law is given in the Old Testament. God's judgment on Israel for disobeying the Law is also present in the Old Testament, but the Old Testament is equally full of God's love and devotion to the people of Israel.

One of the most important Old Testament verses repeated in the New Testament is Genesis 15:6, "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." Abraham believed God. God credited that to Abraham as righteousness. Paul repeats this verse in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6. He does so to remind his readers, both Jews, and Gentiles, that faith came first. God's primary goal is for us to believe Him more than our sinful desires, worldly promises, and the enemy's threats. That is why Paul writes in Galatians 3:7, "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham."

In this series, we will look closely at Father Abraham's life. He is celebrated in Hebrews 11 as a great hero and example of faith. Sometimes, though, the stories of his faithfulness can make it seem like our own faith is so weak and small by comparison. The truth is, though, that faith is not an on-off switch. It is a muscle. It gets stronger the more that we use it. In fact, as we look at the story of Abraham, we will see not just the successes but also the failures of Abraham as he learns to believe God. My hope is that as we do so,

we will gain confidence in our own life of faith, confidence to persevere, confidence to keep going, confidence to trust God and not ourselves. The goal of faith is so simple to say but so hard to do. Faith simply means to Believe, hence the title of this series.

Our first lesson is on the call of God. God called Abraham. God still calls us. It's an invitation to life, but to embrace the life God has for us, we often have to lay down important parts of what we are used to. Today we will look at the Call of Abraham, understand what He was invited to pursue, and what He had to lay down to do so. Hopefully, we will learn more about what God is calling us to and what we have to do to believe him and follow.

### **The Call of God is Painful (v1a) – Go Forth**

The first aspect of God's call is that it frequently is a call to move beyond our comfort zone. Before God tells Abraham where he is supposed to go or what he will do, God tells Abraham what he will have to give up. In Verse 1a, God says to Abraham, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives, And from your father's house."

We live in a fragmented and mobile society. We are used to living by ourselves away from our families. But this is an entirely recent and entirely Western phenomenon. Most people throughout time and throughout the world today live in family groups. Family came first. Family was your security net. Family was your world. To be asked to leave your family would be like death. But that is what God's call is like. That is what it is always like. Jesus says in Matthew 16:24-25, "24 If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

The call of God is hard. He knows it. That is why He mentions it first. He knows what He is asking you to leave behind. But He knows that you must be willing to lose your current life to find the life He has for you. German Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer summed it up this way, "When God calls a man, He bids him come and die."

### **The Call of God Is Personal (V1b) – I Will Show You**

One of the initially most challenging aspects of God's call is that He rarely tells you exactly where you are going. If we are asked to leave our comfort zone, we expect to know where and what our new comfort zone will be. We expect God to give us a road map of the next steps. But that is not what God does. In Verse 1b, God gives Abraham what many of us would describe as an unsatisfactory description of the destination. "To the land which I will show you." God doesn't tell Abraham where he is going. He only tells Abraham that He promises to lead him continually.

You see, God's call is personal. He invites us not to approve a plan but to enter into a relationship with him. I heard a preacher say once that God leads like headlights, not a roadmap. Headlights don't show you the whole path. They only shine 50 feet ahead of us at a time. But if you follow them, they will take you where you want to go.

This is how God always leads His people. He leads us personally. Psalm 32:8 says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you." Why does God lead this way? Perhaps because if He told us exactly where we were headed, we would trust the plan, not Him. Perhaps we would think we could do it without Him. Perhaps we would hesitate or refuse when we saw all the twists and turns involved. For whatever reason, God's personal method of leading might be frustrating when we want to know the destination, but it provides great comfort when you realize that this means He goes with us and will "never leave us or forsake us." (Deut. 31:8).

### **The Call of God Is For Prosperity (V2) – *I Will Bless You***

In verse 2, Abraham says, "And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing." The specific details of this calling are specific to Abraham. It tells of the grand plan that starts with Abraham. He will give Abraham a new family, and from that family, He will build a great nation. Even in these details, He doesn't tell Abraham the whole story. He just tells him that God's plan is a good one. God reassures Abraham that his plans are intended to both bless him and bless others through him.

It is essential to remember that when God calls us to forsake our comfort zone and venture out, not knowing where we are going, He isn't doing so to break us or destroy us. As God later tells the people through the prophet Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 29:11, "I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope." We serve a God who makes good plans. They are to give us hope and a future. Even when we don't understand where we are going or how our road ends well, he reminds us that the plans He makes are for His glory and our good.

### **Call of God is For Your Protection V3a – *I Will Bless/Curse***

One of the reasons people choose not to believe God is because what God is calling them to doesn't feel "safe." They are worried that it won't work out. But God's call involved his promise of protection. In Verse 3a, God tells Abraham, "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse."

This doesn't mean that you will never experience hardships or challenges. The rest of the Bible contains story after story of people who found themselves in challenging circumstances and chose to believe God instead of their fear. Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; God didn't save them from being thrown into the fiery furnace. He was with them and protected them in the midst of it. Psalm 23:5 says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." It doesn't say that we won't have enemies. It says that God will be with us. As Paul writes in Romans 8:31, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?"

Contrast this with the people of Israel leaving slavery in Egypt. They have seen God do amazing things, yet when times get hard, they grumble to Moses and God in Exodus 14:11, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt?" When times were hard, they refused to believe God promised to protect them.

### **The Call of God is Expansive v3b – *The Earth Will Be Blessed***

The final statement in God's call to Abraham provides a window into the scope of the plan in which God calls Abraham to be involved. Verse 3b says, "And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." God's plan for Abraham will be one that the whole world will ultimately benefit from. The plan means the undoing of all the adverse effects of the first 11 chapters of Genesis. But it starts with Abraham and Abraham deciding to believe God and follow Him into the unknown.

Though we might not be in the same exact position that Abraham is in, the truth is that God's call to a person is always intended for more than just that person. He calls us because He wants us to be a part of His grand plan that is still unfolding. In fact, God calling us into His kingdom is a part of His fulfilling the promise He made to Abraham. When we receive Jesus, we are one person blessed through Abraham. And every person God brings into His kingdom through us is one more person blessed by God through Abraham.

As Psalm 71:17-18 says, "17 O God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still declare Your wondrous deeds. 18 And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come." The writer of this Psalm has experienced the tremendous blessing of God, but he doesn't want it to stop with him. He wants to live into old age, not for selfish reasons, but so that he can declare the faithfulness of God to the next generation.

## **CONCLUSION**

God called Abraham to be a part of His amazing plan to redeem and restore His good by fallen creation. He calls us as well to be a part of that plan. It's a plan that will cause us pain as He moves us out of what we find comfortable and familiar. But if we are willing to believe Him, we find that we have the personal leadership of a God who promises to bless, protect, and include us in his grand plan that is coming true.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is the division of the Bible that ends in Genesis 11 and begins in Genesis 12?
2. What does it mean that God's call is painful? What pain was Abraham called to endure? What pain do we sometimes try to avoid by refusing to believe God and follow Him?
3. What does it mean that God's call is personal? Why do we sometimes prefer God to tell us the whole plan beforehand? Why do you think God doesn't work that way? What is challenging about being led this way?
4. What does it mean that God's call offers protection? How do we sometimes doubt God's protection? Who are some people in the Bible who doubted God's protection? Who are some people who embraced it and chose to follow Him even when it was hard?
5. What does it mean that God's call is expansive? What did God promise to do through Abraham? How do we sometimes approach God's call and his blessings selfishly?



## LESSON 2 | ABRAHAM AND PHAROAH

### GENESIS 12:4 - 13:4

When I first moved to Houston, I loved learning about the History of the space program. Since “Houston” was the first word spoken from the moon, this city takes its role in space flight seriously. I remember visiting Johnson Space Center with my kids and seeing one of the capsules used for the Apollo program. What stood out to me was how black and charred the bottom was. The exhibit highlighted what the capsule’s bottom was comprised of. Getting people off the planet may be difficult, but returning them to Earth is dangerous.

Reentry is the term used to refer to the spacecraft moving from the vacuum of space into the atmosphere of Earth. As it does so, the capsule moves so fast that the air in front of it becomes compressed and heated to almost 3000 degrees Fahrenheit.

What is true for space flight is also true for human life. Reentry is hard work. Whether it is coming back from vacation, a honeymoon, or a retreat, when we return from a time of peaceful reflection and personal connection with God and others, it is hard to reenter life with all its complications and potholes. Maybe it was your first fight as a married couple after returning from a fantastic honeymoon. Maybe it was when you returned from church camp with renewed vigor and excitement about your faith only to discover that everybody else was still the same and your life hadn’t changed.

The comforting thing about that situation is that you are not alone. This is the nature of human life. Honeymoons, retreats, and things like that are mountaintop experiences intentionally separated from “real life” so that you can make important decisions and practice in a more manageable situation. Heading back into the valley of real life doesn’t mean your experiences and decisions weren’t real. You just have to learn to live them out in complicated, difficult real-life situations.

Heavyweight champion Mike Tyson famously said, “Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.” The enemy waits for us to reenter life and then “punches” us in the face with reality. Handling that attack is important for learning to persevere and become the people God wants us to be.

Today we are going to look at Abraham's story of "reentry." God has called him into an amazing plan. And he obeys. Everything is going well, then life heats us, and he makes some really poor choices before eventually getting things back on track. I hope that as we study Abraham's story, we will better understand what to do when life punches us in the face, and we respond poorly. Faith is not a life of perpetual success but rather a life of learning to pick ourselves up when we fail. It was true of Abraham. It will be true of us.

### **Abraham Leaves (12:4-10)**

Abraham's initial response to God's call is impressive. He responds in obedience, and things couldn't be better. Verses 4-6 tell the story of Abraham packing up everything he owns and heading in the direction God tells him to go. Abraham makes it to Shechem, a town in the hill country, about halfway between Galilee and Jerusalem. The end of verse 6 contains the first hint of trouble: "Now the Canaanite was then in the land." The land isn't empty. But that doesn't stop Abraham because he has another amazing experience with God.

Verse 7 says, "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him." Amid opposition, Abraham received confirmation that he was looking at the land God promised him and his family. He again responds with obedience. He symbolically claims the land by building an altar there. He continues on his journey. When he arrives further south near Bethel, verse 8 says, "he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD." Abraham is walking by faith and worshiping along the way.

In verse 10, things change. "Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land."

Life gets hard. So Abraham decides to leave the land God had just promised to give him. It might sound like a reasonable thing to do given the famine, but it does seem odd. It seems less like Abraham is walking by faith and more like he is reverting back to trusting himself and not God. He doesn't call on the name of the Lord about this. He doesn't ask God what to do. He stops building altars, and as we will see next, he starts sinning to try to provide for his family and protect himself. He considers every factor except for God's promises. He heads to Egypt on his own initiative.

No. This isn't Abraham being wise. Abraham's faith is being tested by a famine....and he fails.

### **Abraham Lies (v11-13)**

Going to Egypt doesn't solve Abraham's problems. It just creates new ones. In verses 11b-12, Abraham says to his wife 11 "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live."

Abraham's statement seems odd. Was Sarah not beautiful before? Some have argued that because Egypt was so hot and dry, Egyptian women had a reputation for having dry, leathery complexions. I don't doubt Sarah's beauty, but I think this is more about Abraham. He finds a solution to his famine issue, but now he is worried about dying a different way. Once you start walking in worry instead of faith, you see a million problems.

He has forgotten that God has promised to bless and protect him, so he takes matters into his own hands again. He asks Sarah to play fast and loose with the truth. Verse 13 says, "Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you." As Genesis 11:29 and Genesis 20:12 make clear, Sarah is Abraham's half-sister. This is not technically false. But sin frequently finds a way into our lives through the word "technically."

What was Abraham's goal in this lie? Was he hoping to see his wife's honor to keep himself safe? Probably not. He was probably hoping to set up a situation where if someone were attracted to her, they would come to him as a brother and try to negotiate a marriage. This would allow him to dissuade them from trying to marry her or give him a chance to escape before they tried to claim her.

Unfortunately for Abraham and Sarah, the lie, as we should expect, doesn't work because a person who doesn't need to negotiate enters the running for Sarah's hand.

### **Abraham Loses (12:14-20)**

Everything happens the way Abraham predicts. They get to Egypt. People think his wife is beautiful. But then something happens that they weren't expecting. Verse 15 says, "Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house." Pharaoh was impressed by the beauty of Sarah. The problem is that Pharaoh doesn't ask or negotiate. He takes. Sarah is taken from Abraham and added to the harem of royal wives. Pharaoh does recompense Abraham. Verse 16 says, "he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels."

Abraham is rich but wifeless. He has placed himself in a spot where he is separated from God's plan. He has removed himself from the land of promise. Now he can't have any children without a wife. And there is nothing Abraham can do about it.

Fortunately, just when the story looks like it's over before it's begun, verse 17 contains the phrase that is the turning point in so many stories in Scripture: "But the Lord." When it seems like we have broken God's plan and got ourselves so stuck that we don't know what to do, God intervenes and gets the story back on track. The rest of verse 17 says, "But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife." It's a powerful picture of what sin does to us. God promised to bless others through Abraham. Now, because of sin, Abraham is a person who brings trouble instead of blessing to others. This also shows us that no matter how much we think our sin is our own business, it always has a way of negatively affecting others.

We aren't told how Pharaoh figured it out, but he tells Abraham in verses 18-19, "18 What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go."

God gets Pharaoh to make Abraham do what Abraham wouldn't do on his own. Verse 20 says, "Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him." He is forcibly escorted out of Egypt and sent back to the Promised Land against his will.

### **Abraham Learns (13:1-4)**

If that is where the story ended, it would be a bummer. Fortunately, it's not. Remember, the chapter and verse breaks in Scripture were added later. This episode in Abraham's life ends not at the end of chapter 12 but in the first four verses of chapter 13.

Verse 1 tells the story of Abraham reentering the Promised Land, "So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him." It doesn't describe his attitude, but he must have been discouraged. He had doubted God. He had lied to protect himself. He had married his wife off to Pharaoh. He had gotten kicked out of the land he fled to for safety. Now he was headed back to the land he had left because of the famine, but this time he had more mouths to feed. Verse 2 says, "Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold." This sounds like a blessing, but Abraham is probably carrying it more like a burden.

I wonder if he worried that he had ruined God's plan. I wonder if he wondered if God was through with him. Fortunately, Abraham comes to his senses, returns to where it all went

wrong and starts all over. Verses 3-4 tell us, “3 He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, 4 to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.”

He is in the same land, still plagued by the same famine, surrounded by the same enemies. But this time, Abraham seems to have learned his lesson. The promises of God are intended for hard times like this. This is the last place that Abraham called on the name of the Lord, so Abraham goes back to this place and calls on God again. He renewed his commitment to walk by faith, trusting God instead of his fears.

### **APPLICATION**

There are several things worth mentioning as we learn from Abraham how to believe God and walk by faith.

**1. Trusting God is a Process** – We sometimes expect that once we follow Jesus, we will make smooth linear progression along an upward path. But that is not the case. We will stumble, we will fall, we will doubt. This doesn’t excuse our sin. But it reminds us that God isn’t expecting us to be perfect. We are learning to trust God. God knows we are learning. He is putting us in situations where we have the opportunity to trust Him more so that we can build our faith muscles. We won’t always choose well. When we fail, we have to remind ourselves to get out and keep going.

**2. Trust God to Pick You Up** – One of the lies the enemy tells us when we stumble into sin is that God won’t take us back. We created this problem, and we are stuck in it. The whole story of Scripture is the constant message that God is coming to rescue us from the mess we made. God factored in your sin and stupidity when He wrote the plan for your life. When we feel stuck in sin, trapped by our own choices, and don’t see a way out, we can trust God to pick us up and put us back on track. That’s what God does for Abraham. He does for Abraham what Abraham couldn’t do for himself. In Genesis 13:4, Abraham finds himself exactly where he was in Genesis 12:8. He can start over and trust God going forward.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Have you ever had difficulty reentering life after a transforming experience? What made it hard? What were you thinking?

2. Why does Abraham leave the promised land? What does Abraham fail to do before He leaves? Have you ever made what looked like a wise decision but was actually a failure to trust God?

3. Was Abraham's lie really a lie? How was it "technically" true? What is wrong with living in the land of "technically?" Have you ever tried to disguise the truth with "technically?"

4. How does Abraham's plan backfire? How does it go from bad to worse? Have you had a plan that started by trying to make a wise decision but kept worsening because you hadn't factored in trusting God's promises?

5. What does it mean that trusting God is a process? What does it mean to trust God to pick us up and get our life back on track? What does God need from us to do that?

## LESSON 3 | ABRAHAM AND LOT

### GENESIS 13

Hoarding. We all think it's weird until we do it. When we see someone else hoarding, we wonder what is wrong with them. Sometimes we say it jokingly. Sometimes we say it seriously. But we all got a taste of what life inside the hoarder's mind felt like when the COVID pandemic struck. All of a sudden, when faced with going without some basic things that we either needed or simply were used to, many of us began stocking up on things to make sure we didn't run out.

Sometimes the fear runs wild, and we buy more than we need. I am not talking about people who stockpile things hoping to profit from other people's lack. I am talking about real people faced with a lack of real products, so they hoard more than they need out of fear.

The product that immediately comes to mind is toilet paper. No one could find it anywhere. People were getting desperate. I read a news story about people meeting in parking lots to do clandestine black-market cash-only deals. I have a big family, so I knew I needed to secure my supply. After figuring out how much toilet paper my family went through on average in a given month, I slowly acquired what I felt was a two-month supply. After I acquired it, I sat back and felt like the foolish man in the Parable Jesus tells in Luke 12:19, "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'"

But then, one day, I was at the store and saw a truck unloading a pallet of toilet paper. I saw people rushing up to it, and immediately my blood pressure rose, and I felt the urgent need to increase my supply. I had what I needed, but I needed more.

It sounds silly to me now and is the source of an easy laugh. But the truth is that my response in that situation is something that I repeat over other issues as well. I worry I won't have enough, so I try to grasp and acquire all I can.

Most people have difficulty defining how much would be "enough." There is a Roman proverb that says, "Chance gives much to some people, but it gives enough to no one." This proverb underscores the basic human need to worry and grasp. Fortunately, we

don't serve the Roman goddess Chance. We serve a God who promises all through scripture in places like Psalm 23:1, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." God promises to provide what we need. We don't need to strive, or grasp, or hoard. We have to trust.

Today we are going to look at a story from the life of Abraham, where he has to deal with the strife caused by lack. He shows us the way to handle difficulties, while Lot shows us how most of us typically respond. Hopefully, this story will inspire us to follow Abraham's example instead of lots.

### **New Problems (v1-7)**

The story starts with Abraham getting back on track after his issues in Egypt. Verse 2 says, "Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold." The word that is translated as "very rich" actually means "heavy with" or "loaded down with." He had abundance, and verse 5 tells us so did his nephew Lot.

Though a blessing, this also constituted a new problem. Verse 6 says, "And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together." They had too much stuff. Their livestock were too numerous. They were overgrazing the land.

The new problem erupts into conflict between the men that Abraham and Lot used to herd their livestock. Verse 7 says, "And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land."

This sounds like a humble brag or a first-world problem. You know what I am talking about. When a person complains about something, that is actually a blessing. We all have had the experience of hearing someone voice a prayer request and thinking, "Man, I would love to have those problems." So yeah, boo hoo. I am so sorry, Abraham, that you are too rich and have too many cattle for the land you are in. Poor baby. Rough life.

But it illustrates that you never really "solve" your problems. You just exchange them for "better problems." Hopefully, this offers some perspective when you are wrestling with your current problems and begin to fantasize about some change in your life that will "fix everything." It won't. There will be some new problem that needs to be solved.

### **New Perspective (v8-9)**

The interesting to note is not the new problem Abraham has, but how he solves it. He is in the same land he left in Chapter 12 because of the famine; this time, he has more



mouths to feed. But what is impressive is that he preserves in the new perspective he has achieved in Egypt. He isn't going to take matters into his own hands or try to get what he feels he needs at the expense of others. Instead, he feels the freedom to trust God.

In verses 8-9, Abraham tells Lot, "8 Please let there be no strife between you and me nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left."

The word for "strife" that Abraham uses can mean "lawsuit" so evidently the situation escalated pretty severely. In the midst of this, Abraham proposes that he and Lot put some distance between the two of them. He takes Lot to the top of the hills that comprise the Judaeen Hill country. He tells Lot to pick one area and whatever area Lot picks, Abraham will take his flocks and head in the opposite direction. This might be the first example of a "this town isn't big enough for the two of us" type of conversation.

One side note. The reference to "left" and "right" are actually North and South on a compass. We are used to having the North on the top of our maps because of the magnetic North Pole and global navigation. But Ancient cultures "oriented" themselves by facing east, towards the rising sun. In fact, the word "oriented" means facing east. Orient comes from a Latin word and means "rising," referring to the rising sun. The word "Orient" means land in the direction of the Rising Sun.

Some people think Abraham's offer is another example of him being reckless and stupid. God promised him the land, and he just about gave it away to Lot. But that is not the case. This is Abraham demonstrating that he realizes God's promises are God's responsibility to carry out. He doesn't need to do God's work for Him. Because He trusts God, he feels free to let Lot choose instead of taking what he felt he deserved or had earned.

### **New Possibilities (v10-13)**

This is where the story takes an interesting turn. Lot doesn't go North or South. He sees a new possibility, but it will not turn out well in the end. Verse 10 says, "Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere—this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar."

Lot looks east into the Jordan River valley and likes what he sees. Genesis underscores the fact that this area is wicked. Everyone knew it. But it was attractive to Lot, and he

desired it. This reads almost like a repeat of how Eve was tempted. Genesis 3:6 says, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”

Lot, like Eve, saw something that looked too good to be passed up. He wondered why it had been forbidden him, so he heads in that direction. We will look more closely at how this decision plays out for Lot. But now, it is enough to point out that Lot hasn't learned the same lesson as Abraham. He is literally going outside the land of God's promise. He is repeating the mistake of going to Egypt, but this time it will be worse. He is playing a dangerous game with sin, which he ultimately will lose.

### **New Promise (v14-18)**

After Lot leaves, God renews His promise to Abraham. Verse 14-15 say, “14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever.”

God renews the promise, but that is not all. God adds a new piece to the puzzle. Verse 16 says, ““I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.” Because Abraham has shown himself to be faithful with a little, he is given a little more. God tells him that He will multiply Abraham's descendants.

He has already told him this same thing, basically, in chapter 12, when He called Abraham. But now he makes explicit the fact that he will have countless descendants. He trusts God. Now God trusts him with a little more of the picture.

That seems to be how God works. As we trust God, we are shown more of the plan and are given more opportunities to trust. Jesus tells his disciples in Mathew 13:12, “For whoever has, to him, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.” Trust God, and He will trust you with more. God gives Abraham a greater window into what He is doing. This piece of information, though helpful, will provide additional opportunities to trust God. It will also allow Abraham to mess up, which he does.

## **APPLICATION**

Looking back over the story, there are a couple of pieces of application that stand out.

**1. Trust God to Guide** – God led Abraham to the promised land. God knew there was a famine. God knew Abraham and his family needed to eat. This time, Abraham trusted that God knew what He was doing. We can go the same. God didn't lead you to where you are so you could realize that He doesn't keep His promises. Trust that God guides. And let Him guide you. Sin is simply all the times we take matters into our own hands because God isn't going get us where we feel like we need to be.

**2. Trust God to Give** – Abraham can let Lot choose because he knows that Lot doesn't hold his fate in his hand. God is in control. God will give Abraham what He needs. We need to learn the same. We need to learn to do the same. Proverbs 30:8-9 says, "8 Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, 9 That I not be full and deny You and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or that I not be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God." The writer asks God to give him what he needs to be who He created him to be. In 2 Corinthians 9:8, Paul writes, " God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." You might not have everything you want. But you can trust God to give you everything you need to do everything He has called you to do.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What does it mean that Abraham has "new problems?" Have you ever thought some choice would "solve all your problems?" What happened instead?
2. What does it mean that "For whoever has, to him more shall be given?" How does it apply in this situation?
3. How is Lot's choice like Eve's? What does it show about their focus? Have you ever been tempted to act that way?
4. What does it mean to trust God to guide you? How does Abraham do this? Why don't we? What do we do instead?
5. What does it mean to trust God to give? How does Abraham do this? Why don't we? What do we do instead?

## LESSON 4 | ABRAHAM AND MELCHIZIDEK

### GENESIS 14

US President Harry Truman once said, “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.” The problem is we do care who gets the credit. When it’s our words, we call it plagiarism. When it’s our ideas, we call it copyright infringement. But we want credit and get upset when we don’t get it.

Have you ever asked yourself why? Why are we so desperate for credit? Part of it is monetary. We want someone else to profit from our work. We would prefer that the reward for our labor went to us. We also don’t want someone else getting promoted or praised for ideas that were taken from us. We want to be promoted. We want to be praised.

Such motivation sounds honest enough until we are in a place where we have to share credit with other people. We all had the experience of working on a group project where we did all the work, and everyone got the grade we earned. But few of us remember all the times we were the people who didn’t do as much as that one guy. What this shows us is that all of us are far too eager to overestimate our own contribution and underestimate others.

Today we are going to look at a story from the life of Abraham, where he does a lot of work, but instead of looking for profit or praise, he places both where it really belongs. He gives both praise and profit to God. He believed God and trusted Him to keep his promises. Perhaps as we study this story, we will grow in our ability to trust God and believe that we don’t have to put ourselves forward or insist on praise or profit because, as Jesus says in Matthew 6:6, “Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

#### **Abraham Rescues (v1-16)**

The next part of Abraham’s life starts with a story about a regional geopolitical conflict. The land Lot had settled in became embroiled in a war and revolt (v1-4). The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah lose and leave the city open to attack (v5-10). The victorious army sacked Sodom and Gomorrah. Verse 11 says, “Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed.”

This would be a minor incident about warring tribes, except for one detail. Verse 12 says, “They also took Lot, Abram’s nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.”

When Abraham discovers that Lot is among the victims, he has a choice to make. He could have said, “I don’t want to get involved.” He could have said, “Lot knew the dangers when he moved to Sodom.” He could have sounded spiritual and said, “I have faith that God will rescue Him.” But he doesn’t. Verse 14 says, “When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.” He assembles a small army and heads toward where they had taken Lot.

You can visit the city of Dan today. It’s called Tel-Dan. It has a gate called the Abrahamic gate because it dates from this period and was, therefore, most likely the gate that Abraham when on his way to rescue Lot.

Abraham is strategic (v15 “he divided his forces”), persistent (v15 “he pursued them”), and ultimately successful. Verse 16 says, “He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and all the other people.”

In rescuing Lot, Abraham demonstrates the faithfulness God has shown him. Abraham has already learned through the episode in Egypt that God rescues us when we make a mess of our lives through sinful and short-sighted choices. So Abraham shows Lot the same faithfulness God has shown him and heads off to rescue him.

### **Abraham Recognizes (v17-20)**

The story might sound over, but it is about to take a turn. On his way home, Abraham has an important meeting. Verses 17-18 say, “17 Then after his return from the [r]defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of [s]God Most High.”

Abraham is coming from the north and heading back south towards Hebron. As he is doing so, he passes through the valley of Shaveh, which the author lets us know is the King’s Valley. The King’s Valley is another name for the Kidron Valley that separates Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. In this valley, He is met by two kings: the king of the city where his relative was living, the King of Sodom; and the king of Salem, where the meeting occurs.

Salem is the original name of Jerusalem. The Israelites added the prefix Jeru at the beginning of Salem because the Jebusites had originally built it. Jebu-salem eventually turned into Jerusalem.

It is the king of Salem, a man named Melchizedek, that is the more important of the two. He is an enigmatic figure who becomes important later in the Old and New Testaments. This passage tells us interesting things about him.

- He is a king. The name of Salem means peace, so He is also “King of Peace.”
- He is also a priest. This is the first occurrence of the word “priest” in the Bible.
- He is worshiping the same God as Abraham. His name for God isn’t the covenant name Yahweh, but rather El Elyon, which means God (El) the Highest (Elyon).
- His name literally translates to King (Melchi) of Righteousness (Zedek).

So the scene about to unfold happens near the site where God would one day have Solomon build his temple. There is already a king there, who is also a priest, and he is worshiping the right God in the right place.

This is why later Jewish writers saw a type of the Messiah in Melchizedek, a symbol of the deliverer that God would send. Psalm 110 is a Messianic Psalm. In Matthew 22:41-46, Jesus references this Psalm and says that it not only points to the Messiah but tells us the Messiah is more than a man. In Verse 4 of Psalm 110, the poet-prophet describes the Messiah in this way, “The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.” The writer of Hebrews also uses this Psalm to see in Melchizedek a prophecy of Jesus. Hebrews 6:19 describes Jesus as “having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

What is necessary for our story is what Melchizedek says to Abraham and what Abraham does in return. Melchizedek gives the credit for Abraham’s success to God. Verses 19-20 say, “19 He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” Melchizedek blesses Abraham, but more importantly, blessed God. The first part of the blessing literally says, “Blessed be Abram BY God Most High.”

Abraham recognizes the truth of what Melchizedek says not just by paying lip service and saying, “Amen, Padre.” Verse 20b says, “He gave him a tenth of all.” This is the first

“tithe” mentioned in the Bible. Abraham sets an example by giving back to God a portion of what he has received to acknowledge God as the ultimate source of the blessing.

Because it only occupies half a verse, it’s easy to overlook the importance of what Abraham does in giving Melchizedek a tithe. Abraham was exhausted. He had marched the entire length of Israel...twice... in search of his captured relative. He had fought a battle in which he was severely outnumbered. He may have even been wounded. Now, he is getting close to home, and probably all he can think about is sleeping in his bed and bathing. Then some guy shows up and says God deserves the credit, not him. The tithe is proof that Abraham really does believe it. Whatever he has done to get Lot back, he still recognizes God’s role in delivering His enemies into his hand.

### **Abraham Refuses (v21-24)**

Now the King of Sodom speaks up. He is the opposite of Melchizedek and Abraham. Melchizedek brought bread and wine. He brings nothing. Melchizedek speaks blessing. The first word out of his mouth is “Gimme.” Verse 21 says, “The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.” The reason they are in this predicament is because of his reckless behavior and cowardice. Now, he sees his “stuff” and wants it back. Even if his request was reasonable (it’s not), the fact that he mentions getting before giving shows that he is ungrateful and self-centered.

Abraham responds to the king of Sodom with an oath. Verse 22 says, “Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth.” Abraham refers to the one he has sworn an oath to as “LORD God Most High.” We might read over it, but the words are significant. He has combined the name of God Melchizedek used, El Elyon (God Most High), with the covenant name of God, Yahweh (LORD). By doing so, he acknowledges that he and Melchizedek worship the same God.

Verse 23 tells us the content of his oath, “I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’” Abraham refuses to take any spoils except for what they have eaten on the road and what the others who served with him deserve (v24).

Why does Abraham reject the King of Sodom’s offer? First, he wants nothing to do with the Sodom. Lot may want to live near the wicked city, but Abraham wants no connection. Second, he doesn’t want the King of Sodom to claim he is the source of Abraham’s blessing. Third, he trusted God, not a wicked King, to give him what he needed.

## **CONCLUSION**

May we learn the lessons from this story that Abraham shows us. May we demonstrate God's faithfulness to others like Abraham did to Lot by going after him, even after his poor choices caused his situation. May we truly recognize that God is the source of our blessing, like Abraham did when he gave God credit for his victory. May we demonstrate our dependence on God by giving back to him a portion of what He has blessed us with. May we refuse to associate with wicked people in the same way that Abraham refuses any connection with the Kingdom of Sodom.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. How does Abraham demonstrate God's faithfulness to Lot? How can we act similarly?
2. What makes Melchizedek such a unique character in this story? How do later Biblical writers refer to him?
3. What is significant about Abraham giving Melchizedek a tithe? Why does tithing make many people uncomfortable?
4. How does the King of Sodom's response to Abraham differ from the King of Salem's? How do we sometimes act like the King of Sodom?
5. Why does Abraham reject the King of Sodom's offer? What would it look like for us to do something similar in our world?



**NOTES:**

**— ABOUT THE AUTHOR —**

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