

Abram Had a Lot to Gain Part 2

This morning we left off our study of Abram and the slaughter of the kings with verse 17 of Genesis chapter 14. Moses writes, saying, ***“After his return from the defeat of Ched-or-laomer 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).”***

It is just at this point that a very remarkable personage is brought before us, namely, Melchizedek. Much has been said and written about him. Many believe the Jewish oral tradition that stated Melchizedek was Shem and a contemporary of Abram’s for a hundred years. Others believe that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate Christ, while some believe he was some kind of celestial being. But whoever or whatever he was, there is one thing we can be certain of, and that is that Melchizedek was a *type of Christ*. This is made clear when the Hebrews writer states in chapter 7:1-4 [RSV]: ***1. For this Melchizedek, King of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; 2. and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, King of Righteousness, and then he is also King of Salem, that is, King of Peace. 3. He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. 4. See how great he is! Abraham the patriarch gave him a tithe of the spoils.***

In the words ***“resembling the Son of God”*** (Hebrews 7:3) we have the key to the mystery which centers around Melchizedek. Melchizedek was a *type of Christ*, and particularly a type of our Lord’s priesthood. There are other points of resemblance which we shall consider below, but the first point of analogy between Melchizedek and the Son of God singled out by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 7 is that he is ***“without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life.”*** This does not mean that Melchizedek was a supernatural, divine being, but that he is presented to us in the Old Testament as being without father or mother in the sense of him not inheriting his office as priest, as occurred under the Law of Moses and the Aaronic priesthood. He was priest because he was righteous. This is showing how Jesus was also to become a priest, not through His being born from the tribe of Levi, which He was not. He was born of the tribe of Levi. But His perfect, sinless life in service to the Father is how He became our Great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. This is another aspect as to how Melchizedek is a type of Christ.

Not only was Melchizedek a type of our Lord in the fact that he is presented to us in Genesis as a priest of the Most High God ***“without father or mother,”*** but also in a number of other important particulars. Melchizedek was also a king. He was the ***“King of Salem,”*** and therefore he was a *royal priest*. In the person

of Melchizedek the offices of priest and king were combined, and thus was he a notable type of our Great High Priest Who according to the flesh was not of the tribe of Levi, but of the tribe of Judah, the *royal* tribe (see Hebrews 7:14). Not only was Melchizedek a type of the royal priesthood of Christ by virtue of his office as King of Salem (which means "peace") but his *name* also had a typical significance. Melchizedek means "**King of Righteousness.**" Here again there is a wonderful and blessed bringing together of things which being out of Christ are barren. Not only did Melchizedek combine in his *person* the offices of king and priest, but in his *titles* he united righteousness and peace. Melchizedek was both King of Righteousness and King of Peace and thus did he foreshadow the blessed result of the cross work of our Lord and Savior, for it was at the cross that "**Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other**" (Psalm 85:10 [RSV]).

Observe the order of mentioning characters in Hebrews 7:2, "**and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, King of Righteousness, and then he is also King of Salem, that is, King of Peace.**" This is ever God's order. God cannot be at peace with guilty rebels until the claims of His throne have been met. Only upon a righteous basis can peace be established. As is recorded in Isaiah 32:17 [RSV], "**And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.**" This principle is unfolded at length in the *Epistle to the Romans*, and particularly in Romans 3:21-26. God's righteousness was "**declared**" at the cross where the Lord Jesus made propitiation and fully satisfied every demand of the holy God. There it is that the great "**work of righteousness**" was accomplished, the effect of which is peace. As it is written, "**and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on Earth or in Heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross**" (Colossians 1:20 [RSV]). The benefits of this accrue to the believer through the channel of faith, as Paul states in Romans 5:1 [RSV]: "**Therefore, since we are justified** (pronounced righteous) **by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**" The same order is found again in Romans 14:17 [RSV]: "**For the Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**"

In Hebrews 7:4 attention is called to the *greatness* of this man Melchizedek, his greatness being recognized and acknowledged by Abraham who "**gave him a tithe.**" In this also he is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, our "**Great High Priest.**" Jesus is the only Priest so denominated in the Scriptures. The greatness of our Lord's priesthood inheres in His intrinsic glory which is in contrast with the feebleness of the perishable priests of the Levitical order who could not save. Two things prominently characterized the Levitical priests: First of all, they were personally unclean, and therefore each high priest needed "**to offer . . . for his own sins**" (Hebrews 7:27 [RSV]); and secondly, they were mortal, and therefore death put an end to their ministrations. Now in contradistinction, not only is our Great High Priest sinless, but He is made "**by**

the power of an indestructible life” (Hebrews 7:16 [RSV]), and hence it is written concerning Christ, ***“Thou art a Priest forever”*** (Hebrews 7:21 [RSV]).

It is important to remark here that it is as a risen and ascended Lord Jesus that He has received the eternal excellency of the Melchizedek title. His never-ending ministry of blessing dates its effectual beginning from the finished work of the cross.

One can hardly fathom the temptation the triumphal return of Abram presented to him. His reception must have been the ancient counterpart to a ticker tape parade in New York City today. If the King of Sodom came out to meet Abram, how much more those people of the city who had given up all hope for the return of their loved ones. If the King of Sodom had some appropriate words for the occasion, he had to wait to say them, for out of nowhere the King of Salem appeared. He brought out some bread and wine and spoke the words Abram most needed to hear: ***“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Maker of Heaven and Earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”*** After hearing this proclamation, Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the spoils.

King Melchizedek of Salem, as has been noted, was a priest of God Most High. Melchizedek is a crucial figure in this account because he put Abram’s victory in proper theological perspective. There was no back slapping, there were no high-fives exchanged, and neither was there any politicking once Melchizedek arrived. Melchizedek was a king and a priest, not a king and a politician. His words were intended to remind Abram that the victory was God’s, and that his success was a direct result of God’s blessing. In effect, Melchizedek’s words were a reminder of the covenant God had made with Abram when He called him from Ur to Canaan: ***1. Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the Earth shall bless themselves.”*** (Genesis 12:1-3 [RSV])

I believe it was providential that Melchizedek’s appearance interrupted the meeting of Abram with the King of Sodom. The appearance of Melchizedek at this time just after we first learn that Abram was referred to for the first time in Scripture as ***“the Hebrew,”*** and right on the heels and in mid-celebration of this great military victory. It is as if Melchizedek came for the very specific purpose of “passing the torch” to God’s chosen vehicle, Abram, the recipient of the covenantal blessing that through him would come the Promised Seed in which all the world would be blessed. It is as if Melchizedek was confirming that Abram was indeed ***“the Hebrew,”*** the rightful heir to wear the moniker ***“the children of Eber,”*** the truly spiritually faithful individuals who follow in the footsteps of Shem and his faithful great-grandson, Eber.

Abram's response was a testimony to his faith in the one God worshipped by Abram and Melchizedek. His tithe to Melchizedek was tangible evidence that it was God Who deserved the glory.

Imagine this scene unfolding before our eyes. The King of Sodom met Abram and, no doubt, heaped praises upon Abram for his great victory. And then in the middle of all of this the King of Salem arrived who urged Abram to give the glory of the victory to God. I easily can see the King of Sodom standing there wide-eyed and open-mouthed as Abram gave a tenth of the best spoils of Sodom to this interloper priest and king, Melchizedek. What a witness to the glory of God was given, and what a statement of derision was made about the condition of utter sinfulness of Sodom!

The King of Sodom knew well that "to the victor go the spoils." In addition, he had already witnessed a tenth of the goods being given to the King of Salem (Jerusalem). The best bargain this pagan could hope to strike was to get back the people and to surrender the possessions to Abram: ***"Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself."*** How tempting this offer must have been to Abram. By all rights, and even by the request of the King of Sodom, the spoils were his. In a way it was poetic justice. Lot had chosen Sodom for its promise of material blessings. Lot had seemingly gotten the best of Abram, and now God was giving it back to Abram to whom it should have belonged in the first place.

Abram's words must have been an even greater shock to the King of Sodom than his act of sharing the spoils with Melchizedek: ***22. But Abram said to the King of Sodom, "I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, Maker of Heaven and Earth, 23. that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' 24. I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me; let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share."***

Where would you suppose Abram found the words that he spoke to the King of Sodom? From the King of Salem – where else? Melchizedek referred to his God and Abram's as ***"God Most High, Maker of Heaven and Earth."*** This was an unusual designation for God (*El Elyon*) and yet Abram used it – the same words as Melchizedek had spoken.

The arrival of the King of Salem, I believe, was a turning point for Abram because it brought his victory into proper perspective. It not only reminded Abram of Who God was, it reminded Abram of who he was. While men may give glory to men, the saint must always give the glory to God, for any victory, ultimately, is His, not ours. For this reason, Abram could not accept the offer of keeping the goods of Sodom. Abram, like Melchizedek, was now jealous for God's glory to be His alone. To accept anything from a pagan king would be to give him the opportunity to suppose that his giving was responsible for Abram's success. The

price of such goods was too high and so Abram refused what was rightfully his. All he was willing to take was a little off the top, the consumed food of his men!

This is a wonderful conviction to which Abram has come, but notice that he does not cram his convictions down the throats of his allies: ***“I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me; let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.”*** What the men have eaten of Sodom’s goods was not to be repaid. But also what the others were entitled to, who were not related to God by faith, who were not ***“the children of Eber”*** spiritually, should not be withheld.

There is more at stake here than what first meets the eye. In making his choice, Abram said "No" to receiving Canaan on a platter; he said "No" to being treated as an earthly king. But he also said "No" to receiving God's promise of a land and nation and name through military might and conquest.

Abram knew that the choice before him was to either possess the land by faith and trust in God and His promises or to possess the land by the power of the sword, by military strategy, and by making deals and treaties and alliances with the Canaanites. Abram's choice was to live either by divine grace or by the works of the flesh. He chose divine grace.

The King of Sodom knew that Abram was the most powerful man in Canaan. He knew that Abram was a man to be reckoned with. Abram had, in effect, taken Canaan militarily by destroying its enemy. The King of Sodom knew that he owed Abram his life, his city, his people, and his goods. So he offered Abram all the booty of his city. In other words, he was now willing to pay to Abram the tribute he had been paying to Chedorlaomer. He was willing to treat Abram as his overlord, as his king. He was handing Canaan to Abram on a platter.

All Abram had to do now was consolidate his power. All Abram needed to do to control Canaan was to set up a government, enlarge his army, and collect tribute from the other four kings of the Jordan River Valley alliance. The choice was Abram's.

I am sure Abram could see the opportunity that the King of Sodom was offering him. Do not forget the promises of God to Abram: God had promised to Abram a great nation, a great name, and a great land in Genesis 12:1-3). Was Abram's defeat of Chedorlaomer what God had in mind? Were God's promises to be realized by military might and victory? Should Abram see the offer of the King of Sodom as the way God intended to fulfill His promises?

When it comes right down to it, did Abram earn, did he deserve, what the King of Sodom was offering to him? The victory over Chedorlaomer and his army – was it Abram's victory or was it the Lord's victory? Was Abram his own man or was he God's soldier? And the alliance he headed, was it Abram's army or God's

army? Abram's answers to these questions shows whether he lived by divine grace or by the works of the flesh. Abram chose divine grace.

The choice confronting Abram reminds me of the words of the prophet Zechariah: ***“This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts”*** (Zechariah 4:6 [RSV]).

Perhaps more than anything the event in Genesis 14 provides us with a divine commentary on the decisions made in chapter 13. Lot chose Sodom and self-interest, and nearly lost everything because of it. Abram chose to pursue peace and thereby was given a military victory. Lot relied on himself and became a slave. Abram trusted in God and became a prominent figure among his brethren. How different our decisions appear in the light of history. History weighs the decisions of men.

This passage also reminds us of the sovereignty of God in the affairs of men. God is in control of history. The events that appear to be only secular often have a much deeper spiritual purpose and significance. What seems to be a tragic situation in which Lot is caught between two competing political systems is really the purpose of God being worked out for the benefit of two men (primarily), Lot and Abram. There is, my friends, another side of the news.

This event also provides us with a beautiful illustration of the salvation of God. Lot chose to go his own way, seeking his own interests over the promise of God to bless men through Abram. As a result of his self-seeking, Lot had to face the consequences of his sin. Rather than peace and prosperity he found shame and slavery.

Finally, it is to be noted that Melchizedek is termed ***“priest of God Most High”*** (Genesis 14:18 [RSV]), a title which looks beyond all national relationships. Here is the final contrast between the two orders of priesthood, the order of Melchizedek, and the order of Aaron. Aaron's priestly ministry never transcended the limits of Israel, and he was ever the priest of Jehovah as the God of *Israel*. But Melchizedek was priest of Jehovah under His more comprehensive title of the ***“God Most High, Maker of Heaven and Earth”*** (Genesis 14:19 [RSV]), and therefore Melchizedek foreshadowed the eternal glory of Christ: ***“It is He Who shall build the Temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule upon His throne. And there shall be a Priest by His throne, and peaceful understanding shall be between them both”*** (Zechariah 6:13 [RSV]). He shall reign in righteousness and peace. As it is written, ***5. “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which He will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’*** (Jeremiah 23:5-6 [RSV]). We now have this Divine Melchizedek ruling as both our Great

High Priest and as King of Righteousness and King of Peace. As it is written again, **6. For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** **7. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over His Kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.** (Isaiah 9:6-7 [RSV])