

## Abram Had a Lot to Gain

Last week we studied how God called Abram out of a world of idolatry in Ur of the Chaldees into a covenant relationship with Him. Abram, who was later described as a great man of faith, believed God and acted upon his faith, and his obedience was counted to him as righteousness: ***“For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’”*** (Romans 4:3 [RSV])

Genesis 14 is a rather peculiar chapter of the Bible. Moses packs the first thirteen verses with the names of kings, peoples, and cities before he actually gets around to his main point. In working through these names it is easy to become distracted from the main event the author wants to highlight. But to understand the author's main point, we do have to take note of the details of the story in front of us.

First of all, what is recorded in Genesis 14 is the first war on record, although it very well may have not been the first war in history. On one side were aligned the first block of nations engaged in this early battle, four Mesopotamian kings of the east led by King Chedorlaomer of Elam, which is modern day Iran. Pitted against the four kings of Mesopotamia was a second alliance of five kings of the south, including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 14:2).

After 12 years as vassals of the four eastern kings, the five southern kings attempted to throw off their shackles. The eastern kings could not allow such rebellion to go unpunished. This revolt did not go unnoticed by others in the same plight (see Genesis 14:5-7). The economic results of ignoring the insurrection were too devastating to contemplate. The five southern kings controlled the territory through which the “way of the kings” passed. This was the land bridge through which commerce between Egypt and the four eastern kingdoms must make its way. Whoever controlled this land bridge maintained a monopoly on international trade.

After splitting from his nephew, Lot, because the land was unable to support all of their property in Genesis 13, Abram settled in the land of Canaan. Abram did this after Lot chose to dwell in the fertile Jordan Valley near the city of Sodom (Genesis 13). Lot's family and all their possessions were taken into captivity from Sodom by the four Mesopotamian kings. The choices Lot and Abram made and their end result are significant. Lot chose the worldly advantages of living near wicked Sodom and lost everything he had, not just once, but twice! Abram was the one who saved Lot twice, first of all in Genesis 14, and later in Genesis 19. When Lot was separated from Abram, he suffered loss. He became influenced by the world and its ways. When he was with Abram, however, he was blessed.

There is a great lesson to be learned from this fact alone. It is more than acting prudently; it is absolutely necessary that we protect our own salvation by

surrounding ourselves with like-minded individuals who hold the same values as we do. This is why the Apostle Paul said to the church in Corinth, **33. Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” 14. Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15. What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16. What agreement has the Temple of God with idols? For we are the Temple of the living God; as God said, “I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 17. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them,” says the Lord, “and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, 18. and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters,” says the Lord Almighty.** (1 Corinthians 15:33, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Moses says in Genesis 14:13 [RSV], **“Then one who had escaped came, and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner; these were allies of Abram.”**

This is the first time the words **“the Hebrew”** are found in Scripture. The word “Hebrew” (**“Ivri”** in the Hebrew language) comes from the word “Eber” (sometimes written as “Ever” and in some versions of the *Gospel of Luke* is called “Heber”), and it means “the other side.” I believe there are at least three reasons why Abram became the first man called **“the Hebrew.”**

First of all, Abram was a stranger “from the other side.” Born east of Canaan in Ur of the Chaldees of Mesopotamia, Abram had come “from the other side” of the Jordan River before settling in Canaan.

Secondly and more importantly, Abram stood “on the other side” in his opposition to the entire pagan world. His recognition of the One True God, Yahweh, and his adamant refusal to comply with the “modern” religious ideology of his time, set Abram at odds with the rest of humanity and their false worship of idols created by man.

Finally, Abram was a descendent of **Eber** from which the word Hebrew is derived. Eber was the great-grandson of Noah's son, Shem, and Eber is given special recognition as a man of worth and honor by Moses, who states in Genesis 10:21 [RSV], **“To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born.”** Shem, as you may recall, had been the recipient of the blessing of the prophecy of Noah following the sin against Noah committed by Ham. Noah, waking up from his drunken stupor, realized that Shem had not dishonored him as did Ham, and Noah said, **“Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave”** (Genesis 9:26 [RSV]). Just as Abraham and the Messiah were to come through the line of Shem, so, too, was the world to be blessed through the **“children of Eber.”**

There was obviously something special about this man, Eber, otherwise Moses would not have added the extra commentary he does regarding this man and his children. And how Moses words his commentary shows us that he fully expected his original audience to know what was special about this man, Eber, and why he and his offspring were specifically mentioned as they were. According to Jewish tradition handed down since before the time of Moses, Eber refused to help in the building of the Tower of Babel as ordered by Nimrod. Consequently, his and his family's language was not confused when the building of the tower was abandoned through the intervention of Yahweh, and Eber and **"the children of Eber"** were given the blessing of retaining the original language given to Adam by God in the beginning of time. Therefore, God further honored Eber by designating his called out man, Abram, **"the Hebrew,"** the one from whom the entire world would be blessed, and also naming the original language of the Earth after him also, Hebrew.

The point I am trying to bring out is that the Bible can point us to other sources of truth, too, if we study it. The Apostle Paul quoted Gentile poets, and on two separate occasions in the Bible the *Book of Jasher* (Jashar) is referenced as a historically accurate book. Therefore, it is my opinion that the oral tradition regarding Eber and the children of Eber is most likely true: They did not follow Nimrod and the pagans in building the Tower of Babel, and God rewarded their faithfulness by not confusing their language. They kept the original tongue given by God to Adam. And because they were faithful, the language itself has been named after the faithful man, Eber, and his true spiritual children who remain faithful to the Lord are called the Hebrews. As Jesus said in John 8:39 [RSV], **"If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did."** And to this the Apostle Paul adds in Galatians 3:29 [RSV], **"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."**

Even by this early account, Abram and his family were already considered so important that the land where they were living was already known as **their** land, the land of the Hebrews. Why? Because when Noah divided up the world among his three sons following the Flood, the land portion encompassing Israel originally was allotted to Shem and his descendants. The descendants of Canaan, son of Ham, eventually drove out the descendants of Shem and so the land became known as Canaan's land. So when Abram arrived on the scene centuries later and he began to drive these people out, the land was called in Hebrew and known as **"Eretz Ha-Ivriim,"** meaning "the land of the Hebrews," the true spiritual **"children of Eber."** Eventually, the **"children of Eber,"** the Hebrews, lived in Egypt as slaves for over 400 years before God interceded and destroyed their captors, creating the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. When they went to re-conquer the land of the Hebrews, once again they found it occupied by the descendants of Canaan as races of giants, just as in the days of Abram, were found to be living in Canaan's land. So when push comes to shove, according to

what we find in Scripture, the land was originally apportioned to Shem and the **“children of Eber,”** Shem’s most prominent offspring prior to Abram.

At Siddim Valley, the armies of the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela fought the armies of King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Babylonia, and King Arioch of Ellasar. The valley was full of tar pits (**“bitumen”**), and when the troops from Sodom and Gomorrah started running away, some of them fell into the pits. Others escaped to the hill country. Their enemies took everything of value from Sodom and Gomorrah, including their food supplies. They also captured Abram’s nephew Lot, who lived in Sodom. They took him and his possessions and then left.

The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, with their allies, must have decided it was nobler to suffer defeat in war than to have to back down by surrendering. The troops dug in for all-out battle in the Valley of Siddim (Genesis 14:8). The rebel kingdoms must have offered little resistance to the invasion. As they retreated from the enemy, some fell into the tar pits of the valley, while others fled to the hills (Genesis 14:10).

Sodom and Gomorrah were sacked. Everything and everyone that could be carried off was. That is the secular side of the news. But why is so much emphasis placed upon the details and description of this event? I believe the answer is only to be found in the “other side of the news,” the spiritual dimension. Apart from the facts and figures and the strategies and the speculations of human reasoning undertaken, there was a spiritual purpose. This international incident is not to be understood only in terms of power struggles and economic forces. It was a part of the program plan of the sovereign God for the lives of two of His people, Lot and Abram.

The remark that to the unenlightened eye seems casual and incidental is foundational: **“they also took Lot, the son of Abram’s brother who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed”** (Genesis 14:12). The outcome of this conflict was the capture of Abram’s nephew, Lot.

What a commentary on the decision of Lot in chapter 13! It would seem that instead of laying up treasures for himself in Heaven, he had chosen to pitch his tent towards Sodom, and lay up treasures for himself on Earth where the thieves can break through. Lot had chosen to act on the basis of economic self-interest, and had thus disregarded the covenant God had made with Abram (Genesis 12:1-3). What Lot should have learned is that “he who lives by the sword also dies by it.” Economic self-interest was the motive of the kings of both alliances in this war, both southern and Mesopotamian. What is ironic is that the only character involved in the conflict who was not acting out of greed or economic self-interest is the ultimate victor, Abram, and he takes nothing. And yet, he ends up being blessed greater by God, both materially and spiritually, than all of the

others, proving how true are the words of James: ***“Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you”*** (James 4:10 [RSV]).

All that Lot seemed to have gained by taking advantage of Abram was lost in an instant, and seemingly by chance. He was caught in the middle of an international incident. Can you imagine the thoughts that went through Lot's mind as he and his family and all their goods were being carted off to a distant land? He who had been so shrewd was now a slave, and all because of his selfish choice.

Also, did you notice that Lot was said to have been living in Sodom in verse 12? When we left him in chapter 13 he was first living in the valley of the Jordan, heading eastward (Genesis 13:11). Then he moved his tents as far as Sodom (Genesis 13:12). But now in chapter 14 we see that Lot is one of them, at least so far as the victors were concerned.

At this time, Abram the Hebrew was living near the oaks that belonged to Mamre the Amorite. Mamre and his brothers Eshcol and Aner were Abram's friends. Someone who had escaped from the battle told Abram that his nephew, Lot, had been taken away. Assembling his forces, and those of his allies, Abram hastily pursued the captors of Lot. 318 of Abram's servants were fighting men, so he took them and followed the enemy as far north as the city of Dan.

That night, Abram and his servants divided up his troops. They were attacked from all sides, but Abram won a great victory. However, some of the enemy escaped and Abram pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus (Genesis 14:15-16). Abram brought back all the goods, and he also brought back his relative, Lot, with his possessions, and also the women and the people who had been captured (Genesis 14:15-16). Abram returned after he had defeated King Chedorlaomer and the other kings. Then the King of Sodom went out to meet Abram in Shaveh Valley, which is also known as King's Valley.

There were a number of good reasons for Abram to ignore the report of the fugitive altogether. As Sarai, Abram's good wife, no doubt suggested, the odds were not in Abram's favor. Such a campaign could be suicide. Also, Lot got exactly what he had asked for. He chose to live in Sodom. Let him learn his lesson in Elam or Babylon! He deliberately chose to take advantage of his uncle, Abram. So let him pay the price. This would have been the easy way to think.

It is beautiful to observe the actual effect of this intelligence regarding the capture of Lot brought upon our great patriarch. Abram was not indifferent to his nephew's well being. There was no root of bitterness in him. There was no callous, "Well, this is none of my doing: he must reap what he has sown." Promptly he went to the aid of the one in distress. But note it was not in the energy of the flesh that he acted. Abram learned that a loved one was in distress and in need, and Abram went to rescue him (Genesis 14:14). Surely there is a

lesson for us today to take from this! How many of our own brothers and sisters, both in the flesh and in the Spirit, have been taken captive by the enemy? Should this not move us to hearken to the words of the Apostle Paul, who wrote in Galatians 6:1 [RSV], **“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted.”** But only too often the call falls upon ears that are dull of hearing. Only too often, our prided separation from evil leads to independence and indifference. How unfortunate that it should be so. How different from our blessed Lord, Who leaves the ninety and nine and goes after the sheep that has strayed, and rests not until it is found and restored!

Maybe there is some sin in our lives that is hindering us from doing more ourselves to bring the lost to the Lord. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 28:1 [RSV], **“The righteous are bold as a lion.”** When the news came that Lot was a prisoner in the hands of a mighty warrior, Abram showed no hesitation but immediately set out in pursuit of the victorious army, and taking the initiative was quickly successful in rescuing his nephew. **15. And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16. Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his goods, and the women and the people.**

**17. 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).** (Genesis 14:15-17)

Abram, it would seem, had a great military mind. He employed a forced march and a surprise attack from various positions. As appearances would have it, Abram was the commander of his own men, as well as those of his allies. Pursuit was vigorous and extensive, until the victory was complete and the spoils entirely recovered. Everything was recovered: The possessions, the people, and the prodigal who, in this case, was Lot.

Perhaps no test a man faces is greater than that of success. Abram passed that test, as we will study further this evening. There is an old proverb that states, **“The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is judged by his praise”** (Proverbs 27:21 [RSV]).

You and I have the same choice as Abram. Like Abram, we have to choose to live either by divine grace or by the works of the flesh.

I want to remind you that God's promises to us are as big as His promises made to Abram. God promises us life everlasting. He promises us a new and better life in a new and better body on a new and better Earth. He promises us a place in the Heavenly Kingdom. He promises us a crown of righteousness. He promises us salvation and the blessings of salvation!