

Genesis 13:5 – 14:24

^{13:5} Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. ⁶ And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together. ⁷ 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. ⁸ So Abram said to Lot, '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.' ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. ¹² Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. ¹³ Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD. 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.' ¹⁸ Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD. ^{14:1} And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, ² that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). ³ All these came as allies to the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). ⁴ Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but the thirteenth year they rebelled. ⁵ In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim and the Zuzim in Ham and the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, ⁶ and the Horites in their Mount Seir, as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness. ⁷ Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and conquered all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, who lived in Hazazon-tamar. ⁸ And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah and the king of Admah and the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim, ⁹ against Chedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim and Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar--four kings against five. ¹⁰ Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country. ¹¹ Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed. ¹² They also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom. ¹³ Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them

as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. ¹⁶ He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people. ¹⁷ Then after his return from the 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 God Most High. 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.' He gave him a tenth of all. ²¹ The king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.' ²² Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, ²³ that 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.' ²⁴ I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share.'

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Altars:* Abram built altars in the places he encountered God, so far in Shechem (Gen.12:7) and on a mountain between Bethel and Ai (Gen.12:8). In the last section, Abram's departure from that mountain and return there (Gen.13:4) is a story of personal fall and redemption from which he learned something about God's character and faithfulness.
- *A Regional War:* Amraphel of Shinar is from Babylon. Arioch king of Ellasar may be from eastern Asia Minor or perhaps the southern coast of the Black Sea. Chedorlaomer was king of Elam, a powerful state in southwestern Persia east of the Jordan River during the early second millennium BC. Tidal king of Goiim may represent the Hittite kingdom in Anatolia, central Turkey.
- *Sodom and Gomorrah:* The kings' names Bera and Birsha echo the words 'evil' (*ra*) and 'wickedness' (*rasha*).
- *Melchizedek, King of Salem:* The name/title Melchizedek means 'my king is righteousness' or 'king of righteousness.' Salem means 'peace.' Salem was the precursor city to Jerusalem (city of peace).

Questions

1. What clues in the text do we have for how Abram thinks about this conflict between Lot and him?
 - a. The herdsmen of both men were having strife with each other, but Abram says that it is a strife between 'you and me' (13:8)
 - b. Abram seems aware that the 'Canaanite and Perizzite were dwelling then in the land' (13:7). He does not want them to observe conflict happening between Lot and himself, especially over the land. He cares about his witness to them. Remember the fact that Abram pitched his tent on the top of a small mountain between Bethel and Ai, built an altar on top of that mountain so that people around him could see him worship God.
 - c. Application: What is the cost of a conflict to your witness?
2. What do you think about how Abram treats Lot?
 - a. He personalizes the conflict. He doesn't just relegate it to their hired hands.
 - b. He calls Lot a 'brother' even though Abram and Lot are uncle and nephew. He does not pull age or rank, although he probably easily could.
 - c. What does the word 'brother' remind you of, in the Genesis story? Cain and Abel. Note how this story is a reversal of Cain and Abel.
 - d. Abram is quite generous. He gives Lot the first pick of where to go.
 - e. He does not presume that God's promise of his descendants inheriting the land should affect the decision. He does not pull spiritual claims.
3. When Abram separates from Lot, how is Abram interpreting God's promise to him, up until 13:11?
 - a. Is Abram including Lot and Lot's descendants as part of his own descendants? That's possible.
 - b. Is Abram assuming that God will sort out the question of how Abram's descendants will eventually inherit the land that Lot chose? That's possible, too. Hard to know which one. Does it matter?
4. What do you think of Lot's choice?
 - a. How does the Jordan River valley look to him?
 - b. What conflict do you anticipate for Lot?
 - c. If there were music playing and if this were a movie, what music would you expect to hear? Ominous. Lot made a bad choice.
 - d. Lot chose 'for himself' just like the builders of the Tower of Babel built 'for themselves.'
 - e. He made a choice by 'sight' like Eve and Adam made a choice to eat the fruit by 'sight.' He does not perceive the spiritual danger posed by Sodom and Gomorrah, it seems. Abram, by contrast, makes a choice by faith, and now his vision and capacity to receive from God are enlarged.
 - f. Application: How does wealth cloud your spiritual perception?
5. Then God speaks to Abram again in 13:14 – 17. What do you think of what God says?
 - a. He promises Abram the land again, even though Lot is going to occupy it in the short term. That's interesting!
 - b. Application: How does looking ahead into God's future enable us to be generous? For Abram, he was learning that God was faithful to his promises, and will keep his promise to Abram's descendants. For us, we learn that God will restore the whole world with his healing power, because he is keeping his promise to Jesus his Son. So, we will inherit the whole earth (e.g. Mt.5:5). That frees us up from having to enjoy everything now, travel everywhere. Jesus will be a far better host and tour guide for all eternity, than we can have here in this time!
 - c. Application: Name one thing you can let go of, right now, and entrust that God will bless you even more in his own time.
 - i. Illus: Teaching guitar at Stanford rather than taking more guitar classes.
 - ii. Illus: The world is our inheritance in Christ. For me, traveling the world is something I'd love to do, but I can put it off until eternity where the world will be transfigured by Jesus in such a way that the experience will be entirely new. Instead, I can give more money to those around me. Living in a bigger house is something I'd love to do, but I can put that off, too, to care for the poor.
 - iii. But there's an internal inheritance as well. For you, probably 'your potential' is one thing that you can let go of. I'd love to get a Ph.D. in both theology and Middle East Studies. And I can study but the degree and the recognition are not for me at this time. But I can also be content by putting that off to the time Jesus comes for me. You can do

the same. God has given you more 'potential' than you have capacity to develop in one lifetime.

6. Check out a map. Understand this conflict.
 - a. This is a huge regional war!! Babylon is to the east. If this spans the Black Sea region and central Turkey to the north as well
 - b. Abram could interpret this as God's way of sweeping Lot out of the way. Why not? Why doesn't Abram just let them take Lot away?
 - i. Abram doesn't think that God is causing the war. Notice how easily he could have believed that. 'Maybe this is God's way of getting rid of Lot and his family...!' How convenient!
 - ii. Abram wants Lot to share in the new garden land.
7. What's going on with Lot?
 - a. Where was Lot the last time we read about him? Living outside Sodom in his tents (Gen.13:12). Now he is living inside it (Gen.14:12).
 - b. What do you think the conversations were like between Abram and Lot on the way home?
8. What happens to Abram here? How do we see him grow?
 - a. Has he been encouraged by God's promise to him, and how God protected him against Egypt? That concerned Sarai. This now concerns his nephew Lot, whom he called 'brother.'
 - b. He acts on tremendous courage and love for Lot
 - c. He is his brother's keeper. He reverses the sin of Cain, who killed his brother. Abram does not let his 'brother' die. He rescues him. Abram is learning about God's concern for the integrity of the marriage relationship, and the brother-brother relationship, two of the major relationships commented on by Genesis 2 – 4. He will soon learn about the father-son relationship, which is the last major relationship illustrated as affected by the fall.
 - d. He is generous towards all he rescues. He places the entire city of Sodom and its king in his debt.
 - e. He becomes a leader in the region! Author Bruce Feiler writes, 'When Lot is taken captive in a war pitting four kings against five, Abraham leads the coalition to rescue him. Our pitiful, impotent geriatric suddenly becomes a war hero! And the world takes note. He begins to negotiate treaties with local leaders. The king of a Canaanite town, Melchizedek, blesses him and praises his Creator, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth." Abraham responds by giving Melchizedek a tenth of everything he has. One wants to cheer, rooting for Abraham's growth, the power he accumulates, his dignity. Abraham is not merely a man of faith, he's a man of strength and tolerance, too. He's not Machiavellian, Draconian, Napoleonic. He's Abrahamic – measured, moral, middle of the road.'¹
 - f. Abram knows that the victory belongs to God. So he tithes, and refuses to keep anything for himself. This incident seems to anticipate the encouragement of Deuteronomy 20:1 about having faith in God when having to fight.
9. Who is this Melchizedek? Why does he show up here?
 - a. To show us that not all Canaanites were like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. This guy worshiped God, like Abram did.
 - b. Because he was an ally and friend to Abram. Or wanted to be.
 - c. Because he recognized that Abram won a spiritual victory, and not just a physical victory. Abram believed God's promise which implied that he had to stay alive until he had a child. Abram also believed the general character and scope of God's promise, that others would be blessed through him and because of him. As a result of his faith, Abram had just delivered Lot and others from the clutches of the foreign kings.
 - d. That means Melchizedek was a spectator to what God did through Abram. Melchizedek recognized that the character of God is to deliver people from the oppressor, and bring them back to the garden land.
 - e. The bread and wine that Melchizedek served are a foreshadowing of Christian communion! Jesus believed in God's faithfulness, so he won a victory, delivering human nature from the clutches of sin, death, and the devil. Then he comes back in resurrection power to offer his Spirit-infused new humanity to us, and serves communion – bread and wine! Melchizedek became a foreshadowing of Jesus, who is the true king of righteousness and true king of peace, who reunited the roles of

¹ Bruce Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), p.62

king and priest (Psalm 110:5). *This is a Christus Victor motif, for those of us who appreciate atonement theology!*

10. The king of Sodom: Is this his replacement, after the previous one fell into the tar pits? Presumably. Is he grateful to Abram? Begrudging? His terse expression suggests that he was embarrassed at his own failure, and the fact that Abram was able to rescue Lot and the people and goods of Sodom where his predecessor had failed as king.
11. Why does Abram walk away from success? What does this suggest to us about how God wants us to handle success?