

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: "No Shortcuts to the Promises"

Text: Genesis 14

RGGJR FBCCS/5-16-21 **UNEDITED**

- We used to watch war movies with my Grandma on many Sunday afternoons following church and a family dinner at her house. If you have seen the movie, "Saving Private Ryan," it opens depicting about ten minutes of the start of the bloody, WWII battle on Omaha Beach—June 6, 1944. This is what those war movies we used to watch on Sundays were like. They were only limited, in their energy and gore by the special effects of their day. I'm not sure that Grandma-movie-watching activity would be politically correct *screen time* for a grandma and her grandkids anymore, but I loved it!
- Genesis chapter 14 opens with the setup and description of oppression, rebellion and a battle between city-Kings in the Promised Land in the days of Abram who will become Abraham.
- Moses is careful to tell us the names of these city-kings and their alliances so that we will have some idea of who was the most powerful and expected to win any battle.
- The warfare itself—at least the part in which Moses is most interested—doesn't last long and isn't described in very bloody details. The kids can stay in the room and hear the story.
- Let's read Genesis 14. **READ GENESIS 14:1-4**
- There are two alliances here. They are made up of city-kingdoms that are each ruled over by a king of that city. It was sort of like some mayors of big cities think of themselves today as ruling their own little *fiefdoms* to do with as they please. Except, these city-kings had their own armies.
- Since King Amraphel is mentioned first, it may be that he is the leading king of this alliance but we don't hear much more about him. One allied side of city-kings and their armies has been the subject vassals of the more powerful, a leading king of the other alliance—

King Kedor-la-omer. It is against Kedorlaomer that the other side bands together and rebels.

- Let's read on. **READ GENESIS 14:5-7**
- The Kedorlaomer alliance has set out to expand its territory by conquering more cities—at least some of which are within the boundaries of the land the LORD has promised to Abram as part of His plan to carry on the purpose for which humans were created—being *the Imago Dei*—the image of God in all the world.
- Read on and see how Abram, gets involved in this battling for territory. **READ GENESIS 14:8-12.**
- The alliance that includes the Kings of the cities of Sodom and of Gomorrah rebels again as the Kedorlaomer alliance attempts to expand. They lose the battle against the expansionist. In their retreat, some either accidentally fall into, or perhaps to hide, they purposely jump into the tar pits that dot the area near the fight. Others run to the hills, away from their cities, in order to hide.
- As the victors, the Kedorlaomer alliance strip the loosing cities of their possessions and food and head home. They also take with them at least some of them the people of the loosing cities—likely to become slaves.
- AND, by the way, Lot, Abram's nephew who is probably like a son to him, is dragged away even though he was not naturally born as one of the conquered people. However, he had now moved from living in a tent on the well-watered plains he had looked up, saw and chosen from Abram's offer, *into* the wicked city of Sodom to live.
- The Kedorlaomer alliance had no way to tell Lot apart from the conquered Sodomites. To the conquerors, Lot and his family looked just like the rest of the God-rejecting humans in Sodom. They looked like they too were choosing to live life autonomously in their own

power by their own wisdom rather than by faith in the God of Abram, His promises and His plan for them.

- There is, one more point I should mention that Moses makes in the setup. He tells the Israelites who will now enter this land and see the tar pits he described that the Kedorlaomer alliance of just four kings was victorious over the 5 kings allied with the king of Sodom. We might have expected the 5 city-kingdoms to beat the 4 city-kingdoms but they did not.
- There are certainly insights in just this portion of chapter 14 we could highlight but I think Moses' lesson from this war movie is still to come. Please look at verses 13 and following. **READ GENESIS 14:13-16.**
- Abram is designated as "Abram the *Hebrew*." This may be how the people of the land differentiate Abram from others in the land. It is possible that it means something like "Abram the dispossessed." If that is the case, think of the contrast this makes with all the kings we have just met. Instead of looking like a powerful king of a city, Abram looks to those around him as if he is one of the unfortunate dispossessed who must wander the land to sustain life.
- Abram has not settled in a city as Lot had done. He is still living in a tent without foundations to this world near the "great trees of Mamre." The oaks of Mamre turn out not to be a type of oak named "mamre," but rather some trees belonging to the territory of an Amorite leader named Mamre.
- Even though Abram has not laid permanent foundations in the Promised Land, he has made some of his own military alliances with Mamre and his brothers Eschol and Aner.

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- Encamped near Mamre's well-know, *great* trees, Abram gets the word that Lot and his family have been taken captive by the Kedorlaomar alliance.
- Now there is a bit of a let down for me. I have been picturing, if not an Omaha Beach battle, at least a Braveheart size war. Abram has, not thousands of troops at his command, but 318. Very close, by the way, to the whittled down size of Gideon's army that will, by God's power, defeat the tens of thousands of Midianites in the years to come.
- Abram has 318 troops, the allied brothers probably each had more than this and together they set out to take back what the invaders had carried off—for Abram this was Lot and his family.
- Abram uses a strategy—a nighttime attack—probably a surprise. He defeats the encroaching armies that had powerfully defeated the Sodom alliance even when it was 4 against 5. Abram sends them running in all directions to escape. They leave behind all the booty and people they had taken.
- Victorious Abram now learns a lesson and teaches a lesson. We MAY learn a difficult lesson for us to accept as well about living as God's people for God's purpose and promises in a world that chooses autonomy over faith and attacks God's plan.
- Moses shows the lesson, once again by a contrast. This time it is a contrast of two kings. One has been involved in the battle and we have read about him. The other arrives like a mysterious UFO—unexplained, mysterious, but very powerful. Let's read the last few verses of chapter 14. **READ GENESIS 14:17-24**
- After the victory, the powerful but defeated King of autonomous-living, wicked acting, God rejecting Sodom, who had lost his stuff and

his people, comes out to meet the dispossessed wandering victor, Abram *the HEBREW*.

- They are joined by another king—King Melchizedek—city King of Salem—King of what likely becomes the city of *Jerusalem*. This UFO king, King Melchizedek seems to have a different alliance. He is also has another role along with being king. He is a priest—a king-priest.
- He is allied with and priest—or go-between with the people for *El Elyon*—"the *God Most High*"—the highest God—the greatest God—the most powerful God connected with the Promised Land.
- Melchizedek brings a meal with him—a communion meal of bread and wine. I'm not suggesting this is exactly the communion meal we will share in a few minutes. I am suggesting there is meaning to this eating together in fellowship that will be echoed through the fractal patterns in God's Word.
- I called King Melchizedek "the UFO king" because he is so mysterious to me. There is a reason this King Melchizedek is talked about in Psalm 110 and plays a part in explaining the role of the Messiah—who is also a King-Priest—In the NT book of *Hebrews*.
- Moses doesn't tell us much about him here in *Genesis 14*, so I need to recognize that silence when making the application to this story.
- But, come on now! The appearance of this King-Priest of a city in the Promised Land that will likely become Jerusalem worshipping and representing the "Most High God" who he recognizes is the "Creator God of Heaven and Earth"—come on now, I have to say something.
- One thing I think we can know from the text is that *Genesis* does not tell us everything that God is up to in the world and universe at the time. When I say that aloud, it makes sense but sometimes we unintentionally close in our perspective to see just the narratives of

Genesis in front of us assuming that was all God was doing in his Creation.

- The narratives in *Genesis* tell me how God was working his plan, one way or another in spite of human autonomy, failures and lack of faith to bring about redemption. In one sense, the biggest sense, *Genesis*, is telling us the story of Jesus the Christ rather than the story of all humans.
- But, the "all-of-the-sudden" presence of the King-Priest Melchizedek reminds me God is up to lots of things and he hasn't told me all of them—not even in His Word. That expands my mind to the glory of God and makes me less likely to see myself at the center of God's universe.
- Like C.S. Lewis, I can imagine in terms of what God might be doing on the planet Venus and hasn't told me about it. I can look to a starry night sky and imagine that God, because he is so glorious and beyond my tendency to make revolve around me as the center, God might have plans for some of those stars that turn out to be galaxies and systems of galaxies and who knows what else.
- Since reading about Melchizedek, the King-Priest of Salem representing the God Most High the Creator God—as a kid, I have tried to keep my mind open to me not being the center of all of this and instead reveling in the bigness of the God I trust.
- To really go crazy, and I admit fully, that I only speculate, I am not convinced that this King Melchizedek wasn't a *Christophany*—that is a *preincarnate* appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity in time and space. There are a couple of other places in Genesis where I think the Son of God may have been present here on earth as well.
- Anyway, this King-Priest Melchizedek, is at the center of lots of **blessing** now happening in the narrative. He blessed Abram not on

his own but by the power of the God most High Creator of Heaven and Earth.

- I asked you to think of God's blessings on Abram as the power from God—the enablement from God—for Abram to carry out God's plan by trusting God and his promises.
- In verse 20, Melchizedek then seems to **ble**ss God Most High. When God is **ble**ssed, when the words of blessing flow in the other direction, this is not someone less than God empowering God. This is someone less than God recognizing God **is** empowered to carry out his plans and promises.
- This is exactly what God Most High has done for Abram. The one who is empowered to bless has blessed the one who has placed faith in him for empowerment. The result is that, no matter the apparent odds against it, God's plan is fulfilled. **Critically, remember, God's plan is fulfilled by God's power in God's way.**
- As the two kings stand before him, there could not be a more stark contrast to teach a lesson to Abram. On the one hand there is the autonomous God-rejecting King of Sodom who has chosen to live life as he pleases and led others to do so as well. On the other hand, there is the King-Priest of the Most High God reminding Abram of the true source of his victory being God not him. **Abram has participated in this victory by faith, but it is still God's victory.**
- Having seen and heard the lesson, Abram acknowledges that the victory belongs to God Most High by acknowledging the King-Priest of the God Most High with an offering of 10%--a tithe.
- I wonder when Moses writes Abram gave him a tenth of **everything** if he means just of all the returned property or of **everything** God had given him so far. Moses doesn't clarify that for me but I have my suspicions.

- Then, I don't know if you noticed this but, once again, Moses may have used a way to highlight his emphasis here—a chiasm. He mentions the King of Sodom—skips to King of Salem—says a second thing about the King of Salem and then completes the frame, that emphasizes the ideas in the middle, with more information on the King of Sodom.
- The framed emphasis is, of course, ***all the blessing that is happening comes from faith in the Most High God as the one who blesses to keep his promises.*** The blessed, i.e., empowered God has, again, blessed Abram and through that blessing, God has blessed those who have blessed Abram (rather than cursed Abram) JUST AS HE PROMISED Abram He would do.
- In the frame closing of the chiasm, the King of Sodom decides to be "generous." The reality was that all this worldly stuff belonged to Abram now and that King knows it. He wants to have the appearance of BLESSING Abram with earthly stuff by his power.
- But Abram had learned the lesson and he applied it here immediately. He has sworn to the God Most High who has blessed him through faith. He will not allow himself to be empowered by any source of a God-rejecting world such as the autonomous, God-rejecting King of Sodom.
- Abram's source of the promised blessing will not come from this world and he will do nothing that confuses that testimony to the world that his faith is in God Most High and nowhere else.
- Abram will wait for the blessing promised by God and take no shortcuts by compromising with the blessing of this God-less world even if it looks like a blessing.
- Where else have we seen this later in the story that only begins with *Genesis*? As I said, it is really the story of Jesus.

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- Remember in *Matthew 4* when Jesus, having been identified and identifying with his purpose—his mission—by baptism launched on that mission? God the Spirit led God the Son into the wilderness to learn a lesson under suffering circumstances.
- Satan said, hey Jesus, your Father has made promises to you. How about if I bless you to fulfill them? Here is the bread you need for your suffering stomach. Here is the protection you need for your frail human construction. And, here is all he promised you—the whole world—just worship me by taking it from me. I can give it to you. I can make what seems like is supposed to happen, happen.
- Just bow to the King of Sodom Abram and you'll be blessed. Just Bow to the Deceiver Jesus and you will be blessed. Just bow to the ways and the means of this world Raleigh and you will be blessed. Just do it the world's way so that it works FBC and you will be blessed.
- As I have been preaching for some months know, this is one of the most difficult things for believers to discern. How do I or we know when I am trying to shortcut the promises of God by bowing to the ways and power of the God-less world?
- Please understand I realize that Abram used a plan. Abram acted on a sneak—attack strategy. Abram allied himself, in the moment, with other humans—probably unbelievers. Abram had wealth and power.
- But, still there was this major distinction that Abram needed to see and live by just as we do. We are not to try to shortcut even the painful process of receiving the promises of God by the world's power and means—even if it looks like the world is giving us the blessings God has promised.
- Confused? Al Ross my Hebrew professor years ago wrote: "**God's blessings and the world's benefits are easily confused!**" (p.299) Yes,

Dr Ross, you have that exactly right—they are indeed. How can I unconfused them?

- Another writer I have read in conjunction with this passage, John Walton writes, "***When preparing ourselves for our role in God's plan or to receive God's blessing it is often counter productive to take the easy way out to the goal. It can be disastrous to simply seize what lies before us.***" (p 435)
- In my wisdom, if I have any, I would say that this will always be confusing because we live in this world even though we are not of it. There are times God will bless us using the world's ways and stuff but that is different than the world blessing us with its stuff and being able to take the credit—the glory.
- Like the king of Sodom all the world and all the humans of the world who live by the power of the world need the significance of saying we made that happen—no need for God the Most High. Otherwise, there is no lasting purpose for which to live life.
- It is confusing but more than one NT writer doesn't allow that to be an excuse for God's people to keep their eyes closed. We are to wake up spiritually from any worldly stupor—this confusing question is meant to wake us up and make us ask—is this, giving God or taking a less painful and quicker shortcut to the blessings he has promised.
- One way—the long hard way usually—just ask Jesus—gives God the glory and raises his name as we were created to do in this world. The other way allows the King of Sodom to make a name for himself.
- The outcomes may look the same but that is why ***pragmatism*** is so poisonous—so much of this worlds power and ways. For ***God's*** glory the "how" we get to the desired end matters.

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- There are no painless, quick shortcuts to God's Promises—at least none that will give him the glory.
- So, even though this can be confusing, let's not jump at every need, every opportunity, every feeling we get—or as Walton said "simply, impulsively seize what is before us" because it seems like it might be what God promised and we can make it happen.
- Let's pause, give the recognition to God Most High, and ask him to help us not mistake any worldly shortcuts for his perfect path to his promises.