

Abram With Lot and Melchizedek

Genesis 13-14

Focus Verse

“Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.” – Genesis 13:17

- Abram and Lot – 13:1-14:16
- Abram and Melchizedek – 14:17-24

Engage

How do my daily decisions impact God’s plan for my life? If God controls the details of this life and eternity, am I held responsible for the choices I make in this fallen world? Can I mess up God’s plan for my life?

The story of Abram and Lot highlights the reward of obedience and the cost of compromise. We live in a fallen world that offers a daily menu of temporary thrills. Trusting God requires a long view, placing value on and living for more than a short-term win. Long-term gain may require short-term pain.

Your daily choices reveal your priorities and impact your future. Your desires drive your thoughts. Your thoughts direct your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits mold your character. Your character shapes your destiny. Even believers, whose eternal destiny rests in the secure grip of God, forfeit spiritual impact in this life when daily choices do not align with God’s best for us. While God can bring good from the bad, we save ourselves trouble by seeking God first. Lot chose the most fertile land, pitching his tents toward Sodom, and then soon found himself engulfed in that wicked city’s troubles. Abram took his herds to far less appealing land but found that God’s favor and promises offer a greater reward. **People who receive God’s grace should respond with reverence and gratitude to God and graciousness to others.**

Abram and Lot — Genesis 13:1-14:16

In Chapter 13, Abram faced the opportunity to show grace to his nephew, Lot. He knew God’s grace personally and demonstrated faith in God by yielding his rights and taking on risks for the good of another. **A series of deliberate responses reveal Abram’s growing faith and dependence on God.**

Abram Separated From Lot – Genesis 13

Returning to Bethel – 13:1-4

In Genesis 12, Abram and his family fled to Egypt during a severe famine. Now, after experiencing both the consequences of his choice and God’s merciful protection, he returned to Bethel. **Abram stepped out of God’s perfect plan by leaving Bethel. He now returned to the very place where he chose his own way.** He built an altar at Bethel and called on the name of the Lord. Believers in God can count on two things: They are prone to wander into sin, and God graciously responds to repentance. Abram recognized and renounced self-determination in favor of trusting God, proven by his God-dependent choices in Chapter 13.

John the Baptist, prophesying before Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry, said that people who truly repent “produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8). Abram increasingly lived a changed and fruitful life of faith.

Verse 2 describes Abram’s growing wealth in livestock, silver and gold. Pharaoh likely offered a dowry of sorts when he took Sarai as a potential wife. They returned from Egypt quite wealthy, which soon became a source of conflict.

Defusing conflict – 13:5-9

Abram and Lot settled in Bethel. Their combined wealth, flocks, herds and tents were more than the land could sustain amid the native Canaanites and Perizzites. Quarreling erupted between Abram’s and Lot’s herders. **The peace and reconciliation Abram experienced with God likely raised his awareness of the danger of broken human relationships.** Abram valued family relationships and the positive influence of God’s people among their neighbors.

Pursuing peace reveals maturing faith.¹ Abram took initiative to find a peaceful solution with Lot. He looked over the whole land and suggested they part

company. Abram deferred to Lot and allowed him the first choice of land, a gracious offer that reflected his faith in God's provision. Abram had every right to choose first. He set aside his position as the older man and the one responsible for Lot's wealth and welfare. Many conflicts could be avoided if people put others above themselves. Godly wisdom honors peaceful relationships over personal rights.

Destiny-defining choices – 13:10-13

“So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east.” **Lot made his choice by sight and not by faith.** He failed to insist that Abram choose first. To Lot, the Jordan plain seemed ideal – well-watered like Eden and the lush land he observed in Egypt. Lot pursued what his heart desired: prosperity, comfort, honor and ease. He owed his uncle everything, yet he wanted the best at his uncle's expense.

Lot's choice of the Jordan plain revealed his heart. Though a shepherd, he moved near the cities on this fertile plain. Lot knowingly pitched his tents and settled near Sodom, where wicked people “were sinning greatly against the LORD.” The first readers of the account Moses recorded here knew well the infamy of Sodom and Gomorrah. God's judgment on those cities so destroyed the beauty of the land that Moses included a parenthetical reminder in verse 10 stating, “(This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)”

Divine compensation – 13:14-18

The eternal gains of following God more than compensate for any temporary loss. God's presence comforted Abram after Lot departed. Abram's distance from Lot, his lone relative besides Sarai among the Canaanites, surely tested his trust in God. **The Lord intentionally spoke to Abram after Lot departed,**

meeting his loss and loneliness with His own presence and promises. When people disappoint us, we realize that only God meets our deepest needs. Lot failed to honor Abram's charity, but God did not. God told Abram to lift his eyes and look north, south, east and west. God repeated His promise with attention on His amazingly generous provisions:

- **Land** – “All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring....” Canaan included the land Lot had chosen.
- **Timing** – God gave the land to Abram and his offspring “forever.”
- **Descendants** – God's future for Abram included uncountable offspring like “the dust of the earth.”

God wanted Abram to grasp the full reality of His amazing promise. He called Abram to respond in active faith. God first engaged Abram's eyes, promising him all the land he could see. He then enlarged his physical experience of what was promised as Abram was commanded to walk the length and breadth of the land promised to him. These beautiful commands, “look ... see ... go ... walk,” expanded Abram's experience from a verbal promise to a physical reality. Abram obeyed. He journeyed to live and worship near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron. Hebron stood just 19 miles (39.5 km) from present-day Jerusalem at the junction of the region's principal highways. According to the historian Josephus,^a Hebron was more ancient than the city of Memphis in Egypt. He wrote, “an old oak tree had been there since the creation of the world.” So Abram set up his home of tents and constructed a stone altar to the Lord. He allied himself in peaceful cooperation with the people (14:13).

^a Josephus, *War* 4.9.7 §529–33.

Biblical Theme: Battling Evil

Genesis 14 represents the Bible's first recorded warfare as Abram waged a military battle to rescue Lot. Throughout Israel's history, Abram and others fought under God's command to deliver righteousness and justice. Physical battles recorded in Scripture include spiritual dimensions. **Abram's courageous redemption of Lot demonstrated how God made His Name and power known to the inhabitants and invaders of the promised land, both physically and spiritually.** Since the ascension of Christ and sending of the Holy Spirit at the birth of the Church, the spiritual nature of our earthly battles is better understood.

Jesus Christ ultimately fought and achieved victory over evil, sin and death without physical weapons. Jesus fought on behalf of you and me, leaving His heavenly home to go to battle on our behalf. He realized victory on the cross through obedience to the Father's will. Since then, all Christians are to be prepared to do spiritual battle with unseen spiritual enemies.² The crucial distinction for believers is our enemies are not people, but sin and darkness. **The goal of spiritual battle is God's rescue of people from the grip of evil by the resurrection power found in Christ.** Christians are called to be on guard against godless world religions and systems. We recognize that our internal sin nature makes us prone to sin. Scripture teaches us to be armed with God's Word, to submit and come near to God and to depend on His power through His Spirit.³

Abram Rescued Lot – Genesis 14:1-16

Warfare – 14:1-12

Choices bring consequences and reveal character. Genesis 14 reveals the character of Abram and the consequences of Lot's decision to first move near Sodom and then into the city (14:12). While Abram experienced peace, the area around Sodom and Gomorrah was filled with anger and violence. An alliance of kings attacked and ruled over Sodom and other cities. Wanting to escape this oppression, the Canaanite kings allied and rebelled at a time when they sensed weakness in the defenses of their enemies. Their military strike did not go well. **The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, the ruling kings looted Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot became their prisoner of war.**

Rescue – 14:13-16

A thread of hope remained. Lot still identified with Abram, now called a Hebrew for the first time in verse 13. A man who escaped from Sodom brought news of Lot's captivity to Abram. The troubling report stirred Abram to action.

How could Abram overcome this mighty force to free Lot? Five powerful kings and their armies had been completely overrun in their attempt to defend Sodom. **Abram's best qualities of faithful leadership and compassionate servanthood are seen in his response:**

- **Grace** – Abram bore no grudge against Lot, nor did he stand on his rights. He had a right to say, "This happens when you make a wrong choice," and let Lot suffer. Instead, Abram generously gave all he had to rescue Lot.
- **Provisions** – Abram considered all God had given him. He had loyal servants trained to protect his flocks and possessions. Abram also immediately asked for help from his allies.

- **Power** – By outward appearance, this was an impossible task. Yet Abram knew God and rose up to battle in His Name. Later, his descendant David would meet the giant Goliath with the same spiritual zeal.
- **Wisdom** – Abram planned a rapid, surprise night attack. He routed the kings to recover the goods and prisoners, including Lot.

God keeps His promises. Abram's amazing victory made his name great among the king of Sodom and the people in that region. He became a man of standing because God was with him. God's blessing of victory overflowed to bless Abram's allies who witnessed faith at work. The kings who oppressed Sodom and captured Lot were defeated.

Are you trained and ready for your own crisis or ready to help someone else? Helping others requires personal investment of thought, energy, resources, time and prayer. Trusting and walking with God in daily life builds the spiritual resources needed in times of unexpected difficulty. How much compassion do you feel for those caught in the consequences of their own poor choices? **The "battles" we face here on earth are opportunities to trust and rely on God.**

Tragically, neither Lot nor the king of Sodom recognized God or His warning in these events – that God's grace overcomes evil, and He saves the undeserving. The king of Sodom came out to honor Abram but did not repent and honor Abram's God. Lot received the gracious gift of freedom but did not yield to God and Abram's kindness. This account does not record Lot's exact response, but we know he returned to Sodom where its corruption continued to impact him. The later destruction of Sodom might have been averted if these proud men recognized God's mercy and responded to His grace. Ignoring God's call to repent and believe is always a serious matter.

Abram and Melchizedek – Genesis 14:17-24

The kings of Sodom and Salem met with Abram in the "King's Valley," likely a plain near present-day Jerusalem. Salem means "peace." The king of Sodom, last seen fleeing a battle he started, now publicly acknowledged Abram as a hero. **Abram's personal courage risked loss to do what was right.** His faithful effort benefitted the prisoners, their families, the cities and the region.

Melchizedek, the king of Salem, interacts far differently with Abram than the king of Sodom. Evidently, Melchizedek was one of the few people of that day who truly knew and worshipped God. This mysterious priest-king is mentioned in several places in

the Bible. **Melchizedek's importance stems from how his meeting with Abram illustrates aspects of Christ as our Priest and King.**

He came from the place of "peace" with bread and wine for the war-weary men. As priest of the Most High God, he publicly praised God for giving Abram victory.

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."

Melchizedek publicly acknowledged God's blessing on Abram. As priest of the God Most High, Melchizedek recognized that he and Abram worshipped

the same God – Creator of heaven and earth. Abram proved this in verse 22 when he repeated the same name to speak of his God, “the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.” In other words, the God of the universe, of humanity and all creation is the living God of Melchizedek and Abram.

Melchizedek publicly praised the God Most High. Abram did not win the conquest by military might, but by the power of Almighty God, who deserved all honor for the victory. God Himself defeated those who served other gods, oppressed people and sinned against Lot. Abram presented Melchizedek, as if to God Himself, a tenth of everything. Then Melchizedek nearly disappears from the pages of Scripture as suddenly as he entered them.

Melchizedek’s countercultural blessing stands in stark contrast to the king of Sodom’s offer. Sodom’s king recognized he owed Abram a debt. The cultural custom gave the victor legal right to keep the spoils of battle. He told Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.” Abram’s response reflected his growing faith and desire to honor God above himself. He had certainly earned the reward. Abram believed it would dishonor God for the king of Sodom to be able to say, “I made Abram rich.” He accepted only the portion due his Amorite allies. By refusing this world’s riches, Abram declared that God was sufficient to meet all his needs.

Abram again gave up his rights. He gave Lot first choice of the land. He then rescued Lot from a mess of his own making and refused bounty from the king of Sodom. He voluntarily honored Melchizedek with a generous tithe. What did Abram lose? Nothing. **Abram gained trust that God would be with him, meet his needs and fulfill every promise.**

Our Lord Jesus states that those who lose for God’s sake gain far more in the coming kingdom than

Similarities Between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ

- **His name means “king of righteousness”** (Hebrews 7:2). The Bible always connects righteousness with peace.⁴ In the Bible, only Melchizedek and Jesus Christ were both priests and kings.
- **Salem means “peace.”** Christ is the Prince of Peace.⁵ Christ will one day reign from Jerusalem.
- **He was “priest of the God Most High.”** The title priest and name God Most High are used first here in Genesis 14.
- **He has no recorded genealogy, beginning or end to serve as a symbol** (Hebrews 7:3). Christ is eternal, from everlasting to everlasting.
- **He gave bread and wine.** Christ gives spiritual bread, or flesh, and spiritual wine, or blood.⁶
- **He, the greater, blessed Abram, the lesser.** Christ, the greatest, blesses believers with all spiritual blessings.
- **He received tithes from honor and gratitude.** Christ receives tithes from us out of the good things He gives.

they temporarily give up here.⁷ This promise is why believers can give generously without fear of loss. Those who understand the grace God has given them freely extend grace to others. **People who receive God’s grace should respond with reverence and gratitude to God and graciousness to others.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Lot chose to live according to the ways of the world; Abram chose to live by the ways of God. Lot chose immediate physical comforts such as well-watered land and the goods and activity of city life. The comforts of this life are not bad, in and of themselves, but they can distract us from finding genuine peace and joy in the Lord. Earthly possessions are good only when enjoyed with gratitude and obedience to the Lord for the glory of His Name. When we seek God first, as Abram did in these chapters, we experience abundant life, no matter our circumstances. **Living by faith in God overflows in grace and goodness to others.**

Abram was prepared to physically pursue, rescue and restore his nephew from captivity. He redeemed Lot, renewed his hope and gave him an opportunity to make better choices. Abram’s rescue mission was a physical one, but Christians also know and love people who are held captive spiritually. God calls believers to not only enjoy the personal benefits of their own salvation but recognize and address the spiritual peril of those around them. **God equips and positions Christians, like Abram, to battle in prayer, to build loving relationships and to share the gospel with people held captive by sin.** God provides the spiritual power and armor needed for the battle.⁸

Nearly a thousand years of Bible history passed before the next mention of Melchizedek. Then, David mentioned him in Psalm 110. After another thousand years, the book of Hebrews emphasized that Melchizedek prefigures the work of Jesus Christ, our superior great high priest. “Therefore he

is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”⁹ **Because Jesus serves as our high priest, we approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, finding mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.**¹⁰

Apply It

Genesis 13 and 14 tell the story of two people who responded very differently to the grace of God. Abram made mistakes but returned to God, sought His ways and experienced His blessing. Lot sought the pleasures of this world, got caught in painful consequences and intentionally returned to the very place that entrapped him. God extended grace to both Abram and Lot. Their individual responses to that grace differed greatly. We do not earn God’s favor by what we do. Even those who obey God encounter difficulties. But our lives reflect who and what we love. Abram loved God more than fleeting pleasure. Lot loved his own pleasure the most. How do you respond when God, in grace, calls you back to Himself when you go the wrong direction? What does your life reveal about what you love?

Lot’s trouble became Abram’s cause. Abram had every reason to enjoy his own

peace and let Lot suffer the just consequences of his foolish decisions. As Christians, we enjoy spiritual blessings, sweet fellowship with one another and spiritual safety in the arms of our Savior. The crazy thinking and brokenness in our world can lead us to retreat to the safe shelter of our Christian circle. Even though believers are not a perfect bunch, the world seems much riskier. While salvation in Christ brings untold personal benefit, God always calls us to a cause beyond ourselves. Abram set the example when he pursued Lot. Jesus perfected the example when He left heaven’s glories to pursue rebels on earth. We are not responsible for the responses of others, but we are responsible for our own obedience. Where and how might God lead you to invest in the rescue of someone else? How might you relieve suffering and oppression, both physical and spiritual? How is God calling you to His cause, a cause beyond yourself?

Abram was progressing in a step-by-step walk of faith. He was learning to trust God in a variety of life circumstances. He learned to love what God loves and hate what God hates. He began to want what God wanted Him to have. As life brought Abram to new challenges, in everyday life as a shepherd, in military conquest or just continuing to believe God without visible proof, he kept walking. He walked with God, not perfectly, but steadily. Can you do that? Can you just keep walking with God, “steady on,” trusting His purposes in every circumstance He allows in your life? The ups and downs of life do not change the steadfast character of God. Seek God in the battles. Seek God on the quiet days of rest. Seek God when obedience brings risk. Share God’s heart for others. Step by step. Day by day. Will you trust God for the fresh strength for whatever your day brings?¹¹

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God’s Word in this week’s lesson.

1: Living in peace: 1 Corinthians 6:1-7; Ephesians 4:2-3, 30-32; Philippians 2:5-11

2: Spiritual warfare: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-18

3: Victorious Christian living: James 4:1-10

4: Righteousness and peace: Psalm 85:10; Isaiah 32:17; Hebrews 12:11

5: Prince of Peace: Isaiah 9:6

6: New covenant: Matthew 26:26-28

7: Gain for loss: Matthew 16:24-26

8: Spiritual armor: Ephesians 6:10-18

9: Able to save: Hebrews 7:25

10: High priest: Hebrews 4:15-16

11: Fresh mercies: Lamentations 3:22-24

The Doctrine of Grace

God's creation of humanity in His image reveals our greatest possible destiny – a life that honors and reflects His glory in everlasting joy with Him. **While God's common grace brings good to all people, His special grace brings new life to those who believe by faith.** Like Abram, those who mature in faith experience the power of God and become increasingly gracious toward others.

Grace is God's undeserved favor. Grace is never earned: It's the gift of God's unconditional love to people who do not deserve it. If we could earn grace, it would not be grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

God never compromises His character to extend grace. Humans exercise grace imperfectly. We think we are being gracious to others but often expect something in return. Other times, we show leniency to one person at the expense of another. Not so with God. God's grace never jeopardizes any other aspect of His character. He is always gracious, always holy, always righteous, always just, always good.

Grace fuels salvation. God's Word teaches that Jesus Christ provides salvation from sin and a credit of righteousness, or justification, by grace through faith alone (Romans 3:21-24). We are saved because of God's unmerited favor toward us in Christ, which we cannot earn by good works (Romans 4:1-8). We receive His grace by believing His Word. Grace is God's love expressed through Jesus Christ. God does not expect you to earn His love. He does not give and take away His love. God's love does not depend on our performance.

Grace is kind and good. God does not owe anyone anything. He gives life, breath, food and everyday pleasures to all He created. Every good thing in the world exists because of God's benevolence (Acts 14:17). He orders people's lives to give opportunities to seek Him (Acts 17:24-27). God pours out grace on believers as He gives them faith, adopts them as children and transforms their lives. (Psalm 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5).

When I truly believe grace is a gift that cannot be earned, I am free to admit my failures with confidence that God's love and favor will not fade. The security of the grace of God spills over into other areas of life. Because I am a recipient of God's grace I may now freely extend grace to myself and others. I can let go of impossible standards. I can recognize my value is not earned through accomplishments but is secured through the unconditional love and grace of God.

On the other hand, when I believe I must earn God's grace, I live in a constant state of strife and performance. My life resembles a roller coaster as I pride myself on my successes then torture myself when I fail or make a mistake. Not only do I hold myself and others to impossible expectations, I place expectations on God based on my behavior. I expect Him to reward my faithfulness and good service or expect Him to punish my sin and disobedience. My view of God is skewed. My love for God hinges on fear and duty.

But thanks be to God there is freedom in the abundant, unmerited, undeserved, overly impressive grace of God through Jesus Christ!