

## ***PATRIARCHS: Lesson One, Abram's Call and Arrival in Canaan*** ***Genesis 12-14***

**Subject:** Called Abram arrives in Canaan; shocks Egypt; parts from, then rescues, Lot.

**Main Idea:** God's commands and promises are the believer's compass.

**Principles:**

1. *God expects us to respond to what He reveals to us.*
2. *Fear and insecurity often lead us off course.*
3. *God wants us to live with integrity, regardless of our circumstances (or how they came to be).*

### **Introduction**

Our family lived just outside the large, southwest, American city of Phoenix, Arizona for 18 years. There were many things I liked about Phoenix. One of them was that the city is a "planned city," and as a result, all major roads run directly east and west or north and south. For this reason, once I memorized the names of the main roads, it wasn't difficult to find my way around such a large place. The only difficulty that remained was making sure I was going the right direction! On a number of occasions I headed east when I meant to be going west, or north rather than south. Eventually, we were privileged to own a vehicle that had a compass built into it. Having that compass in front of me made all the difference!

The portion of the Bible we are covering in this lesson describes God's command to Abram to "go to the land I will show you" and the promises of God that accompanied this command.

- Once a person has come to understand the entire story of the Bible, it becomes clear that the significance of God's commands and promises to Abram are difficult to over-emphasize. They are critical to understanding much of the rest of the story.
- Throughout this study, we will keep seeing these commands and promises being challenged by people and circumstances, but protected by God.
- And we will also see that for the Patriarchs, these commands and promises became *a compass* by which they directed their lives.
- At times they (figuratively) "headed east rather than west." Eventually, God's clear commands and promises got them back on course again. They were the guides that brought direction and purpose to their lives.

Have you ever thought about what *your* "life compass" is?

- Where do you look for direction when you wonder if you have made a major mistake and have taken a wrong turn in your life?
- Maybe you are so busy that you are confused about your daily priorities?
- Where do you look for direction when you are bored or restless or lonely?

Navigating through life can be challenging! We want, *and need*, clear information, reliable principles, something we can keep returning to that will keep us focused and give us direction, something available at a moment's notice, something that helps us with routine decisions as well as life's big crises. We need a compass! Once we start reading the Bible, we find it is full of commands and promises to give *us* the life compass we need!

## I. God's Call to Abram – Genesis 12:1-3

**A. Who was Abram?** As we began learning about Abram's life, it is helpful to return to the end of Genesis 11 where we find a description of Abram's family. It indicates that they migrated from Ur of the Chaldeans to Harran. Their intention had been to relocate to Canaan. However, they ended up settling in Harran along the way.

i. Abram's Siblings: Abram was one of three named sons. (Genesis 11:27-32)

1. *Birth order*: Abram being listed first among these does not necessarily indicate that he was the firstborn; there is precedent in Genesis for listing first the man whose story the author is mostly concerned with. (See Genesis 6:10 with 10:21.)
2. *Haran*: One of Abram's brothers died sometime after fathering Lot but before any of the party departed from Ur of the Chaldeans. The name of the brother who died was Haran (not to be confused with the city to which Nahor led his family that bears an identical name in English. An extra "r" [Harran] is added in some translations to the name of the city to distinguish the two.)
3. *Nahor*: Abram's second brother Nahor, and his wife Milcah, must have remained in Ur initially, since Genesis 11:27-32 does not seem to include them in the traveling party. However, later in Genesis, Nahor and his family play important roles in Abram's story.

ii. Abram's father Terah

1. *Terah's Party*: Terah led a party that included his grandson Lot, his son Abram, and Abram's wife Sarai, from Ur, with the intention of relocating in Canaan.
2. *Reconciling Acts 7:2-4 with Genesis 11-12*
  - a. According to Stephen in Acts 7, God appeared to *Abram* and called *him* to Canaan while he still lived in *Ur*. Yet Genesis 11:31-12:4 indicates that Abram left Ur under his father's authority and that God's call to Abram to go to Canaan came once Abram was in Harran.
  - b. This can be reconciled by understanding that God appeared to Abram in Ur, calling him to Canaan, but Abram was delayed in Harran, because while his father still lived he remained under his authority.
  - c. Terah died in Harran. After this, it seems that God spoke to Abram again, reminding him of his earlier call to Canaan. Such a reiteration of the call was probably necessary in light of the fact that the text indicates that Terah and Abram were "settled" in Harran. It had become their home.

iii. Abram's Barren Wife

1. Sarai was Abram's wife. Her inability to conceive is an extremely significant fact as the story continues.
  2. Because of Sarai's barrenness, it is likely that the fatherless Lot (Abram's nephew) was Abram's heir presumptive. In that culture, as in many today, the continuity of a family line through a son was considered extremely important.
- iv. These verses at the end of Genesis 11 set the stage for the story of Abram's life that picks up in chapter 12.

**B. God's Command to Leave and Go**

i. Ur, Abram's City of Origin

1. *Capital of Sumer:*

- a. Sumer, in southern Mesopotamia, contained a number of independent cities and city-states, the first of which were established possibly as early as 5000 B.C. The prominent city Ur was the capital of this ancient region. It was a very large coastal city, about 600 miles south of Harran.
  - b. According to the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Ur was a "great city, cultured, sophisticated, and powerful".<sup>i</sup>
  - c. Archaeological discoveries show the average family lived in a home that had 10-20 rooms.<sup>ii</sup>
  - d. Tablets that have been found show Sumerian students learned reading, writing and arithmetic.<sup>iii</sup>
  - e. The moon god was its patron deity.<sup>iv</sup>
2. However, Abram's father Terah was from "Ur of the Chaldeans" (Genesis 11:28)
- a. Lower Mesopotamia wasn't called Chaldea until 1000 years after the time of Abram!<sup>v</sup>
  - b. Some scholars believe that Abram and Terah originated in another "Ur," located in northern Mesopotamia, in a location not nearly as far from Harran. A lesser city by the name "Ur" has been discovered there.
  - c. Interestingly, the names of some of Abram's forefathers are identical to the names of cities in this more northern region.
  - d. Some also point out that Harran would have been much more en route to Canaan if Terah and Abram originated in the northern, less-known Ur. However, one could also reason that if Terah's relatives were from northern Mesopotamia, he and his sons may have migrated 600 miles south to the "greater" Ur. In this case, they may have decided to travel through the region in the north, where extended family still

resided, en route to Canaan. In either case, they unexpectedly “settled” in Harran.

ii. Harran, a City Where Abram Settled

1. The specific reason why the group settled in Harran, short of their goal, is not stated.
2. Although Nahor and his wife Milcah are not indicated as traveling to Harran with Terah and Abram, later in Genesis (chapter 24), we discover that they must have also relocated in Harran eventually and are well established there. One way or another, by Genesis 24, Abram was well aware that this was the place where his brother resided. Later in Genesis, the region around Harran is referred to as “Paddan Aram”.

iii. The Significance of “Leaving” and “Going”

1. *What Abram Left:* In addition to leaving behind most all of what was familiar to him, Joshua 24:2-3 tells us that when God called Abram to Canaan, He called him away from an idolatrous family of origin. God planned to use Abram to build a family that would worship and represent Him. This necessitated a separation.
2. *Abram’s Faith:* Another reason Abram’s leaving and going is significant is that it was a step of faith.
  - a. Specifically, God told Abraham (12:1) to leave his country, his people, and his father’s household to go to a land that was unknown to him. Hebrews 11:8 stresses the faith of Abram in doing this, saying that he “obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”
  - b. *Where did this faith come from?* God was at work in the life of this former pagan, creating faith in him. He takes the initiative to reach us! Are you a person who senses God is reaching out to you? If so, here is what He wants in return – He wants you to respond in faith to the limited amount of knowledge of Him you already have. Act on what you know, however little that is!
  - c. Abram’s obedience to God’s call is one of the reasons, according to Hebrews 11, why he is considered a model to us of a life of faith.
  - d. Most likely, Abram knew very little about the God who spoke to him. *But, in faith, he responded to what he knew.*
    - i. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that “without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”

- ii. In other words, if you are at a place where you are beginning to wonder about and have interest in God, if you sense He may be reaching out to you, then respond in faith by acknowledging His existence first. And then, trust that if you seek Him, He will reward that search. “If you seek Him, He will be found by you” (1 Chronicles 28:9). That is His promise!
- iii. No doubt, you may still have questions, but the starting place is responding to what you know. That is what Abram did, and God rewarded him. He was immediately rewarded by some spectacular promises from God, and he began a process in which he grew to become a friend of God.

### 3. *Example to Posterity*

- a. A third reason Abram’s leaving and going was greatly significant is that it gave a critical example to his descendants, who were called by God to *leave* Egypt, where they lived as slaves for 400 years, and to *go* to Canaan – the Promised Land.
- b. However, they are not the only ones who needed Abram’s example. “Leaving” and “going” is the call of God on the life of *every* believer, not just certain, “special” people. The New Testament is clear that the Christian life always involves leaving behind our lives of sin and entering a new way of life in Christ. This involves breaking old habits and patterns, sometimes necessitating physically removing ourselves from certain people and places that present too much of a hindrance to living this way successfully.

### C. **God’s Promises to Abram:** What were these promises God gave Abram?

- i. Blessing of Becoming a Great Nation (12:2): This was a promise that, despite Sarai’s barrenness, Abram would have many descendants. In Genesis 15:5, God told Abram his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Such a promise must have really stretched Abram’s faith and imagination!
- ii. The Blessing of a Great Name: (12:2) In ancient times, a person’s name was more than merely what they were called. Their name represented their character. The promise is that God would build Abram’s character, so that He would represent God well to others. As we will learn, this was a process for Abram.
- iii. Blessing of Sovereign Protection (12:3): God promised to bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who cursed him.

- iv. Blessing to All People on Earth (12:3): We cannot know how Abram understood this promise. But the New Testament reveals that through Abram's descendant, Jesus Christ, the whole world has been blessed with a Messiah, a Deliverer. Additionally, Abram's descendants wrote the Bible, almost exclusively, and preserved it for us through many generations.
- v. Blessing of Land (12:7): Finally, God promised Abram that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan, to which God had called him. This is hinted at in God's call in 12:1-3, but stated more clearly in 12:7 (as well as 13:14-17).

**Summary Statement:** God issued a tremendous call to a man from a pagan family. Once Abram was willing, by faith, to respond, God's command and promises became his compass. They were the rule by which he would live his life from this time forward. Abram didn't know everything, but he responded to what he *did* know.

**Principle:** *God expects us to respond to what He reveals to us.*

**Application:** God has given *all of us* clear commands and promises in the Bible to keep us "on course" in life.

As we know Him better, we find that He is eager to speak to each of us. Primarily, this happens through the Bible, His Word.

- Occasionally He speaks through a combination of ways: other trustworthy people, by circumstances, and in prayer. Even then, we cannot depend on these if they ever contradict clear, Biblical principles.
- As we know Him better, we learn that His clear commands and promises were given as a compass to lead us in our own personal situations.

The Bible portrays people as forgetful, especially when it comes to God and His commands and promises. Because they are our compass, it's important to develop ways to help us remember God's clear commands and promises!

- Memorizing Scripture verses is a key way of doing this.
- One way is to underline commands and promises in the Bible that speak clearly to your situation. I find it helpful to write a date next to them, and sometimes a word or two about the circumstance with which the command or promise helped me.
- Some prefer not to write in their Bible. If that is the case with you, you might record verses with dates and the way God spoke to you in a journal. I keep a journal for the specific purpose of recording occasions on which I knew God was saying something important to me. After all, if the God who made me gives me direction, it certainly seems worthy of being recorded and remembered!

**Transition:** Holding tightly onto God’s clear commands to “*leave*” and “*go*” and to His promises of blessing, Abram began his journey with God.

## II. Abram in Canaan and Egypt – Genesis 12:3-20

### A. Abram in Canaan (12:3-9):

- i. A Nagging Question: At 75, Abram left Harran for Canaan, taking his wife, his nephew Lot, and all his possessions with him. Scholars debate the nagging question: Did he disobey the instruction to “leave his people and his father’s household” by bringing Lot with him?
- i. Important Places: Genesis 12 names three locations in Canaan to which Abram journeyed, from the north, where he would have entered the land, to the south. These locations continued to be places where the Patriarchs found themselves.
  1. *Shechem*: This city, in the heartland of Canaan, was the place where God appeared to Abram (again), promising the land to him. 12:7 tells us Abram responded by building an altar there.
  2. *Between Bethel and Ai*
    - a. This “calling on the name of the Lord,” is first mentioned in Genesis 4:26. With regard to its meaning, scholars Keil and Delitzsch add, “We have here an account of the commencement of that worship of God which consists in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, or in the acknowledgment and celebration of the mercy and help of Jehovah.”<sup>vi</sup>
    - b. In this location between Bethel and Ai, Abram built an altar and also “called on the name of the Lord.” Martin Luther translated this phrase to mean, “Abram preached.” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* gives weight to that interpretation, saying that Abram proclaimed the name of the Lord among the Canaanites there.<sup>vii</sup>
  3. *Negev*: The Negev is the desert highland region between Israel and Egypt. *Negev* means “dry.”

### B. Abram in Egypt (12:9-20)

- i. A Possible Mistake
  1. Some time after Abram entered the land, a famine caused him to leave for Egypt. Once again, the question arises as to whether or not Abram was mistaken to do so. There is no record that the Lord directed Abram to do so. Additionally, his trip to Egypt (as well as his decision to bring Lot with him to Canaan) resulted in consequences that were regrettable.
  2. It seems that Abram was not walking by faith when he moved from Canaan to Egypt. Abram was still a “work in progress.”

- ii. A Definite Mistake: While there may be uncertainty about the wisdom of Abram's journey to Egypt, we can be certain that Abram made a serious error once he arrived.
1. *The Lie*:
    - a. Apparently, even with her advancing age, Sarai was quite beautiful. We are told that in order to protect his life from those who might kill him in order to have Sarai, Abram told Sarai to say she was his sister rather than his wife (12:11-13).
    - b. Later in Genesis, we are told that Sarai was, in fact, Abram's half-sister. Although it was a half-truth they told, it was still a lie.
  2. *The Results*: Several things resulted from their deception:
    - a. *Sarai at Risk*
      - i. Even in the role of "brother," there was one suitor Abram could not deny: Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt.
      - ii. Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's harem. She was put at great risk! Abram could have lost permanently the woman who was to bear his children!
    - b. *Abram's Wealth*
      - i. A second direct result of Abram's lie and Pharaoh's acquisition of Sarai was that he became wealthy, acquiring animals and servants (important commodities of the day) from Pharaoh.
      - ii. It is an error to assume that wealth is always a sign of God's blessing. The psalmist complained to God that the wicked are often those who prosper (Psalm 73). This mistaken theology continues to this day. The teaching of a "prosperity gospel" (that believers can and should expect material blessings) is a great misunderstanding of the Scriptures.
      - iii. One might ask, "Why did God prosper Abram when he lied?" Abram's wealth wasn't an indication that God condoned his behavior. God is gracious, often giving blessings we do not deserve.
      - iv. In a future lesson, we will discover that one of the Egyptian servants obtained by Abram, a woman named Hagar, became a threat to God's promises to Abram and Sarai (Genesis 16).
    - c. *Outcome for Pharaoh*: The third result of Abram's deception was that Pharaoh and his household suffered. The Lord inflicted serious diseases on his household. In some way, Pharaoh came to believe that Sarai's presence in his harem

was the reason for this divine judgment, and upon further investigation, discovered Abram's deception.

d. *Other Outcomes for Abram*

- i. First, we are told that Pharaoh threw Abram out of Egypt.
- ii. Second, we can easily deduce that, while Abram may have proclaimed the name of the Lord in Canaan, any opportunity for him to have done the same in Egypt was lost!
- iii. Third, it seems quite likely that Abram also would have suffered his wife's wrath, once she was returned to him, over the awkward position in which she had been placed. We are not told whether or not Pharaoh engaged Sarai sexually on this occasion. At a later date, God's protection of Sarai sexually in similar circumstances is clearly stated (Genesis 20:6).

3. *Threat to God's Promises*

- a. Abram's deception might have cost him his life. It might have cost him the wife who was to bear his children. It might have prevented him from ever returning to Canaan. All of God's promises, from a human perspective, were put at risk by Abram's selfishness. The man who became a "model of faith" still had a lot to learn.
- b. Referring to this incident as the first of many ways in which the God's promises appear endangered, John Sailhamer writes, "*In nearly every episode that follows, the promise of a 'numerous seed,' 'blessing to all peoples on earth,' or the 'gift of the land' is placed in jeopardy by the actions of the characters of the narrative. The promise looks as if it will fail. In the face of such a threat, however, God remains faithful to his word and safeguards the promise. God can bring about his promise, despite human failures.*"<sup>viii</sup>

4. *God's Sovereignty and Grace*

- a. We learn at least a couple of things about God's character from this account. First, God's sovereign purposes prevail, despite our failures. God had a plan to build a nation through Abram and He protected that plan.
- b. Secondly, God graciously works on behalf of His children when we least deserve it. He is not obligated to do so. Yet He often chooses to. Sarai was safely returned to Abram, and both left Egypt alive, with the many possessions they acquired there. This was not what Abram deserved.

**Summary Statement:** Abram epitomized the life of faith by leaving Ur and Harran to go to Canaan, but when he felt threatened by famine and by the implications of having a beautiful wife, he relied on his own schemes to save himself.

**Principle:** *Fear and insecurity often lead us off course.*

**Application:** How often do you find you act (or react) out of fear or insecurity? Sometimes, this may happen many times in a single day.

Abram lied because his fear led him to believe he had to lie to protect himself.

- Satan uses fear, perhaps more than anything else, to keep us from doing what God wants us to do, and becoming who God wants us to be!
- We are wise to evaluate what we think we “*need*” to do (or need to *avoid*) to see whether any such urgencies are motivated by fear or insecurity.
- When they are, it is likely they will lead you off course, to make a bad decision.

How would it change your life if you practiced replacing fear and insecurity with God’s commands and promises? Here are *just a few* of them:

- “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). Will you trust your salvation from death and judgment to the God who promised that whoever believes in His one and only Son will have eternal life (John 3:16)?
- “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Could you trust God to be your defense, the God who promises elsewhere to be a shield around you (Psalm 3:3)?
- “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5). Could you trust God to provide for you, the God who said “Look at the birds of the air... your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matthew 6:25-26)?
- “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5). Can you trust that God, who promised “if you ask you will receive” (Matthew 7:7-8), will give you wisdom to navigate a threatening situation?

The compass of God’s commands and promises, *when appropriated*, give us security and freedom from fear.

**Transition:** Abram was thrown out of Egypt and returned via the Negev to his altar at Bethel. While at Bethel, a couple of incidents took place that probably forced Abram to consider whether he had been following God’s compass when he chose to bring Lot with him to Canaan.

### III. Abram’s Dilemmas Regarding Lot – Genesis 13-14

#### A. A Personal Battle (Chapter 13)

##### i. Wealthy Abram Reroutes

##### 1. *Returning to the Place Where God Last Spoke*

- a. It is interesting to note that Abram rerouted to the last place where he had communed with God before entering Egypt. When he had found his way back to the place between Bethel and Ai, once again he “*called on the name of the Lord.*”
- b. Verse 5 of chapter 13 indicates Lot had been with Abram all through his journey to Egypt and back. Perhaps the “flocks and herds and tents” Lot had (verse 6) were also enriched in Egypt.

##### 2. *Conflict Outside the Family Replaced By Conflict Within*

- a. Quarreling arose between Abram’s herders and Lot’s because of the shortage of land for their animals. This problem existed because there were already locals settled in Canaan. There was not an unlimited amount of land for Abram and Lot to share. What they could use was not enough to support both households.
- b. Previously, *famine* brought Abram into crisis. Now, *abundance* brought him crisis. Previously, Abram sought a selfish, manipulative solution *in fear*. This time, Abram resolved the matter with a very unselfish, generous offer *in faith*.

##### ii. Parting Company

- a. *Abram’s generosity:* Abram offered Lot first choice of the land: How magnanimous!

- i. Allen Ross explains this, saying, “*A person who has the promise of God’s provision does not need to cling to things.*”<sup>ix</sup>

- ii. Abram was the elder relative and the head of the household, and, therefore, by custom (if nothing else), should have taken what was best for him.

##### b. *Lot’s choice*

- i. Lot chose the eastern, fertile plain of the Jordan. He was infatuated with what he saw and pitched his tent near wicked Sodom – a careless decision!

- ii. One would assume Lot knew of Sodom's reputation when he chose to move there, but he went because the land was fertile and ignored the spiritual danger to his family.
- iii. Archaeologists have not conclusively identified the location of the former city of Sodom (or the other "cities of the plain"). However, the region southeast of the Dead Sea is favored.<sup>x</sup> Genesis 13:12 distinguishes the cities of the plain from the land of Canaan.
- iv. Following on the heels of Abram's near disaster in Egypt, Lot's departure represents a second occasion upon which we wonder how God will fulfill His promise to grant many descendants to the childless Abram.

### iii. God's Reassurance

1. *Abram's Losses*: Abram had given up the familiarity of Harran to go to a strange, new place (Canaan), he had lost his father, and finally, presumably, he lost confidence that Lot was a suitable heir to all God promised Abram.
2. *God's encouragement*: At this time, when Abram was most likely discouraged, the Lord brought him just the encouragement and reassurance he needed.
  - a. First, the Lord confirmed His promises to give Abram's numerous offspring and to give him all the land of Canaan.
  - b. Then, God told Abram to walk through the entire land.
    - i. Some have suggested that walking through the land may reflect a legal mode of conducting a land transaction in which the one receiving the land surveyed it and was shown its boundaries by the one granting it.<sup>xi</sup>
    - ii. That Abram walked the land is not recorded but only assumed. By doing so, he surely received a greater perspective than the sad circumstances of the moment.
  - c. God's promises consoled Abram that:
    - i. although he lost human companionship, he had not lost God's companionship and promises;
    - ii. although he lost Lot as a potential heir, he would have much family in the future;
    - iii. and that, although he sacrificed the more lush land by offering Lot his first choice, God would give Abram more land than he could imagine.
    - iv. By promising something eternal ("forever" verse 15), God reminded him that all temporal losses are nothing if eternal things are gained.

- v. Walking through the land probably also gave Abram a short-term goal and a reason to rejoice, rather than allowing his losses to become his focus.
- iv. Abram settled in Hebron
  - 1. Verse 18 tells us Abram settled in Hebron, presumably after walking through Canaan, where he built his third altar to the Lord. In the following chapter we also find that he established himself with local princes there (see 14:13).
  - 2. Hebron is an ancient city in the heart of Judea, between Jerusalem and Beersheba.

## **B. A Societal Battle (Chapter 14)**

### **i. Four Kings Versus Five Kings**

- 1. *Who were the Four Kings?* Kedorlaomer and the other three kings with whom he was allied, listed in Genesis 14:1, came from eastern lands. The mention of Shinar reminds the Bible student that, after God dispersed mankind at Babel and nations began to be formed, Shinar was the place where the powerful Nimrod built a kingdom of city-states (10:10). Kedorlaomer and his allies were having a successful military campaign.
- 2. *Who were the Five Kings?* The five kings listed were Jordanian kings not so far from Abram's vicinity. One of these, we note, was the Bera, King of Sodom. These kings had rebelled from previous subjugation to Kedorlaomer, and apparently determined not to be in that position again, marched out to meet his forces. However, Kedorlaomer defeated them.
- 3. *Lot's Position:* Lot, we are reminded, "was living in Sodom" (14:12). As a result, he and his possessions were taken captive and led away by the victors. Lot was already reaping the consequences of his poor decision.

### **ii. Abram's Victory**

- 1. As a significant side note, 14:13 indicates that Abram found favor with those clan leaders (local princes) near whom he resided and they had formed an alliance. The indication is that Abram was becoming a person of influence in the region and God was indeed blessing Abram, as He promised.
- 2. Unwilling to abandon his relative in crisis, Abram and his allies chased down the eastern kings, defeated them, and recovered the captives and plunder. This victory is another indication of God's blessing on Abram.
- 3. The name "Hebrew," regarding Abram, is used for the first time in the Scriptures in verse 13.

- iii. Abram Encounters Two Kings: Upon his return from battle, Abram encounters two kings who are contrasted with one another, Melchizedek, King of Salem and Bera, King of Sodom.
1. *Melchizedek, King of Salem*
    - a. “Melchizedek” means “king of righteousness” and “Salem” is most likely a reference to Jerusalem.
    - b. We are told this man was both a king and a priest. Even more surprisingly, he was a “priest of God Most High.” Here we learn that at least one other resident of Canaan worshipped Abram’s God, the God of the Bible.
    - c. Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth (that is a tithe) of all he recovered.
    - d. Melchizedek then blessed Abram.
    - e. The book of Hebrews portrays him as a ‘type’ of Christ (Hebrews 5-7). Some have suggested that this was a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ to Abram. But it seems just as likely that Melchizedek was an historical figure.
  2. *Bera, King of Sodom*
    - a. We have already been informed (13:13) that Sodom was an extremely wicked city that sinned greatly against the Lord. Bera was the king of Sodom.
    - b. Whether Bera maintained the rights to any of the people and goods over which he bargained with Abram is doubtful. What is clear, though, is Abram’s unwillingness to benefit from anything affiliated with Sodom. Perhaps Bera would have considered Abram indebted to him (rather than the other way around) had Abram kept the plunder.
  3. *Abram’s motives* are not stated outright. However, he clearly received the blessing of one king and refused the “blessing” of the other. Both were righteous acts on Abram’s part – rejecting anything connected with evil while aligning himself with God’s blessing and people.

## C. Comparing Genesis 13 and 14

### i. God’s Promises Being Fulfilled

1. The back-to-back accounts concerning Abram and Lot in chapters 13-14 highlight Abram’s growing power and influence in the region. God promised to bless him and this promise was already beginning to be fulfilled.
2. We also see, by comparing the two stories, the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who cursed him. Those who allied themselves with Abram were blessed.

Sadly, Lot chose to distance himself from the one who had received God's promises. The result for him was misery.

ii. Abram's Character Being Developed

1. We note that both chapters concern battles. The first was a personal battle between Abram and Lot's households. The second was a geopolitical battle, one with greater social implications.
2. We should notice that while Abram chose *not* to fight the first battle, he *did* engage in the second one. How did Abram decide which to fight? By considering this, we see that Abram's character was being developed.
  - a. When it came to personal loss, Abram refused to engage in the argument. He trusted God to protect his personal interests and let Lot have his way.
  - b. However, he later engaged in battle when more than personal loss was at risk. He fought *for the sake of others*.
  - c. Abram's decisions showed faith and unselfishness!
  - d. In Genesis 13, Abram chose to give up rather than fight a battle. In chapter 14, he chose to wage a war he didn't have to fight.

**Summary Statement:** Surely Abram must have doubted his decision to bring Lot into Canaan with him after these two incidents. But it was too late!

- In both cases, he had to trust God to help him live courageously and righteously *in light of the choice he had already made* to bring Lot along with him to Canaan.
- By keeping God's clear commands and promises as the compass in front of him, he was able to do what was right on both occasions.

**Principle:** *God wants us to live with integrity regardless of our circumstances (or how they came to be).*

**Application:** I have often made decisions that seemed right to me at the time and later wondered if they indeed were right. Have you ever wondered:

- Did I really marry the right person?
- Am I living/working in the right place?
- Do I own things that have become encumbrances? Were these purchases wise?

There are some decisions we can't easily un-do or just can't un-do at all!

- Abram couldn't "undo" the fact that he chose to bring Lot with him. We can debate whether it was actually the right thing to do, but there is no doubt in my mind that at this point in his life, Abram wondered!
- There are times we have to trust God with the possibility, the probability, or even the certainty that we *have* made a mistake.

In moments of questioning, believing God will keep His promises to us, and reminding ourselves of the clear instructions He has given us, will enable us to victoriously endure under difficult circumstances and choose the right battles to fight!

God wants us to live with integrity, regardless of our circumstances or how they came to be. These two chapters show Abram doing so.

### Conclusion

The promises and commands God gave Abram continue to be central to the story of the Bible, as we will discover.

- For Abram, they were the certainties to which he could keep returning.
- And God's clear commands and promises are *our* compass, as well.
  - Our feelings may deceive us. Fear and feelings of inadequacy often lead us off course.
  - The wisdom of the world may lead us in the wrong direction.
  - Circumstances may confuse us.
  - Satan will cause us to have tremendous doubts.
  - But God's clear commands and promises will always lead us in the right direction.

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