



GENESIS 13- 15 ABRAHAM RESCUES LOT; HIS FAITH IS SLOWLY PERFECTED

In the last study, we covered Abraham's dangerous stay in Egypt. Since he had not trusted enough in God, he almost lost his life and wife. Thanks to God's intervention, he was spared, but then had to quickly leave Egypt to avoid more of the Pharaoh's wrath. He returned to Canaan, thankfully after the drought and famine there had ended.

Due to his close shave with death in Egypt, he began to learn a valuable and humbling lesson of having to rely more on God and not so much on being deceptive. This lesson would serve him well in the trials that loomed ahead--although he would slip again on the same fault in chap. 20. Abraham's faith had to grow in stages, as should our faith. It would take God many years to finally perfect it.

Back in Canaan, they set their tents in a place just north of Jerusalem. And the Bible says, "Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journey from the South as far as **Bethel**, to the place where **his tent** had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai...Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together" (Genesis 13:2-6). So a dispute erupted between Abraham's and Lot's herdsmen about grazing space, and Abraham peacefully settled the issue. He graciously gave Lot the first choice of where to go, something unusual at that time.

"As the elder person," notes *The Evangelical Commentary of the Bible*, "Abram would have been fully within his rights to decide who gets what portion of land. As the younger, Lot would have to accept passively what was left over or assigned to him. But notice the change in Abram since he returned from Egypt. In the first instance he is obsessed with himself, his safety, his future. He must become deceitful. In the second instance, Abram assigns himself position number two. He empties himself of patriarchal authority."

Lot based his decision more on the greenery of the land than on the character of the people, a big mistake. "And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all **the plain of Jordan**, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and

Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abraham dwelt **in the land of Canaan**, and Lot dwelt **in the cities of the plain**...But **the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful** against the Lord" (Genesis 13:10-13). Thus, Lot went down and dwelt in Sodom, and Abraham eventually settled down in the mountainous region of Hebron. Yet, this peaceful settlement among them would soon be altered by a war among nine kings—and Lot had arrived right in the middle of the fray!

The Bible says, "And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations, that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah...All these joined together in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled...And the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is Zoar) went out and joined together in battle in the Valley of Siddim. Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits, and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains. Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. Then one who had escaped came and told Abram" (Genesis 13:4-13).

It is interesting that there still are **tar pits** in this area. Also, true to form, the Bible describes this event in a historical context that fits that age—around 1900 to 1800 B.C. The names of the five invading kings are all of **Amorite** origin and the Amorites had recently conquered most of the Middle East. They had made their vanquished nations pay a heavy tribute—which means paying a very grievous tax on all their goods and services.

"In the closing centuries of the third millennium," says *The MacMillan Bible Atlas*, "a wave of nomads speaking a West Semitic tongue, swept over all the centers of the Middle East. In Acadian documents they are called the 'People of

Amurru (of the West), and in the Bible, the *Amorites*. No kingdom withstood them, and in the first centuries of the second millennium [when Abraham lived], new kingdoms arose under Amorite domination...In Palestine a similar picture is presented...and the initial phase was quickly overrun by the Amorite invasion...The names of the kings of the Dead Sea valley are Amorite and belong to the corpus of names of the Patriarchs and of the Execration Texts” (p. 23).

The Execration Texts are inscribed on Egyptian clay figurines or sherds from the 1950-1850 B.C. that bear the names of rebels and enemies of Egypt that are being cursed. “Mention is made,” *The MacMillan Bible Atlas* goes on to say, “of cities and tribes within the Egyptian sphere of influence and rule...In the first group only a few, mostly unidentified names are mentioned, beside *Jerusalem and Ashkelon*” (p. 23).

So here we have proof that ancient Jerusalem was a sizeable town in Abraham’s time, and not as critics say, that it hardly existed at all.

Returning to the account, Lot is captured by the Amorite kings and will be made a slave if not rescued. Obviously, there were thousands of soldiers involved here, and it would be nearly impossible to free him--but Abraham had a bold and cunning plan to free him.

The Bible explains, “Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants...and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people” (Genesis 14:14-16). Does this appear to be far-fetched account? Not according to Werner Keller, who mentions, “Abraham dogged the withdrawal of the army of the victorious four kings like a shadow. He watches it unobserved from safe cover, makes accurate reconnaissance and bides his time. Not until they reach Dan, on the northern frontier of Palestine, does the opportunity arise for which he has been waiting. Like lightning, under the cover of darkness, Abraham and his men fall on the rearguard and in the confusion that follows, Lot is set free. Only those who do not know the tactics of the Bedouins will consider this an unlikely story.

Among the inhabitants of that country the memory of that punitive expedition has remained alive to this day. It is reflected in the name of a road which runs eastward of the Dead Sea and parallel with it, traversing what was in ancient times the land of Moab and leading to the north. The nomads of Jordan know it very well. Among the natives it is called, remarkably enough, *the ‘King’s Way.’* We come across it in the Bible, where it is called ‘the *King’s Highway*. It was the road that the children of Israel wished to follow on their journey to the Promised Land (see Num. 20:17-19)” (*The Bible as History*, p. 73).

Abraham arrives at Sodom while all the survivors are still lamenting their fate. Then they see the great entourage he has with them, and that he had recuperated all their goods. “And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valle of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him. There was great gladness as they realized Abraham not only defeated their enemies and recuperated their goods, but they were saved from paying the odious tribute.

Now comes a mysterious section of Scripture--Abraham’s meeting with Melquisedek king of Salem and priest of God the most High.

“Then Melquisedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave him a tithe of all” (Genesis 14:18-20).

Abraham recognized the Person who had blessed him, and gave him his tithes. Who is this person that has perplexed so many studious people? God later explains this account in the Bible.

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated ‘king of righteousness,’ and then also king of Salem, meaning ‘king of peace,’ without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life [this means being immortal], but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually...and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.

Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives” (Hebrews 7:1-8). So we see here that “Melquisedec” is just another appearance of *the Word* (John 1:1), that is, of Jesus Christ--in the Old Testament (see 1 Cor. 10:4). Christ would again appear to Abraham while on His way to execute judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah.

The king of Sodom was very grateful to Abraham, and tested his generosity. “Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself.’ But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’—except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion. After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Genesis 15:1).

God saw Abraham’s generosity and that he rightly attributed the victory to Him. He visited Abraham in a vision to promise more protection, but Abraham was still puzzled over how his descendants could eventually populate all of Canaan without him having a child and at his age it seemed impossible. His faith was still firm, although he did not understand how all of these promises could be fulfilled. He said to God: “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, ‘Look, You have given me no offspring, indeed one born in my house is my heir!’” (Genesis 15:2-3).

Abraham’s comment might sound strange to us, but this was the custom at the time, and again, it confirms the authenticity of the account. “The ancient custom of adopting a servant as an heir in northern Mesopotamia and eastern Syria is frequently mentioned in the Nuzi Tablets, and the reason was so family property would not pass illegally to strangers. It appears since Abraham did not have a son, he was obligated by custom to adopt Eliezer as a son” (*Archaeological Bible Commentary*, p. 36). But God had other plans for Abraham. The Bible says, “And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be

your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:2-6).

Abraham’s faith was gradually growing. Although all of these promises appeared impossible, he finally relaxed and trusted in God. The Bible describes this triumph. “Abraham...who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken. ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be *imputed to us* who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord” (Romans 4:16-25).

We need the same faith as Abraham had, but in our case, in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and who will send Him back to establish His kingdom. Our faith needs to grow slowly, and through different trials, be perfected. The Bible mentions about Abraham: “For when God made a promise to Abraham...saying, ‘Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.’ And so, *after he had patiently endured*, he obtained the promise” (Hebrews 6:13-15). As James says of Abraham, “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works [his] faith was made perfect? Abraham failed at times, but he never gave up. He patiently endured to the end, faithfully obeying God despite the occasional setbacks, and this is what we also have to do in order to obtain these wonderful promises.