

Genesis 14:17-24 and 15:1-8

Abram had given Lot the choice of any spot in Canaan, and he had not been long in taking advantage of it.

Genesis 13:10 **"--Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar."**

It was a herdsman's paradise, but a godly man's grave, for V 13 tells us **"---the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly."**

However, Lot eagerly moved in, and even **"pitched his tent toward Sodom."**

Now, there was good grazing ground anywhere in the plain of Jordan, for **"it was well watered every where."**

Lot could have stayed out in those lush plains and fared very well indeed, but he chose to live just outside the wicked city of Sodom.

The plain of Jordan was good for his cattle, but apparently the city of Sodom was good for his business.

So Lot closed his eyes to the evil, and lived a life of compromise.

Lot was already rich, but not nearly as rich as he would like to be.

He put gain ahead of godliness, and risked sin's contamination in his own life, and the lives of his family and servants.

It was a bad choice, for 1 Timothy 6:9-10

tells us that "--**they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.**

10: For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

And in Lot's case, because of war, sorrow came soon enough.

Genesis 14:11-12 **"And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way.**

¹² **And they took Lot, Abram's**

brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed."

Lot had lost all his wealth, and besides that, he and his family were now doomed to live out their lives as slaves in a strange land.

Yes, he had pierced himself **"through with many sorrows."**

However, for Abram's sake, God had mercy on Lot's wayward soul.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Abram, the separated man, was no longer the kind of man that had lost his testimony in Egypt because of fear.

Against insurmountable odds, he took *action*, and saved his nephew and the people of Sodom.

With the help of his neighbours, whom he was confederate with, and with his own

little army of 318 men, Abram pursued and subdued the conquering hordes.

The very fact that his neighbours were willing to go with him on such a hazardous conquest was a testimony to Abram's transparent faith in the Lord. Surely his strength and courage must have been contagious.

Genesis 14:16-17 **"And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.**

¹⁷ **And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale."**

Yes, Abram had trusted his God in the face of insurmountable odds, and had come out victorious!

It was a high point in his life.

But Satan wasn't through with him yet.

Even though Abram had stood bravely in the face of adversity, Satan knew he could still fail in the presence of favour.

Oh yes, good times can be dangerous also.

V 21 **"And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself."**

It was a very generous offer, and in a way, not a surprising one, seeing that Abram had returned all of his people unharmed.

However, in this offer of material gain, coming as it did from a very wicked

king, there was a subtle trap for Abram's soul.

In a very real way, the goods of Sodom could have compromised his position as the servant of the Lord, and made him instead the servant of the world.

As it stood, he only served the Lord, who was also his sole sustainer, but as soon as he accepted the wealth of Sodom, he would be everlastingly indebted to these wicked people for his prosperity.

Under such an obligation, how could he speak out against the wickedness of Sodom, when it was evident that they had made him a rich man?

So, in actual fact, this generous offer was not unlike the temptation that Lot had

faced, the temptation that had cost him his testimony.

But Abram had learned his lesson in Egypt.

By the generosity of Pharaoh, based upon

Abram's lie, he had become a rich man, but in the process, he had lost his testimony for God.

Yes, he was a wiser man now, but he was

still a man, and a great deal of wealth was involved here.

So to make sure that he didn't yield to this

temptation, God sent Melchizedek, **"the priest of the most high God,"** to

strengthen him at this critical time in his life.

V 18 **"And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

We spent quite a bit of time in the book of Hebrews studying this most unusual man, so I will not take the time to go over that material again.

However, let me say that although Melchizedek was a mortal man, Hebrews 7 presents him as a type of Christ.

And in this case, he was definitely God's agent to strengthen Abram against this subtle but dangerous temptation.

V 18-21 **"And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.**

19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of

all.

²¹ **And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself."**

No, it was no coincidence that Melchizedek arrived on the scene at the exact moment when Abram met the king of Sodom with his offer of riches.

And he was definitely there to fortify God's servant against that temptation.

The first thing that Melchizedek did was to meet a very practical need in Abram's life.

He gave him "**bread and wine,**" and in so doing, provided for his physical needs that would be so great after his conflict with Chederlaomer.

No doubt Abram was battle weary, and even
godly men can yield to temptation when
they are at a low point physically.

Yes, God is very conscious of his servant's
physical needs, **"For he knoweth our
frame; he remembereth that we are
dust."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Secondly, Melchizedek's benediction prepared
Abram's heart to resist the appeal of
the world.

Melchizedek described God as **"the most high
God, possessor of heaven and earth,"**
and then pronounces Abram **"blessed"** by
that very same Almighty God.

This helped him to resist the temptation to
accept Sodom's riches, for, after all,
a man who is so **"blessed"** of God does
not need anything from the world.

Yes, the **"possessor of heaven and earth"** so filled his vision that **"the goods"** of Sodom had little attraction for him. So then, it is not surprising that we hear Abram saying, in V 22-24, **"---I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,**

23 That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:

24 Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."

His neighbours, who knew not the true God,
had no reason to refuse the riches of
Sodom, and indeed they deserved them.
However, Abram had determined in his heart
that he would not compromise his
testimony by putting himself under any
obligation to the king of Sodom.

It was good thinking on his part.

After all, how could he deliver Lot out of
enslavement, and then end up enslaved
by the world himself?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

There is a lesson here for us, isn't there?

The only true way in which to deliver
someone else from the power of the
world is to be thoroughly delivered
from it ourselves.

As Jude tells us concerning the lost---we
should pull **"them out of the fire;**

**hating even the garment spotted by the
flesh."**

As long as we are in the world ourselves, it is quite impossible for us to pluck someone else out of it.

Yes, the path of separation is the path of power, and it is also the path of peace and blessedness.

Abram was on that path, but in the riches of Sodom, there was a danger of derailment.

The world, in all its various forms, is the instrument of Satan, and he skilfully uses it to weaken the hands and alienate the affections of the servants of God.

So at exactly the right time, God sent Melchizedek to make sure that Abram would not be bound by Sodom's gift.

God knows that **"the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,"** and He is ever ready and alert to strengthen the Christian against temptation.

Yes, **"--the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."**

That promise is found in 2 Chronicles 16:9.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

As we begin Chapter 15, we find that Abram is a little down.

That's often the way it goes after a spiritual victory.

V 1 **"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."**

God's first words to him were **"Fear not,
Abram: I am thy shield."**

Abram had just proven that fact in his own life.

He had fearlessly pursued and conquered the enemy with 318 of his own servants and possibly a few hundred allies, and then returned without any harm to himself.

Yes, God had certainly been with him and had been his shield.

But one victory of faith does not guarantee that we will always be victorious.

He had been courageous for the Lord during the excitement of battle, but now he had to face, and conquer, a more subtle and long-term fear.

There was still the possibility that the armies that he had chased away could

return and overwhelm him when he least expected it.

And now he had cut himself off from any alliances with Sodom by his rather abrupt words, "-- **I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,**
²³ **That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich."**

Yes, worry could certainly creep in and steal his confidence in God.

So, to prevent this happening, God assures him that he is far better off, protected by Jehovah's shield, than by the patronage of the king of Sodom.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

And the Christian has that assurance also.
He can rest in peace, being sheltered behind
God's shield.

Psalm 84:11-12 says--"**For the LORD God is a
sun and shield: the LORD will give
grace and glory: no good thing will he
withhold from them that walk uprightly.**

¹² **O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man
that trusteth in thee."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Abram had refused great wealth and no doubt
the goodwill of the king of Sodom in
order to keep himself free of the
world's entanglements, but now it
seemed to him that God's blessings were
on hold.

God knew his heart, and so appeared to him
with the comforting words---"**Fear not,**

**Abram: I am thy shield, and thy
exceeding great reward."**

It had been costly for him to follow his
convictions.

He had given Lot first choice of any spot in
the land of Canaan, the very land which
God had promised to him.

Then he had refused to profit from the spoil
of Sodom, a great fortune that had cost
him a great deal both in risk and
exertion.

And not only that, but Abram had given
"tithes of all" to Melchizedek, priest
of the most high God.

Yes, Abram had learned to give, and it would
be abundantly given to him.

So God assures him, **"I am thy shield, and
thy exceeding great reward."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Now Abram already knew what this "**exceeding great reward**" involved.

Back in Genesis 13, God had told him clearly what to expect.

Genesis 13:15-16 "**For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.**

¹⁶ **And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered."**

However, all these promises hinged upon one important event.

Abram must have at least *one son* in order to inherit these blessings, and so far that had not happened, and it seemed very unlikely to him that it would ever happen, for "**--Sarai was barren; she had no child.**"

That had been the situation way back when Abram lived in Ur of the Chaldees, and as the years passed by, nothing had changed for the better.

No doubt it was much on his mind, and as he grew older, the situation seemed hopeless.

So when God told him **"I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,"** Abram just blurted out in V 2-3: **"---LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?**

³ And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir."

It had all been bottled up inside him, and then suddenly it all came out: *How can I receive your "exceeding great*

reward"? How can I have descendants as numerous as **"the dust of the earth"** when I am **"childless"**?

I don't have a single heir, and someday my chief servant is going to inherit everything! And he's from Damascus. He isn't even a relation of mine!

Poor Abram had fastened his mind upon the physical impossibility of having a child rather than resting upon God's promises.

Yes, Abram was quite human.

He was worried, he was discouraged, and he was limiting God.

We all know about that, don't we?

It's what holds back the blessing in our own lives.

But God didn't rebuke Abram. He simply restated His promise in a new and

wonderful way, and then called upon him to just believe Him.

V 4-5 **"And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.**

⁵ **And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."**

Abraham stop worrying. *You're going to have a son of your very own, and descendants without number.*

No, God did not give him a number, because they would be *without* number.

Rather, He simply told Abram to step outside his tent and look at the stars.

Can you count them? --"**So shall thy seed
be.**"

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Now God had already impressed Abram with the fact that his descendants would be without number.

He had previously told him that they would be "**as the dust of the earth.**"

Perhaps in Abram's present state of mind, with his eyes on his boots, "**the dust of the earth**" wasn't the kind of example he needed.

And I am sure that God was fully aware of Abram's depressed state of mind.

After all, when God had tried to encourage him with the words--"**Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,**" Abram just couldn't seem to

see any reward ahead. **"---What wilt
thou give me, seeing I go childless"?**

So, by telling him to look up, God
encouraged Abram to get his eyes off
his boots!

**"Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars,
if thou be able to number them: and he
said unto him, So shall thy seed be."**

Did that give Abram anything more to go on
than he had before?

Not really, at least not in one sense, for
he was still childless.

No, Abram simply had to *believe God*.

It was still a matter of faith.

And that is how it is with all believers.

We simply must use God's Word as our basis
of proof.

As Hebrews 11:1 says, "--**faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**"

Abram needed to believe God.

He needed to keep his head in the stars, and his feet on the ground, and that's exactly what he did.

V 6 "**And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.**"

Now that sounds good, but what exactly did he believe?

Of course, he believed he would have a son, and numerous descendants.

He believed that Canaan would belong to his family someday.

Those were the promises that he believed in, but those were only the by-products of his faith.

The really important point here is not that he believed those promises, the point is, *he believed in the One* who had made those promises.

Yes, he simply **"believed in the LORD,"** and as a result, God **"counted it to him for righteousness."**

And how great was Abram's faith in the LORD?

Romans 4:18-22 says---"**Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.**

¹⁹ **And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:**

²⁰ **He staggered not at the promise of**

God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

²¹ And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

²² And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Again we are faced with the question, *How much did Abram actually understand at that time?*

Did he understand and have faith in Jesus Christ, the coming Sin Bearer?

*Back in Chapter 13:15 when God said -- "**and to thy seed for ever,**" did Abram understand, at least to some degree, that God was talking about Christ?*

I think he did.

And Genesis 15:1 gives us a pretty good indication that this was the time when Christ actually appeared to him.

Let's read that verse again.

V 1 **"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision---."**

Let's just stop right there for a minute.

This is the first time that the little phrase, **"the word,"** appears in scripture, and in this verse it says that **"the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision."**

So, if it was a vision, then what did Abram actually see?

I don't think he just saw a written word.

But he did see **"the Word of the LORD,"** and, incidentally, the book of John calls Jesus Christ the **"Word."**

So this was probably the very occasion that Jesus referred to later when He said in John 8:56, **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad."**

This assumption is further fortified by the words in Genesis 15:6 where it says "--
- he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."
And certainly righteousness can only be imputed on the basis of faith in Christ.

Also, we must remember that Abram had been offering blood sacrifices for a long time now.

Surely he must have known that these sacrifices were only substitutionary, and that they foreshadowed God's Lamb, the real sacrifice for sin.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

So, V 16 says, Abram "--- believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Back in Romans 4:20-25, it says of Abram---

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

²¹ And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

²² And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

²⁴ But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

²⁵ Who was delivered for our offences,

**and was raised again for our
justification."**

Therefore, all those living in this age of
grace who believe in Christ as their
Saviour will have righteousness
imputed, or counted, to them.

And they will receive it on the same basis
that Abraham received his righteousness
when he--"**believed in the LORD.**"

And, as we see in V 16-17 of this same
chapter of Romans, the Church of Jesus
Christ is the heavenly seed of Abraham.

Yes, concerning God's work of grace, these
verses say ---"**Therefore it is of
faith, that it might be by grace; to
the end the promise might be sure to
all the seed; not to that only which is
of the law, (speaking of Israel) but to
that also which is of the faith of**

Abraham; who is the father of us all,
(speaking of the Church)

¹⁷ **(As it is written, I have made thee
a father of many nations)--."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I previously said that God had not given
Abram any additional information at
that time, but simply called upon him
to believe "**in the LORD.**"

Well, in a sense, that was not quite the
case.

It is true that Abram already *knew* that his
descendants would be as "**the dust of
the earth.**"

However, at this time, God described them as
"**the stars**" of heaven, and that was
quite a different description.

I believe "**the dust of the earth**" not only indicated a large number, but also the *earthly* nature of the seed.

In other words, that example pictured Abram's earthly posterity, the nation of Israel.

But this new description, that is, "**the stars**" of heaven, spoke of the *heavenly* origin of Abram's spiritual seed, not his earthly seed.

So, as Abram looked at the starry heavens, God foreshadowed for him, in the brilliance and multitude of His heavenly galaxy, the extent and glory of the born-again believers that would receive new life, eternal life, on the same basis that Abraham would that night.

Genesis 22:18 **"And in thy seed shall all
the nations of the earth be blessed."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Well, Abram had taken a great step of faith.
V 6 says--**"And he believed in the LORD; and
he counted it to him for
righteousness."**

Abram believed God's promises, but most
importantly--**"he believed in the LORD."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

However, Abram had another request to make.
When God spoke of the Promised Land, Abram
asked for a sign.

V 7-8 **"And he said unto him, I am the LORD
that brought thee out of Ur of the
Chaldees, to give thee this land to
inherit it.**

**⁸ And he said, LORD God, whereby
shall I know that I shall inherit it?"**

Apparently this was not a lapse in faith on Abram's part, for God did not rebuke him.

In fact, when Abram asked "**Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?**"---God abundantly answered his request, and supplied him with information that he had never heard before.

Yes, God laid out before Abram a detailed description of 400 years of Israel's history.

And it will all be revealed to us in next week's lesson.