



Rescue and Encounters Genesis 14

Sermon – Marc McLaren, 16 May 2021

Abram Rescues Lot and Encounters 2 Kings

Bible Readings:

Genesis 14

Hebrews 6:19-7:17

1. Introduction

We encounter in Genesis 14 a story of war and rebellion, a story of heroic victory and rescue and a story of mystery and blessing. In the midst of this story we encounter a God who shows himself to be a Promise Maker and Promise Keeper, even when his peoples' actions are at odds with him.

In Genesis 13, we discover disputes had broken out between Abram and his nephew Lot's herdsman. Put simply, "the land could not support both Abram and Lot's flocks and herds living so close together." (Gen 13:6)

2. Lot chooses to move east and importantly to leave Canaan

So to deal with the conflict Abram invites Lot to freely choose where he wants to move to. Abram says, "wherever you choose to move to I will take the land in the opposite direction."

Lot chooses the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley, in the direction of Zoar at the bottom end of the Dead Sea. Lot's decision may have been influenced by many factors. One of those being the apparent agricultural benefit and economic gain from grazing on prime land.

What is important to note is that Lot freely chose to move east to the cities of the plains and leave Canaan. Importantly, by Abram giving Lot the first choice it could never be claimed that Abram forced Lot out of the Land of Canaan.

Following Lot's departure it is interesting to note that God restates the promise of giving the land as a permanent possession to Abram and his descendants...and so many descendants, "like the dust of the earth they cannot be counted!" (Gen 13:14-17)

3. Lot's decision to set up camp near Sodom not only placed him and his family in moral danger, "The people of this area were extremely wicked and constantly sinned against the Lord" (Gen 13:13), it also placed Lot in a place of political occupation and a brewing war.

To help bring this ancient war into a modern perspective, think of armed conflicts that led to occupation and an eventual uprising that was crushed by the occupying party. One example out of many could be Hungary in 1956, where a spontaneous national uprising took place against the occupying Soviet Union. Thousands of protesters had taken to the streets the month before demanding a more democratic political system and freedom from Soviet oppression. The uprising was viciously crushed when Soviet tanks and troops rolled into Budapest on 4th November 1956. Thousands were killed and wounded and nearly a quarter-million Hungarians fled the country.

Let's turn back to Abram and Lot...

For 12 years the region of the East had been subject to King Kedorlaomer and the three ally kings from Mesopotamia (King Amraphel of Babylonia, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Kedorloamer of Elam and King Tidal of Goiim).

The 5 Kings of the East (King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim and King of Bela) in the thirteenth year attempted to rebel against King Kedorlaomer. This led one year later to King Kedorlaomer and his allies sweeping down and defeating the Rephaites, Zuzites and Horites and then turning back to En-mishpat and conquering the Amalekites and the Amorites in Hazazon-tamar. (Gen 14:4-7)

The 5 rebel kings of Sodom, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela (Zoar) then prepared for battle in the valley of the Dead Sea. They were thoroughly beaten and fell into disarray, fleeing to the mountains, while others fell into the tar pits scattered throughout the valley of the Dead Sea.

King Kedorlaomer and his allies ransacked Sodom and Gomorrah taking their material possessions and food supplies, and devastatingly a number of their people, including Abram's nephew Lot and his whole family and all his possessions that he had amassed.

4. A remarkable victory that in human terms was against the odds

Fortunately, one of Lot's men escapes and finds Abram who was living near the Oak Grove belonging to Mamre the Amorite. Interestingly, Abram is peacefully living alongside his allies, Mamre and his relatives, Eshcol and Aner. (Gen 14:13)

Abram doesn't think twice about engaging in a battle against a much larger combined Kings' army in order to rescue Lot and his family, a pattern we see repeated in Gen 18:16-33, when Abram intercedes for the righteous living in Sodom and Lot and his family, prior to Sodom and Gomorrah being destroyed.

He assembled 318 trained people who had been born into his household. We are unsure if there is any significance in such a

precise number being mentioned. Possibly Abram' was supported by his three allies mentioned in Gen 14:24 - Aner, Eschol and Mamre.

A well planned night time attack is orchestrated by Abram, where the 318 trained people and most likely allies are divided and attack from several fronts. This leads to Abram rescuing Lot and his possessions, all the women and other captives and all the goods that had been taken from Sodom. He then chases Kedorlaomer's army to Hobah, north of Damascus, removing them from Canaan and from further attack.

5. Two Very Different Responses from Two Very Different Kings

Following Abram's victory and successful rescue of Lot two of the five kings come to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (King's Valley). The two kings respond radically differently to Abram.

Melchizedek, the King of Salem and a priest of God Most High brought Abram provisions of bread and water and a blessing for Abram, and blessed God for the defeat of Abram's enemies.

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has defeated your enemies for you.” Gen 14:19-20.

The King of Sodom demanded Abram give him his people that Abram had rescued (completely overlooking that Abram and his people had placed themselves in grave danger), offering to allow Abram to keep all the goods that had been recovered.

Melchizedek brings blessings and provisions and the King of Sodom brings demands and disdain.

Abram's response to each of the kings also differs. Abram submits to the king and priest, Melchizedek, by paying a tithe; he

acknowledges Melchizedek's status by giving him a portion of the spoils.

To the King of Sodom, he says "I won't take a single thread or sandal thong that belongs to you." The reason given - I don't want you or others saying that you are the one who made Abram rich. He was only prepared to accept what his warriors had eaten and that a fair share of the goods was given to his allies - Aner, Eschol and Mamre.

Two very different responses - one of gratitude based on recognising God's direct intervention and one of demand and self-preservation. An interesting question to pose is, how do you and I respond when something unexpected happens that lies outside our understanding? It is very easy to be consumed by our own agenda and perceived needs so that we completely miss what God is doing in our midst. While there are times Abram loses sight of Yahweh's promises and provisions (where he tries to pass off his wife as his sister) there are also times he places his full confidence in the promises made by Yahweh, leaving his home land without question, letting Lot choose the land, and then pursuing a formidable warring party.

6. Abram's encounter with the mysterious Melchizedek raises the vexed question: who is this King and Priest? Let's see through Abram's eyes who he might have understood Melchizedek to be.

Firstly, Abram recognised Melchizedek as the King and Priest of Salem. Having the joint role of king and priest in the Near East was common. Salem is considered to be located where Jerusalem was ultimately established. We discover in Psalm 76:1-2,

"God is honoured in Judah: his name is great in Israel.

Jerusalem or Salem is where he lives, Mount Zion is his home."

Secondly, Melchizedek's name means 'king of righteousness' and Salem, means 'peace'. This is quite a name for anyone to bear and may suggest only peace can be experienced where there is righteousness.

Thirdly, Melchizedek appears from nowhere; his family lineage is not provided and we are unsure how his life concludes. He might have been a Canaanite, Amorite, or Jebusite; it is not clear. There is no mention of where he got his priesthood from, or whether or not he inherited the title from his family.

The name of God Melchizedek uses to bless Abram is 'el 'elyon, which translates "God Most High". In the Old Testament, Yahweh is referred to as El or, more frequently, as Elohim. El is also the chief Canaanite god. So it is unclear whether or not Melchizedek was a worshiper of Yahweh or believed in one God.

Seeing Melchizedek through the eyes of Jewish Christians as described in Hebrews

The writer of Hebrews is writing to a group of Jewish Christians under the power and authority of Rome, who are experiencing great opposition and are struggling to stay true to the course.

In Hebrews 5:6 the writer takes Jesus' followers to Psalm 110. In Psalm 110:4, we find that the Messiah, who sits on the right hand of God and has all things placed under his rule, is appointed by God as a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. The writer reminds them that In the midst of the struggle God is both a promise maker and promise keeper, all things are placed under his rule and it is impossible for God to lie.

We can have this confidence because "Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek." (Heb 6:20)

Hebrews 7:3 is key, “there is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors - no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God.”

This is a striking claim for any Jewish person that the king spoken of in Psalm 110, could be in any sense a priest. Although Solomon had offered sacrifices in the Temple, the kings who had followed were from the tribe of Judah. There was a clear division: priests were from the tribe of Levi, more specifically from the family of Aaron, and kings were from the tribe of Judah.

This would immediately raise a question for the Jewish Christians - so what sort of priest is Jesus? Firstly, Jesus himself, is a Melchizedek type High Priest who is far superior to the Levitical priesthood. Secondly, when we understand that the Messiah is both priest and king, we can lean our full weight on Jesus and him alone, both now and into the future. As our great High Priest we can place out full trust in him and have complete confidence that he will keep the promises he has made. Finally, Jesus has attained the rank of High Priest not because of a law regarding physical descent but through the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. (Heb 7:16)

7. What do we make of all this in 2021?

God both makes and keeps his promises and, despite the turbulence we might encounter in life, he is for us not against us. We see this in Abram and Lot's life and we see this in our own lives. God has brought us into perfection or, another way of saying it, into completeness through Jesus, a Melchizedek type high priest.

Hebrews 7:16 reminds us that Jesus, having died, has been raised from the dead and is alive forever; he has brought us into being through “the power of a life that cannot be destroyed.”

Remember, as you and I head out this week Jesus, our high priest, is holy, blameless and unstained by sin. Jesus offered his life once for you and I so we can be made complete in him.

