

MELCHIZEDEK BLESSES ABRAM

Genesis 14:1-24
Key Verse: 14:19,20

Lesson 7b

"And he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."

Sometimes we think of Abram as a weak, vague old man, a man who had to live by faith because he had few human abilities. But in this chapter we see another side of Abram. He was an able man and he could have been a world leader had he chosen that life for himself. He was an able general who earned the respect of kings. But more importantly, he was God's man, and he had a great shepherd heart. This chapter is about a time in his life when he was successful and the temptation to become a worldly man was very strong.

1. The battle of the kings (1-12)

The times in which Abram lived were unsettled times. There was no central government in Canaan. The country was controlled by a number of feudal lords who ruled as kings in city states. The military campaign described here is a large-scale one. Kedorlaomer was the king of Elam (modern Iran). The power of his arm was felt throughout the Middle East. The 3 kings allied with him were actually his subjects. The 5 kings who lived in the vicinity of the Dead Sea (including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah) acknowledged Kedorlaomer's suzerainty, and as his vassals, they had paid him tribute for 12 years. Then, in the 13th year, they rebelled. Evidently, they did not send tribute. Kedorlaomer waited one year, then in the 14th year, he led a large military expedition to Canaan and subdued all the territory from north of Damascus to the far south, almost to Egypt (the land of the Amalekites and the Edomites). Then he turned his attention to the 5 kings who had rebelled against him. They met in the Valley of the Salt Sea, the 4 kings against the 5. Kedorlaomer and his allies quickly subdued the

rebels, many of whom fell in tar pits in their haste to escape. They plundered the cities and carried away a large amount of booty and many hostages. Lot was among those who were carried off, because he lived in Sodom.

2. Abram's war (13-16)

Abram was a peaceful headsman. He owned no land; he stayed out of politics and out of war. He had no reason to rescue Lot. Lot was not a "good sheep." He had run away from Abram and from the life of faith. But Abram had a great shepherd's heart for Lot. His shepherd's heart is like God's heart of love for rebellious and sinful people. God keeps on loving; Abram also kept on loving.

The news of Lot's capture galvanized Abram to action. He had trained enough of his servants to make a strong defensive force, but he had not engaged in an offensive war before this time. He marshalled his forces, made an alliance with some of his neighbors and set out in pursuit of Lot's captors. He caught up with them in Dan, the northern-most city of Canaan. He attacked at night, using skillful military strategy. The enemy soldiers were totally surprised, and they were thoroughly routed. However, a large contingent escaped, and taking Lot with them, they continued their retreat. Abram pursued them and again caught them at Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered everything and brought back all the people and goods which Kedorlaomer had taken.

Abram came back from the battle of the kings as a conquering general. He had gone to war simply to rescue Lot, but in the course of doing this, he had defeated the most powerful king in the whole region. He could have regarded his victory as God's sign to him to possess the whole land. He could have said, "Perhaps God is giving me the land he promised me. Maybe this is the time for me to change my life-style and live like a king."

3. Abram meets two kings (17-24)

Two kings came to meet him when he returned from this successful military campaign. One king represented the world; the other represented the simple tent life God had called him to live. They symbolized the choice that lay before Abram. Abram had a conference first with Melchizedek.

Melchizedek was king of Salem. His name means "King of righteousness." Salem means "peace." He was king of righteousness and king of peace. (Heb 7:1-10) He was priest of God Most High. His visit and his blessing taught Abram two things. First, he reminded Abram of God's friendship. He came with bread and wine to strengthen Abram, who must have been physically and emotionally exhausted. They ate the meal together and shared spiritual fellowship. Second, and most important, he came

with God's word and God's blessing. Melchizedek's blessing has two parts: First, he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator (Possessor) of heaven and earth.." This blessing reminded Abram that God is the Possessor of heaven and earth and everything else. He is the One who can give us everything. Why become greedy for a few material baubles when one can have everything. When God blesses, we are truly blessed. The worldly things for which we strive cannot make us happy even if we succeed in obtaining them. Second, Melchizedek said, "Blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." This blessing reminded Abram that his victory over the kings was only won by God's grace. Abram pledged his loyalty and obedience to God Most High, and sealed that pledge by giving Melchizedek a tenth of everything. It was like the tribute which the vassal kings offer to their masters. Abram's tithe represented the commitment of his heart and life to God Most High, the Creator and Possessor of all things. Someone once said that a man's heart is where his pocketbook is. We should learn from Abram to give our tithes and offerings to God as a symbol of our commitment to him. Our tithing should be an act of worship.

Then Abram met the king of Sodom. The king of Sodom tempted Abram to act like the ordinary men of those times. He wanted to make a deal with Abram. "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." Abram could take for himself all of the spoils of war, for they were his by right. But Abram had God's word in his heart. He quoted Melchizedek: "I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, Creator (Possessor) of heaven and earth,..." He believed God's almighty power. He believed God's sovereignty over heaven and earth. He believed that God would keep his promises. He believed that God's blessing was the best. He continued, "I have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'" Abram could refuse the wealth of Sodom and return to his simple shepherd's life. God had sent Abram a shepherd, Melchizedek, to help him in a time of spiritual crisis, and Abram had received God's word from him and overcome the temptation to compromise with the world and acquire the tainted riches of Sodom.