

The Humble Warrior

Genesis 14

Introduction What organizes and orients our hearts is often clearly seen in what we fight for and boast in. We will often fight for relationships and boast in our riches – riches of gifts, abilities, material things, station in life, positions and possessions. Out of our mouth come boasting words launched by what we prize and who we take pleasure in. So we will boast in ourselves. We will boast in our children. We will boast about our achievements. But this is not the way of the humble warrior. What organizes and orients Abram's heart causes him to locate his boasting in something or someone completely different.

How do we get here to this text? Where are we in the larger story, particularly in the Lot cycle? The larger chiasm of which this a part looks like this.

A Introduction: The promise of descendants - The tension begins	(12:1-9)
B Abram lies about Sarai in Egypt	(12:10-20)
C Lot settles in Sodom	(13: 1-18)
D Abram intervenes for Lot and Sodom	(14:1-24)
E Promise: a son from Abram himself	(15:1-21)
F Ishmael's birth	(16:1-16)
G God's Covenant:	
Abram's and Sarai's names	
changed; circumcision instituted;	
promise of a son reiterated (17:1-21)	
f Ishmael circumcised	(17:22-27)
e Promise: a son from Sarah herself	(18:1-15)
d Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot	(18:16-33)
c Lot flees Sodom	(19:1-38)
b Abraham lies about Sarah in Gerar	(20:1-18)
a Conclusion: The birth of Isaac - The tension resolved	(21:1-7)

Obstacles and advances, tension and resolution mark the movement through this narrative. Moses shows them now that God's people may face danger and difficulty through obvious and through the subtle. The enemy may test them through open warfare, capture and battle. The enemy may tempt them with flattery and approval. He will provide the scratch of self-recognition where we itch with self-regard.

Here then is what it means to be a humble warrior.

The Great Battles**(v.1-16)**

The narrative here changes tone into a precise historical record. Moses moves the narrative by showing the great strength of Abram as a warrior.

The Conquest by the Eastern Kings**(v.1-7)**

The region east of the Salt Sea which included Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar had been subjugated by the Eastern Alliance of Amraphel of Shinar (Babylon), Arioch of Ellasar, Tidal of Goiim led by Chedorlaomer of Elam. This alliance had moved through and conquered most of the trans-Jordan down to Kadesh-Barnea. For 12 years, they kept the Southern Alliance in thrall as absentee suzerain rulers. Dr. Nelson Glueck, a Palestinian archeologist, has completed digs in this area from this time period uncovering ancient cities and towns bearing the marks of foreign occupation. [Morris, *The Genesis Record*, p.312-313]

In the thirteenth year, the city states rebelled against their overlords. We do not know exactly what that rebellion entailed. Certainly, the tribute or money tax due their overlords was withheld. It would be reasonable to assume that the occupying presence of the eastern kings, in whatever form that took, was attacked. Moses records for us the fact of the rebellion without going into all the details.

The response of the Eastern Alliance is to move into the region, moving from city to city like locusts, destroying everything in their path. They seemed to have avoided following the normal trade routes and so moved across the open country. Glueck's archeological digs also demonstrate that at some point, this civilization was almost totally wiped out by an invading army. The houses, villages and towns are totally leveled. The Eastern Alliance appears to have not only put down the rebellion but also to make an example of them.

The Capture of Lot in Sodom**(v.8-12)**

The Southern Alliance seems to have decided to go on the offensive against the Eastern Alliance in open battle, rather than sitting waiting on them to attack their cities. They meet and engage one another in the Valley of Siddim. This valley was full of bitumen pits. This valley had been heavily mined for the minerals that were used in pottery, mortar, hardening of surfaces and waterproofing.

The Eastern Alliance routs the kings allied with Sodom. As the Southern Alliance flees from the battlefield, many of their soldiers fall into these open mines and are killed. With the defending army defeated in the field, the Eastern Alliance takes the two major cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. They carry away much of their possessions and their people.

Moses then records that Lot no longer merely sojourned in the region, but had now settled into Sodom itself. Later, we will see that he even had his own house in the city. He also, along with all his goods and his family, were taken captive. Evidently, the conquering kings intended to take not only the material wealth home with them, but also a large host of the inhabitants.

The Chase by Abram

(v.13-16)

During this great destruction and havoc, many were able to escape. One who did escape, went to Abram to report that his nephew had been taken captive. Abram was dwelling by the Oaks of Mamre and had established an alliance with the Amorites Mamre, Eshcol and Aner.

Abram gathered up his trained men as well as some from his allies. We know from verse 24 that Mamre, Eshcol and Aner at sent a contingent or went themselves as a part of the small army. Moses says that there were 318 armed men. Like Gideon later, this may seem like a very small army. But its very size means that a victory be God's work through the leadership of Abram.

They pursue the Eastern Alliance all the way up to Dan, catching up with them just at nightfall there. Abram divides his forces up and under cover of nightfall and attacks their camp from several directions. The Eastern Alliance is shattered and flees northward with Abram's army in hot pursuit all the way to a town north of Damascus. In fleeing for their lives, they leave their captives and their booty behind.

Thus, Lot, his family, their possessions and presumably, many other residents of Sodom and Gomorrah are released and returned to their homes. There is some evidence that in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities were sacked, but not razed so that the refugees can return not have to entirely rebuild. Lot returns to Sodom, resettling there. You have to wonder why he does not at this point leave Sodom and try to either reestablish with Abram or seek a different place to live.

Abram is shown here to be a great tribal chief and mighty warrior. His tribe is beginning to emerge as a local force to be reckoned with. His power and prestige, the respect he would be shown, has now been established. In this context, Abram is identified for the first time as "the Hebrew" (v.13). His tribe is now gaining recognition so that it has a name.

Abram's care for Lot is also shown. Abram intervenes for Lot here in chapter 14, receives the final Covenant and its ratification in chapters 15-17 and then intercedes for Lot in chapter 18. With Lot's bad choices and difficult consequences as the backdrop, Abram's faith and walk with God is highlighted. As a worship driven man of faith, he has been generous to Lot and utterly trusting in God. Now, we will see him as a humble leader who glorifies God in the midst of victory.

The Glorious Blessing

(v.17-24)

How does Abram glorify God? Here, after the battle comes the blessing.

This amazing text speaks through its structure and its use in Scripture. A short chiasm shapes it and Hebrews interprets it. Moses is contrasting the Kings of Salem and Sodom. The King of Salem comes with a blessing and the King of Sodom comes with a demand; one comes to give and the other to take.

The Receipt of the Blessing

(v.17-20)

Abram is met, after his great victory, by these two kings. The King of Sodom comes out to meet him in the King's Valley. There also, Abram is met by Melchizedek, the King of Salem. This mysterious and august personage simply appears here in Genesis without a real introduction. Yet, clearly, Melchizedek is at the center of this glorious blessing.

Five important statements are made about Melchizedek.

His Identity

His name in Hebrew means King of Righteousness. His name not only identifies who he is, but to what he was known for. The names of people, given in the Bible, tend to point to their character.

His Authority

He rules over the city which is called Salem (shalom), or Peace. Most agree that this probably is a reference to what will later become the city of Jerusalem. It would not have real significance to the Israelites to whom Moses was initially writing. But later generations could not but help see the reference.

His Hospitality

He brings out bread and wine. In the culture of the day, these were the symbols of gracious hospitality. Through bringing these fellowship foods, Melchizedek is honoring Abram. He is humbly treating him as a respected person.

His Office

He is the priest of the God Most High. While this is a parenthetical in our English Bibles, it is a significant statement in the redemptive history. Here is one who is both King and Priest. He is the priest of God *before the Law is given* and *not in the line of Aaron and Levi*. As priest he represents the Most High God. He then stands to mediate between Abram and God.

His Blessing

Melchizedek makes this declaration of blessing.

Abram is blessed by the God who is Creator/Owner of all, of heaven and earth. This shows that God has sovereignly bestowed and bequeathed to Abram the land and descendents through the promises, the covenants. God, as creator and possessor of all has the right to give as He sees fit.

This blessing then declares to all that Abram's claim by faith is God's to give and Abram's to receive.

God is blessed by granting Abram the victory. God declares the Abram's victory is God's deliverance. God then is blessed, God is praised, when Abram acknowledges God in his own doing.

Israel again learns that God will give them the land He has promised and the victory required to actually obtain it. God blesses in giving and is blessed in making the receipt of the blessing possible. Thus God is at the center of it all. Abram cannot boast in being blessed by God – it is sheer mercy. Nor can Abram boast in his victory – it is God's doing. Thus God's people, like Abram, are blessed by God and boast in God. The giver is glorified. The recipient is blessed and is blessing as he boasts in the Giver.

The Response to the Blessing

(v.20b-24)

Abram's understanding of the blessing shapes his response to the King of Salem and the King of Sodom.

In What He Gives

(v.20b)

Abram gave a tenth of the spoil to Melchizedek. Here is the first mention in the Bible of giving a tenth. Make no mistake; this is important to our understanding of giving. Abram is responding to the greatness of God, the blessing he has received and the bounty that God has given by giving in return. While the idea of a Kingly tithe was common in their culture, Hebrews says that this tenth is given to Melchizedek as the *priest* of the Most High God (Hebrews 7:4-10). It is before the Law. It is a response to God's power, providence and provision. It is gratitude responding to grace.

We teach that God's people are always, in view of God as the creator and owner of all, in view of our being dependent recipients of all His graces are to respond by faith with gratitude in generous giving. We do not give as a matter of the Law. We give in the context of grace. Like Abram, before the Law was codified at Sinai, we experience the blessing of God and boast in Him through giving as an act of worship.

Christian giving is an imperative, a responsibility. We don't get that from this text, though it certainly informs and helps shape our giving. The New Testament clearly tells us that each of us must give in a proportional, planned and periodic manner in line with what we have. The debate over *tithing* is simply the tool of the enemy to distract us and to divide us. Beloved, our God is the creator and possessor of all things. All that we have is a blessing from Him. Our hearts are to be humbly poised, not to grasp at everything we can, but to give as generously as we can.

In What He Refuses

(v.21-24)

Abram refused to be enriched by the King of Sodom. Please do not miss the impact of this. More is said about Abram's thinking about what he refused than about what he gave. Why is this? Because the very beliefs and wants that caused him to refuse to be enriched by the King of Sodom are the rea-

sons he gives to the King of Salem. That is, Abram believes the fame and reputation of God are at stake.

First, there is *THE SOLEMN PROMISE* that Abram has made (v.22-23). The solemnity of this oath is highlighted. The seriousness of what is at stake frames Abram's thinking. He is neither the creator nor the possessor nor the distributor of all this bounteous blessing. The Lord, the God Most High, the Creator/Possessor of heaven and earth is His King, His Lord and Benefactor. He has heard the blessing Melchizedek gave and sees by faith the core truth of the high and holy place that God holds. Here is growth and change in Abram. The Pharaoh in Genesis 12 was the visible and therefore, acknowledged benefactor of Abram. But now, Abram has come to understand that God alone, even in the midst of a military campaign, is the bestower of bounty and blessing.

There is *THE GRAND PURPOSE* to be upheld (v.23). Abram is concerned for the fame and reputation of God. God will be Abram's benefactor. He will not allow the King of Sodom to boast where God is to be boasted in. He is concerned for the glory of God. He desires that the great worth of God is magnified before the eyes of men. He, the blessed by God, will bless God in his giving and in his glorying. If we are to have purpose driven lives, let this purpose, this great aim, shape all we do – may we boast in God alone.

There is *THE PRACTICAL WISDOM* to be considered (v.24). He, as the man of God, is free to refuse what the King of Sodom offers. But he knows that he cannot speak for his allies who have gone to war at their own expense. Abram, as a worship driven man, generous in his dealings with Lot (Ch. 13), is generous in his dealings with others as well. He refuses his share. It is right for him. But these three Amorites should be allotted their share, their reward. What he denies for himself, he insists for others as their due.

The Role of the Blessor

Hebrews 7

So what are we to make of this text? Does the New Testament interpret and apply this text to Christ? Yes. The author of Hebrews makes much of Melchizedek in relation to the Lord Jesus. He does so based on Psalm 110:4. There the Messiah, the Ruler from Zion, is promised by an unchangeable oath that He will be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. As the author follows the trajectory of a Canonical Theology, he does what the Scriptures always demand that we do: what we formulate in doctrine always is developed directly from the time and space facts of the Biblical record. The New Testament is an interpretation – it is taking the Old Testament record, getting it right in its setting, establishing connections through other texts pointing to Christ and then interpreting them in a New Covenant framework.

Hebrews then unpacks the significance of Melchizedek. He is like Christ as King and Priest. In him righteousness and peace are brought together. On the record, he has no genealogy, no birth or death. He receives tithes and imparts blessings. And his priesthood is both before and apart from the Law and from Levi. And his priesthood is the order in which Jesus Christ exercises His own priesthood. From

Psalm 110, Hebrews begins to develop the interpretation of the Genesis account through a Christ-centered, New Covenant lens.

Thus, Hebrews says that an amazing change has taken place during in the 33 ½ years of Jesus' life. (See *Hebrews*, R.Kennedy)

The first change is the **family** of the priesthood (v.13-14). Jesus, God's final High Priest, was in the tribe of Judah, not Levi and ordained in the line of Melchizedek. The next change is in the **foundation** for the Priesthood (v.15-19). Jesus comes as a priest, not on the basis of the Law, but on "the power of an indestructible life." The third change is the **filling** of the office (v.20-22). Jesus becomes a priest, not through heredity, but rather through the promise of God. The indestructible life of Jesus Christ and the inviolable oath of Almighty God guarantee the New Covenant. All that God is for us in Christ as expressed in the New Covenant will, without fail, come to fulfillment. The last change is the **finality** of the office (v.23-24). The Old Testament priests could not sustain their efforts forever. Weariness, sickness, senility and finally and inevitably, death ended every single ministry. But this is not so with Jesus. He continues because He never dies. He lives forever. We can never come to the mercy seat and find there a new face. It is and will always be Jesus whose sacrifice and intercession greets us with mercy and grace.

Here then is why we have no priests here. Jesus' priesthood is sufficient and final because it is Melchizedek not Aaron, life not law, by oath not office, and it is permanent, not passing.

O, we must not miss the first verse of chapter 15 just because it is a new chapter. Listen to this, "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'" (Genesis 15:1, ESV). He who has given up much, will now receive more than he can imagine. He will have God as his shield. He will have a very great reward. Beloved, why is it so hard for us to be blessed by God and then be so unwilling to bless God? Is it because of a disorder of worth and worship? Are we simply not satisfied that God Himself is our portion and our reward? But let us join with Abram to lift our hand to the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth, and swear to uphold His great and glorious Name, His fame and reputation, through every simple act of worship, that is, of obedience by faith.

We see in Abram's life here several great lessons for us.

Lessons

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE POISED TO RESCUE THE WAYWARD, even those caught in the consequences of sinful choices. Lot is like the one stray sheep, the one lost coin, the one prodigal son. Unlike the nasty elder brother, we should be quick to pursue those who are straying and rejoice in the repentant. It may be hard work. It may be dangerous work. But it is good and holy work. May we as a gathered church care for, go after and welcome home the wayward.

GOD'S PEOPLE SHOW GRATITUDE BY GIVING. We have been much blessed by God. We have been rescued from sin and hell. We have been transformed by saving and sanctifying grace. We have life and breath and the basic sustenance of life. We have sufficient suffering to keep us humble and holy. We have a church family who shares and serves and sustains us in faith. How can we not bless God by grace-enabled, glad-hearted, ungrudging, grateful, generous giving?

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE INSIGHTFUL OVER THE ACCLAIM OF THE WORLD. We will not be impressed that the cultural kings of Sodom want to recognize us or to richen us. We need to recognize the danger in that acclaim. We will refuse to seek it and be humbly able to reject it when it comes. We affirm that the praise of men, like the fear of man, is a terrible snare in the heart.

GOD'S PEOPLE BOAST IN GOD ALONE. We will live for the glory of God, for the savoring and spreading and sharing of the glory of God. He may do much for us. He may do much through us. But in the bounty of His blessing, we will boast in Him alone. He will receive the praise. We will let our light shine in such a way that men will see our good works and give all the glory to God.

Let us gaze in wonder and worship on the Lord Jesus Christ:

He is our Righteousness, whose name and character are soaked with holiness.

He is our King of Peace, the ruler of Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem.

He is our High Priest, perfect in the order Melchizedek, by the oath of God, in His indestructible life and for the sake of His redeemed people.

He is our Bringer of the bread and wine. No New Covenant Christian can hear that simple phrase without seeing the cross and communion. The hospitality of God is embodied in our taking of the bread and the cup.

He is our Benefactor who in blessing us with bounty enables us to bless Him by boasting in Him alone.

May it then be true of us, that God is all we need and all we want.