

Abraham (Part Six)

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We are continuing to go through things that involve the life of Abraham, and we have already looked at a little of the historical background of the man and some of the things that he was involved in, things that are not necessarily contained within the Bible. But there are things that seem to have a great deal of credibility to them and at least lends to some sort of an idea that God was dealing with the man who had quite an impact on world history way back there in the early parts of the second millennium of man's existence on this earth, after the Flood, that is.

Then we began to see some of the spiritual values of the man and as I mentioned to you that he is the first person in the Bible that any detail is given about his living by faith. Of course, that is important to you and me because this man is the father of the faithful, of all men he is the *archegos*, he is the one that goes before and his life becomes a pattern for all of us to follow. That does not mean that we are going to go through everything that he went through, we certainly will not. But we are going to be going through many of the things that he went through, experiencing some of the same things and many of us will make some of the same kinds of mistakes that he made. In fact, I think most of us will.

We saw his calling. We saw the difficulty he had with getting out of his homeland, we saw him go into the journey and actually become a pilgrim, we saw him digress in his pilgrimage in going into Egypt where a number of not-so-good things occurred to him. Then we saw him get back on the track and back into the land. And now we are going to pick him up while he is in the land and he goes to war. That is the title of this at the beginning of this anyways, "Abraham goes to war."

We are talking about the fourteenth chapter of Genesis. We will not read through a great deal of it, but just to get the flavor.

Genesis 14:1-2 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, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).

We are not going to go through the sequence of events, but we will pick it up in verses 11-13.

Genesis 14:11-13 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. [this is where they made the mistake] Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram.

Some commentary that I read said that this is the Bible's first glorification of war. Do you not believe it! The Bible does not glorify war. There are many occasions where important personages, including Abraham, including David, including Joshua, including Moses, and I think many others besides them whose lives we look to as examples, they did take part in war. But God is hardly glorifying war. Just because some of these heroes of the Bible were involved in them, and God may have indeed given them victory, the Bible is not saying that anyone should ever go to war. This is a report of a time when Abraham did go to war. I mean he literally got into battle.

Now, human existence has always been a struggle, including much war, and that of course is because of Satan. A Christian is not relieved of his burden because we wrestle against principalities and powers in heavenly places. Our war is spiritual and it is very real. It is swirling around us all the time. There are not many occasions where we are very far from the battle that the Bible talks about.

Warfare, and I am talking about the kind that nations get involved in or city-states, does at times represent or show qualities that are noble. For example,

physical hardihood. The apostle Paul picked up on this back in a letter that he wrote to Timothy, and he says that a soldier has to endure. So we see in some of the accounts of biblical warfare, examples of physical hardihood.

We find discipline as well. We find at times uncalculating courage, where a man does not consider the risk to his own physical wellbeing and sometimes people have been willing to give up their lives. You might recall times where some of David's mighty men, without any calculation at all as to what they could get from it, volunteered to go get David a drink of water in the heat of battle. They went out and they got it and they brought it back and David poured it out on the ground and he said he would not. He did not have enough vanity to drink the water that these men risked their lives for, but they were willing to spill their blood to relieve their commander of a little bit of discomfort.

Well, it is these kinds of things that warfare does show, and the lesson, the type, the principle is applicable to our spiritual warfare and that is the main reason that God gives us reports of these people going to war. He is not glorifying war—He is glorifying character, courage, faith. He is glorifying examples of people. We understand people in the New Covenant are not to go to war, but we are to pick up on the examples of the exemplary actions of those people.

War does inspire, it stirs our blood. In earlier periods of time, it has been linked to chivalry. You think of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, and battles on horses with armor and jousting with one another and going to war and slaying the dragon, that kind of thing. There is all kinds of gallantry in going to war as well. People write about it. There is heroic greatness and even the Bible writes about those kinds of things.

Christian civilizations in the past have called their wars crusades and gives it an aura of sanctimonious, as though there is something holy involved in going to war. They inspired men to fight under the banner of the of the God of armies of Israel.

Now as late as the early part of this century, the 1900s, there were Christian churches, writers, that were glorifying war. For example, this quote might be interesting to you, it comes from a minister who wrote a book called *Hebrew*

Ideals (just to give you some kind of a sense of what the context of what the book is about), ideals, standards, things that we should shoot for. This man's name is James Strahan, a minister of the church of Scotland. His book was published in 1906.

Abram the Hebrew left his people an ideal of noble warfare and high chivalry. He is a type of all heroes of faith, mighty men of valor, animated by the Spirit of God. The appropriate limits of the holy land, Dan to Beersheba, were a battlefield and a shrine. [some flowery terminology there, a little bit later he said], He [Melchizedek], blessed the hero whose good sword was wet with the blood of tyrants. Before the dulcet tones of peace there must often be heard a trumpet tones of war for righteousness.

Now that man was glorifying war. He got what he picked out from the Bible, that war could be fought in righteousness.

I think that the twentieth century has witnessed a major change in people regarding war because war has become so awful and it has become so available for people to see. You can witness war on your television set practically while it is going on. I know I saw some of these things in Panama. They had cameras down there right behind the troops going from buildings and they were filming these things while the shooting was going on and they can bring it right into your living room now. I guess the bloodier it gets the better the ratings that they are going to get, and they are going to try to do that.

But there is a measure, I would say, of revulsion toward war in the twentieth century that in a general way, for larger percentages of the population of the world that has ever been before. Now, despite that, the revulsion, we know from the Bible, in prophesy, that man is still going to be unable to avoid war. It is going to come regardless. I would have to say that here in the twentieth century, mankind is making his best shot ever at making a peace that will in some way stick. They are trying to resolve these differences among nations, clear up some of these prejudices and fears and lusts out of people's minds so they do not try and grab in a massive way the property and wealth of other

nations. God has given mankind his best shot at it, and He is going to show mankind that despite that, the worst warfare in the history of mankind is still going to break out.

To give you some sort of an idea of the contrast between the early part of the nineteenth century and even the middle part of the nineteenth century after the Second World War was over, here is a quote from General Omar Bradley that was made on Armistice Day, December 11th, 1948 (for you younger folks who do not know that). He said these words before the Boston chamber of commerce.

With the monstrous weapons man already has, humanity is in danger of being trapped in this world by its moral adolescents. Our knowledge of science has clearly outstripped our capacity to control it. We have many men of science, too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Man is stumbling blindly through a spiritual darkness while toying with the precarious secrets of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.

Revelation 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.

When Christ comes, He is going to make war, He is going to stop the madness through His warfare. God only makes war in righteousness. That is why He has forbidden man to go to war. Man, no man including Abraham, should go to war because he does not have the nature, is not equipped with the nature, and therefore the character, you might say the heart, to wage war in righteousness against each other.

Abraham lived in a different time, a different era, you might say, a different dispensation of God's work, at times when God's Kingdom, as it were, was of this world and it fought even though it was not God's will for it to do so.

God's purpose must stand, and if God's servants decide to go to war, God's purpose is going to be worked out regardless.

Now I do not think that Abraham thought of warfare in terms of being a noble idea. His warfare symbolized his depth of feeling and love toward Lot, his brother, as it is said, but literally his nephew. It exemplifies his willingness to lay down his life for him. Does that remind you of anything that Jesus said there in John 14 and 15? "That greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friends." Lot was Abraham's flesh and blood, and he risked everything. He did not calculate at all what the cost was going to be to him. His only thought was to rescue his nephew Lot, and this comes out as we get closer to the end of the chapter. He was willing to lay down his life for Lot.

Abraham does show us, then, the type of effort the work of God is to go through to release people from their bondage to Satan. We are involved in this war, and part of our warfare is focused on getting the gospel out and there are those who are against us in this regard. We have to fight this battle. Abraham in an uncalculating way is willing to lay down his life for his brother, and that is the lesson for you and me. It is not the fact that he went to war, it is that fact that *he was willing to lay down his life*. We are going to see that a little bit more later on, how uncalculating. In other words, Abraham did not go to war to see what he could get for himself. He was not after glory, he was not after money. His only thought was to preserve the life of someone he loved.

We have to begin to ask ourselves questions in this regard: Do we love our brother? As Jesus was beginning His ministry, He made a statement in regard to this.

Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives [that is what Lot was, he was kidnapped, held captive], and recovery of sight to the blind [I am sure that Abraham was hoping that somehow Lot would see the circumstances he was living in and want to take himself from it], to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

He is quoting Isaiah. This is the commission of Jesus Christ. This principle applies to this episode with Abraham. This is some of the details of the commission that God has given to the church. We are to preach the gospel to the world. That is not an easy thing to do.

And though we do not literally go to war, as Abraham did, or as David did, we are nonetheless involved in a war with a very real enemy who fights very hard to resist and keep us from fulfilling our role. What I am talking about are those principalities and powers that the apostle Paul named them back in a couple of his letters. Let us nail that down by turning to Ephesians 6.

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood [not as Abraham did, not as David did], but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

We can fill in the details from other parts of the Bible. We will not take the time to do that, but these principalities and powers are demon spirits who occupy positions of authority over the nations of the earth, and they know what is going on, and they are striving as hard as they possibly can, within limits that God set, to hang on to their first estate. They know what our destiny is, and they know what the rest of mankind's destiny is. They do not want to allow us to live to get the job done that will enable the people to come out of this world. So they are going to fight back in the way they can.

Please turn to II Corinthians 2.

Now in its context, this verse does not apply directly to what I am going to be talking about here, but I just want to pick up a phrase at the end of it.

II Corinthians 2:11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Our job is to announce, to witness to, to testify of the coming Kingdom of God. Satan and his demons will use all the devices of their kind of warfare to stop that. They will use propaganda, gossip, slander, to deceive, to confuse, and thus create doubt in the minds of the faithful. They are masters at creating the pressures of this kind of war from things like illness, so that we begin to think, why does God not heal me? Why does God allow me to suffer this discomfort? And without being on guard, they are able to turn our thoughts against God if we do not watch out.

Illness, innuendo. I just heard today on the tape I was listening to, where 70% to 80% of the communication that comes to us is non-verbal. We get that communication by what we see, and thus we read things into what we see from people who are communicating with us—a look on the face, the eyes we look at. They send messages, there are innuendos contained within those things. If we happen to be of the right mindset, frame of mind, our minds are fully capable of running amuck and insinuating all kinds of things that a person is not even saying.

That is part of the demons' warfare, that is the way they get us into a state of bitterness. We take offense and they are great at putting thoughts into our minds, and twisting things into our favor. Of course, the end result of that is bitterness. The apostle Paul said that many are defiled by bitterness in Hebrews the 12th chapter, verse 15.

So what do they accomplish? At the very least they have created division between us and the body, or us and another individual, and all that thinking distracts us from more important responsibilities. Now in addition to that, Satan has created a world that is filled with distractions and all kinds of things that are not sin in themselves, but unless we are careful and discipline ourselves, we find ourselves so deeply enmeshed and involved in these things so that all our time and effort are spent on less important endeavors as time slips away, as our energy slips away, and we never can recover.

Satan and his demons are masters at keeping us off balance, and thus, once we get off balance, it is much easier to knock us off the path, you see, off the Way, and so we miss the mark. Now if he fails in those things, he will eventually resort to persecution, being ridiculed, and work it so it is impossible for us to find a job unless we break the commands of God and eventually he will produce outright terror in the form of tribulation, in the form of warfare.

Now all of this ever-intensifying level of pressure that he puts on us is all in an effort to keep the announcement from being made and thus keeping people from being called out of this world, trying to sever God's purpose so that it will not be accomplished and we of course will not be born into God's Kingdom.

So he has a lot of guns that he can fire and they do not become visible until the more intense things come along and there is a lot of tension, a lot of pressure. The apostle Paul was an unusually vigorous individual in delivering God's good news. He attracted an awful lot of attention and thus a lot of persecution. But this is the same apostle who said, all who lived godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

II Corinthians 11:23-28 Are they ministers of Christ? [talking about false ministers]—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

I am not about to say that all these things came about because of Satan. If I was a betting man though, I would bet that some of them were, how many, I do not know. But the result is, anybody who is involved in the work of God

is involved in a war. There is going to be varying degrees of tribulation or persecution as a result of this calling.

Now this word persecution is kind of interesting. It simply means “to follow closely upon.” We would say today, “man, was he dogging my heels.” That is what Satan does, he dogs your heels, he will not let go. You can be sure that if you are a Christian, Satan or one of his demons is going to be dogging your heels, to make sure that things do not go right. They do not have to be major things, but he is going to try and keep us off balance. He is going to work on our minds to make us bitter, to make us angry, to make us defenseless, to make us doubt, to make us fear. You see, all kinds of negative feelings, emotions that he can use to trip us up. He is going to dog your heels that way. That is the kind of war that he fights. Then, as a last resort, he uses terror to really threaten our lives.

His intent is to hinder our development and if possible, to stop as much as he possibly can, the rescue of those who are kidnapped by him, as Lot was, kidnapped by his sins, so that he and his henchmen can hold on to what they have.

Now back to Abraham again in Genesis 14. You might say that this is just an interesting side light that we are to live by every word of God.

Genesis 14:12 They also took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son who dwelt in Sodom.

That is interesting. Where was Abram living at this time? He was in Hebron. Apparently the warfare never got close to him. See, he was walking to the beat of a different drummer than Lot was. He took a different road, a different path than Lot did. You can see very plainly that when Lot had the choice, he took the low road. He said, “Hey, I want to live in Sodom. It’s just like Egypt down there.” Lot felt comfortable in the world. That is the lesson here. Many things that happen in the world come upon us because we are not where we ought to be.

Where should Lot have been? Literately, he should have been with Abraham or somewhere nearby. I think we can assume this would have never happened had not Lot chosen to go into Sodom. Lot was asking for trouble

when he chose to go there. Would you have chosen to go there? To the most violent, crime invested area of the city? I do not think that most of us would choose to do that. Lot did. He was not using his spiritual smarts. He was not using his good common sense.

Now God does call the weak of the world and sometimes we do some very foolish things. I am not overly concerned about that particular aspect of things. This is in here as a type, you see, Lot physically did it. But there is a spiritual lesson involved in this. The spiritual lesson is that even as Lot was not where he should have been physically, many times we are not where we should be spiritually. Now for me, the prime example in all of the Bible for those of us in this era of God's church is the Laodicean. They are in the church, but they are also in the world. They are not where they ought to be spiritually. So whenever the tribulation comes, because of where they are spiritually, they are caught up in the problems that come on the world.

Where are the Philadelphians going to be? Because they are where they should be spiritually, they are going to be in the Place of Safety while the Tribulation is going on. This is a *powerful* lesson! The Laodicean says "I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing". You can tell by that statement where he thinks he is spiritually, just like Lot. "Oh, I won't be tempted if I go into Sodom." Just like the alcoholic that allows himself to get alcohol in his hands. When he gets it in his hands he is as good as hooked, Satan's already got him. Very few addicts can walk away from it once they get it in their hands. This same principle applies to people who eat too much.

Now I am not so concerned about that as I am concerned about the spiritual principle that is involved here. The Laodicean gets what they get because they are not where they should be spiritually.

One more thing before we leave this particular section. There is probably no more irreligious group on the face of the earth than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet, in the mix of things somehow or another, Sodom and Abraham, who are poles apart, end up on the same side against the Babylonians and Assyrians. You know what? That is really not all that as strange as it seems at first look.

[break in audio]

. . . Babylon of the worldly religious people, the Chaldeans. There is nobody that has counterfeited the truth of God any more closely than the Babylonians. Virtually every doctrine of the Christian church has been counterfeited by them and has been put, with a slight twist on it, into a body of beliefs that makes up the Christian religions of this world. Now, who is the great whore associated with? Sodom? No, it is associated with Babylon. Notice who it was that was bringing the persecution on Abraham's family and who Abraham went to war with. It was not the almost totally irreligious Canaanites, it was the worldly religious Babylonian Assyrians.

Now when Jesus came, who was it that brought the persecution against Him? Again, it was the religious of the world, the Pharisees. It was not the publicans and sinners, it was not the sodomites. No it was the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the religious people of the world. It is going to be that way again when [unclear]. Well that is not so strange, that is the way it has always been.

Genesis 14:18-20 Then Melchizedek 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.

Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek has this war as its backdrop, and this is a very interesting lesson for those of faith today contained in this. Now in passing I think it is interesting to note that tithing is introduced into the Bible as an ongoing practice, something that is already established, rather than something new and needing a legal basis. A legal basis is never provided previously, and we do not see tithing presented in a legal basis until we get to the book of Leviticus, 400 and some years later. And then, it established not that one should tithe, but rather to *whom* one should tithe. So it appears very strong that tithing was an ongoing practice from the very beginning, and it is something that is also required today. It is the way that God finances His work here on this earth.

Another thing. There are those who will argue that the introduction of bread and wine in this sequence of events here, with the presence of Melchizedek,

indicates a forerunner, a type, a symbol of the Lord's supper. Now if it does, I am convinced it is not the primary reason that it is put in here. It was merely a meal. I will tell you why I believe this in just a bit.

Remember, the warfare is a backlash. This event occurred immediately after Abraham's return to the area after the defeat of the four kings. Now what does warfare do to a person? At the very least it is going to very severely enervate someone. You can see right in story here, in this case, why Abraham and his 318 men underwent a forced march. They got their troops together in a hurry and they took off and they went north as fast as their legs and horses and camels and whatever else they had would take them. Apparently they arrived at night, and they attacked at night and surprised the enemy and routed them out of there, and chased them all the way to Damascus, which is quite a hike up the road, and then when they felt it was useless to chase them any further, they apparently turned around and came back down again.

Now warfare under normal circumstances is something that enervates a person very greatly, and there is need of a great deal of refreshment because after all, we are just human. War is not easy. It is demanding, it is stressful, it is enervating because of the mental and physical forces that are unleashed by it. Tremendous tensions are created by fears and by hatred. When the battle is over, a period of R & R is in order.

Now when Abraham returned, he is met by Melchizedek. But Melchizedek is not the only one present and that sets up a very interesting by-play. It is important to a person of faith.

Abraham successfully defeated the Babylonish Assyrians, only to be tempted into a fellowship with the irreligious Sodomites. (I did not read that verse, I stopped just short of it.) Would it not seem the natural thing to do, to go into a truce, an agreement, a covenant with these people who assisted you in this warfare? You could become a team, "Hey, we work well together, don't we? We could put our heads together and really have a thing going here." They might have said something to Abraham like, "You could be the leader. You have already proven yourself of great leadership capacity. Let's put our forces together and we could do a great deal."

Abraham might have been tempted, but you see that is one reason why I stopped reading when I did because that was the exact point that God showed, that through Melchizedek He intervened to stop what Abraham might have been very tempted to enter into.

Remember, these things are symbols. These physical examples that Abraham went through are to teach you and me spiritual lessons. Now the lesson is this: That we do become enervated by the spiritual warfare in which we are involved, and there are times when are so tempted to let go, you see when the bowstring becomes wound so tight and your are twanging all over the place, you are about to make a compromise and make a deal with the world.

So it was just then that Melchizedek showed up on the scene, broke the course of events that was going on and offered Abraham something to strengthen him. Now what is bread likened to in the Bible? It is the Word of God. The symbol here is that God is giving Abraham strength to enable him to make a life choice, and he did.

I want to give you a little more evidence. Let us go to Numbers 20. Now as you are turning there, where does it say in the Bible concerning Christ and “afterward He was hungry,” Matthew 4:2, right? Satan thought he had caught Christ at a time when He was going to be a pushover, when he would be at His weakest, when He was hungry, physically weakened as a result of the fast. Satan knows when, for most people, to plant the seed of doubt. And usually he will do it through something physical.

Now look at this in Numbers 20. The Israelites are complaining.

Numbers 20:4-5 Why have you brought up the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink.”

How many times can you remember that Israel complained and rebelled when they got hungry? Well, the tempter knows when to plant his seed of doubt.

Numbers 21:5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.”

Again, a painful lesson.

Here is more proof. When they became physically weakened, they rebelled. Now that can happen to you or me if we are carnally minded. The lesson for you and me is to not let ourselves become spiritually weakened by failing to take in God’s Word and His Holy Spirit. When they became physically weakened, they were at the point of rebellion. Every time they did that, practically, God would intervene. He would give them refreshments, and they would be okay, until the next time they got hungry.

We must eat to be strengthened, eat spiritually. We must eat physically to be physically strong. If we do not eat of the Lord’s food, then we will eat of the world, because there is no alternative.

Now what did Melchizedek do? He intervened at just the right moment when this temptation was being put before Abraham to enter into a fellowship with the Sodomites with whom he had been allied to some degree in fighting this war, and, in a way, for whom he went to battle in behalf of. So Melchizedek intervened and re-focused Abraham’s attention on whom it was that gave him strength and the victory, and Abraham was enabled to make the right choice. You see what Melchizedek did, he said “Blessed be Abram of God Most High.” He refocused Abraham’s attention on God. “Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” These Sodomites and Abraham did not do a thing. It was God who gave you the victory.

Genesis 14:21-23 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 [he means lifted his hand in prayer and appealed to Him], 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.’”

Abraham wanted to make sure that he was living by faith, and that God only was going to be the blessing of Abraham, and Abraham would know it. No man would be able to brag that they helped Abram along the way. No, it had been God and God only. Abram had not only recognized the gift that God had given, but he in turn then, becomes a giver. He gave tithes as the Lord commanded to Melchizedek. So Abraham makes a public declaration that he will trust the Lord God to supply him.

Genesis 14:24 “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.”

Now, I want you to notice this, because there is another biblical principle that derives from this example, and that is that Abraham does not require of others what he requires of himself. Each person has to live according to the measure of *their* faith. Abraham’s faith was in God, but these other people’s faith was not in God, at least to the degree that Abraham’s was. So Abraham’s example was there but it could not be copied without the power to do so. Did they have the Spirit of God? I do not think so.

So each person has to be true, according to the measure of their faith, rather than falsely pretending to what they have not attained to. There is a whole chapter on this back in the New Testament, anybody know where it is? It is in Romans 14. It is the chapter that ends with, “For whatever is not from faith is sin.” It is where Paul says, “don’t offend people by trying to force things on them. Even your brother in the church.”

The lesson that we have to learn from this is that the King of Salem still lives. He is on the right hand of the throne of God, and He will still feed us in our time of need, and He does it over and over and over again.

On to chapter 15. I have entitled this, “Abraham’s trial with God’s promise.” Abraham is learning that the blessings are trials too. Indeed, the great blessing of God’s call has been responsible directly or indirectly for all these events that we have been studying into. Now who would ever have thought

to treat God's own promise, combined with the work of God toward Abraham, would involve him more deeply perhaps than anything he had faced yet?

Genesis 15:1-3 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." But Abram said, "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!"

"I go childless," he said. Some time has gone by since God called him. Now not taking possession of the land, well, that can be dealt with fairly easily by Abram because after all, even though he was not actually possessor of the land, God had blessed him very greatly, as we found out at the beginning of chapter 13 that he was exceedingly rich. And though he lived in a tent, it was probably the nicest tent anybody had ever lived in. Probably nine rooms and two or three baths. It was a great tent. So, dealing with not actually inheriting the land was something that he was able to do, at least without a great deal of difficulty as far as the Bible shows.

But much more difficult to deal with is the fact that he is getting older, Sarah is getting older, and the means of fulfilling the promise is getting slimmer and slimmer. "I go childless," he said. Abraham is no dummy. He knows that fulfillment of that promise depends on the production of a son to carry Abraham's line through.

Now let us look at this, the set up here, and kind of update it for you and me. The joy of this calling, that first love, the excitement of being in the work of God, and all the new things that we learn and come to understand and we experience a lot of things, and going off to the Feast of Tabernacles, all of that is great! We enjoy the fellowship that we have and maybe the best fellowship that we have ever had before, and interesting for Abraham, that carried him for quite a number of years.

But now he began to dwell on the lack of evidence that the seed portion of the promise is not being fulfilled. So, his concern and his enthusiasm began

to wane, even though God was mercifully intervening in his life. Well, that happens to you and me. We have not inherited yet, we are not in the Kingdom of God yet. There are promises that God has not yet fulfilled. We know that He has intervened. Each and every one of us have experienced it and we know that those things occur. Yet even though He intervenes in our lives and we believe in His promises, our enthusiasm begins to wane and doubts begin to creep in because evidence is not visibly seen that He is carrying these things out.

Here is Abraham. He has given his all, as far as we are able to see, and he has forsaken the world and has denied the temptations of Satan, yet he is fruitless in terms of having a son, and he is a stranger without an inheritance. Now here in this chapter, God intervenes again. He is willing to give Abraham a boost, but that event was a trial too.

Now the first thing God does is remind Abram of the promise.

Genesis 15:4-6 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.” [so He reminds him of that] 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.

In principle, what He did here, first of all, was remind him of the promise. Then the next step was to broaden Abraham’s scope, beyond the limits of flesh and blood. See, He made him look up into the heavens. He literally made him do that, in a sense, made him look away from the physical, looking away from flesh and blood, looking away from the earth and towards God’s throne, into an expanse that was so great.

Remember, Abram was probably an astronomer, a mathematician. He took Abraham right into his elements, and said in a sense, in a nice, kind way, “Look dummy, get your mind off the self, get on to heaven above, get your mind on the vast scope of the power of which you are dealing.” And

Abraham believed. It means that he took God at His word and God immediately responded. He accounted it to Abraham for righteousness. It was the right thing to do and God acknowledged it.

But now, the rest of the chapter. Abraham believed God. God is always the same. Faith, that belief, must be tested. Of all things, He tested Abraham purely with worship of that God. That has a valuable lesson contained within it. Now we might just expand on this word *worship*. Worship in its broadest sense involves every act of life. We tend to think of worship in terms of coming to services on the Sabbath, and that certainly is included because at that time we very definitely have a fellowship with God. We are in His presence, and we lift up prayers to Him and He speaks to us through His Word. There is a communication there.

But in its broadest sense worship includes all of the acts of life: what we do at home, and what we do on the job, while we are shopping, and while we are driving an automobile. Everything in our fellowship with God is contained within the scope of our worship of Him. This has something to do with the lesson that is involved here. How is God going to picture something to you and me in which this lesson is contained? He did it through a very ingenious method, and that is by requiring Abram to do something that we could very easily relate to as being an act of worship.

Now everybody here understands that when an Israelite worshipped, he made a sacrifice. That was the individual Israelite's supreme act of worship. Under normal circumstances it was to make a sacrifice.

Genesis 15:6-8 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." And he said, "Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

Here comes the answer to his question: make a sacrifice. Abraham's question at first glance appears like a contradiction to verse 6. On one hand he believed, and on the other hand he is asking for proof. No, he is not asking for proof, that is why God accounted it as righteousness. Abraham believed, he took God at His word, and he knew it was going to happen.

What we have a little trouble with is this, “How shall I know?” What he is asking for is how or through what experience the promise will be fulfilled. He believed it was going to occur, but he wanted to know the means through which it was going to occur. Now you and I are wondering about that and asking that about God all the time. We ask, “I know you’re going to do this, but how are you going to do it.” That is exactly what Abraham did.

We too may believe. Abraham believed, you see, but God’s answer is sacrifice. Now what kind of an answer is that? What He is telling Abram is this: That understanding God’s will comes when we offer ourselves as a burnt offering. Do you remember the sermons I gave on the offerings of Leviticus? We went through the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering.

Genesis 15:9-10 So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

All the aspects of the burnt offering (Leviticus 1), the sin offering (Leviticus 4), and the trespass offering (Leviticus 5), are contained here. In the animals that were offered, you remember the type because I went through them, we see service, sin bearing, and innocence. The bull, the sin bearing of the ram and goat, and the innocence of the turtle dove. These aspects cover our thoughts, our conduct, and our emotions. I want you to remember this, we are primarily dealing here with the burnt offering. Do you remember what the burnt offering symbolized? It symbolized a person offering themselves completely and totally to God.

I think that it is interesting that the meal offering is not stated here. Because remember, the meal offering is offered in relation to men. It might be assumed that the meal offering is included even though it is not mentioned here because when we get back to the book of Leviticus, we find that every time a burnt offering was offered, the meal offering is offered on top of it. So, the two great commandments are covered here—giving ourselves

completely to God and also serving, loving mankind as we love ourselves. But in order to do that, a person has to be a whole burnt offering. That is what the type is here. The emphasis is offering the entire self to God.

Now this is a great key that God is giving you and me. This is how we come to understand God's purpose! God very rarely ever directly answers our questions. Did you notice back there in the New Testament, when you read of Christ, when He was asked a question, He always kind of beat around the bush and made people think, or He made people go through some kind of experience to get the answer.

God works in the same pattern all the time. That is one way we can prove, there is evidence that Christ in the New Testament is the same as the Lord in the Old Testament. They think in the same parameters, they act in the same way. When God answers Abraham's question, "How shall I know," He made him go through a test, and from that test comes an example, a lesson to you and me that we understand the will of God by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him.

You want to understand? Sure, you want to understand. Now where does it tell you this directly? It is in the Psalms.

Psalm 111:10 A good understanding have all those who do His commandments.

Sacrifice is a major key to understanding God's purpose. Let us turn back to another psalm, Psalm 25. This is a great answer to this. Abraham wanted to know God's secret, how is this going to be worked out.

Psalm 25:14 The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.

God is telling you and me that if we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, truth will be made manifest to us. Now why? What is the process? Sacrificing for God's purposes, for the fulfilling of His will, forces us to live by faith. Living by faith pleases God, and His reward is to reveal more of Himself to us. It is a simple process, but not easy to do.

Now back to Genesis 15. The Lord then put Abraham through this.

Genesis 15:11-12 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.

Now, here is Abraham doing his sacrifice. In type he is offering himself to God, in worship. He is offering his life. The vultures, again in symbol, represent distractions. We can tie this into scriptures like Isaiah 46:11, Revelation 18:2, the vultures are shown to be demonic, either evil spirits or a demon-possessed person. Again, it is showing that while we are offering ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, there will be distractions from those principalities and powers. They come in and try and keep us from making the sacrifice that God intends we keep.

Genesis 15:13-16 Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

I forgot for a moment about the darkness as that occurred. Darkness is symbolic in the Bible of not knowing the truth. It is showing here that even when one is offering himself in a sacrifice, our faith is going to alternate between light and darkness. There is going to be periods of darkness and we are not going to know the truth. It is going to come in on us as a distraction and try to arise doubt and it will be a horror to us, when these periods come along.

However, we have to understand that darkness is not overcome by sleeping. Remember the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25, they all slumbered and slept. But rather, God shows that we have to go through our trials, through our periods

of darkness with Him. Remember I Corinthians 10:13, that He will allow these trials to come upon us but He will always give us a way through the trials.

Abraham is experiencing these things in type to give us a lesson so that we understand the trials of our faith.

So sacrifice is a major key to understanding God's will. The reason for that is because it forces a person to live by faith. Living by faith pleases God, and God's reward or blessing is to reveal more of Himself.

While we are going through the trial, there are going to be distractions from the principalities and powers, represented by the vultures, and there are going to be periods of darkness alternating with periods of light. There will be times that we know we are in the church and we are joyful and happy and we see our way very clear, and there are other times when darkness is going to descend and we are not going to understand what is going on. There is going to be darkness and a black cloud around us, so to speak, and we are going to feel horror as a result.

And then suddenly a burning, fiery furnace appears, a smoking furnace. This is symbolic of something. What do trials do to us? They refine our character. This is a refiner's fire. It is refining our character, our hearts, our minds in the midst of trials, and then suddenly there is light. You see the light.

So it is only through the crucible of a fiery furnace, a refiner's fire, through much tribulation that the Kingdom is to be won. Now, the smoking furnace is ready to burn away all of the dross that is in our character and the burning lamp appears and the trial [burns?] with light.