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The Family of Abraham: Part 4—Defeating the Kings, Rescuing Lot, Meeting Melchizedek

March 7, 2019



Alastair Roberts

In the fourth part of my series on Abraham and his family, I discuss Genesis 14, with Abram's victory over the kings, his encounter with Melchizedek, and his final break with Lot.

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today is the fourth of my series on Abraham's family. I'm exploring the history of Abraham's family from Genesis 11 to Genesis 50, discovering the ways in which the different characters that are part of this family are tightly interconnected as part of a great narrative that's playing out.

A narrative in which the destinies of peoples are being determined and the significance of those characters as they emerge, as they are juxtaposed with each other, as they're compared and contrasted, and as we see the consequences of their actions play out over time. I've looked at the first few chapters of this story, got to the end of chapter 13. I want to make a few more comments on the end of chapter 13 and then move into

chapter 14, which is the battle of the kings.

In chapter 13, we see Abraham going into the land of Canaan. And as he goes into the land of Canaan, he takes Lot with him back from the land of Egypt, but yet they divide. They have both have great possessions, but there's rivalry between their groups and they end up going different directions.

Now this is significant because Lot would seem to have been the natural heir and successor of Abraham. He was going to be the one through whom Abraham's name would be made great, but yet that was not to be. And so Lot goes his own way.

The way that Lot goes his own way is worth paying attention to. He goes his own way, choosing a particular area of the land for himself. So we read, And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of Eden, like the land of Egypt, as you go toward the Zoar.

Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Now, when you read that, there are a number of things that should click in your mind, a number of connections that might emerge.

First of all, a reference to the garden of Eden, the garden of God. There's also a reference to Egypt. There's a reference to this looking and seeing that something is good and choosing that and then going east.

All of these are events that, and significant details that might highlight that this is a bad choice. Or it's a choice at least that foreshadows something negative. It's not in itself necessarily a bad choice, but it is something that is relayed to us in a way that would suggest that there's something that's going to go wrong about this.

The garden of God, the Eden setting, looking, seeing that something is good and taking it. That there is something like taking the fruit here, heading east. That's the way that the people go when they're building the journey from the east and the building of Babel.

It's also going east from Eden. In these cases, that sort of journeying is associated with negative themes. What else is going on here? There's a separation of Lot's destiny from Abraham's destiny in various ways.

They're going their own separate ways. And he will eventually, even though he thinks that he's choosing the right thing, he's choosing something that looks like Egypt. He's choosing something that is reminiscent of the garden of God.

And yet he will end up in dire straits before long. We will see that his choice leads him ultimately into a pit. Whereas Abraham's choice, which he depends upon God is one that will lead to him being made great.

And so I've spoken about the diptychs, the way that within the book of Genesis, we have characters held up against each other, juxtaposed. And as we see their destinies play out, as we see the differences and similarities between them, we see something more about the significance of each character. And this division of the ways, this parting of the ways between Lot and Abraham is a significant part of that.

What we're seeing is the diversion between these two characters now seen more as brothers than as father son. And we'll see more of this in the chapters that follow. Lot is described as a brother within this passage.

And later on, we'll see Abraham goes after his brother Lot. When Lot is taken in chapter 14, it might seem as if there was providence involved that God was going to give Lot back to Abraham. Lot had seemed lost, but now the prodigal son is going to return.

God is going to make his name great through Lot and it will all be set right. But yet that's not to be. And as we go through this passage, we'll see some of the ways in which that plays out.

But at the end of chapter 13, you see a promise that God will give the land to Abraham and his descendants. At the very beginning, God has promised in chapter 12 that he will make Abraham's name great, that he will make his family and descendants great. But yet it's not entirely clear who those descendants are, where they're going to come from.

It would seem it might be through Lot. And at the very end, we have the promise that God will give them this place, this particular land. And then he describes the people in a way that relates them to the land.

They will be like the sand of the seashore, the dust of the earth. And so they will be beyond numbering. They will be those that multiply upon the face of the earth.

What we'll see later is that there is an amplification of that, that they're not just going to be like the dust of the earth multiplied in that sense. They're also going to be like the stars in the heaven and the sand on the seashore. And each one of these images add something in.

So what we can see as we're looking through the story of Genesis is each one of these promises is an amplification and a clarification of what has gone before. So at the very beginning, you have the promise concerning family and seed and or the promise concerning making his name great, making him a great nation. Then you have the promise to give him a particular place and that they will be like the dust of the earth multiplied beyond number.

And again, this can relate back to the very basic themes of the book of Genesis, the calling and the blessing upon humankind to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, exercise dominion over its creatures. This is a progressive working out. So first of all,

you're fruitful, then you multiply, then you fill the earth, then you subdue it, then you exercise dominion.

And we're seeing this playing out that God promises that he will fulfill those things for Abraham and his descendants, that they will, that Abraham will be fruitful. He will become a great nation. He will multiply.

He will fill the earth, that he will have this particular place. And then later on, we see these promises of subduing and exercising dominion and a foreshadowing of these things in chapter 14. Chapter 14, we have a story that is very much set within that ancient world of wars between kings, of wars between kings from outside the land, dominating over these small princelets or these small kingdoms within the land.

These forces are significant. Chedorlaomer is the king of Elam and Elam is the first son of Shem. And within this passage, we have Abraham described as the Hebrew, which might suggest that he's associated with Eber, a younger son of Shem.

And so the older son of Shem, one associated with Elam is displaced by a younger son of Shem, son of Eber. And that sort of progression would suggest a relationship with the broader theme that we see throughout the book of Genesis with younger sons displacing older sons. We see it in Cain and Abel and Seth.

We see it in the story of Esau and Jacob, Ishmael and Isaac. We see it in Judah and Joseph and Joseph and the other brothers. We see it in Manasseh and Ephraim.

And in all these different characters, we're seeing the reversal of the natural birth order. And here there might be another similar thing going on that the king of Elam, the king of the oldest son of Shem is displaced by a younger son. The king of Elam, Chedor-Le-Omer and his allies, they're ruling over these people in Canaan.

And this would seem to be a fulfillment in part of the prophecy that we find in Genesis nine concerning Canaan. Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants, he shall be to his brethren. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant.

May God enlarge Japheth and may he dwell in the tents of Shem and may Canaan be his servant. So that is the curse, the judgment that we have in the story of Noah that begins the lines of these families as they spread out. And what we're seeing is the flowing out of families at this point.

The families of the nations are dividing up, they've divided up and they're playing out different destinies. And the division of Abraham and Lot is a division of two different nations going their own different ways. There's a split in the river head at this point.

And the description of what happens at this point is that there's a split in the river head at this point. The well-watered land, things like that. All of this suggests themes of the

garden of Eden, waters flowing out and this is what we're seeing taking place.

That there is a garden of Eden type situation and then there's this division of the river head to fill these different lands. The story of these kings is interrupted at many points with glosses upon the particular locations or kingdoms, which suggests that this is updated for a later audience. It's connecting the story of these kings and the victory over them with the later conquest of the land that we see in the book of Joshua.

So for instance, you have characters that would seem to be, or references that would seem to be anachronistic. Amalek, for instance, the reference to the country of the Amalekites. Now that would later become the country of the Amalekites, but the Amalek hasn't yet been born yet.

And we have characters like the Amorites and others, these other people of Canaan that significant figures. We need to think about the way in which they're playing a part in this story. So we're having forces from outside the land, dominating the Canaanites, the Canaanite peoples within the land, sons of Ham's youngest son, Canaan are being dominated by these forces from outside the land, led by Chedulaioma, who's a Shemite.

And then we have the people who are associated with, for instance, the title King of Nations, who is presumably, the Gentiles are associated with Japheth. So he's a Japhethite. And these are dominating over Berer, King of Sodom, Bersha, King of Gomorrah, Shinnab, King of Admar, Shemobar, King of Zeboim, and the King of Bela, which is Zoar.

And they're all gathering together in the Valley of Sidim, which is later the Salt Sea. So these are settings that will later be familiar within the conquest of the land. So we see places like En Mishpat, which is Kadesh.

And then you have other names, Bela, Zoar, and these other places, which we'll find later on in scripture. Significant places often. These locations are also associated with peoples, the Rephaim, the Zuzim, the Emim, these peoples who will later be great enemies of the people of Israel, people that they have to conquer to take possession of the land.

And yet here we see a Shemite King, Chedulaioma, exercising dominance over them. He has dominated these particular kings and he's the big fish within this world of the ancient Near East, within this world in which Abraham is operating. Abraham is operating.

The fact that Abraham beats him is a sign of what Israel should be doing. This is the conquest narrative. He is conquering the land and he's conquering a significant tract of territory.

He pursues Chedulaioma and his forces north, up to north of Damascus. This is a

significant terrain that he is marking out by his victory. And so what we have seen originally is him building altars throughout the land and now waiting throughout the land, having a certain area of the land that is given to him as his possession, north, south, east, and west, as God maps out that territory for him and says that his descendants will multiply like the dust of the earth.

But here we see him taking a possession of that land and guarding the people within it. He has taken possession in a way that foreshadows what will later on happen in the story of Joshua and the connection between the names here, which are older names and the newer names that we'll find within the book of Joshua and elsewhere is an important part of the meaning of the story. If Abraham did this, if he anticipated all the victories of the land that are later on going to happen, then you too, you too people of Israel can conquer the land.

You can take possession. There's no reason why you can't do what Abraham, your forefather did. And looking back within the context of this chapter, we've already seen Abraham go through certain parts that are significant.

Places like he's been to Shechem, the place where the family has been divided. He's been through Ai, where they failed to take possession of the land and he's built altars in those places. He's been down to Egypt.

He's experienced the struggle as Pharaoh takes Sarai into captivity. And then later on as plagues and other things are the means by which he's delivered into, to return to the land with many gifts, returns to the land, walks throughout the land and now he wins a great victory within the land. So as it were, he's spied out the land and now he is going through the land to take possession.

And this is playing out the history of Israel in advance that helps Israel to see that their destiny has been foreshadowed, that there is nothing that they will face that Abraham has not faced before them. The kings of the nations, the kings of the Chedoraim and his forces drive the forces of the land, the Canaanites down to the pits, the asphalt pits where they're hiding within those. This is a very significant site.

It's a sign that they have come down to the pit. They come down to this place of judgment and complete impotence. They have no power and they're also driven to the mountains.

They're completely robbed of their possessions. And they take Lot, Abraham's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom and his goods. Lot's part in this story is very important.

Lot is the one who it would seem was the one that Abraham's descendants should be named in. He would seem was the one that Abraham's name would be made great through, but yet Lot went his own way. And Lot just seemed to be a bad penny in certain

respects, but here he's gone his own way and maybe he can be won back.

This is the hope, but yet it does not transpire that way. And it seems that Lot has been brought down to this very lowest point. He's been brought to Sodom to this wicked king and now he's lost everything.

And he has a chance. Is he going to be taken back? Is he going to return to Abraham's side? The other question is how is Abraham going to relate to him? Is Abraham going to relate to him as a son again, someone that's going to be part of his house, someone who's going to be building up his name, or is he going to relate to him as a brother? His brother's son, is he going to give him that independence and to forge his own destiny? Or is he going to see his destiny being fulfilled in him? And this is an important question because we've already seen certain aspects of Lot's behavior and his choice that do not augur well for Lot and his character. He's chosen this something that looks appealing, but it's associated with the choice of the forbidden fruit, associated with Egypt, associated with the king of Sodom and this wicked city.

And in these respects, it seems that he's not the sort of person that Abraham wants to put his legacy in, entrust his legacy to. This is not going to be the person through whom Abraham's name is going to be made great. But will he protect him? Will he stand and fight for his brother or will he allow him to be taken into slavery and captivity? And so Abraham gathers together his forces.

He's someone who has influence within the land. Part of the significance of this passage is showing that Abraham is someone who is acting very much like a king here. He's not just a priest who's building altars, but he's a, he's an incipient king.

He's a judge figure. He's someone who has allies. He's someone who has forces.

He has forces of over 300 men, 318 men. Now this number of people, as I've suggested before, suggests that Abraham had at least 2,000, 3,000 people in his sheikdom. There were significant numbers of people surrounding him.

These are all 318 trained servants who were born in his own house, house-born servants. These are not just regular mercenaries. These are people that belong to Abraham's own house.

So Abraham is a king of a type. He's a sort of sheik and he has a large group around him that takes refuge and people will come to him for aid when people within the region need help. So this is important to bear in mind, that he is acting on a more grander scale here.

He's acting with the peoples of the land and he's also combating these great empires of the world. These early empires, as Chedulaioma and these Japhethite kings come against him. He's someone who is standing for this particular land and taking conquest, making

a conquest within it.

But he does not take absolute possession of it. That is something that awaits and we'll see that when he gathers the servants together, he drives out the opponents and he divides his forces up against and he attacks by night and pursues them as north of Damascus. Over 300 men and attacked by night.

That might remind us of Gideon. Gideon does a very similar thing with 300 men. Abraham has 318 men.

There's significance to that fact in all probability. I'm not entirely sure what that significance is, but 318 is not a figure that we have by accident. It's there for a reason in all probability.

The king of Sodom then meets him at the Valley of Sheba, the king's valley. And after he has defeated the kings and then Melchizedek, the king of Salem brings out bread and wine. He's the priest of God most high.

What we see here are themes of priesthood and kingdom. We've already seen that in the story of Abraham as he goes throughout the land, building altars, sites of worship, and presumably leading his people in worship at these particular sites. And leading maybe other peoples of the land.

He already has allies here, Mamre, Anna and Eshkol. These are figures within the land who have allied themselves to Abraham. So we have a group of people that are already gathering around him.

And he is met by Melchizedek, king of Salem. The significance of this meeting I've commented upon before. It happens at this particular point in a narrative that is playing out the destiny of Israel.

So he's already gone to significant sites like Shechem and Ai and Bethel. He's already gone down into Egypt and been brought up again through plagues. He's spied out the land and now he's taken possession of it.

Or he's won a great victory in it. And at this point he is met from Salem, and this site that will later be the site of Jerusalem, he's met by Melchizedek, king of righteousness, his name suggests. So this is a significant meeting.

He's gone through this whole anticipation of Israel's history. And then he meets this person at this site. This would seem to be an anticipation of a sort of Davidic kingdom, but a Davidic kingship that also has priestly authority.

And here it's significant as the author of Hebrews suggests that Abraham gives to this one a tithe of everything. A tithe of everything that he has won. And that is a very

powerful thing to do.

Although he has, as it says later, within his loins, Levi, the tribe of Levi and the Levitical priesthood is within Abraham's loins, but yet he still gives tithe to this Melchizedek. And then Melchizedek brings out bread and wine. It's a priestly act and it's after his victory over the kings.

And this I think is appropriately seen as connecting with New Testament themes. That Christ is the greater Melchizedek. Christ is the one who, after his victory over the principalities and powers, comes to his people with bread and wine and sets a table for us in the presence of our enemies, our defeated enemies, and feeds us at his feast.

We are the true sons of Abraham and we are fed by the greater Melchizedek. So there is this pattern that's playing out and a pattern that anticipates further history and which plays out the destiny of the peoples. So the King of Sodom says at this point, something that might have struck a very dark note for Abraham.

He says, Abraham, you can keep the goods, but I want the people for myself. And what does that mean? He wants Lot. He wants Lot and his family.

He wants the whole people that have been taken. And yet he's going to give Abraham all these possessions. That is a very significant blow for Abraham.

Abraham who might have considered regaining Lot, this lost son, he might have him brought back in again. But no. Lot ends up going back with the King of Sodom and he has a place there within that society as a free person.

Now he's been liberated from captivity to this King Chedoraim. He's someone who's back within the land and he has a part to play within the society of Sodom. He's pitched his tent near Sodom in the past, but later on we'll see him.

He's within their gates. He's one of the rulers. He's one of the people who has influence within that society, even though they looked at him with some suspicion.

And so we see a very significant trajectory in the story of Lot and Abraham here. Whereas it might seem that Lot might come back and be part of Abraham's sheikdom again and be part of Abraham's orbit, be someone who's within his house again. No, he goes with the King of Sodom and Abraham refuses to take any of the gifts, any of the spoil from the King of Sodom.

What he says is beyond the portion that is needed for his allies and his men, he is going to just leave that. He's not going to take any of it. Lest it be said that the King of Sodom made him rich.

He is going to receive this from God alone. And the language within this context where

both Melchizedek and Abraham refer to God as the possessor of heaven and earth might be part of this, that he is going to receive the possession from God, not from any human hand. The kingdom is not going to be given to him by any of the rulers of this age.

Rather, it will be handed to him by God himself, the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth. And this encounter with Melchizedek and the response to the King of Sodom set the context for what happens next. And in the next chapter, we'll see God appearing to Abraham.

And this is a key pivotal moment within the story. It plays out some of the deeper themes and brings attention to some of the themes that we've already seen, the significance of the time in Egypt and these other things that are taking place. And it also brings to clarity where and how God will fulfill his promise of making Abraham a great nation, of multiplying him and making him his name great.

Lord willing, I'll be back to discuss that in a few days time. I'll probably be doing other subjects in the next couple of days. Thank you very much for listening.

If you have any questions about this or any other subjects, please leave them in my Curious Cat account. If you would like to support this and other videos like it, please do so using my Patreon or PayPal accounts. Thank you very much for listening and Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow.

God bless.