

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

ABRAM, THE UNLIKELY GENERAL

Genesis 14:10-24

July 14, 2019

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message.

My points for today's message are:

- Possessions over faith ended in misery for Lot.
- Faith over possessions ended in victory for Abram.
- God confirmed Abram was in the center of his will.

Let's review what we've studied about Abram so far:

- Abram was a man God called to set out on a journey of faith.
- Abram was already well-to-do but he and his wife had no children.
- God told Abram he'd make him the father of a great nation.
- As he traveled, Abram stopped to build altars and worship God.
- At one stop, God told him he would give the land he saw to his descendants, who would number so many they'd be impossible to count.
- Abram's relationship with God was growing until a famine came. He decided to take a detour and go to Egypt where there was plenty of food.
- During the detour in Egypt, there was no sign at all of Abram worshipping God, seeking God, praying, or anything. He gets himself and Sarai in a fix and God intervenes. They are expelled from Egypt.
- Abram returns to the place where he last worshipped God before his detour to Egypt.
- Abram and his nephew Lot part ways because their two estates had grown to the point that they had conflict.
- Abram let Lot choose his territory and Lot chose the greener valley and set up camp outside of Sodom, a wicked city.
- God confirmed to Abram that Canaan land was best for Abram.

In today's message, we have the first war recorded in the Bible. There had been many generations since Adam, and probably there had been battles, but this is the first one recorded in the Bible. And the only reason we have record of it is because of Abram and Lot.

## **POSSESSIONS OVER FAITH ENDED IN MISERY FOR LOT**

**EXPLANATION:** Let me set the stage. This is an oversimplification of what was going on, but I don't want to go into a big history lesson. So here it is: Several cities were under the oppression of a stronger kingdom. They had to pay tribute to the stronger kingdom, which means they had to pay money or do whatever the kingdom wanted, in order to keep it from overtaking them. The lesser cities formed an alliance and rebelled. This resulted in a war.

The stronger alliance overtook the lesser alliance and here we have our entry into today's scripture.

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 14:10-12

*Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. <sup>11</sup> The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. <sup>12</sup> They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.*

This must have been an incredible scene; bloody and violent, with many of the losers fleeing and/or falling into tar pits. If you look at your Bible maps, this action took place, I believe, just south of the Dead Sea.

With the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah empty, the victors took the spoils including Lot and his possessions. By "possessions", we're talking about all that he owned including his family, servants, and livestock.

All that stuff now meant nothing to Lot. The green plain that he chose when he parted ways with his uncle meant nothing to him. Living near the city now meant nothing to him. He was completely helpless.

**APPLICATION:** As we look at Lot's life and his choices, let's take heed. Let's not let our possessions drive us and others to misery!

## **FAITH OVER POSSESSIONS ENDED IN VICTORY FOR ABRAHAM**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 14:13-16

*A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. <sup>14</sup> When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. <sup>15</sup> During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup> He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.*

**EXPLANATION:** When and where did Abram learn to be the commander of an Army? When and where did Abram's men learn to be warriors? The reality behind this is just stunning! Here we have a man who was a nomad, traveling with nomads – and they completely defeated equipped and developed armies. How did they do it?

In verse 14, we read that Abram had 318 trained men. Some might focus on the significance of 318 – and that I do not know, other than this notation of a specific number foreshadows the copious records that Jews would be known for. What caught my eye was the word “trained.” The Hebrew word is ḥă·nî·kāw and it is used only one time in the entire Bible, right here. It means “trained, tried, experienced.”

I have been sharing this thought with you for some time: strategy is the Lord's work. Abram in his growing wisdom and faith in God, had somewhere along the way trained his men, tried them, and they gained experience. Did they have target practice with bows and arrows? Shepherds had to contend with lions and other vagrant animals from time to time, but how did they prepare for battle against an alliance of armies who had just been victors in a bloody battle?

At this juncture when we read between the lines, we see that Abram's faith included strategy. Abram trusted God and he used the brain God gave him. He trained his

men for battle. Whether they'd ever have need of it or not, they were trained. What if Abram said – Listen. Because I've said this several times – What if Abram had said, “If we find ourselves in battle, if God's in it, we'll win. If he's not, I guess we'll lose. Let's not prepare, let's not plan, let's not train, because if God's in it, he'll see us through.” Trained, tried, experienced. Somewhere before Genesis 14, Abram developed a strategy for battle.

But we still have the question, how did 318 of Abram's men completely annihilate the allied armies without suffering one loss that we know of? I can answer that. George Whitfield, an Anglican minister and founder of the Methodist movement said, “We are immortal until our work on earth is done.”

**APPLICATION:** Abram used his possessions to help rescue his nephew, the family, and all their belongings. He was organized, his people were trained – he had all his possessions in good working order.

## **GOD CONFIRMED ABRAM WAS IN THE CENTER OF HIS WILL**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 14:17-20

*After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying,*

*“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.*

*20 And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

**EXPLANATION:** Melchizedek is an interesting, mysterious character in the Bible. Parallel to Abram is another man of God we know little about. We tend to think Abram was the only one following God at this period, but no, Melchizedek was a priest of God. I believe Melchizedek represents the works God has going on that we don't know about.

You know in the parable of the seeds...there are birds who take the seeds away...leading us to believe that God plants his work around this world completely out of our sight. From time to time we hear about remote groups who've had the

Gospel for hundreds of years and no one knows how it got there. I believe Melchizedek is one of those anomalies. He was a man of God, yet the only record we have of him is when he interacts with people in the Bible.

Abram and his men, just having come out of battle, were probably experiencing some type of post-traumatic stress that warriors experience. The battle was so sudden they had no time to get their minds prepared. They had killed people for the first time. “Did we do the right thing?” “Could we have done this another way?” “Should we have let Lot and his people fend for themselves?”

And then, out of nowhere, a bizarre thing happens that no one could have predicted. A priest – not related to them, but of the same God they knew - shows up and does three things:

- Brings them food and drink.
- Speaks a blessing from God.
- Confirms God had given the enemy to them.

If any of them had lingering guilt, this was the cleansing ceremony!

Melchizedek knew the mind of God. He knew that Abram was God’s man. Some have said the bread and wine were the first foreshadowing of Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples, what we call Communion, or the Lord’s Supper. Let’s look at it from that perspective. Communion represents the blood and body of Christ. It represents God’s grace and mercy. Abram and Melchizedek had no concept of the coming Messiah, as far as we know. He had not yet been introduced by any prophet at this time. I love the beauty of the bread and wine representing God’s grace and mercy given to Abram in battle.

How did Abram respond? He tithed! Yes, he did! He had faith over his possessions. He didn’t let his possessions rule over him.

And what did Lot do? Nothing, as far as we know.

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 14:21-24

*The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”*

<sup>22</sup> *But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup> that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ <sup>24</sup> I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”*

The days were numbered for the King of Sodom although he didn't know it. Abram had experienced the almighty God. He received an unexpected verbal confirmation from Melchizedek, and so therefore he didn't need or want any gift from the king of Sodom – and he made sure the king knew it by telling him he wouldn't even accept a boot strap from him.

**APPLICATION:** When we have an experience with God, material things all of a sudden become immaterial.

**CONCLUSION:** At the end of the battle, we have two men together again – Abram and his nephew Lot. Two men, two ways of thinking and living. Let's see how they are faring:

**Abram** now had several experiences under his belt, didn't he? God had confirmed several times that he had chosen Abram. Abram messed up along the way but got things straightened out. His faith had grown and now he was a veteran war general.

I am reminded of Paul's writing in I Corinthians.

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

*Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.*

Then we have this pitiful man named **Lot**. Last week, I contrasted him to Abram. He had no spiritual side at all. He was just in the shadows of Abram. He was not a

man of faith. He was not a man of strategy as he couldn't defend himself against his enemies. To our knowledge, he didn't pray. But Lot liked his stuff. He liked fertile land. He must have liked the wicked city of Sodom because chapter 13 had him pitching his tents outside Sodom. Yet in this chapter, at the time of the invasion, he was living in the city.

You know I think there are a lot of Lots out there. People who just live in the shadows of movers and shakers. People who have no incentive to have any strategy at all. They just collect stuff... and hope if there is a problem, Uncle Abram will bail them out.

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at [www.thbc.com](http://www.thbc.com). Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn  
Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA