

Friends Always Protect

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3rd in a five-part series

March 4, 2018

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Genesis 13:1–13 (CEB)

Abram went up from Egypt toward the arid southern plain with his wife, with everything he had, and with Lot. ² Abram was very wealthy in livestock, silver, and gold. ³ Abram traveled, making and breaking camp, from the arid southern plain to Bethel and to the sacred place there, where he had first pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai, ⁴ that is, to the place at which he had earlier built the altar. There he worshipped in the LORD's name. ⁵ Now Lot, who traveled with Abram, also had flocks, cattle, and tents. ⁶ They had so many possessions between them that the land couldn't support both of them. They could no longer live together. ⁷ Conflicts broke out between those herding Abram's livestock and those herding Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites lived in the land.

⁸ Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have disputes between me and you and between our herders since we are relatives. ⁹ Isn't the whole land in front of you? Let's separate. If you go north, I will go south; and if you go south, I will go north." ¹⁰ Lot looked up and saw the entire Jordan Valley. All of it was well irrigated, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as far as Zoar (this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah). ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself the entire Jordan Valley. Lot set out toward the east, and they separated from each other. ¹² Abram settled in the land of Canaan, and Lot settled near the cities of the valley and pitched his tent close to Sodom. ¹³ The citizens of Sodom were very evil and sinful against the LORD.

[After the two men parted ways, Lot was caught up in a war in and around Sodom. He, his family, and all his possession were carried off by the victors.]

Genesis 14:13–16 (CEB)

¹³ When a survivor arrived, he told Abram the Hebrew, who lived near the oaks of the Amorite Mamre, who was the brother of Eshcol and Aner, Abram's treaty partners.

¹⁴ When Abram heard that his relative had been captured, he took all of the loyal men born in his household, three hundred eighteen, and went after them as far as Dan.

¹⁵ During the night, he and his servants divided themselves up against them, attacked, and chased them to Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶ He brought back all of the looted property, together with his relative Lot and Lot's property, wives, and people.

Friends always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere.

If you got into trouble, I mean really big, giant, trouble . . . to whom would you turn? A family member, a friend. We all need some help at times, and occasionally what we need is to be truly rescued. Who would you call at 3am? Abraham came riding to his friend's rescue without even being asked. That's a friend.

Abraham and God's rescue plan

In the beginning, God creates everything there is and pronounces it all good. God also creates humans in God's own image and gives them responsibility for all the creatures of the earth. God gives the humans, a man and a woman, a beautiful garden in which to live and work. God even comes to walk with them in the evening. There are two trees of special note in this garden. The first is the Tree of Life, from which the humans will eat and, hence, live forever. The other is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God warns the humans that they are not to eat of that tree or they will die.

For awhile, all is as God intends. The humans enjoy an intimate relationship with God. But soon, it all falls apart. The woman is tempted to eat the forbidden fruit, believing that she will then know what God knows. She will be like a god herself. Sadly, she eats the fruit. The man follows suit and their relationship with God is torn apart. Rebellion against God has become their way. They hide from God and blame each other for what

has happened. Tragically, they must leave the Garden and will never eat from the Tree of Life. They head off into exile and, soon, murder and other horrors become their way.

What's to be done? God "uncreates" with a flood and preserves a single family who will start over. But it goes no better. Eventually, the humans build a tower to the heavens, so that they can go where the gods go, just as the humans in the garden wanted to know what the gods know.

Thus, a deep and foreboding silence falls across God's creation. What will God do now? The humans are estranged from God and one another. All of God's creation groans under the weight of rebellion and pride. What is the cure for the curse? Where is the repair for the rupture? How will God put things right so that love and mercy and justice are again the way of life? With those questions hanging, we come to God's new rescue plan.

In the ancient, but knowable, world of nearly four millennia ago, we meet a man named Abram and his wife, Sarai.¹ He and his family live in Haran, far to the north of Canaan,² his father having moved there from Ur. One day, God speaks to Abram. There is no fanfare, no burning bush, no angels or flaming swords.

God makes three promises to Abram when he comes to him that day:

1. God will give them a land.
2. God will make Abram's family a great nation.
3. All the families of the earth will be blessed through Abram.

It is the third promise that gets forgotten and overlooked; yet, I couldn't really overstate its importance. God's call of Abraham sets the stage for all that follows. Yes, Abraham will become the father of a great nation. Yes, he will go to the land given him by God. But, more importantly, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" through Abraham. In the Old Testament, blessing is a gift from God, encompassing material well-being, peace, and success in life. Blessing shapes the lives of Abraham's family and the "outsiders" they meet. Such blessing will be brought to all the people of the earth.

Abram's rescue plan

Abram has a nephew, Lot, and together, they leave Haran and bring their families and flocks to Canaan. Upon their arrival, it soon becomes apparent that they have to part ways. Their combined flocks are overgrazing the land. So, uncle Abram lets the younger man have his choice of land. And Lot makes one of those choices that seems very logical in the moment but actually leads to disaster.

At that time, the land south of the Dead Sea was verdant and able to support large cities and large flocks. It seemed like just the right place to head. So Lot, taking what he thought was the best portion, pointed his family southeastward . . . right toward Sodom. Yes, that Sodom. It isn't so surprising that Lot would get caught up into big trouble. That's how it is sometimes. We grab at something that looks like a blessing, failing to see that it is anything but. Being materially well-off seems like a blessing, but it can raise its own set of problems. It is what we do with the blessings we are given that determines whether they will remain blessings.

In any event, Lot is soon caught up in a war. He, his family, and all their possessions become no more than plunder for the victor. But when all seems lost, who comes riding to the rescue? Ole' uncle Abe, of course. Kent Hughes tells the story colorfully:

¹Later in the book of Genesis, Abram will be given a new name by God. "Abraham" means something like "father of a multitude." The name of Abram's wife, Sarai, will be changed to Sarah. God changes Abram's name when God tells Abram that circumcision of male children is to be a sign of the covenant between God and Abram. In ancient cultures, a new name would signify a new phase in the person's life.

²Canaan is the ancient name of the land that would become the homeland of biblical Israel, given to them by God. Later, it would come to be called Palestine. The people living in this area in the time of Abraham were known as the Canaanites.

Abram was magnificent. Iain Duguid sees the event as a kind of epiphany: “The veil is lifted for a moment, and we see Abram in his true colors, acting as the king of the land that is his by right and that will be inherited by his offspring. This is Abram’s mount of transfiguration, when his glory is clearly—if brightly—revealed to those closest to him.” We see Abram in stunning magnanimity.

Abram could easily have elected to do nothing. Lot had made his choice. He had cared for no one but himself. Lot had pitched his tent near Sodom and then moved into town! Besides, wisdom is the better part of valor. People would get further hurt if he got involved. And what if something happened to Abram? He was the one indispensable man.

But Abram chose to take action. He was the original Braveheart—the real thing. “He led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them.” These were servants from birth, not acquired servants, and therefore the most loyal and dependable. The Hebrew here is dynamic. “He led forth ... 318 of them” is literally, “drew out 318 men,” as you would draw out a sword from its sheath. His 318 loyal men were his sword unsheathed and ready for war! Out came the quivers and bows; swords were whetted to a razor’s edge; spears were thrust into the sky.

Abram trembled like every man has who has mounted for battle. Napoleon often referred to Marshall Ney as the bravest man he had ever known. Yet Ney’s knees trembled so badly one morning before a battle that he had trouble mounting his horse. When he was finally in the saddle, he shouted contemptuously, “Shake away, knees, you would shake worse than that if you knew where I am going to take you!” Abram surely trembled, but there was no way he would turn back. . . .

Abram the shepherd, the wanderer, the man of peace, was now General Abram. And amidst war cries Abram and his valiant men were off in a cloud of dust on the trail of the kings of the east—the Elamites and Babylonians, the Hurrians and Hittites. One hundred and twenty miles later at Dan, the northernmost reach of the promised land, they caught the four kings.³

And Lot, along with all of his family and all their stuff, was set free. Abram, like a true friend, had rescued his friend when he was most needed. As the proverb goes: “One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (18:24). Abram was nothing if not reliable, ready to protect and rescue. Indeed, Abram would come to Lot’s rescue a second time, though more indirectly. But that is a story for another day!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. You could begin by sharing some stories of rescue, those occasions when a friend came to your rescue. How did it make you feel to have friend like that? Did it change your relationship? Have you ever come to someone else’s rescue? How did that make you feel?
2. In God’s wisdom, he has given us a library of writings, the Bible, which is largely a collection of stories about God, about his creation, and about ourselves. They are stories that beg us to use our imagination for we can enter a story in ways that we could never get into a book of systematic theology. These stories are given to us so that, through them, we might come to know God better, to live in a right and loving relationship with him who made us. So, what, if anything, do think God would hope you would carry away from this story? How would you characterize the relationship between Abram and Lot? They are relatives, but are they truly friends? You might read more in Genesis about these two men and see how those events shed light on their relationship.

³ Hughes, R. K. (2004). *Genesis: beginning and blessing* (p. 208). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Daily Bible Readings

This week: *More on Abraham and Lot*

Monday, Genesis 13 Abram and Lot separate.

Tuesday, Genesis 14 The full story of Abram riding to Lot's rescue

Wednesday, Genesis 18:16-33 Abram pleads for Sodom to be spared, where Lot still lives.

Thursday, Genesis 19:1-22 Lot is beset by townspeople as he tries to protect strangers.

Friday, Genesis 19:23-38 Lot's wife is turned to a pillar of salt; his daughters then get their father drunk and are impregnated by him.

Saturday, 2 Peter 2:4-9 Lot gets a mention in the New Testament.

An archive with more than 700 of these studies can be found at www.scottengle.org

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the gospel of John.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Samuel.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *The Messiah Comes to Middle Earth*

There are still a few spots open for the October 2018 cruise to Israel with Robert Hasley, Pam White, and Scott Engle. For more information go to www.scottengle.org.