

98-10-25b

We are back now from our break and normally, I don't like to just leave off that way and not have made, not to say I don't like to leave off and not have finished the story, but it's important to stop and think, what is the significance? If you ask yourself the question, so what? Any passage of Scripture that we look at, any story that we observe in the Scripture, all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. Just from what we have seen so far, there is interpretation and application for us. Abram has heard, no doubt, about this sacking and pillaging army that has come down on the other side of the Jordan and has been wreaking havoc.

He did not act, he didn't do anything special. What is the point at which Abram acts? What is the point at which he reacts and responds and takes a course of action? It's when he hears that his brother, actually his brother's son, Lot, has been taken. If Lot had not been taken, there is no reason to believe Abram would have cared anything about the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, these cities of wicked individuals.

The Bible has already told us in verse 13 of chapter 13, you want to talk about unlucky numbers, Genesis 13, 13, the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord. You can imagine Abram sitting up there in the Mamre region up there north of Hebron saying, well, good enough, God controls history, these wicked men have gotten their just desserts and left it alone. You can also imagine at the point that the fugitive comes and tells him that this defeat has taken place and these people have been taken captive and all of this stuff has moved north, well, it's out of my hands.

Lot, it's between him and God, he chose, he went east, he decided he would live with the evil men, farewell, that's the end of Lot, sure, sorry about that, I'll pray for him, maybe he'll live through the captivity or something. There was strife between the men of Lot and the men of Abram. It caused Abram problems when Lot was with him.

It wasn't a happy coexistence once they got back to the land after Egypt, was it? They parted, Lot said, I don't want to be with you anymore, Uncle Abram, goodbye, I'm going to go down here and live in the plain. So you get the idea that there was a strong possibility of sort of an I told you so and you've made your bed, now you can lie in it type of attitude that Abram could have had about his nephew Lot, who doesn't seem interested in the things of God, isn't interested in sharing the covenant blessings with Abram, has gone off and chosen the evil land to the east. Yet, what does Abram do when he hears that his nephew is in trouble? Immediately, he calls in his favors with his allies, he takes his 318 trained men, by the way, that word is also unique.

We always like to use these little Latin terms when we can trot them out and impress people with them, but this is a hapax legomena. Hapax means one or only and legomena means word, only word. The only time this word is used in the Old Testament scriptures,

here in 14, it says he armed his 318 trained servants.

The word servants may be in italics in your Bible there if you have a New King James. This is a word that we have found in texts that are not biblical used for mercenaries or used for soldiers that are trained for the express purpose of providing security or engaging in some sort of military action, but it's an unusual word. It's the only place it's found in the Old Testament scriptures.

This, again, is evidence or earmarks of the fact that this account has been lifted from somewhere else and incorporated. Of course, it's been edited. You can see the marks of editing throughout here when ancient place names have been updated so the Israelites would understand them.

The town of Bela in verse 2 of chapter 14, it says that is Zoar, and later on in verse 7, En Mishpat, this is an ancient, ancient name. Kadesh is an old, old town, but even before the time of the Exodus from Israel, it had a different name. It was called En Mishpat.

Mishpat is the word for justice, and yet he says that is Kadesh. This is such an old record it had to be updated for people to understand it when Moses put it into Genesis. So you can see the mark of editing here as this military account has been incorporated into the book.

And so Abram here in verse 14 of chapter 14, when he heard, and you can almost, it's just a happy coincidence in our English because obviously there were no chapters and verses in the ancient text, but 13.13 talks about the evil environment that Lot chose. 14.14 tells us something amazing about Abram. When he hears that his nephew and his family have been taken captive, he armed his 318 trained servants.

And you get the idea that the Abram Corporation here, because it's so large and he's got so many holdings and businesses and flocks and herds and interactions with the culture up there, he's got his own security force. Most large companies, if they're very large, they have buildings downtown. There are security guards that watch out.

These guys typically either carry a rubber gun or they carry a gun with no bullets. They understand security and so forth, but they don't typically engage in action very much. Abram has got these trained men who are probably his internal security force to prevent marauding, to prevent theft, to secure and safeguard his property, his holdings.

But they're not necessarily experienced warriors. But he takes these trained men who were born in his own house. Of course, this also speaks of their loyalty and their desire to serve Abram.

And he went in pursuit as far as Dan. These men and the allies go this huge distance up to Dan. There's a phrase in the Old Testament that you often see in the later books where it says, from Dan to Beersheba.

These were the northern and southern extremities of the land of promise. Beersheba is down in the south, Dan is up in the far north. Dan to Beersheba.

So he goes up to the northern boundary of the land that God has promised to him and he intersects with this returning coalition army. And in verse 15, same thing that Gideon will do later in the book of Judges. Remember he had the 300 men and then he divided them up into groups that surrounded the camp and then they broke the pitchers and raised the lanterns and gave a great shout and just scared the devil out of the encampment.

And they wind up killing each other and so forth. Well, from a military point of view, if you're the smaller force, if you're outnumbered and outmanned and outgunned and less experienced and so forth, the last thing you want to do is divide your force. Because now you've got two tiny forces you weren't very big to begin with.

Abram divides his forces against them by night and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. We're already 150 miles from where Abram lives. We're already over 200 miles from where Lot lives.

And if you look at where Dan is and you get on a map and find out where Damascus is, this is another 50 miles, let's say, beyond Dan. I'm measuring these things as the crow flies, but you know they're having to go through ravines and hills and valleys and things. So they've gone another 50 miles.

Today, we just drove this past week down to Houston and back. It's a 250, 260-mile trip down there. And in four hours you can be there if you drive the limit.

The average is 60 miles an hour. In four hours you can go 240 miles. But in these days, in that terrain, you think about taking a group of men and trudging 50 miles.

It's an amazing thing. And he's already trudged 150 miles to get up there and intersect them. So they make this long forced march.

They catch the army and intersect with them up there. And then they divide up and attack them and rout them. It doesn't even mention that, oh, by the way, they defeated them and scattered them and routed them.

And now they're chasing down as they flee. But this is what happened with Abram and his force. It's such an understated victory.

It's an amazing thing, these four kings. But in addition to divine blessing and divine enablement to achieve this victory, which is the primary thought here, because Abram goes, obviously, in faith. It's not explicitly stated in this account.

But you know he's trusting God with this tiny force to go against this huge four-king coalition. Not only this, but Abram is wise. He divides his force and attacks by night.

Remember also that Keterleomer and his forces have never been on the defensive in this whole story, have they? They're always on the offense. They are the attackers. They come down, and they attack.

They pillage. They ransack. They are on the offensive, and they move down city by city, town by town.

And they're always the ones taking the initiative. Here, they've experienced all these victories, and they've glutted themselves with all of the spoils. So they're heavy-laden.

It's like a big quail or a big bear, after it has gorged itself on food. You can imagine someone being heavy and weighted down with the sheer amount of stuff that they've glutted themselves with. They're trying to get all of this stuff back home.

Their forces are spread out because they're trying to supervise all of these slaves and all these flocks and herds and all these goods, trying to guard them and so forth. So this army that was lean and mean and attacking on the way down is now stretched and scattered, trying to shepherd all this big amount of stuff back up north, trying to get back home with it. And now they're on the defensive instead of the offense.

They are now subject to attack. Abram has the initiative. He's got the element of surprise.

They're not expecting anyone to attack them, and so their security is lax. He attacks them by night, and in the confusion and in their lack of communication, they're not expecting any more battle. We used to have a saying over in Okinawa after somebody had been there a year and was getting ready to go back home.

The last several weeks, they're so looking forward to going home that they would get burns on their shoulders from letting their pack slip off. They just take off their pack, and they're virtually worthless the last few weeks that they're there. Well, these guys, in effect, have taken off their packs.

They've laid down their swords and shields. They're not expecting any battle, and so Abram catches them unprepared, at night, scattered, thinned out through all of these flocks and herds and piles of stuff and just routs them, and he and his allies continue to pursue them. Why do they keep pursuing them? They're going further and further north, up even past Damascus, because they haven't got all the stuff back yet.

Abram is trusting God, saying, I'm going to continue to have victory until I get everything back that these guys took, and he has to chase some of them clear up north of Damascus to Hobah, 60 or 70 miles from Dan, to get back everything that they took, and so these guys are just strung out and scattered all over the place and defeated by Abram's force. So, in verse 16, he brought back all the goods. He got everything back, and he also brought back his brother-in-law and his goods, as well as the women and the

people.

Everything that got scooped up, he got it all back, and he marches back down. You remember how far away he is, and it's going to take him a while to come back down, and he's going to come back down the western side, just the way that he went. So, then in verse 17, it says, The king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh, that is, the king's valley, after his return from the defeat of Keterleomer and the kings who were with him.

So, it's just an astonishing victory, and this reminds us of the book of Esther, where great things are done, and yet, in the book of Esther, God is never mentioned. In this account, a great thing is done, and God, up to this point, has not been mentioned. But we know, from the pattern that Abram has established ever since his return from Egypt, that he's doing these things in faith.

He is taking the promise of God at face value and trusting it. He says, I'm not going to be wiped out. I'm not going to be destroyed.

I'm going to inherit the land. I'm going to have a son. I'm going to be a blessing to the nations.

And he goes and rescues his nephew, with whom he's sort of on the outs. There's no real love lost on Lot's side of the equation for Abram. And it's a reminder to us, I mentioned at the beginning here, that as we think about these stories, we ask ourselves, well, what is the correction and instruction and righteousness for us in this story? There are times when we find ourselves divided from fellow believers over issues which may not even be of our own making.

They, of their own accord, choose not to dwell with and have fellowship with us on a close basis. This can be within a family. It can be within a church.

It can be with former friends or former fellow members of a congregation or whatever. But there are times when people decide, for whatever reason, that they're not too happy with us and they leave. They put some distance between.

And later on it may happen that suddenly they are in need. There is an opportunity for expressing love, expressing our spiritual gift, or an opportunity for ministry of some sort. And then the old issue kind of comes up and we say, well, I wonder if this is going to be well received.

I mean, they left. Maybe I should just stay out of the picture here. Maybe I'll let them make the first move or whatever.

But it is similar to the principle that we see. One of the illustrations of this comes to my mind are the service academies. There's an intense rivalry between Army and Navy.

When I was on jury duty a couple of weeks ago, one of the ladies on the jury had a son at West Point. And she had one of these tote bags that had the list of all the members of the Class of 2002. And so I had an opportunity to chat with her a little bit.

And when a football game is going on, or where there's a sports rivalry between the two academies, they can be just bitter enemies. But when you look out at the rest of the world, people from different service academies find themselves on the same side of the fence. And there's a great deal of respect and mutual camaraderie between cadets at West Point and midshipmen at Navy and zoomies at Air Force and that sort of thing.

So I don't even know what they really call their guys. That's what I've always called them, so I don't even know what their name is. But we have the phrase, blood is thicker than water.

And you can have infighting and stuff within a family, but if somebody on the outside starts attacking the family, the family bands together and says, hey, we're a clan, we're a tribe, we're a family, and we're going to stick together against this outside. Well, there ought to be the spirit within the body of Christ, within the church, within the body of believers, that we may have differences, there may be things that divide us as far as fellowship goes, but it should not divide us as far as the expression of love. Jesus said, by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.

It doesn't say that you love the faithful or that you love the correct or that you love the ones that haven't apostatized or the ones that haven't gotten into gross error or that haven't misunderstood the scriptures or that haven't become holy rollers or some other thing that we find difficult to cope with. Times of pressure, times of attack, times of need on the part of fellow believers are opportunities to express the same faith and the same love that Abram expresses here. There are a lot of reasons and a lot of excuses and a lot of rationales that Abram could have applied to just sit tight under the oaks of Mamre and done nothing.

But when Lot, erroneous Lot, mixed up priorities Lot, going down and living with the evil people Lot, when he gets in trouble, Abram immediately packs up and goes to his aid and doesn't stop. He makes a long, torturous, forced march. He risks his life and the life of his people and he pursues and completes the thing.

He gives 110% in this effort and he gets everything back, all for the sake of his nephew. It's all because of Lot. There's no other motivation.

There's no other reason. Abram doesn't keep any of the plunder. He's not interested in anything except rescuing his brother.

And we need to remember there's an awful lot of infighting and an awful lot of animosity and rocks thrown from one side of the body of Christ to another. But when the chips are

down, we are one in Christ. There's one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

And if we are the stronger brother in a case like this, it's up to us to exercise the initiative, just like Abram does here. It's up to us to discern the right thing. And whatever other fog and smoke may be in the air, we are the ones who need to see clearly.

If anybody is able to see the right thing, if anyone is able to express and exercise genuine love, it ought to be us. We ought to know better. And it will be our opportunity and it will be our privilege to express that love heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men.

We have to watch and be prepared for those opportunities. Abram is prepared. He's got trained men born in his household who know how to fight, who know how to secure things, who are willing and able.

Abram isn't caught flat-footed with no resources. And most of all, Abram has faith in God. And in faith, knowing that you're in the right, knowing that this is the right thing to do, it doesn't matter what the obstacles are.

It doesn't matter that the army is large. It doesn't matter that the terrain is rough. It doesn't matter that the journey is long.

It doesn't matter that the odds are against him. Abram has solid faith in God. He is applying the promise of God.

Initially, you would think, well, the promise of land and the sun and being a blessing and so forth, what does that have to do with Lot being captured by marauders? It has everything to do with it because Abram steps out on the basis of that promise and puts himself and his family at risk because it's right, because Lot is his brother. So there's a great deal we can meditate on in the example put before us in this story. So then, as he accomplishes this incredible victory, and this is going to make Abram notorious all through the region, and I think this story drifted all the way down to Egypt and they wrote it up and put it in the paper, as it were, and said, wow, look at what happened.

This man with his tiny band of 318 and a few allies went up there and whacked this undefeated team from up north. In verse 17, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaddai, that is the king's valley. Now, where is this valley is really hard to ascertain.

There aren't other references to this in the Bible. However, if we look at the scriptures in, for example, 2 Samuel 18, 18, there is a reference to the valley of the king, the annotation here. It says that is the king's valley.

This editorial remark gives us a clue. This valley is referred to in 2 Samuel 18, 18, and it

tells us that Absalom, in his lifetime, took up and set a pillar for himself, which is in the king's valley. He said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance.

He called the pillar after his own name, and to this day it is called Absalom's Monument. Well, this is a valley just south of Jerusalem, about two and a half miles south of Jerusalem, is this valley of the king. And this apparently in ancient days was the valley of Shaddai.

So, interestingly, the king of Sodom comes up from the north as Abram is heading back south to return Lot to his own land, and he meets him up just south of Jerusalem. This is important. After his return from the defeat of Keterlehomer and the kings who were with him, then in verse 18, Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine.

He was the high priest of God Most High. You remember our scripture reading this morning from Psalm 76, and I mentioned in verse 2 there that that parallelism is important because in the first half of the verse it mentions Salem, and in the second half of the verse it mentions Zion, and they're in parallel and they are equated. Salem equals Zion.

Well, we know that Mount Zion is the mount where Jerusalem is located, so the king of Salem is the king of Jerusalem. There's another town in Israel called Salem that's off at some distance, and there has been some debate, well, was this king actually in Jerusalem, or was he in this other Salem elsewhere in the land? But the location of the Valley of the King, where Absalom's monument will eventually be erected 2 1/2 miles south, this puts us there, and there are numerous scriptures that equate Zion and Salem, or Zion and Jerusalem. So, Josephus also confirms this in his account.

He says that when he's talking about Genesis here, that this king of Salem came out from Jerusalem. Also, the Genesis Apocryphon, which is a very ancient commentary on Genesis, says the same thing. And that's important because Melchizedek, the name is composed of two Hebrew words, Melchizedek is the word for king, and the E on the end there, that suffix means my, so my king, Melchizedek, and then tzedek is the word for righteousness.

So, it could be, in some cases, this is translated king of righteousness, or my king is righteous. He is the king of Salem. His name is obviously a title rather than a personal name.

Melchizedek, either king of righteousness, or my king is righteous, is a title. The king of Salem, he brings out bread and wine. He was the priest of God Most High.

The phrase here is El Elyon. Elyon means the Most High. El is the first part of Elohim, and so he is a priest.

Now, this is such a cryptic reference here, and we think, well, he just comes out of the

blue. He's a priest of God, and he's dwelling in Jerusalem, and yet, there isn't even a Jerusalem yet, it's called Salem, and if he's a priest of God, how did he get there? I thought this was all the land of the Canaanites, and Abram left Ur of the Chaldees and went up to Haran, and then came down, and then went down to Egypt, and came back. Where did this guy come from? Well, the Bible doesn't say, and that fact is pointed out in the New Testament when you get over to Hebrews.

A lot is made of the fact that Jesus Christ is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and like Melchizedek, there's no emphasis placed on his father or his mother or his origins, that this is a unique priesthood. Well, how do we end up with a man in Salem who's a priest of the Most High God? Some people have tried to say, well, this was a Canaanite deity called El, and in later Canaanite theology, there is a God called El, and that this guy, they sort of swap deities here, but this is clearly God, the God of Abraham, and we know this from what follows in verse 19. 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 Abram gives him a tithe, gives him a tenth of all of the plunder that he has taken from these fleeing kings. If you draw a chart, my dad did this long years ago. He took the Schofield correspondence course that you used to be able to send off and get.

I don't know if they still have it or not, but when I was a little, little boy, my dad took a correspondence course and studied through. They had lots of lessons, and one of the things he did in connection with that was sit down and chart out the lifespans of the patriarchs and starting at the flood with Noah's three sons and so forth, who lived how long. One of the interesting things you discover if you use the information in the Bible is that at this time in Abram's life, his oldest living relative is Shem.

Shem, the son of Noah, is still alive at this time. What sort of priesthood, it says here that Melchizedek is a priest of the Most High God, what sort of priesthood is in effect at this time in Bible history? We haven't had Moses and Mount Sinai and the tablets of the law and all of the things in Leviticus and Numbers yet, have we? So we don't have the Levitical priesthood, we don't have the sons of Aaron. What kind of priesthood is there at this time? All the way from Adam down to Moses, the priesthood is the family priesthood.

You can see examples of this in Job. Job, as the patriarch of his family, offers sacrifices on behalf of his children. Remember in Job chapter 1, it says he had feasts and he offered sacrifices on behalf of his children before the Lord? It's the family priesthood.

And the patriarch, the oldest male member of the family, is the priest. So who is Abram's priest? It's Shem. The interesting thing is that apparently after the flood and the dispersion of families and so forth, people lost track of Shem.

Because Abram's family, Terah and Nahor and all these others that have gone down to

Ur, is a long ways from Mount Ararat. It's a long ways from where the ark came to rest. And as the families scattered out, obviously some parts of the clans and tribes lost touch with one another.

But God speaks to Abram and says, Get thee up out of your family area, your kindred and so forth, and go to the land I will show you. He makes this long journey of many years through Nahor and eventually down to the promised land. And he travels up and down in the land and apparently becomes reacquainted with his great-great-great-granddad who apparently came to the promised land.

It's fascinating to think about. Apparently Shem, in some fashion not recorded in scripture, has arrived in the promised land. Not only arrived in the promised land, but is living in and is king of the little city-state on Mount Zion.

Salem, which will become Jerusalem, which will be retaken in later days by David. The holy mountain of God where the temple will eventually sit in early days. Here's the family priest.

And it's literally Shem. I can't imagine who else it would be who is a priest of the Most High God who blesses Abram and to whom Abram gives a tenth of the spoils of his victory. It's a fascinating thing to meditate on.

And what does Melchizedek bring out? He brings out bread and wine. Well, of course, from our perspective bread and wine just resonates with meaning as the central ordinance of our lives as believers is to partake of bread and wine in celebration of the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross and looking forward to His return when He will drink it new with us in the kingdom. But obviously in the old days it didn't have that resonance.

What would it have meant to the Israelites? What does it mean that Melchizedek brought out bread and wine? Turn with me to 1 Samuel 16, verse 20. As soon as we get to 1 Samuel in this portion of it you can imagine that we're going to be in the story of Saul and David and Jonathan and so forth. In 1 Samuel 16, verse 17, Saul has been distressed by a spirit that causes him distress because he's been disobedient to the Lord.

And his servants in verse 15 say there's a distressing spirit from God troubling you. Let our Master command your servants. We'll find a skillful harp player and so forth.

And one of them says, I've heard of a wonderful harp player. He's David, the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite. So in verse 19, Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, Send me your son David who is with the sheep.

Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a young goat and sent them by his son David to Saul. Jesse, recognizing that he needs to give a gift to the king, what does he send? He sends bread and wine and a young goat. This is royal fare.

This is a gift befitting a king, befitting a ruler, befitting the father of the nation, if you will. So when Jesse thinks, What can I send to the king? He sends him bread and wine. Bread and wine also accompanied animal sacrifice.

When you do get down to the Levitical form of worship, the worship that God gives to Israel at Mount Sinai, if you turn to Numbers chapter 15, these are elements that accompany worship or sacrifice. In 15 of Numbers, The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving you, and you make an offering of fire to the Lord, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow, or as a freewill offering, or in your appointed feast, to make a sweet aroma to the Lord from the herd of the flock. He who presents his offering to the Lord shall bring a grain offering, one-tenth of an ephah, a fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hint of oil, one-fourth of a hint of wine.

As a drink offering, you shall prepare with a burnt offering, or the sacrifice for each lamb. So you have flour and oil mixed together. This is your bread, your bread dough, and you have wine.

So you have the bread and wine that accompany these sacrifices. This is a specific kind of bread. It's the unleavened bread.

It's just oil and flour mixed together, and obviously it's baked. And then it talks about whether you're sacrificing, in verse 11, a young bull or a ram or a lamb or a young goat, according to the number that you prepare, so shall you do with everyone according to their number. Anytime you're bringing an offering made by fire, you have this bread and wine accompanying it.

So these are powerful symbols of worship, and Jesus consciously incorporates these, taking them from at least the anticipation of the Passover meal and so forth, and leaves them to us as perhaps our one lasting ordinance in this age is the celebration, both looking back and looking forward, of that bread and wine. Jesus Christ is prophet, priest, and king. He is son of David, son of Abraham, son of God, when you trace his genealogy back.

So these are potent and yet so cryptic references here in verse 18 of Genesis 14 that Melchizedek, the king of Salem, brings out bread and wine. He is the priest of the Most High God. And he blessed him and said, and this word for blessed is the word Barak.

This word has come down to us. There are various incarnations of this. There is a Baraka church, which takes its name from the noun that comes from this verb, Barak.

Barak, who was the general with the prophetess Deborah, this is his name. Barak means to bless, B-A-R-A-K. This word occurs three times in these two verses.

And it reminds us of what God told Abram back at the beginning of chapter 12. I will

bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing to all the people of the earth. And here, blessing is pronounced, and blessing is mentioned three times here.

Melchizedek blesses Abram and says, 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. So God is glorified because of this victory.

And it's not just the fact that the victory was achieved and the prisoners were delivered, the captives were returned, and the goods were restored. It's the way that Abram did it. By the way, Melchizedek here knows about the victory, doesn't he? Word of this has preceded, it doesn't say, well, there was a long conversation and Abram explained what had happened, and then Melchizedek said, Oh, praise God.

Melchizedek comes out to meet him already knowing what has taken place. And he comes out and bestows a blessing. Why does he do that? Why does he come out to Abram specifically? He knows who Abram is.

He knows how this victory was achieved. He knows that God was in it and that through it God was glorified. And so he pronounces this double blessing.

He blesses Abram and he blesses God who has delivered the enemy into Abram's hand. Abram gave him a tithe of all. Tithing is a fascinating subject in the Scripture and in our modern day Christianity.

And it has great biblical precedent. People always say, well, we're not under the law. The law says we should tithe and so forth.

Well, Abram was not under the law, and Abram tithed. If you turn forward to Genesis 28, verse 22, Jacob, remember Jacob's ladder? He lays his head down on a rock and he sees the heavens open. In Genesis 28, verse 11, Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran.

He's actually retracing his grandfather's steps here. He came to a certain place and stayed there all night because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head and he lay down in that place to sleep.

Then in Genesis 28, verse 12, then he dreamed and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth and its top reached to heaven and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. Fascinating phrase. Jesus will repeat this during his ministry when he says one of these days you're going to see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

He is Jacob's ladder. We've seen that in our study of Colossians. He's the bridge between the divine and the human, between heaven and earth, between God and man.

And behold, in verse 13, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac, the land on which you lie, I will give to you and to your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth. You shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south, and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Virtually word for word, the same promise, the same covenant that God made with his grandfather Abraham in this exact same spot. Because the place where Jacob has pulled up this rock, even though he doesn't know it, he has no idea where he is. He thinks he's in a town called, or near a place called Luz, L-U-Z.

But he is in fact in the exact same spot where God spoke these words to his grandfather Abraham. Behold, I am with you, in verse 15, will keep you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.

Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. He was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. This is the bait of El, is what he says there in verse 17.

And it dawns on him where he is. This is the place that his grandfather named, Bait El. So Jacob rose early in the morning, he took the stone that he had put at his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it, and he called the name of that place Bethel.

This isn't the naming of Bethel, this is the recognition of Bethel. Jacob realizes where he is. The name of that city had been Luz, this is the surrounding inhabitants, they didn't know that Abraham had named this place anything.

Jacob made a vow saying, If God will be with me and keep me in the way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, the bait of El, and of all that you give me, I will surely give a tenth to you. That's what Jacob says to God.

Remember in Psalm 76 that we read for our Scripture reading this morning, it says, Pay your vows to the Lord. Abram receives great blessing from God and he dedicates a tenth of it through Melchizedek to God. Jacob, who sets up this rock at Bethel, who sees Jacob's ladder, the angels ascending and descending, and has this great spoken promise from God reiterated to him.

The same promise given to his father and his grandfather. Dedicates a tenth of everything God will give him to God. Well, this raises a question in our minds.

What is the role of tithing, which much has been made of in some denominations of modern Christianity? That is a study we will save for next time. But as we close this

morning, the impression that what we should be impressed with, I think, from this story is the demonstrated faith of Abram. Not only does he know and acknowledge the promise of God, but he lives in the light of it.

He acts on the basis of it. He steps out on the solid ground of the Word of God. And against horrendous odds and against great difficulties, he exercises love.

He expresses love for his brother. It doesn't matter what the obstacles are. It doesn't matter what the danger is, what the potential for loss is.

He sees a brother in need with whom there has been a violent disagreement. And he puts himself out and puts himself in harm's way for the sake of his brother. And as a result, the priest of God comes out to meet him and blesses him.

God will come to Abram again, as we're going to see, and reiterate his covenant promises. Abram is in the very center of the will of God at this point. He is hitting on all eight of his spiritual cylinders.

And it's a wonderful example and a wonderful encouragement to us that God will do the same for us. Read again, at your leisure, Psalm 76. Let's close in prayer.

We thank you, Father, for the preservation of your Word. We thank you for the truth that it contains, the food and nourishment for our souls, the strength and encouragement, the correction and instruction that it gives us. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will use these things to make deep and lasting changes in our souls and in our perspective as we set our priorities and engage in our activities of this life.

We pray that as a result, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be glorified and that we will fulfill your plan and your calling for us as believers in this most opportune moment of history to lay hold of the hope set before us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.