

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 14:1-24

Topic

Despite the fact Lot brings it upon himself by making terrible personal choices, Abraham risks his own life to rescue his brother's son

Title

"He Ain't Heavenly, He's My Brothers' "

Introduction

You know to call 9-1-1 in an emergency, but what would you do if no one answered?

Residents of New Hanover in North Carolina encountered that situation back in 2009.

Around 6:30pm Saturday night, neighbors noticed a fire. They immediately called 9-1-1. "I had my cell phone on this ear and her house phone on the other ear," Kathy Boone said, "and they were just ringing and ringing." Fellow neighbor John Cumbus said, "My wife tried three times to get 9-1-1 and the phone rang, nobody was there." About five neighbors called to report the house fire. They say they couldn't believe no one answered their calls.

Someone dialed the Sheriff's Department directly and help was sent. Neighbors say a firefighter told them 911 was just too flooded with calls when neighbors tried to report the fire.

It's being called 9-1-1 overload. There are lots of reasons for it. One study, for example, reported that as many as 45% of 9-1-1 calls made in California are for non-emergencies.

BFF's FOREVER - Studies in the Life of Abraham

To give you some perspective, in 2010, 260 million calls were made to 9-1-1 in the United States. Dispatchers do an incredible job, but they can't do it when the lines are full.

A 'call' for help is made in our text in Genesis fourteen. Information gets to Abraham that his nephew, Lot, has been taken captive during a battle. Abraham was Lot's 9-1-1. Abraham answered the call and rescued Lot.

The Bible describes situations in which people - both believers and nonbelievers - are taken captive. In Second Timothy we read,

2 Timothy 2:26 [correct those who are in opposition]... that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Perhaps the clearest spiritual 9-1-1 call is Galatians 6:1.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Our story is very much an illustration of Galatians 6:1.

- Lot was indeed overtaken.
- Abraham, who was spiritual, rushed to "restore" him.
- Then Abraham had to be careful because a temptation presented itself to him.

Abraham was ready to answer the call, and he remained steady in the face of temptation. *So must we!*

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Are You Ready To Answer The Call And Rescue Those Taken Captive?, and #2 Are You Steady To Avoid The Fall And Refuse To Be Taken Captive?

#1 Are You Ready To Answer The Call
And Rescue Those Taken Captive?

(v1-16)

We're going to note two things about Abraham:

1. He was mission-ready at all times.
2. He was mission-willing regardless the outcome.

Let's take a quick look at his mission readiness.

Genesis 14:1 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,

Genesis 14:2 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).

Genesis 14:3 All these joined together in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea).

Genesis 14:4 Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

Genesis 14:5 In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him came and attacked the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim,

Genesis 14:6 and the Horites in their mountain of Seir, as far as El Paran, which is by the wilderness.

Genesis 14:7 Then they turned back and came to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and attacked all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazezon Tamar.

Genesis 14:8 And the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and joined together in battle in the Valley of Siddim

Genesis 14:9 against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of nations, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar - four kings against five.

Genesis 14:10 Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains.

The king of Sodom and the kings of the adjoining cities, after having been tributaries for twelve years to the king of Elam, combined to throw off his oppression. To punish their rebellion, Chedorlaomer, with the aid of three allies, invaded their territories, defeated them in a pitched battle where the nature of the ground favored his army, and hastened in triumph on his homeward march, with a large amount of captives and spoil.

BFF's FOREVER - Studies in the Life of Abraham

Genesis 14:11 Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way.

Genesis 14:12 They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

The last time we saw Lot he was parting ways with Abraham, and the Bible said he had “pitched his tent as far as Sodom.” Here we read that he “dwelt **in** Sodom.”

Lot's first poor choice led to others. It made it easier for him to justify his backsliding. It's a good 'bad' example of being overtaken, and it led to him being taken captive.

Genesis 14:13 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.

The “one who had escaped” we suppose was a godless citizen of Sodom. He sought out Abraham. It's wonderful when the ungodly, in their time of crisis, seek out the believer knowing that you can be of real help to them.

This is the first occurrence of the word “Hebrew” in the Bible. It's a description, really. The word itself means something like *to cross over* or *pass over*. Abraham was called the first "Hebrew" probably because he crossed-over the Euphrates river in pursuit of the one, true God and His promises.

Abraham had relationships with nonbelievers, like Amorites, but he wasn't being affected by them in a negative way. He was in the world, not of the world.

Abraham received news that Lot was taken captive. He was mission-ready.

Genesis 14:14 Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

Genesis 14:15 He divided 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.

Three hundred and eighteen servants are a lot of servants! But it's not a very large army to face-off against four kings with their armies.

God loves to send-out His servants against overwhelming odds. It gives Him the opportunity to display His power.

We used to sing a song whose chorus was, *we are few, but we are strong when You surround us*. Numbers are great, but they are never necessary in a spiritual battle.

In fact, you might be better off with a smaller force. There are times in the Bible that God goes out of His way to reduce the number of His soldiers.

Abraham had trained his servants to fight. They were servant-soldiers. I'm not telling you anything you don't already know when I point out that you, too, are a servant-soldier in God's household of faith, the church.

Abraham had equipped his servant-soldiers with weapons. I'm not sure what type of weaponry they had, whether it was state-of-the-art or not. I will say that, in keeping with the idea that God wants to reveal His strength in your weakness, that often the weapons of our warfare seem inadequate.

It reminds me of Will Smith as Agent J in *Men in Black* when he is given his weapon, the noisy cricket. It was tiny and seemed inadequate but packed quite a wallop.

Ever feel like your weapons are like that? They are mighty to the pulling down of strongholds!

Training and weapons were great. But you still need a plan. Abraham had a strategy and it worked.

Genesis 14:16 So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people.

Abraham was mission-ready and it was mission accomplished. But I also mentioned at the outset that he was **mission-willing** regardless the outcome, and now we see what that means.

We're told that Abraham "brought back... Lot and his goods." Brought back to where?

Back to Sodom! The next time we see Lot he is one of the leaders in Sodom and he has to be dragged out by angels as the city is about to be toasted from Heaven.

I believe most Christians are somewhat mission-ready. We've been taught the Word, we spend time in prayer, we have some idea about our equipping in terms of the gifts of God the Holy Spirit.

We might not always be mission-willing, however, if we have opinions about the people needing rescuing. Or about the expected outcome of our mission.

Let's be blunt. Why should Abraham risk his life for Lot when Lot chose to live in Sodom, knowing the possible consequences? Why should Abraham go to battle for Lot only to see him move back to Sodom and backslide even further?

Well that's like asking why should Jesus leave Heaven, take the body of a man, and die on the Cross for the sins of the whole world, knowing most people will reject Him and His offer of salvation!

Or that you and I would reject Him for so long a time and then, even after receiving Him, often choose poorly on our path toward Heaven.

The nonbelievers around us are taken captive by the devil to do his will. That doesn't mean they are possessed, only that they are dead in their sins and act like sinners towards us. They need rescuing despite their undeserving condition. In fact, the more undeserving they seem, the greater is the display of God's grace.

Believers overtaken by sin need rescuing, too. Even when they bring it upon themselves. Even when they return again-and-again to making bad choices.

That's our mission and we need to be ready **and** willing despite the results.

The results are not up to us, only the mission. We will be evaluated on our faithfulness, *not* on our seeming success or failure.

So today when we ask, "Are you ready?", we also mean, "Are you willing?" If there are prejudices and opinions that are keeping us from reaching out, then we need to leave them at the Cross and see people the way Jesus did - with compassion.

#2 Are You Steady To Avoid The Fall
And Refuse To Be Taken Captive?
(v17-24)

Abraham was in his greatest danger *after* the battle. Flushed with victory, a serious temptation was presented to him.

Genesis 14:17 And 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 Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him.

Genesis 14:21 Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself."

Abraham certainly deserved a reward for his efforts. Or did he?

Whenever we start down the road of what we might 'deserve,' we're headed for a fall.

It's not that we deserve nothing because we are so unworthy. It's that we must let God determine what we deserve, and that we must prefer things that are spiritual over things that are material.

Abraham was steady.

Genesis 14:22 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,
Genesis 14:23 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' -
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."

The problem here was that if Abraham received the goods the perception would be that the king of Sodom had made him rich. It would cast doubts upon Abraham's motives for rescuing Lot and the others with him. Was he in it for the money? For the glory?

It is so hard to not judge, and to be judged, by the standards of the world. We tend to measure success, even spiritual success, by outward observation. We need to look deeper, to what God is doing in the heart.

Abraham had trained himself and his servant-soldiers for the battle. More importantly, God had prepared him for the victory by giving him mission parameters, and we see that in verses eighteen through twenty.

Genesis 14:18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High.
Genesis 14:19 And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;
Genesis 14:20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.

"Melchizedek" is a title, not a name so much, and means, *king of righteousness*. He was a believer, declared righteous the same way Abraham was - by believing in God.

He lived in "Salem," which is the precursor of Jerusalem.

Melchizedek is an interesting Bible character. It is best to study him in the context of the Book of Hebrews. Chapter seven of Hebrews draws out the importance of Melchizedek in convincing the Jews that Jesus qualifies as a priest even though He was not in the lineage of Aaron. God saw to it that

there was another priesthood He had ordained, a superior one, prior to the Law of Moses.

Abraham was returning with great wealth and was met by both the king of Salem and the king of Sodom. It was intended as a contrast: The wealth he had been blessed with could either be an occasion of *stumbling* or an opportunity for *sacrifice*. It could stain his testimony, or it could steady it.

Abraham chose to remain steady and sacrifice. He gave to the priest, and therefore to God, “a tithe of all.” “Tithe” means *tenth*, or 10%. *On your gross and before taxes!*

It's often argued that since Abraham gave God 10% before the Law of Moses, then it is a universal principle that God's people give 10%.

It's not. The New Testament gives us principles to evaluate our giving. We are to give regularly, joyfully, and sacrificially of our money to the work of the Lord, especially through our local church.

If you want to set a percentage of how much to give, *it's 100%! We belong to the Lord and are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices.* That would include, but not be limited to, our money. Now God said we owe Caesar (the government), and obviously we need to live. But our giving to God should not be a matter of getting a small percentage out of the way so we can do what we want with the rest.

It's not about how much we are required to give, but about how much we should keep knowing that the Lord's coming is imminent and that there is much work to be done.

Melchizedek brought Abraham “bread and wine,” which we immediately recognize as the future elements of the Lord's Supper.

There's certainly a lot of deep mystery we can plumb here, but it's also pretty obvious what was going on. God was preparing Abraham for the temptation victory always brings by having communion with him, fellowship with him.

It was in this fellowship that God instructed Abraham how to answer the temptation. When the king of Sodom offered him the goods Abraham referred to God as “God most high, the possessor of Heaven and earth.” He got that title in this encounter with Melchizedek. It readied him to remain steady against temptation.

In his personal fellowship, God revealed to Abraham that God was “the possessor of Heaven and earth.” Instead of thinking that meant he deserved the world’s goods, Abraham understood he needed nothing from the world except what God chose to provide him. In fact, he gave away some of what he had to show he understood.

By the time the king of Sodom made his offer, Abraham had settled in his heart that he wasn’t going to take *anything* from him that might insinuate he was enriching him. God had given him mission parameters.

It’s in knowing the nature and character of God that we are steadied to handle temptation. We come to know Him in our personal fellowship with His priest - in our case, Jesus Christ Who is at the right hand of the throne interceding for us, with Whom we have communion because of His body and blood.

You’re mission-ready and God has placed you strategically in the world to answer the calls to rescue and restore.

Make sure you have the compassion of Jesus to be mission-willing and then let the Lord steady you against temptation.