

Genesis Chapter 14 and 15 – John Karmelich

1. If I had to pick one thing to remember from Chapters 14 and 15, it is as follows: If God gives you a talent or resource, he expects you to use that for His glory. To use that talent for God and not for yourself brings far greater rewards than if you use that talent for your own gain.
 - a) There, all done. You are now excused. ☺ The rest is just the details.
 - b) These two chapters can be summarized in 3 “R” words: rescue, rewards and revelation.
 - i) Our hero Abraham has 3 main story points in these two chapters:
 - ii) He rescues his nephew Lot who was part of the losing group in a war (“Rescue”).
 - iii) He encounters King Melchizedek, who was never mentioned in the text of this war, and who then disappears from the record forever. (“Rewards”)
 - iv) Finally in Chapter 15, we have Abraham being told by God what will happen to his descendants over the next 400 years. (“Revelation”)
 - c) In the first part of our text Abraham rescues his nephew Lot from a war.
 - i) God blessed Abraham with servants and possessions and Abraham uses those people to rescue Lot. In fact, Abraham refers to Lot as his “brother” in the sense that he is rescuing an “equal”, someone who believes in God. Lot wasn’t as obedient to God as Abraham, but Lot believes in the same God, and that makes Lot “worth rescuing”. God calls us to help other believers in need, no matter what their “spiritual state” is at that time.
 - ii) The next section of this chapter deals with Abraham being rewarded for this effort.
 - a) We read of two kings attempting to reward him.
 - (1) One is King Melchizedek. Abraham not only accepts his reward, but pays this guy 10% of all he owns. We’ll read in this lesson how Melchizedek is a “word-picture” of the Messiah to come.
 - (2) The other king trying to reward Abraham is the King of Sodom. Abraham essentially turns down the rewards as he says in effect, “I’m doing this for God and not for your stuff”.
 - iii) Finally, in Chapter 15, is mostly the story of God revealing the future to Abraham.
 - a) Abraham had plenty of “stuff”, but pondered the greater questions of life: “What is my eternal reward?” “What about my descendants?” “What is the purpose of me serving you?”
 - b) Remember that Abraham didn’t have a bible to explain to him the purpose of life. Abraham had to walk by faith and trust in God who only spoke to him every now and then. God rewarded Abraham’s faithfulness and shared with Abraham God’s plans for him and for the future.
 - c) While we have our own questions about our specific future, the “general plan” of life is laid out in God’s Word for us to study!
 - d) With that confusing introduction all done, we can start the chapter. ☺- 2. Genesis Chapter 14, Verse 1: At this time Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim ² went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). ³ All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (the Salt Sea). ⁴ For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.
 - a) OK, any questions so far? ☺
 - b) Why does God want you to know this stuff and why is this text listed at this location?
 - i) Whenever you are stuck on a text, I find it is helpful, to try to see this text in context of the surrounding text.
 - ii) The last part of Chapter 13 had God blessing Abraham.

- iii) To recap the last part of Chapter 13, Abraham had separated from his nephew Lot. Each took their families, support staff and possessions and separated. Then after Abraham had separated from Lot, God told Abraham to look in every direction, and as far as Abraham could see, God was going to give that land to Abraham's descendants. God will reaffirm that promise in Chapter 15.
 - iv) Here, we get this break from a discussion of Abraham and Lot to discuss a bunch of kings who all went to war with each other. OK, John, what's the deal? ☺
 - c) Know that at this time, these people were loyal to their cities as opposed to a nation. Each of these leaders were kings over individual cities.
 - i) Here is what I think is important to remember:
 - a) Four kings fought a battle against five kings.
 - b) Among the five losing (city) kingdoms was Sodom.
 - c) Lot was living near or in Sodom at this time.
 - d) The bible called Sodom "exceedingly wicked" in Chapter 13, Verse 13.
 - ii) The leader of the four winning kingdoms is Kedorlaomer, as implied in Verse 4. This is spelled "Chedorlaomer" in other translations.
 - a) "Archaeologist Nelson Glueck documents the destruction left by these kings: "I found that every village in their path had been plundered and left in ruins, and the countryside was laid waste. The population had been wiped out or led away into captivity. For hundreds of years thereafter, the entire area was like an abandoned cemetery, hideously unkempt, with all its monuments shattered and strewn in pieces on the ground." (From David Guzik's Commentary on Genesis 14).
 - iii) The text states that for 12 years the 5 "losing" kings were subject the 4 "winning" kings. That means the losers paid taxes to the winners. In the 13th year, the 5 losing kings rebelled.
 - iv) Remember that all of this is "background" information to the story. The key issue is going to be Abraham rescuing Lot. Genesis gives us the details of why Abraham had to rescue Lot in this section of the bible.
- 3. Verse 5: In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emities in Shaveh Kiriathaim ⁶ and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert. ⁷ Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazazon Tamar.
 - a) OK, we now have more kings and territories, who's names you are going to forget in a few hours. ☺
 - b) The leader of the 4 winning kings, Kedorlaomer, now is described as going after other territories.
 - c) Note that a few of the locations listed in Chapter 14 are not historically accurate as of that date. Let me explain with an example:
 - i) Suppose I said, "Before the white man came to America, there were Indians living in this land from California to Maine." That statement is not historically accurate for that date, because when the Indians lived here at that time, there was no California and there was no Maine. The words "California" and "Maine" help us, the reader identify with that location.
 - ii) With that said, remember that Genesis was compiled by Moses over 400 years after this time era. Moses used the geographical terms of his day to describe some of the locations here in Chapter 14.
 - iii) For example, the Amalekites did not come into existence until later. They were a descendant of Esau, a grandson of Abraham. My point is Moses described some of these geographic locations based on terms his audience would understand.

- d) One of the big-picture ideas to get is the world that Abraham lived in was not one of “peace and harmony”. There were wars; there was greed for territory and possessions just as there is today. This is the first mention of the word “war” in the bible.
 - i) Remember that despite all of this, God told Abraham that he was going to “bless those that bless him and curse those that curse him.”
 - ii) Lot, despite all of his faults, trusted in the God of Abraham. Despite the fact Lot was living in (or near) Sodom, and despite the fact that Sodom was a conquered city-state at this time, God is still working in the lives of Abraham and Lot.
 - iii) Further, God was going to use Abraham to rescue Lot. That is the key point to this story text. These verses being told here are the “background picture”.
 - iv) So why doesn't the bible just say, “Lot was captured when Sodom was attacked”? Why does Genesis give us all of these details of the conquering king and all the cities he went after? (I'm so glad you asked that question! ☺)
 - a) I believe part of the reason is to show what life had become for “godless” people. Remember the flood was not that long ago. From Noah's three sons came all of these people. Instead of being “fruitful and multiplying”, they were now busy trying to conquer each other and gain power and possessions. When you get people away from the true God, they start worshipping other things. Among them is power and possessions.
 - e) Meanwhile, let's finish the discussion of the kings and get to the part about Lot.
4. Verse 8: Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim ⁹ against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar--four kings against five. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. ¹² They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.
- a) Now we are back to the five “losing” kings. Among them are Sodom and Gomorrah. They rebelled against the four “winning” who beat them 12 years ago. This paragraph is about another battle in the 13th year when they rebelled.
 - b) The text mentions that the battle took place in a location full of tar pits. When the five losing kings lost again here in this battle, some of the men fell in the tar pits and others fled to the hills (Verse 10).
 - i) For those who have ever visited the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles can visualize how people can get stuck and die in tar pits. The La Brea Tar Pits is a natural history museum based on a square block with actual tar pits. Animals have gotten stuck in those pits through the centuries and the fossils dug out of those pits were used to set up this museum.
 - c) OK John, enough about the history of tar pits. ☺ Why does the bible include this section?
 - i) Obviously, the key verse is Verse 12 that says, “They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.”
 - ii) I think part of the answer was to show who Lot was “involved” with.
 - iii) In Chapter 13, Lot moved his family and possessions toward the wicked city of Sodom because it was “pleasant to the eyes”. Lot still trusted in God, but Lot is a word-picture here of compromise. He saw what was “good to the eye” and went after it. A modern example is to compromise what is best with your relationship with God “in order to make a few more bucks”.

- a) A modern, extreme example would be a Christian doctor taking a job in an abortion clinic because “the pay is much better than I could get in any other job”. Another example might be a Christian moving to a city with a great job opportunity, yet there are no Christian schools or churches with the type of strong “take-your-bible-seriously” values that are important for one’s own growth and the growth of his family.
 - iv) This is why Genesis spends so much text describing the world around Abraham and Lot. It is not so you can memorize the historical battles of that time and location. It is so you can comprehend the greed and corruption of kings. A few generations after Noah’s ark rested, the “Gentile nations” were busy killing each other to get each other’s stuff.
 - v) The question for us is, “Is any part of our life like Lot, where we are living in places where we should not be?” Can we be more like Abraham, reaching out (or at least praying for) other Christians who have compromised with the world?
5. Verse 13: One 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 Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶ He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.
- a) This paragraph is all about Abraham rescuing Lot.
 - b) Notice that Abraham had his own “private army” to rescue Lot.
 - i) First of all, it says something of the size of Abraham’s wealth when, among all of his servants, he had 318 guys who were (or could be) trained soldiers. If you most of these guys had a family, and then Abraham had other servants who were too young or too old to fight, you get an idea of how wealthy Abraham was.
 - ii) When you have a lot of stuff, you need “private security” to take care of that stuff, especially when you read of these nations all trying to kill each other in order to gain each other’s stuff.
 - c) The next thing to understand is the biblical principal of “to whom much is given, much is required” (From Luke 12:48).
 - i) God blessed Abraham with lots of possessions. That included armed security.
 - ii) Abraham could have said here, “Well well, I read in the morning newspaper that Sodom was conquered. ☺ Too bad for Lot. He shouldn’t have been living there in the first place. It serves him right for hanging out with those people.” ☺
 - a) That is not the attitude God wants for us. Jesus said people would know we are Christians by our love for one another. (John 13:35). That does not mean Abraham is to just sit there and pray for Lot when Abraham had the resources to do something about it!
 - b) God blessed Abraham with resources (private military) and He expected Abraham to use that resource to help out his “brother in need”.
 - c) (You can see where I’m going with this! ☺). God expects us to help other Christians. If God has blessed you with the resources (money, time, ability) to help others, He expects you to use that God-given talent accordingly. I’m not knocking praying for others. Some are called specifically with the ministry of intercessory prayer. I’m saying there is also a time and place to take action, especially when God has given you the resources and talent to take action.

- iii) Notice that Abraham set out to rescue Lot despite the fact he was among the Sodomites. Again, there is no hint of, “It serves Lot right for doing this”. One of the things God expects of believers is for us to work together to help build up the church (See 1st Corinthians 14:12). It is the idea that once someone is a believer, part of the responsibility of all other believers is to help that person mature in their faith and support them. Even when, especially when, they are living in the “Sodom’s” of this world.
 - d) Before I move on, notice Abraham is called “Abram the Hebrew” in Verse 13.
 - i) This is the first biblical mention of the word “Hebrew”.
 - a) The word “Hebrew” literally means to be passed over. (Barnhouse). The idea is that of a pilgrim living in a strange land. Remember that Abraham lived among the Canaanites, but was not one of them. It goes back to the last lesson’s concept of being “in the world, but not of this world” (See John 8:23 and 18:36 for further comment on this idea).
6. Verse 17: 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).
- a) Remember that Kedorlaomer is the leader of the 4 “winning” kingdoms” in the early verses of this chapter. When Abraham rescued Lot, he also defeated the 4 “winning” kingdoms” and helped the surviving people of the 5 “losing” kingdoms.
 - b) Now, the plot focuses on one of the kings, the king of Sodom coming out to thank Abraham for his private army rescuing him.
 - c) In Verse 18, we get an interruption of the story of Abraham and the King of Sodom, to tell the story of another king, the King of Salem. Note that Salem is not among either the 4 “winning” kingdoms, nor among the 5 “losing” kingdoms in the early part of this chapter. There is no reference to Salem, nor the king of Salem up until Verse 18.
 - i) As to the King of Sodom, we’ll come back to him in Verse 21. First, I’ve got a lot to say about the King of Salem. ☺
7. Verse 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 blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.
- a) Based on these 3 relatively obscure verses, comes a major portion of Christian theology about the role of Jesus and a “word-picture” of Jesus here in Genesis. The New Testament Book of Hebrews has the better part of 3 chapters (6-8) focusing on Melchizedek.
 - b) Let me summarize some of the references and their meaning.
 - i) David in the Psalm talks about the Lord, and says “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:4b NIV)
 - ii) First of all, Jesus is not literally Melchizedek. It is a “word-picture” or type. Jesus not only is our king (Messiah means king) but also our “bridge” between God the Father and man. That is the role of the “high priest”.
 - iii) This is a Messianic reference. It is the idea that the Messiah will not only be a king, but a priest between God and man. It is the idea that Jesus is the intercessor between man and God.
 - iv) Hebrews 7 key point is Jesus as a priest is superior to the Levitical priesthood.
 - a) The system of Jewish priesthood did not start until God called Moses’ brother Aaron to be the first high priest. This is over 400 years after the time of Abraham. Both Aaron and Moses were of the tribe of Levi, and thus it is called the “Levitical Priesthood”.
 - b) Therefore the high priest is a descendant of Aaron. In Jewish though, the older is always superior to the younger. In that “sense”, Abraham is then superior to all the Levitical priests.

- c) This leads us back to Genesis. In Verse 20, Abraham gave Melchizedek 10% (a “tithe”) of all he owned.
 - d) Abraham is honoring Melchizedek as being superior to him.
 - e) That is the point of Hebrews 7. It is the idea that Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood.
 - (1) In that sense, Melchizedek becomes the most important person in Genesis, because Abraham, “the father of the Jewish nation”, honored Melchizedek as superior to him.
 - (2) Jesus is not our high priest in the Levitical system, because he was not of the tribe of Levi. Jesus is our high priest as part of the role of the Messiah, as predicted by David in Psalm 110 is that he would be “a high priest forever” according to the “type” of Melchizedek.
 - v) Hebrews makes this point about the Levitical priesthood; “If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?” (Hebrews 7:11 NIV).
 - vi) Lastly, the Book of Hebrews explains what Melchizedek name means: “First, his name means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. (Heb 7:2-3, NIV)
 - a) Hebrews makes a point that Melchizedek does not have any genealogy.
 - (1) He just sort of “appears out of nowhere” and then disappears into oblivion again. If it weren’t for David’s reference to Melchizedek in the Psalm’s, it would be easy to just glance over this section.
 - vii) It is also a “big deal” in that the name means “king of righteousness” first and then “king of peace” second. It is a word-picture representing the fact that we have peace of God only after accepting God’s righteousness. We are relying upon God’s perfection and perfect cleansing of our sins in order to have our peace.
 - a) It is similar to the New Testament rule that “grace” always comes before “peace” in the different New Testament letters. It is through the grace of God that we are saved. (Ephesians 2:8-9). After we receive that grace, then we can have peace with God. It is never the other-way around.
8. Verse 21: The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." ²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath ²³ that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' ²⁴ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me--to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."
- a) First let’s talk about the location of these verses in the whole-chapter context:
 - i) Why did Genesis first mention the King of Sodom coming to greet Abraham in Verse 17, and then have a 3-verse “interruption” about Melchizedek, and then get back to the King of Sodom in Verse 21?
 - ii) My personal view (meaning I haven’t read much to back this up. ☺) is that “Whenever God comes around, Satan is always there to offer a substitute”.
 - a) We don’t read anything positive ever said about the city of Sodom. It was called “evil” back in Genesis 13:13.”
 - b) Here comes the king of Sodom out to greet Abraham at, essentially the same time that Melchizedek comes out to greet Abraham.
 - c) Melchizedek offers Abraham bread and wine in Verse 18.
 - (1) The king of Sodom offers Abraham all the “goodies” that Abraham got from winning this war.

- (2) We are back to bible “word pictures”. Think about “bread and wine” from a New Testament perspective. They are the symbols we use in communion. “Bread” is a symbol of the life-sustaining substance. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” in John 6:35 & 6:48.
 - (3) “Wine” in the bible is associated with joy and celebrations. Jesus also tied wine to his blood (John 6:34-36) as a symbol of those who accept his sacrifice inherit “true joy” and everlasting life.
 - d) Now comes the King of Salem to offer “everything else” but bread and wine. It is a word-picture of Satan offering us “everything the world has to offer” if we simply “don’t choose the path of the cross”. Satan is more than willing to offer us every material blessing there is in life if we choose his path as opposed to God’s path in life.
- b) With all that in mind, let’s get to Abraham’s response to the King of Salem in Verse 22.
- i) Abraham said in effect, “Look, I made an oath to serve God. Mr. King of Salem, keep your stuff. The guys who worked for me can have their wages, but I don’t want your rewards. I work for God.” ☺
 - a) By the way, you cannot find a direct biblical mention of this “oath” by Abraham to God. It is something Abraham did that is not in the text.
 - ii) There are also some practical lessons of this section as well:
 - a) It gives Abraham a chance to be a good witness to the King of Salem, the other kings, as well as his men.
 - (1) Abraham wanted to show those around him that he’s not doing for the money, but out of loyalty to God and to his “brother” Lot.
 - b) There are times when we as Christians have to turn down financial rewards for our service. People will question our motivation when we do things for the money as opposed to a love of God.
 - (1) This is not an “anti-professional minister” sermon. ☺ There is a need for full-time ministry people and they need to be financially supported to do their work. This is about certain times in life when we have to turn down money for service.
 - (2) For example, I know of a church where they don’t “pass the plate” on Sundays. That pastor didn’t want to give newcomers the idea that he was doing it for the money. That church is thriving and growing despite the fact they never have a formal time of giving during the worship service.
9. Chapter 15, Verse 1: After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward. "
- a) The first thing that caught my attention was that Abram was afraid.
 - i) The only logical thing is to read this in context of the surrounding verses.
 - a) He just insulted the King of Salem by turning down his reward. Maybe he was afraid of the wrath of king coming after him. Remember that Abraham was a rich man at this point.
 - ii) Based on the next set of verses in Genesis 15, Abraham may also have been afraid of God’s promises not coming true. God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as the “dust of the earth” (Genesis 13:16). Yet, it is now years later and Abraham still doesn’t have any children.
 - a) It is difficult to trust in the promises of God when we can’t see how God is going to work it out. I suspect this is the source of Abraham’s fear at this point in time.

- b) Notice the response to Abraham's fear. God says, "I (God) am your shield, (I, God am) your very great reward. "
 - i) Abraham turned down the riches of Sodom, as God is his reward.
 - ii) Moses, centuries later, was to be the King of Egypt. He rejected those riches to become like his Hebrew brethren, because Moses saw God as his reward. (See Hebrews 11:24-28).
 - iii) Paul said, "I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." (Philippians 3:8b, NKJV)
 - iv) All three of these are examples of how God expects us to live our life.
 - v) Jesus said, "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:33, NIV)
 - vi) God loves us with an eternal love. He reaches out to us and says, "I am willing to give up my only son, because I love you. What I, God desire in response is your free-will love for me." To Abram, God said, "I am your reward". He said that to Abraham and he makes that same promise to us.
 - vii) For us to be a disciple of Christ means to give up everything. That is the word-picture we see throughout the bible. It is the trust that God will take care of us for eternity, but it will cost us all we have in this lifetime.
 - a) This does not mean to go severe your ties with your family and sell all of your possessions. God does not call us to a vow of poverty or to isolation. It simply means that God is now in charge of all those things. We look to God (through the bible) for guidance on how He wants us to use the resources He has entrusted to us.

10. Verse 2: But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

- a) This is the first time we read of Abraham questioning God.
 - i) There is nothing wrong with asking God questions. God wants us to bring our fears and worries to Him so he can deal with them.
- b) Notice Abraham understood that children come from God. Abram said here "You have given me no children."
 - i) "Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him." (Psalm 127:2, NIV)
- c) Notice what Abraham did not say: "Lord, I am fully dependent upon you. I guess if you don't want me to have kids, that is your problem. ☺" There are times when a prayer of relinquishment is valid, but not in this case. Abraham understood that promises were made to him and he was asking about those promises. What Abraham's mistake was, is that Abraham was questioning God's timing.
 - i) The bible makes lots of promises to us as believers. For example, the Lord's Prayer and even "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7) are full of promises to us as believers. It is acceptable to pray for personal blessings and ask God to fulfill promises He has for our life.
 - ii) We simply have to remember that God is in charge, and we are not. We work on God's timing and not ours.
 - iii) Which leads us back to Abraham. God promised Abraham that He would bless him with descendants, and God will keep his word. Abraham's had fear or doubts or at least questions as to when God would fulfill that promise.

11. Verse 4: Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."
- a) Back in Chapter 13, God told Abraham that essentially, "The number of your descendants will be like the dust of the earth". Here, God tells Abraham that your descendants will be like the number of stars in the sky."
 - i) There is a classical theological debate as to whether both the "dust" reference and the "star" reference are the same thing. Some say that one could refer to the Jewish nation, and the other refers to all people who believe in God. Others say they are both metaphors of the same thing.
 - ii) Going back to Adam & Eve, they were created from the dust of the ground, and Genesis makes a big point about that. The name Adam can be translated "dusty" as it refers to the fact he was created from the dust.
 - iii) Look at what Paul says about "Sons of Abraham": Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (Galatians 3:6-8, NIV)
12. Verse 6: Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
- a) Here is your memory verse of the week. ☺
 - i) This verse is quoted 3 times in the New Testament (Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23). That alone should tell you this verse is important! Your extra credit for today is to look up those verses and how they are relevant to today's text. ☺
 - b) A clue to the importance of this verse is where it is located in the text. God already spoke to Abraham at previous times and will talk to him again. This is the only place where Abraham is given "credit" for believing God. OK, John, what's the deal? ☺
 - i) Look at Verse 4 here in Genesis 15. Notice that the word "son" is singular. It then goes on to tell Abraham to compare his offspring to the stars in the sky.
 - ii) That son is not only a prediction of Isaac being born, but also a prediction of the Messiah himself.
 - iii) Remember that bible-prophecy is often with double-fulfillment.
 - a) There is often a short-term fulfillment to validate the prophet. In this case, the "short term" prediction is the birth of Isaac.
 - b) The long-term fulfillment is the birth of the Messiah (Jesus) who was a descendant of this line.
 - c) Here is the important part. (That means pay attention! ☺) Abraham was called "righteous" because he believed in the promise of the future Messiah.
 - i) Salvation for us as Christians means to look back at the events of Jesus, the Messiah. Salvation for Jews prior to Jesus was to look forward to the coming Messiah. Salvation focuses on that moment in history.
 - ii) I'm not knocking trusting God and obeying his commandments. ☺ I'm just saying to be "right with God", which is what "righteousness" means, is to walk by faith that God himself takes care of your sins. That means looking toward that moment in time when Jesus paid the price for our sins.
13. Verse 7: He (God) also said to him (Abram) , "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."
- a) Let's compare this verse to what God said to Moses at the time of the 10 commandments:
 - i) "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (Exodus 20:1, NIV)
 - ii) This is the first sentence spoken to Moses prior the 10 commandments themselves.

- iii) What's my point? Whenever God spoke to the patriarch's of the Old Testament, there is an emphasis first on where God has brought you, before God moves on to give you commandments to follow.
 - iv) Let me paraphrase: "I God, have separated you from the world of sinning people. I have called you to follow me. It is now up to you to respond. I brought you this far, and now, here is what I expect of you."
 - b) Which leads back to Abraham, where God is telling him the purpose of separating Abraham from his family. God wanted Abraham to start a new nation to be His witnesses to the world.
- 14. Verse 8: But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"
 - a) Most of the commentaries I read about this see Abraham wanting some sort of sign from God that all of this would be true."
 - i) This is a common thing all through the bible. You can read of many bible characters asking God for signs for confirmation. (e.g., Gideon in Judges 6-8).
 - b) I find that God works with our faith at whatever level we are at. God does not always guarantee a "sign" for us, but often I have seen God give some sort of sign to people at key moments to help us grow in our faith.
- 15. Verse 9: So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.
 - a) A classical debate in both Judaism and Christianity is the purpose of Abraham cutting up these animals. Some argue that it was for sacrificial purposes and others argue it was for God to show Abraham a sign, and others argue it was for both.
 - i) On one hand, Abraham just asked for a sign, and here was God giving a response. So therefore, the purpose of cutting up the animals is for a sign.
 - a) Verse 17 describes God walking between the split animals, but not consuming them. Thus, some argue that these animals were for a sign from God and not for sacrificial purposes.
 - ii) The sacrificial argument goes, "All of these animals are "clean" animals used for sacrifices in Leviticus. In fact, Leviticus 1:17 specifically states that you are not to cut a bird in two when offering it as a sacrifice. Notice in Verse 10 that Abraham cut up all the animals except for the birds.
 - a) Further, Abraham is known for building altars. Genesis describes 7 altars that were built, four of them by Abraham. (Genesis 12:7, 12:8, 13:18 and 22:9). Since Abraham liked to build altars, it is implied that Abraham understood about sacrifices in the same way that Noah understood that "clean" animals were to be sacrificed. (Genesis 8:20).
 - iii) There are the arguments. Now you decide which is right. ☺
 - b) Verse 11 makes a point about how Abraham drove away the "birds of prey".
 - i) Most commentators believe this is a "word-picture" of driving away evil. Satan didn't want Abraham to receive a sign from God and thus worked to stop it. The application is there are times when God calls us to drive away the "birds of prey" in order for God to work through our lives.
- 16. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³ Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

- a) The word “prophet” is only used once in the entire book of Genesis. It is used to describe Abraham in Chapter 20, Verse 7. Here in Chapter 15, Abraham is giving specific predictions (“prophecies”) about the future of his descendants.
- b) Back to the “why” question. Why was Abraham told this information and why is he told this information at this specific time? Abraham asked for a sign that all of this would be true. He didn’t ask for the details. ☺
- i) Part of the answer is that God wanted to reveal to Abraham how he planned to start a nation. God disclosed to Abraham that for 400 years his descendants would be slaves in another nation (Egypt was not mentioned at this time) and then God would bring them up in this land.
 - ii) Let’s face it. God could have just killed everyone in Israel, left it barren for Abraham and told Abraham to start producing children. Instead, God’s plan was to have his descendants go suffer and be slaves somewhere until God was ready to have his people go in and conquer the land.
- c) So why did God choose this method of having the Israelites occupy the Promised Land?
- i) The first answer is in the text itself. God said, “The sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” in Verse 16. That means that God is judging the Amorite nations for their sins. I suspect they also eventually found out about Abraham prophecy and God wanted to see if they would repent. This verse teaches us that God is patient in judging sin, but at some given time God’s patience runs out.
 - ii) The second answer is that God wanted Israel to be a witness to the surrounding world. Suppose God just caused a plague over Israel and Abraham simply built a nation by starting a family in a barren land. In that case, other nations would think that this is “just a coincidence” and that God was not behind Abraham occupying the land. Further, others would move in the land if it were barren. By God “parting the Red Sea” and doing all the plagues on Egypt, those visual miracles were the evidence needed to show that God has his hand on the Israelites to be his witnesses into the world.
 - iii) The next thing to understand is that in order to prepare the Israelites to occupy the Promised Land, it was necessary for them to be slaves first.
 - a) Let me explain with an illustration. There are many people who become born-again Christians from their youth. Most people make a commitment later in their life. Most people who turn their life over to God have been a “slave to the world” long enough to know it does not bring joy. We see all the world has to offer, and then realize that to follow God is better than anything and everything the world has to offer. Being a “slave in Egypt” gives the Israelites and us enough of a “taste” of the world to know that we don’t belong in that world.
 - iv) There are some practical reasons as well. When the Israelites were slaves, they became physically strong from all the hard labor. That gave them the physical strength to endure the 40 years in the desert and do all that walking. The point is that God puts us through difficult situations for a reason. The Israelites did not fully understand why they were in slavery, but God has his purposes and those purposes eventually help to mature us as believers.
 - v) Next, there is the idea that suffering is not permanent. Even when the Israelites were in slavery for 400 years, they knew it was for “only” 400 years. This 400-year period is a trial for the Jews, but it was not to be permanent. The number “40” in the bible, and multiples thereof, is associated with “trials”. Getting back to Abraham’s vision here in Genesis, the text mentions that after the 400 years, the Israelites will come out of their slavery with great possessions (Verse 14).

- vi) Finally, this 400-year period is set up as a “word-picture” of the coming of the Messiah. Let’s face it, when the 400 year period was coming to an end, the Jews were looking for a redeemer from their suffering. In fact, when Moses first started to help the Israelites, they rejected Him. It wasn’t until 40 years after that that the Israelites accepted Moses as their leader.
 - a) From the time of the last Old Testament Prophet Malachi to the time of Jesus is roughly 400 years. Many see this 400-year pattern in Genesis as a “word-picture” for the Jews to see the timing of Jesus in his first coming.
 - vii) One last thing about the 400 years and then I’ll move on
 - a) Exodus 12:40-41 mention that it was exactly 430 years “to the day” that the Israelites lived in Egypt. Yet here in Genesis, the term used is 400 years.
 - b) Some commentators state that the 400 years here in Genesis is a “round number”. Personally, I don’t see it that way. Here in Genesis, it says that the Israelites were enslaved for 400 years. If you read the story at the end of Genesis carefully, the early Israelites were treated well in Egypt. My personal belief is that for 30 years they were not slaves in Egypt. Then things changed and the slavery began.
17. Verse 17: When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates-- ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."
- a) Verse 17 has God “walking” between the pieces of the animal sacrifices that Abraham had cut up. There is an ancient tradition that when a contract was made, you cut up animals to validate that contract. The idea is “if you fail to honor the contract, you will suffer like these animals”. The concept here is God is putting “his stamp of approval” on His Word about the vision coming true. This is God’s response to Abraham’s request for God to validate his promises.
 - b) Notice the vision has references to “darkness” and “light”. It starts by saying after sundown (remember they didn’t have city lights) and darkness fell then we have this vision of God being a “smoking firepot” and “blazing torch”. It is a vision of God in his purity of light and judgment (“smoke” in the bible precedes judgment). It speaks of God’s plans for Abraham and the judgment on the nations currently occupying the land.
 - c) The borders of the Promised Land extend from Egypt on the south to the Euphrates.
 - i) Whenever I here people talking about modern Israel and whether or not they deserve to occupy the “West Bank”. The term “west bank” refers to a river bank. I often joke about which “West Bank” are you referring to? Currently, modern Israel ends at the west bank of the Jordan River. We read here that the promise to Abraham is that the Israelites will one day possess the land all the way to the west bank of the Euphrates which is currently part of the Nation of Iraq! In the entire history of Israel, they have never occupied territory that far. There will come a day when this promise will come true.
 - d) The last verse of the chapter lists all the people who at that moment of time lived in what is today Israel. Notice that none of these people still exist today. How many Hittites, and Perizzites do you know? ☺ The fact that Jews still live today and live in the Promised Land is proof all in itself that the Word of God is true.
18. OK, let’s wrap this up. We’ve gone from warfare, to rescue to rewards to this revelation by God. Remember my opening point: Abraham was given the talent and ability to rescue Lot and he did. Further, Abraham did the “right thing” to both King Melchizedek and King Sodom. Finally God reveled the future to Abraham

- a) What is important to note is the order of events. In a sense God “tested” Abraham’s faithfulness and Abraham passed with flying colors.
- i) Supposed Abraham failed to rescue Lot. Supposed Abraham took money from the King of Sodom. Would God still have blessed Abraham and used him to start a nation? Well, yes and no! ☺
 - ii) I’m convinced God picks people because God knows all things and He knows in advance what we are going to do. In other words, God doesn’t pick losers! ☺
 - iii) Which leads to you and me. If God has called you to follow Him, He expects great things from you. He knows you have the capability to do great things simply by having faith that God can work through you. (Yes, yes, I know there is a lot more to it, but that’s beside the point. Now be quiet, I’m on a roll! ☺)
 - iv) My point is that God picked Abraham not based on what Abraham was on “day one”. God picked Abraham because he saw Abraham’s potential as a great leader and used him to start a nation. God can and does continue to use anyone willing to follow Him in a great way.

19. Let’s pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have reached out and called us to follow you. We don’t know our future nor your plans for us. We do know they are good. We do know that you see us as followers of your Son and are justified on that basis only. Help us to grow in that faith and knowledge so that our lives can continue to grow for your glory. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.