

Chapter 5: The Custodianship of Abram

Genesis 14:1–16

The world has much to offer. To be clear, the world never really offers us *things*; instead, the world offers fulfillment for our many desires. Everywhere we look, the world promises us not just food, drink, entertainment, wealth, accolades, and sex, but satisfaction for the deeper longings behind those things: pleasure, satisfaction, security, comfort, joy, hope, and love. This has always been Satan’s strategy since the garden of Eden. In the garden, the serpent did not really offer Adam and Eve fruit; rather, the serpent offered the false promise of what the fruit would give them: *God-like wisdom* (Gen. 3:5). In the end, the woman took the fruit only partially because she saw that the tree was “good for food”; the bigger reasons for taking the fruit came in her assessment that “it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6).¹ It is the promise of gaining wisdom independently of God that makes the promises of the world so difficult to resist.

As Christians, we recognize that the world cannot deliver what it promises, but we also understand that we cannot live apart from the world. On the one hand, no amount of worldly possessions, achievements, or experiences apart from God will give us what our hearts long to possess. On the other hand, God never intended us to live apart from the material things of this world like food, water, shelter, and clothing. Even more, we cannot live apart from relationships we forge in this world—including many relationships with unbelieving people. God created us to live firmly *in* this world, even as he warns us not to worship what is in this world. God neither asks us to withdraw from this world, nor does he want us to. Indeed, his ultimate strategy is not to abolish the world altogether, but to renew the heavens and the earth so that we can live *in* the world as he originally intended for us (cf. Rev. 21–22).

The question, then, is not *whether* we will live in the world, but *how*. Fundamentally, there are two different ways of relating to the world. On the one hand, we can live as *consumers* of what that the world has to offer. Under this approach, we see the world as existing for our benefit, and we leverage the resources of the world to gain whatever it is that we think we most need. That is, as a consumer we believe that the world exists for the benefit of *us*. For the Christian, this approach is forbidden. For one thing, this world cannot satisfy the God-shaped desires of our hearts. Beyond that, we also recognize that this world belongs to God, not to us. As such, we are merely stewards, managers, caretakers, and *custodians* of what belongs to God. As custodians, we acknowledge that the world exists for the benefit of Christ and his kingdom. In some ways, serving in a custodial role as stewards of God’s creation means that we must deprive ourselves of pleasures and comforts that Satan peddles to worldly consumers. Ultimately, though, *being God’s custodian is better than being the world’s consumer*.

The World’s Kingdoms in Conflict (Gen. 14:1–7)

It is difficult to see at first how the petty, ancient political conflicts of Genesis 14 relates to the

deep longings of our modern hearts. To start, these are not the international incursions between major nations; these are trifling warlords who rule small city-states.² In this story, five kings of various city-states in Transjordan (the area east of Canaan, on the other side of the Jordan River) revolt against the tyranny of four kings of Mesopotamia in the east.³ In response, the Mesopotamian kings conquer their upstart subjects swiftly on the battlefield. Here is the report we receive:

[1] In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, [2] these kings 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). [3] And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). [4] Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. [5] In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, [6] and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness. [7] Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh) and defeated all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar. (Gen. 14:1–7)

As an initial observation, we should remember that this fierce conflict occurs between men who are fairly closely related to one another.⁴ Most likely, it has not even been 450 years since God began to repopulate the entire world with the offspring of Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.⁵ In less than 450 years, the descendants of Noah separate, spread out, settle in various places, speak different language, and subjugate one another. We have rejoiced to see Yahweh call Abram for the purpose of blessing all the families of the earth. This episode reminds us, however, that the people of these nations are closely related and yet willing to kill one another for profit. The kingdoms of this world will stop at nothing to gain every last enrichment that the world offers them.

The Kingdoms of this World

The instigators of this conflict are the four eastern kings from Mesopotamia: Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim (Gen. 14:1). Fourteen years earlier, Chedorlaomer king of Elam conquered the western kings of Transjordan (Gen. 14:3): Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of a city called Bela, also known as Zoar (Gen. 14:2). For the next twelve years, the Transjordanian kings “served” Chedorlaomer by paying him a tribute tax in exchange for peace. In the language of ancient near eastern politics, this makes Chedorlaomer the *suzerain* lord and the Transjordanian kings his *vassals*.

Then, in the thirteenth year, the Transjordanian kings “rebelled” by refusing to pay their tribute tax. By this rebellion, Chedorlaomer not only lost the tributes that his subjects did not pay, but their rebellion threatened future revenue. If Chedorlaomer's vassals can rebel against him without consequence, then why will anyone fear him in the future? To strike the fear into the hearts of his current and future vassals, Chedorlaomer gathers his Mesopotamian allies to march westward against all who have rebelled against his suzerainty. On the way, they defeat the Rephaim, the Zuzim, the Emim, the Horites, and the Amalekites (Gen. 14:5–7). The Rephaim, Zuzim, and Emim are apparently giants (Deut. 2:10–12, 20–23), which makes this a stunning victory for the Mesopotamians.⁶

Clearly, the narrative portrays Chedorlaomer as a power-hungry, bloodthirsty warlord. Still, the narrative does not excuse the Transjordanian kings as innocent victims in this scenario. For one thing, the language of *serve* and *rebel* is language that appears frequently through the rest of the Old Testament, often to describe Israel's own relationship to God.⁷ In this case, we know that the Transjordanian kings of Sodom and Gomorrah do not faithfully serve God (cf. Gen. 13:13), so their rebellion against Chedorlaomer parallels to their rebellion against God. Sometimes the Bible describes rebellion against oppressive authorities as a good thing (cf. 2 Kgs. 18:7, 20; Isa. 36:5). Certainly, God's people must rebel against any worldly powers who would seek to lead them astray from serving the Lord.

Other times, however, the Bible portrays the rebellion of the kings of Israel and Judah against suzerain lords as sinful (cf. 2 Kgs. 17:4–5; 2 Kgs. 24:1–2, 20; 2 Chron. 36:13; Jer. 52:3; Eze. 17:15; Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–25). This is especially true when God sends oppressors as judgment for his people's sin, since rebelling against the oppressors whom *God* sends is to rebel against God (cf. Jer. 5:19; 16:13; 17:4; 21:1–10; 25:11, 14; 27:6, 8–11). Even so, God also promises that he will ultimately judge the oppressors who come in judgment against his people (Jer. 27:6–7; Dan. 5; Hab. 2:6–20). As the people of a nation who began by rebelling against the authority of another nation, American culture celebrates rebellion in a way that the Bible does not. This does not mean that the Bible condones tyrants; however, it does mean the the Bible places more emphasis on stability and peacemaking than our culture does. This rebellion was wicked.

Beyond this point of serving and rebelling, the narrative describes the wickedness of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah even more directly. The names of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah are compounds that mean “evil” and “wicked,” respectively.⁸ Probably, the names included here are wordplays that deliberately mispronounce the actual names in order to bring out the wickedness of these Transjordanian kings.⁹ Therefore, when the narrative here describes the *rebellion* of the Transjordanian kings, we should not read this as a story about righteous David doing battle against a wicked Goliath. Nor is this a story where a victim rises up to demand justice from an oppressor, since both groups are oppressors (Eze. 16:49–50). The Transjordanian kings rebel for the exactly same reasons that the Mesopotamian kings oppress: greed for worldly gain. This is a story of two coalitions of lawless city-states rising up in violence against each other for the sake of personal gain. The text does not lead us to sympathize with either alliance. Instead, we should see that the people of God have no portion in either entity.

The Kingdom of Babylon

Instead, the very first words of this narrative provide the biggest clue for understanding the significance of this passage: “In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar...” (Gen. 14:1). This is odd, since Amraphel is only a minor player in this alliance. Chedorlaomer is the suzerain (Gen. 14:4) and the most significant king in this alliance, which is why Chedorlaomer is listed first in the second list of Mesopotamian kings (Gen. 14:9). If Chedorlaomer is the ringleader of this ancient near eastern gang, why does the narrative open with the name of Amraphel king of Shinar?¹⁰ To put this into perspective, this would be like beginning a history book about World War II with the words, “In the days of Mussolini dictator of Italy....” While that would be true, Mussolini was a minor player in World War II in comparison with Adolf Hitler, the ringleader of the Axis Powers.

By putting the spotlight on a minor character, the narrative is telling us that we should not

overlook the *spiritual* significance of this person. While Amraphel may not have been the strongest political power of the day, he is the king of Shinar. The narrator has already told us that Shinar is the region of the city of Babel (Gen. 10:10; 11:2, 9), that great city of wickedness against the Lord. The Transjordanians include the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, but the Mesopotamians include the Babylonians. This is not a holy war; it is senseless, greedy violence between two of the most wicked powers in history. God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah at the beginning of the Bible (Gen. 19), and he destroys Babylon at the end of the Bible (Rev. 18). The leaders on both sides are in active rebellion against God. This context is critical for understanding where both Lot and Abram fit in to this narrative, although we will still not encounter either man for a little while longer.

The Lot of Worldly Consumers (Gen. 14:8–12)

The four Mesopotamian kings use their momentum to rout the five Transjordanian kings quickly:

[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) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim [9] with Chedorlaomer 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 bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. (Gen. 14:8–10)

Again, notice the change of order in the list of the Mesopotamian kings: Chedorlaomer king of Elam comes first to indicate his political importance, while Amraphel king of Shinar is listed third to indicate his relatively weaker political strength.

Four Against Five

Apparently, the battle between the Mesopotamians and the Transjordanians is so brief that we do not actually read anything of the fighting.¹¹ Instead, we only read of the retreat of the Transjordanians, including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. As they flee, we read that many of the defeated armies “fall” into bitumen pits (Gen. 14:10). This does not necessarily mean that they stumbled into these pits in their panic, since “fall” can also mean to descend by choice (cf. Gen. 24:64).¹² If so, then this may be a description of suicide by exchanging “one kind of death for another, as is common in the moment of desperation.”¹³ Against the Mesopotamian juggernaut, the Transjordanians fall immediately—some to the sword, and others to the bitumen pits. Only a very few escape by fleeing to the hill country, including the king of Sodom (cf. Gen. 14:17).

The Captivity of Lot

Finally, we happen upon familiar names in this narrative, but not for good reasons:

[11] So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. [12] They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way. (Gen. 14:11–12)

When we last saw Lot, he separated from Abram and inched toward Sodom: “Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom” (Gen. 13:12). Taken together, these two texts suggest that Lot does not actually dwell *in* Sodom immediately, but that he contents himself at first to dwell near (“as far as”) Sodom. Over time, however, Lot eventually abandons whatever separation he tried to maintain at first and now dwells fully “in Sodom” (Gen. 14:12). So, as the Mesopotamians come through to loot and pillage Sodom, they carry away Lot himself into captivity.

In this way, the narrative links this story with the story of Sarai’s captivity in Egypt. The language of *taking* Lot reminds us of Genesis 12:15, when Sarai “was taken” into Pharaoh’s house.¹⁴ In both cases, God’s people go into captivity when they wander outside the Promised Land—first to Egypt, and now across the Jordan into the city of Sodom.¹⁵ The narrative perhaps warned us that this same outcome might come about when Lot first separated from Abram, since Lot chose to go to the place that was “like the land of Egypt” (Gen. 13:10). Lot chose the place that looks like Egypt, so now he receives the same consequence that the holy family experienced in Egypt by being *taken* into captivity. Like Abram and Sarai, Lot most likely wanted to keep his head down and out of trouble during this conflict; however, “the more closely we are connected with the wicked and the ungodly, when God pours down his vengeance on them, the more quickly does the scourge come upon us.”¹⁶

The Lot of Worldly Consumers

Lot’s fate illustrates a clear principle of the dangers of giving ourselves to worldly consumerism. When we throw our *lot* in with the world, dedicating ourselves to gaining as much as we can from the world, we necessarily tie ourselves to the world’s fate. Sodom is not the only city that will be sacked, looted, and destroyed. Again, the Scriptures tell us that Babylon will one day fall as well (Rev. 18). This does not mean that a single city in the Near East will fall to destruction, since the fall of Babylon represents the eventual destruction of the entirety of the world’s system. In the broader biblical theology, these cities do not represent individual metro areas, or even individual nations. Rather, these cities remind us that God’s judgment is coming against the whole world, since the kingdoms of this world are characterized by worldly consumerism.

In the eventual overthrow of Babylon, as in this overthrow of Babylon, all those who live for what this world can give them will have their hopes dashed. They will wail in torment to see the world’s system of power, wealth, and pleasure fall in a single hour when God brings his judgment (Rev. 18:10). By living as worldly consumers, they will lose more than their *stuff*—they will lose the desires of their souls: “The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!” (Rev. 18:14). Therefore, the lot of worldly consumers will be the same as the lot of Lot—captivity, exile, and destruction. Still, just as Lot finds a redeemer to rescue him from his captivity, so also have we. For all those who repent from their worldly consumerism and look in faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, we will escape the judgment of this world. Let us turn our attention to that salvation next.

The Salvation of God’s Custodians (Gen. 14:13–16)

Even though we already know who Lot is, the narrator nevertheless links Lot to Abram: “They also took Lot, *the son of Abram’s brother...*” (Gen. 14:12). What happens to Lot affects Abram, both

now and again in Genesis 18–19 when Yahweh prepares to destroy Sodom, where Lot continues to live after Abram rescues him. The height of Abram’s story comes in Genesis 15–17, when Yahweh enters into a covenant with him. Intriguingly, that covenantal narrative is “bracketed by narratives detailing less than exemplary behavior by a relative.”¹⁷ In his holy communion with Yahweh, Abram cannot remain cool and disconnected from the violence and wickedness of the kingdoms of the earth; his worldly nephew is always in the middle of whatever is happening in the wider world!

Abram the Hebrew

Abram successfully avoids this conflict until news of Lot comes to him: “Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram” (Gen. 14:13). In the middle of this narrative of an international conflict, the narrator points out that Abram is a *Hebrew*. That is, Abram is “a clansman like other tribal chiefs.”¹⁸ The word *Hebrew* “is not a term used by Israelites of themselves, but only by non-Israelites of Israelites (39:14; 41:12).”¹⁹ In the same way we judge the peoples of Ellasar, Elam, and Admah as irrelevant, so also the rest of the world judged the Hebrew peoples as irrelevant. By this reference, the narrator reminds us of what theologians call the *scandal of particularity*. When we step back and see the way that Yahweh has chosen one man out of all the nations of the earth, the grace of election should shock us. Why Abram? Why a Hebrew? Why not the Babylonians, the Sodomites, or even the Rephaim, Emim, or Amalekites? Yes, those nations are wicked, but so was Abram before Yahweh called him out of his idolatry (cf. Josh. 24:2). It is scandalous to see the grace of God in choosing Abram while passing over all the other nations of the world.

By extension, we should also recognize that the nation which arises from the offspring of Abram will not be the best, the wisest, or the most spiritually mature. In fact, the Hebrew nation will only inconsistently and half-heartedly serve Yahweh, frequently rebelling against their suzerain Lord’s authority. Why them? And more than that, *why us*? Why should God choose to bring sinners like you and me into his family when he leaves others in the sinful hardness of their hearts? The reason has nothing to do with *us* any more than God’s election of Abram had to do with *Abram*. The biblical logic behind God’s infinite wisdom is circular: God loves us because he loves us (Deut. 7:6–8; Eph. 2:4). If we press deeper into this mystery, we do not find any features or characteristics in us that bring forward God’s favor toward us. Rather, we discover that God loves us *in Christ* (Eph. 1:3–10). We are justified, sanctified, and glorified through our union with Christ, to whom belongs all glory now and forevermore. None of us have any standing before God apart from God’s own gracious, electing love toward us.

In, but not Of, the World

Abram, therefore, belongs to God; however, this does not mean that he can live outside of the world. He may not be *of* the world, but he remains *in* the world (cf. John 17:15–16).²⁰ So, the narrative tells us that Abram has entered into an alliance with “Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and of Aner” (Gen. 14:13). Literally, the phrase that the ESV translates as “allies” means “owners of the covenant of Abram.” This does not necessarily mean that they entered into the covenant that Yahweh will make with Abram in Genesis 15; however, this certainly means that they have entered into some kind of binding treaty of mutual support with Abram. Because Abram goes

into battle to rescue Lot, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre will go with Abram and will share in the spoils of war (Gen. 14:24). Later, Abram will also make a covenant with the Philistines (Gen. 21:32) and enter into a purchase agreement for property with the Hittites (Gen. 23).²¹ Thus, we see Abram engaging in normal, common, day-to-day business in the course of his life in Canaan.

If this is true, then how does Abram's alliances differ from the wicked alliances of the Transjordanians and the Mesopotamians? In part, the text illustrates the difference between Abram and everyone else in this story by distinguishing the more permanent *dwelling* of Lot in Sodom (Gen. 14:12) from the less permanent *abiding* of Abram in Hebron (ESV: "living"; Gen. 14:13).²² Abram's life is not an ongoing turf war to protect what he believes should belong to him. Rather, he lives as one who possesses the land of Canaan by promise (Gen. 13:14–17), even though he does not yet own it in reality. Therefore, he lives in the already/not yet, awaiting by faith what he does not yet have by sight. Abram holds everything with an open hand, waiting for God to fulfill everything he has promised. Lot and the kingdoms of the world dwell *of* the world as consumers, and every worldly consumer in this story loses what they gain. Abram, on the other hand, refuses to live as though the world existed for his own benefit, and he remains safe by abiding as God's custodian *in* the world.²³

The Warfare of Abram

The narrative does not suggest that Abram experiences even a moment's hesitation before deciding to rescue Lot:

[14] When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. [15] And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. [16] Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people. (Gen. 14:14–16)

Without delay, Abram gathers the 318 trained men born in his house (Gen. 14:14). These may refer to the children of his slaves, or possibly to the children of the converts that Abram has made on his journey thus far (cf. Gen. 12:5). Because they have been raised up in Abram's household, they are better trained and possibly more loyal than any who were not raised in Abram's house.²⁴ With the additional strength of his allies (Gen. 14:13), Abram musters a strong military force quickly enough to overtake the Mesopotamian kings (Gen. 14:14).

This is the only time we see Abram engaging in warfare.²⁵ Even so, Abram does well, strategically dividing his forces and attacking his enemies at night (Gen. 14:15). Not only does Abram defeat them, but he pursues them to Hobah, north of Damascus (Gen. 14:15). As a result, Abram rescues all the possessions that the Mesopotamians took as spoil, along with Lot, Lot's possessions, "and the women and the people" (Gen. 14:16). Once again, though, we have to ask how Abram behaves differently in *his* warfare than the Mesopotamians and the Transjordanians. The kingdoms of this world enter into alliances and go to war, and Abram here does the exact same thing. Why should we condemn the worldly kingdoms, while praising Abram?

Abram is not a violent warlord like his enemies, since he does not seek to *take* and consume (cf. Gen. 14:11–12), but to *rescue*. Nevertheless, Abram gains the victory. To put this another way,

Abram lives according to the reality that the world and everything in it exists for the benefit of Christ and Christ's kingdom. Paul expresses this idea in the form of doxology at the end of Romans 11: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). Where alliances and warfare would only enrich Abram (as in the alliances of the Transjordanians, the Mesopotamians, and even Lot), Abram refuses those opportunities. On the other hand, where alliances (as with Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre) and warfare (to rescue Lot) will serve the purposes of God's kingdom, then Abram engages without delay. God's custodians do not always engage in radically different *activities* than worldly consumers. Nevertheless, we discover vast differences when we examine the *motives* behind each approach.

Life in the World

In part, this scene foreshadows the great military victories that God will eventually give to his people as they enter into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.²⁶ Additionally, this may also reflect God's judgment against those who curse Abram and the blessing toward those associated with Abram (cf. Gen. 12:3, 17).²⁷ Still more broadly, we also see here a general principle of how God's people interact with the kingdoms of this world. We should not follow Lot's example of cozying up to the kingdoms of this world as consumers, since then we will fully share in the world's fate. This does not mean that we should avoid seeking the welfare of whatever city in which God places us (Jer. 29:7), but that we should not bind ourselves to the world, its system, and all that it offers.

There is, therefore, a critical difference between *dwelling* in the city and *abiding* in the city. Lot yokes his heart and soul in Sodom, so he shares in the fate of Sodom until his uncle rescues him. Abram still gets pulled into the conflict, but as an independent agent, and not as someone bound to the kingdoms of this world. He lives in the world and even makes covenants and treaties with other people in the world; nevertheless, he is not *of* the world. Therefore, when need arises, Abram alone is able to respond to those needs as one independent from the systems and power structures of the world. Ironically, by remaining independent of the world's affairs, he is the only person capable of offering help when the world's affairs spin out of control. As such, he can respond to the self-inflicted plight of Lot with strength and compassion rather than being taken captive to the marauding Mesopotamians.

Abram the Warrior King

Still, this story offers more than practical advice for living in the world. Abram not only acts to rescue his nephew, but he also demonstrates a pattern that God's people after him will follow in important ways. To start, Abram typologically foreshadows the godly warrior king who will descend from him: David. Like Abram, David protects outcasts and the vulnerable (1 Sam. 22:2). Also like Abram, David lives as an independent man without a homeland. As an Israelite who is persecuted by Israel's king, David must make an alliance with the Philistines for a time (1 Sam. 21:10–15; 27; 29:1–11). Nevertheless, God gives David impressive military victories, even against an Anakim-descended giant named Goliath who is as tall as the Emim and Rephaim of Abram's day (cf. Deut. 2:10–11; Josh. 11:22; 1 Sam. 16). Apart from his wicked violence against Uriah (2 Sam. 11:14–25), David never seeks out violence for the sake of greedy person gain. Nevertheless, Yahweh will use David in the same way that Yahweh now uses Abram: to execute judgment against the wicked, violent,

greedy, idolatrous nations who persecuted the people of God (2 Sam. 7:9–11).

Abram Against Babylon

Additionally, this story provides a second chapter in the ongoing struggle of God's people against their great enemy, Babylon. The first chapter of this story in Genesis 11 laid out the background of the Babylonian arrogance and rebellion against God. Here in Genesis 14, the Babylonians are only minor world players in the aftermath of God's judgment against their construction project. Nevertheless, the Babylonians will rise again. Later on, the Babylonians will become strong and mighty at exactly the same moment when God's people go too far in their rebellion against God. So, God will raise up Babylon to carry off his people, like Lot, into exile (Isa. 39; Hab. 1:5–11). God's people will eventually return to the land of Canaan, but they will never be the same until another redeemer, like Abram, rescues them from their captivity. Abram is the first servant of God to stand up against the Babylonians, and, by the power of God, Abram wins the battle.

Therefore, Abram foreshadows more than just David and the return from Babylonian exile. In the way that Abram risks his life to save his selfish, guilty, consumeristic kinsman Lot, Abram also foreshadows Jesus Christ. Iain Duguid writes, "In all this, do we not see a picture of Jesus Christ? He did not sit idly in heaven, waiting for us to deserve to be redeemed. If he had, eternity would have gone by without our redemption. Nor was our redemption risk free and painless."²⁸ Both Abram *and* Abram's greatest Descendant Jesus Christ must rescue God's people from the wicked spiritual kingdom of Babylon.

The redemption of Jesus, however, goes much further than the redemption of Abram. Abram did well to rescue Lot from the Babylonians. Still, Lot's heart will remain bound to Sodom so much so that he will linger in Sodom rather than flee its destruction (Gen. 19:16). In the same way, when God brings his people out of Babylon by the decree of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4), the hearts of the redeemed Israelites will not wholeheartedly follow the Lord (Ezra 9–10). The redemption of Jesus Christ, then, must not only bring his people out of *physical* and *political* captivity, but *spiritual* captivity as well. Indeed, though we were once slaves of sin, we now obey God through Christ from the heart, having been made into slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:17–18). Therefore, let us not find our hope in what we can consume from this world, for the world and its wealth will pass away in a moment when Jesus Christ returns to destroy Babylon forever (Rev. 18). While we must seek the welfare of the world as God's custodians (Jer. 29:7), we must never find our hope in the world.

Instead, our hope is in the God who created heaven, earth, and everything in it (Ps. 124:8). Our hope is in our deliverer, Jesus Christ, who pursued us to the point of death in order to free us from our captivity. Our hope is in him, our refuge and deliverer who will protect us from the judgment of the world that he will bring when he returns on the last day.

Discussion Questions

1. How much do you pay attention to current events and worldly affairs? Does this story differ that much from the conflicts of the worldly kingdoms that exist today? How should Christians approach news about the conflicts of of this world? How does God keep us independent of the world's

conflicts? How does God send us into the world's conflicts?

2. What does the text suggest about why Lot now lives in Sodom? How easy is it for believers to be drawn into the allure of the world? In what ways are you most tempted to cozy up to the world as a consumer? Why are the temptations of the world so deceptively tempting? What dangers do you put yourself in by casting your lot with the world?

3. Why does Abram the Hebrew enter into a covenant with his neighbors? What does this teach us about how believers should live *in* the world, but not *of* the world? What is the difference between being a stewarding *custodian* of God's world as opposed to a greedy *consumer* of all that the world has to offer? What does God entrust to your care taking?

4. What do we learn from the warfare that Abram wages in this passage? What does this foreshadow about the conquest of Abram's offspring, Israel, as well as the cross of Abram's offspring, Jesus? Why does God choose to bless or curse the whole world based on the world's relationship to Abram? Is this fair? Is this gracious?

Notes

1. Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 47–48.

2. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 310.

3. The Mediterranean Sea marks the western border of the land of Canaan. The eastern border of the land of Canaan is the Jordan River, which flows south toward the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is also called the Salt Sea (cf. Gen. 14:3), which is where this battle takes place (Gen. 14:3, 8–10). To the east beyond the Jordan River is the region known as Transjordan (“across the Jordan”). The five kings of Genesis 14:2 reside in Transjordan. Going further east leads into Mesopotamia, where the four kings of Genesis 14:1 reside. For more specific details, please consult a good Bible atlas.

4. Calvin, *Genesis*, 380. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xx.i.html>>

5. 222 years pass from the Flood until the birth of Terah (Gen. 11:10–26). Terah begins begetting children at age 70, but Abram was not the first son born to Terah. According to Acts 7:2–4, the seventy-five year-old Abram (Gen. 12:4) did not leave Haran until Terah died at age 205. This would mean that Abram was born when Terah was 130, or 352 years after the Flood. We do not know Abram's age in Genesis 14, but he is eighty-six in Genesis 16:16. If we allow that Genesis 16 narrates the passing of at least one year for the birth of Ishmael, then Abram can be no older than eighty-five at the beginning of Genesis 16. At most, 437 years have passed since the Flood.

6. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 402.

7. “The relationship of the five vassal kings to Elam is described through the successive use of the verbs ‘*ābaḏ*’ and ‘*māraḏ*’. Both verbs are used frequently in the OT to describe political relationships between nations. The first one means ‘to be subject to’ a sovereign. The second one means to ‘refuse allegiance to, rise up against’ a sovereign. By natural extension both verbs were also used to describe Israel's relationship to God (‘*ābaḏ*’: Exod. 3:12, 4:23; 7:16, 26, etc.; ‘*māraḏ*’: Num. 14:9; Josh. 22:16, 18, 29, etc.)” (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 402.)

8. Kidner, *Genesis*, 130.

9. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 309.
10. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 145.
11. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 312.
12. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 403.
13. Calvin, *Genesis*, 382. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xx.i.html>>
14. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 403.
15. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 143.
16. Calvin, *Genesis*, 383. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xx.i.html>>
17. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 398.
18. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 293.
19. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 313.
20. Kidner, *Genesis*, 129.
21. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 314.
22. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 299.
23. Kidner, *Genesis*, 129.
24. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 314.
25. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 399.
26. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 296–97.
27. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 407.
28. Duguid, *Living in the Gap Between Promise and Reality*, 45–46.