

God's Cosmic Plan: Jesus and You

1 Introduction

- It is easy to get lost in OT stories. They are exciting and there is lots of variety.
- But do we read these stories correctly? Are they just for our entertainment?
- This week's passage about Abram in chapters 13 and 14 of Genesis are great for two reasons
 - The stories are exciting, and
 - Other parts of the Bible teach us what they mean, why they are there
- So I hope one result of today's message is that you learn how to use the Bible to help you read and understand the Bible, specifically OT stories
- But beyond using today's stories as examples of how to understand the OT, the actual message in today's passage is something amazing
 - It is a story bigger than any story ever written
 - It is the story of how God is working a cosmic plan in all our relationships, in every promise God makes, and in everything that happens to us, for His purpose and for our good
- Prayer
 - Speak to us through your Word

1.1 Background: In Egypt

- As background to today's passage, last week Pastor Jonathan introduced us to Abram in Genesis chapter 12.
 - Jonathan shared how God promised three blessings to Abram: a place, a people, and His presence, each to be received by faith
- Although we didn't cover it last week, after those promises, Abram and his family took a detour into Egypt at the end of chapter 12, because of a famine in the land of Canaan
- We won't read it, but is an interesting and important story because in it, Abram has some shady dealings with the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh.
 - Abram passed off his beautiful wife Sarai as his own sister, for fear that the Egyptians would kill him in order to take her as their own
 - In fact, Sarai did get the attentions of the Egyptians, eventually ending up in Pharaoh's palace, as one of Pharaoh's wives
 - In the process Abram got treated very well by the Pharaoh, and Abram acquired a lot of possessions
 - But once the Pharaoh found out Sarai was really Abram's wife, and that Pharaoh's household was being judged by God because of this, Pharaoh kicked them all out of Egypt, and Abram and his family ended up back in Canaan

2 God Worked in Abram's Relationships

- Now we are coming to today's passage, and I want to warn you ahead of time that I am going to let Bible speak to us directly by having the actual story tell itself
 - There are several scenes, but it is all part on one important connected story
 - So I need to you to hang with me as we go through it scene by scene
 - To help you, I'm asking you to fill out the titles of these scenes in your bulletins
- The title of the first scene is:
 - **God worked in Abram's relationships**

2.1 Abram Prospers, But There Is Conflict

- We start with Abram's return to Canaan:
 - Genesis 13:1-4: ¹ So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ² Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.
 - ³ From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴ and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the Lord.
- So, even though some of Abram's possessions were acquired through deceit in Egypt, God continued to bless Abram and his family
 - He had livestock, and silver and gold
 - He was back in the land where God had first made a promise to him
- But, everything wasn't perfect in this prosperity:
 - Genesis 13:5-7: ⁵ Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. ⁶ But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. ⁷ And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.
- Here we learn that Abram's nephew Lot was also gaining in wealth, with flocks, herds, and tents
 - And there were other tribes there who had been there longer, probably occupying the most fertile land and abundant water
 - The demands of all this prosperity was so great that there was conflict between Abram's herders and Lot's herders
 - Strangely, God's own blessing to them turns into a source of division

2.2 Abram Gives Lot the Choice

- Abram offers Lot the choice of how they are to resolve their conflict

- Genesis 13:8-9: ⁸ So Abram said to Lot, “Let’s not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Let’s part company. If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left.”
- It is strange that Abram offers Lot the choice, because in the previous chapter, we read that God promised Abram the whole land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7)
- Since Abram already had the promise of the whole land, he could have told Lot “Well, this my land of promise, why don’t you move along somewhere else?” But that is not what he does.
 - Perhaps it is because Abram learned a lesson in Egypt about doing things his own way, so he wanted someone else to choose
 - Or perhaps Abram was so confident in God’s greatness and his promise that he felt he could afford to offer Lot the best
- Lot was given the choice of where to go, and, he makes his choice:
 - Genesis 13:10-13 ¹⁰ Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: ¹² Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. ¹³ Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.
- So Lot decided to settle in the plain of Jordan, where the cities were. Abram, on the other hand, remained in Canaan. Lot may not have known it, but by going to the plain, where the cities were, he was getting dangerously close to wickedness.
 - Outside appearances can be deceiving
 - What looks best on the outside, might not be the best
 - For Lot, it was one of the worst decisions he ever made

2.3 God Worked in Abram’s Relationships

- Before we leave this scene, I want to point out that there is something dramatic going on in this description of what happens to Abram and Lot in Canaan
 - There is a sense that God is orchestrating the events
 - He is working behind the scenes to make sure everything is guided to a conclusion, even in the relationship between Abram and Lot, how they separate, the choices they make, and precisely where each of them end up
 - Something is going on here

3 God Confirmed His Promises to Abram

- One of the consequences of the separation of Abram and Lot was that God used this time to get Abram's attention as to where God had placed him, and to confirm and deepen the promise he had made to him.
- This is the second scene, and I'll give it the title:
 - **God confirmed His promise to Abram**
 - Genesis 13:14-15 ¹⁴The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. ¹⁵All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring [*seed*] forever.
- God had promised the land to him in Chapter 12, and now he calls Abram to walk all over it, to inspect it, to symbolically claim it, because he is going to have it forever
 - Genesis 13:17 ¹⁷Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."
- God also deepened the promise to Abram by detailing how numerous his offspring would be
 - Genesis 13:16 ¹⁶I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.
- In an average environment like this room, there are over 3 million pieces of dust every cubic foot. That's a lot of dust! This is an incredible promise to Abram.
- Abram's response to God's promise is like what he did in Chapter 12: He worshipped
 - Genesis 13:18 ¹⁸So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

4 God Blessed Abram in Battle

- Now the scene shifts again, and the title of this third scene is:
 - **God blessed Abram in battle**
- Because there are so many unfamiliar names, it is easy to get lost in this part of the story
- The big picture is that there are 4 strong kings, lead by Kedorlaomer of Elam, and they are bullies. It says that the 5 other kings were subject to Kedorlaomer, but they decided they had enough and rebelled
 - Genesis 14:4 ⁴For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.
- That probably means that the 5 kings stopped paying tribute (i.e., taxes) to Kedorlaomer
- The 4 strong kings, lead by Kedorlaomer start a new round of raids against their neighbors demonstrating that they are very strong indeed

- Vs 5-7 are a who's who of local tribes and kingdoms that Kedorlaomer and his friends start conquering (I won't read it!)
- Even though the 4 strong kings are on a roll, defeating all these neighboring tribes and kingdoms, the 5 weaker subjected kings decide they have to put up a fight, to take a stand
 - Genesis 14:8-9 ⁸Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboyim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim ⁹against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five.
- So this is the setup. There is going to be battle between 9 kings from the cities in the plain.
 - It is the first description of warfare in the Bible.
 - This is going to be exciting, right?
 - Did the underdogs, the 5 weak kings, have a chance?
- Well, we don't even get a description of the battle. All we hear is that some of the 5 weak kings run away!
 - Genesis 14:10-12 ¹⁰Now 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. ¹¹The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. ¹²They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.
- So as the result of the battle between the 9 kings of the cities in the plain, the defenders, the 5 weaker kings, were forced to flee.
 - Some got stuck in tar pits
 - Others ran to the hills
 - The 4 strong kings took the plunder as the 5 weak kings ran away
- The battle itself is almost insignificant to the main point, that Lot, who had settled in or near Sodom, somehow got drawn up in this, and was captured with all of the goods from Sodom and Gomorrah
- Abram gets the news about his nephew, and responds to it immediately:
 - Genesis 14:14-16 ¹⁴When 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. ¹⁵During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.
- Abram and his soldiers rescued Lot, and in the process recovered all of Sodom's possessions and people
 - What this means is that as Abram was routing Kedorlaomer and his gang, it is the former attackers who became the ones to flee, and they started dropping all their newly obtained plunder as they ran away

- You can picture this as they realize they are somehow outmatched
 - Drop this sheep
 - Drop this chest of precious metal
 - Drop Lot and his family
- Now before this, we never thought of Abram as a military figure, but here we see that Abram and his army of 318 are able to stand up and defeat the biggest bullies of Canaan at the time
- How can this be?
 - It must be that Abram is blessed by the Lord, and that God is confirming his promises to Abram by giving him victory and allowing him to rescue Lot

5 Abram Trusts in God's, not Sodom's, Riches

- So what happens next? What's the next scene?
- Abram defeated Kedorlaomer, got back Lot and his family, and this naturally gets the attention of the kings who were previously defeated by Kedorlaomer
 - Genesis 14:17 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).
- Skipping ahead a few verses, the king of Sodom offers to Abram to keep the goods that he retrieved.
 - Genesis 14:21 ²¹ The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."
- Abram's response is really kind of amazing. He refuses!
 - Genesis 14:22-24 ²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, ²³ that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap 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, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share."
- Why would Abram have refused these riches?
- I mentioned that in several chapters ago, Abram got rich in Egypt through some amount of deceit, and he didn't give it back
- Abram has a different response now
 - It seems he wants to make it clear that the Lord should get the glory
 - So he turns down Sodom's offer.
 - You can imagine this must have been a slap in the face to the wicked king of Sodom
- So this fourth scene is really about how:
 - **Abram trusted in God's riches**
 - So that is the title we'll give

6 What Does It Mean?

- Now I've reviewed most of the story from these two chapters, and it is interesting if you like action and history
- A typical question that people ask when coming to any text in the Bible is "what does it mean?"
- Let's ask that question of this text, but let's be very careful as to what perspective we are taking when we ask the question
- We know that Moses wrote Genesis for the people of Israel. What would they have understood from these scenes?
- What would you, as one of the children of Israel learn from these stories?
 - Father Abram was good and was chosen and blessed by God, despite the wickedness around him
 - He was rich, which is a blessing
 - He worshipped
 - He was wise and generous dealing with his nephew when they were more than the land could handle
 - He received God's promise
 - He rescued his nephew Lot, even though Lot was the one responsible for being so close to the wicked city Sodom
 - He righteously didn't take any of the spoils from Sodom
- The summary for a descendant of Abram is probably pretty clear:
 - As sons and daughters of Abram:
 - We should recognize that whatever riches we have are a blessings from God
 - Like Abram, we should worship
 - Like Abram, we should be wise and generous when relating with our relatives and neighbors
 - Like Abram, we should trust in God's promises
 - Like Abram, we should be brave and fight for our land and families
 - Like Abram, upon victory, we should give glory to God, not trust in the spoils from wicked outsiders
- It is pretty simple, right?

7 Digging Deeper

- That is all a fine reading of the text, but is there more there?

7.1 Melchizedek Blesses Abram

- There is a key part of this story that we've skipped that I think ties it all together
- Before Abram refused Sodom's offer of the plunder, there is an additional scene that almost seems like it was inserted into the middle of the story
 - It is another scene, and we can call it:
 - **Melchizedek blessed Abram**

- Genesis 14:18-20 ¹⁸Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹and he blessed Abram, saying,
 - *“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.*
 - ²⁰And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.”*
- Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.
- Abram is greeted by this mysterious figure, Melchizedek
- What do we know of him?
 - We don’t get any information about his ancestry, how old he lived, or how long he lived
- We are told:
 - He is the King of Salem
 - He is a priest of the God Most High
 - He blessed Abram
 - With food and drink, to refresh Abram’s troops after their victory
 - Acknowledging God as the source of Abram’s victory
 - Abram gave him a tithe, a tenth of everything
- What is this about?
- It says he was a king, and a priest.
- What is going on here?

7.2 Psalm 110 and Melchizedek

- We have to go to another part of the Bible to get the insight into this set of stories, and especially what is going on with this strange Melchizedek character
- Psalm 110, one of King David’s songs, written about 500 years after the account in Genesis, references this mysterious Melchizedek to make an important point about God’s coming messiah
- I’m going to read it in a way to help keep the characters straight
 - LORD -> Yahweh, the covenant name of god
 - Lord -> **lord king**
 - Of David. **Yahweh** says to my **lord king**: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”
 - ²**Yahweh** will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying, “Rule in the midst of your enemies!”
 - ³Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy splendor, your young men will come to you like dew from the morning’s womb.
 - ⁴**Yahweh** has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”
 - ⁵My **lord king** is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

- ⁶ He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.
- ⁷ He will drink from a brook along the way, and so he will lift his head high.
- Of all OT passages, this Psalm contains verses that are the most often quoted in the New Testament
- I'll make three important points

7.2.1 The Coming Victorious Messiah King

- This psalm is about the coming messiah king, not about David
- We know David is writing, because it says "Of David". That is part of the biblical text
- David must be writing not about himself as the king of Israel, but about a future king that is to come, one whom God will make victorious
 - YAHWEH says to my king (my lord)

7.2.2 Messiah King is at God's Right Hand

- This coming future king, this messiah is at God's right hand
 - Vs. 1: "Sit at my right hand"
 - Vs. 5: "The lord (the king) is at your right hand"
- This is unbelievable language about the coming Messiah
- What kind of person could be at God's right hand, the place of honor?
- He will judge the nations, crushing all other rulers
- This coming Messiah will be greater than any other king
- It is like he will be the King of Kings

7.2.3 Messiah is a Priest like Melchizedek

- The third point connects back to our scenes from Genesis is in verse 4
 - Psalm 110:4 ⁴**Yahweh** has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, out of the order of Melchizedek"
- God is describing that this coming Messiah is going to not only be king, but a priest at the same time
 - This is something unheard of for the people of David's time
 - A lord, a king is one who rules, and who leads into battle
 - A priest is one who intercedes on behalf of the people
 - This Messiah will be both
- And as priest, the Messiah will not be like the ordinary human priests of Israel's day, but one who is forever
- Just like Melchizedek was the only combined OT king / priest, Messiah will be a unique combined king / priest figure

7.2.4 Psalm 110 Summary

- From this quick reading of the seem Psalm, we learn the coming messiah will be a victorious, king, priest, patterned after the mysterious Melchizedek, and will serve forever at God's right hand

7.3 The Letter to the Hebrews and Melchizedek

- That is helpful, but the Bible is not done making connections, however
- There is one more piece to the puzzle of these passages in Genesis
- The author of Letter to the Hebrews, in the New Testament, writing about 1000 years after David, makes the most remarkable connection

7.3.1 Melchizedek is a Pattern to Understand Messiah

- The letter to the Hebrews is a 13-chapter sermon. It can be a little hard to read, but it is brilliant
- One of the main arguments of the letter to the Hebrews is the explanation of how superior Jesus Christ is. The author compares **Jesus** to Melchizedek as an example. The author points out:
 - Melchizedek's name literally means "king of righteousness"
 - Melchizedek is the King of Salem, which also means "king of peace"
 - Melchizedek has no ancestry in the Genesis account, he has no parents, no beginning of days or end of days, he is like the Son of God, from outside humanity
 - Melchizedek receives a tithe from Abram, demonstrating his superiority to Abram
- The author points out that Jesus, like the pattern of Melchizedek:
 - Is the king of righteousness, is the king of peace
 - Is a priest forever, eternal
 - Is priest by God's oath or promise, not by ancestry
 - Is a priest who can intercede, that is pray to God the Father, on our behalf, forever

7.3.2 Jesus is our Perfect Priest - King

- The author of Hebrews explains how Jesus is a high priest, and as he explains it, he quotes from Psalm 110 and refers to our passage in Genesis 13 and 14:
 - Hebrews: 7:22-28
 - ²² Because of this oath ("the LORD has sworn, you are a priest forever..."), Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.
 - ²³ Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

- ²⁶ Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.
- The author of Hebrews is saying that Jesus:
 - Is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens
 - Doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, but sacrificed himself once and for all
 - Is the mediator of a new covenant, a new promise, dying as a ransom to set us free from sin
 - In the pattern of Melchizedek, is our perfect Priest – King
- And the story of Melchizedek, written more than 2000 years before His coming, was a lesson for us to understand and appreciate who Jesus is

8 All Together

- God has been writing a story for us
 - It has been over two thousand years in the making
 - So that we could understand His perfect plan about Jesus
- God has a perfect sovereign design to history
 - Abram's prosperity ->
 - Conflict between Abram and Lot ->
 - Lot's choice of where to live->
 - The war of the 9 kings ->
 - Lot's capture ->
 - Abram's rescue mission ->
 - Abram's success and the fatigue of his troops->
 - Melchizedek's arrival and blessing ->
 - Abram's response to Melchizedek ->
 - Abram's ability to refuse Sodom, and instead rely on God
 - David prophesying of the future Messiah as a king / priest, like Melchizedek
 - Jesus coming in the flesh living a perfect life, and offering his life for us as a sacrifice
 - The author of Hebrews connecting the dots between Melchizedek, King David's Psalm 110, Jesus' life and, how Jesus is our perfect High Priest who establishes a new covenant, a new relationship for us
- All of these steps are part of one big connected story – they are not disconnected episodes

- This story is breathtaking
- It is bigger than any contemporary story of our day, bigger than the Lord of the Rings Trilogy, or the Star Wars series, or the Avenger movies
- It is God's story about Jesus, and it is there for us
 - So that we can have confidence in God's plan
 - So we can trust in Jesus as our King Priest

9 Response – So What for Us Today?

- There is a grand design, God's design, being played out in history
- And this design is being played out in your life also
- Everything that happens to you, whether for good or for bad
 - Getting to church late today
 - Car breaking down
 - The choice you made for what to do tomorrow
 - Getting a diagnosis of a bad disease
 - The promotion you got
 - The job you lost
 - The loss of a loved one
 - The argument you had with your spouse
- Like the conflict between Abram and Lot, everything has a purpose, to advance the story
- We may not see it in our lifetime
 - Like these three passages that introduce Melchizedek, and later use him to describe the coming Messiah, and even later reveal Jesus as a perfect priest, it may take 2000 years or more for the plot of **your** life to be fully revealed
- But there are clues, like God's promise to Abram
- **The Big Idea of today's message is that**
 - The story of Abram reinforces the fact that **God's eternal cosmic plan centers on Jesus, our King, our Priest**
- If someone asks you what the Bible all about, tell them that it's the story of Jesus, written across thousands of years
 - And it is a good news story for us
- What is God saying to you right now in the things that are happening to you, good and bad?
- **God's eternal cosmic plan, all of history, centers on Jesus, our King, our Priest**
 - What is your response to this plan?
 - Are you going to respond to this in worship?
 - Are you going to submit to King Jesus, embrace Him, call Him your own, put your faith and trust in Him?
 - Are you going to accept High Priest Jesus, who promises to intercede for you to the Father forever?

- He is at God's right hand, praying, right now, asking the Father to overlook your sin because He took your punishment, and He gave you His righteousness
 - Or, are going to say, nice story, but I don't care, I don't need Jesus
- **God's eternal cosmic plan centers on Jesus, our King, our Priest**
 - Abram's response to God's plan and promise was worship
 - Let us respond in prayer, worship, and the Lord's Supper