

FAMILY MATTERS, MATTER

An Uncle And A Nephew: Part 2

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The rescue motif is woven into most movies. In fact, there aren't too many flicks where you don't encounter it. You know how it goes. Someone is in distress and in need of deliverance, but they are incapable of helping themselves. Someone, usually more powerful than them, comes into to fight the forces of darkness in order to bring salvation and security. To test your movie skills, I'll show you a picture, and you name the rescuer, okay?



Iron Man

Captain America





Batman



Bagheera

Yoda



Kung Fu Panda



With this rescue motif basically ever-present when you head to the movies or watch a DVD, we should all be primed for knowing what to do when a family member is in dire straights, right? We should, as followers of Christ, waste no time springing into action, seeking to do what it necessary to help our relatives with issues either or their making or ones which have been thrust upon them. Sure, there are times when you let the sinner learn from their sin; however, more often than not, we need to put on the Iron Man suit and he ad into the thick of the action.

The story of Abraham’s relationship with his nephew, Lot, easily validates what we need to do. As we know from our prior study, Lot made a really bad decision in moving his family near the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He chose the greener grass over the brown grass where God promised He would bring provision and blessing.

As we learned, he made this decadent decision all by himself because Abraham lovingly and selflessly let him have the first choice of where he’d like to put down his family roots. He’d live to regret the day he moved into the twin cities area. Abraham, on the other hand, would live to be given an opportunity to become a righteous rescuer. It’s a role he’d fit to a tee, and it’s one which now might be one God wants you to step into some 4,000 years later based upon what Lot is doing in your family line.

Before we study how the saint should attempt to rescue a difficult relative from this portion of Scripture, let me first give you a little background of the passage. We will begin by first reading verses 1 through 12 of Genesis 14:

Territory of Ancient of Israel



¹And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer

king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, ²that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). ³All these came as allies to the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). ⁴Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but the thirteenth year they rebelled. ⁵In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim and the Zuzim in Ham

and the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim,⁶ and the Horites in their Mount Seir, as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness.⁷ Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and conquered all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, who lived in Hazazon-tamar.⁸ And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah and the king of Admah and the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim,⁹ against Chedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim and 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 the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country.¹¹ Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed.¹² They also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.”



Stop right there for a moment. Understanding what occurs here is utterly pivotal to understanding Abraham's actions in verse 13. Let me, therefore, give you a quick run down on these events.



What we have here is the first war mentioned in the Bible. What precipitated it? Four kings, from what is now modern day Iraq, collected protection money from the five kings of the area just south of the Dead Sea for twelve years. Sound familiar? According to Dr. Henry Morris, a hydrologist, this area was edenic-like for some time after the Noachic flood, which substantiates why there were kingdoms located here¹

For some reason, the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela got tired of sending a portion of their country's profits to the extortionist allied army north of them.

¹ Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 312-313

- Perhaps they got greedy.
- Perhaps they thought their military would protect them.
- Perhaps they grew tired of these anti-homosexual overlords.

So, they rebelled. The Hebrew word here is most interesting. According to the Hebrew lexicon *Brown Driver and Briggs*, *marad* (מָרַד) denotes “bold and audacious acts of rebellion or disobedience.”² Later, it will be employed to describe Israel’s rebellion against God’s laws (Josh 22:16-19; Ezek. 2:3).



The northern kings, under the leadership of Chedorlaomer, wasted no time in attacking their unwilling, unruly vassal. First, they pounced on and wiped out all of the people groups/tribes/countries north of Sodom. Why? They did this to keep from being attacked from the rear, and to also spread fear in the people of the Sodom region. Next, they wiped out all the neighbors Sodom to their east, south, and southwest. Why? To tighten the noose and show the rebels there was nothing they could do to stop judgment day. Nothing.

How did the soldiers of Sodom and Gomorrah fare? Verse 10 gives you the tragic war footage. They turned tail and ran, and what is most interesting is some of them fell into tar pits while others hid in the hills. Isn’t it interesting that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell into these pits? Really, the Hebrew verb here means they hid in these pits like a bunch of cowards. Concerning their cowardice, the Hebrew scholar H. C. Leopold said years ago:

“That the kings of the Dead Sea region did not turn out sooner to encounter the foe of whose approach they had long been aware, indicates either lack of ability and enterprise, or lack of courage, or, perhaps, the illusory hope on their part that their enemies would not venture against them. It seems most in harmony with the facts of the case to argue that the debauched mode of life characteristic of this group had debased their courage so that they only took up arms when actually compelled to and then put up but a pitiable defense”³

Living a sexually deviant lifestyle can cost you, as we see from this sordid story.

² S. R. Driver and Charles A Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon*, ed. Francis Brown (Lafayette, Indiana: Associated Publishers and Authors, INC, 1981), 597.

³Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 455.

The meaning of their names tells you why they probably hid in these black, sticky, smelly holes. Bera was the king of Sodom and his name meant *in wickedness* (בְּרָע), and Birsha, the king of Gomorrah also had an appropriate name. It meant *in iniquity* (בְּרָשָׁע). Is it not ironic how the two most sexually deviant and promiscuous cities of all time had kings whose names adequately reflected the immoral standing of their people. It's kind of poetic then that they, of all people, fell into tar pits, for these pits served as a snapshot of their lives: A deep, dark, hideous black hole. They, therefore, found shelter in these pits so they could live for their sin on another day.

Having destroyed the armies of the Vale of Siddim, the northern armies then waltzed into Sodom and Gomorrah and took whatever they wanted: men, women, children, gold, silver, weapons, soldiers, and anything else that had worth *along with Lot and all of his possessions*. Who says that living next to Sodom isn't costly? Listen up. Should you choose the greener grass of decadence (be what it may) to enhance your life, you will always be carried away into further bondage, being stripped of the things you once held dear, like possessions and family. I've seen it time and time again. Lot learned this lesson the hard way, didn't he?

Now this is where the story gets real interesting for those of us who want to know how to deal with difficult relatives. Verse 13 is pivotal, like a door hinge to the story, taking us from a problem to a solution, from destruction to liberation. Listen to Moses' inspired words:

¹³ Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. "

One man eluded the northern army and made his way to good, old Abraham. He obviously wasted no time giving Abraham the gory details of how quickly the cities of the Vale of Siddim fell, and about the tragic loss of Abraham's nephew, Lot.

The next verse introduces us to what I call ...

How To Rescue A Difficult Relative From A Bad Situation (Gen. 14:14-24)

Let's first read the verses in question and then come back and sift through the living, life principles we find here.

¹⁴ When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. ¹⁶ He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people. ¹⁷ Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God

Most High. ¹⁹ He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' He gave him a tenth of all. ²¹The king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.' ²²Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, ²³that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, I have made Abram rich. ²⁴I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share.'"

We learn from these verses that Abraham did four things to rescue his difficult relative from his dangerous situation. These concepts, in turn, become truths we, too, can and should apply with the Lots in our families.

Act With Selflessness

Zero in on the opening word of verse 14, "When." When Abraham received the bad news about his difficult relative, he could have said or done many things:

- "That's too bad about Lot. What's for dinner tonight?"
- "Say, I have every right to be vindictive, to relish in the fact that Lot is getting payback for the pain and problems he caused me." Is this a snapshot of you? Are you "righteously" vindictive?
- "I told him not to move to Sodom. He should have listened to me."
- "I'm really too old to pick up weapons, mount a camel and ride off to help anyone."
- "You reap what you sow, don't you?"
- "I just don't get involved in the personal affairs of other family members."
- "He got himself in the predicament. He should get himself out of it."

Yes, Abraham could have said any of these things but he didn't. In fact, he said and did just the opposite. He must have said, "Let's go," because he immediately went out to personally lead 318 hand-picked warriors from his clan to go and rescue Lot. And please underscore this salient point: He did this when he was a senior citizen. When most seniors would say, "How can I do anything to help my nephew? My cataracts make it hard to see, my walker will get in the way, my arthritis won't permit me to get on a camel, and I go to bed at 6 o'clock." Abraham was cut from a different piece of cloth, wasn't he? The inspired Scriptures tell us "he led" the warriors He, a man who had been getting Canaan's version of AARP magazines for many years!

Shocking. Just goes to show you how much he selflessly loved his difficult relative, Lot. He was willing to lead the troops on an over 120 mile trip at night, through rugged dangerous terrain in order to rescue the impulsive, greedy relative.

That's how you should love your difficult relative who is in bondage for whatever the reason. If their bad decision has left them at the mercy of drugs, alcohol, adultery, gambling, or sexual promiscuity, you have a God-given obligation to drop what you are doing and go and help them, as best you can.

I fear too many of us are stuck pontificating at the Oaks of Mamre, talking about what should be done, or what should have been done to avert or solve the terrible scenario at hand, all without getting on the camel and heading out of town in one big hurry. Please, don't use flimsy excuses as to why you can't . . . or won't . . . help a grandson or granddaughter in their predicament. Maybe they caused the mess they are in, or maybe they, like Lot, are just the recipients of collateral damage. Look, if air is still moving in and out of your lungs, if your heart monitor hasn't flat-lined, if you can still get up and get moving, and you're a Christian, then God calls you to stop being selfish and start being selfless toward your difficult relative. I wonder how many family members here today have a Lot who is desperately in need of your assistance. May Abraham's model move you to take some action right now before they are forever lost to the enemy. May Abraham's model move you to use the resources God has put you in charge of so you can utilize them for a much needed rescue.

Act With Soldiers

Abraham didn't go alone. Smart man. As I said, he took 318 men with him, men who were born "in his house." Why did he take *these* men? They went because he knew he could trust them. Further, because they were from his household he knew what they were capable of on a given battlefield, and what their abilities were in the thick of a fight.

Should you have a wayward Lot in your family who needs rescuing, one of the smartest things you could do is to seek to rescue them with a group of godly warriors surrounding you. Got to confront that relative at the bar, then I'd say it's probably not prudent to go in their alone. Got a relative who is abusing his wife, your sister? Take some trustworthy, godly, prayerful friends with you. Got to tell that son to quit living with that young woman outside of marriage? Again, schedule a meeting with the one who is caught in sexual bondage and take some godly soldiers with you.

One of my friend's, a former undercover police officer, and a big one at that. Standing at 6' 4," weighing about 245 pounds, and a multiple degree black belt, he could be a handful of hurt in a tight spot. When his youngest son, also a black belt, wound up in a cult in northern California and became a virtual prisoner in their guarded and secluded compound, my fearsome, godly friend went with buddies to extract his son and get him to a skill deprogrammer. His actions saved his son in more ways than one.

Think about how Jesus commissioned the disciples. They went out how? Two by two. Why not one by one? Jesus obviously was well-acquainted with the story of Abraham and Lot. He knew that two are more powerful than one when you are seeking to break through enemy lines.

So, stop and ask yourself: Who do I need to rescue with God's help?

Act With Strategy

How could 318 men take on a force amassed from four kingdoms? That's easy. They had a well thought out strategy. They divided their forces so they appeared larger than they really were, and they attacked their enemy at night when there would be the most confusion. Had they waltzed into the enemy camp in broad daylight, they would have never made it back to the oaks. Since they had a strategy, a game plan, they rescued everyone and everything who or which had been taken by the enemy (v. 16). Place heavy emphasis upon the word "all."

Too often we have a difficult family member we need to rescue but our rescue attempt is reactive and passionate, instead of calculated and cognitive. Depending on the mess your family member has got themselves in, you will probably need to do a whole lot of planning in order to deliver and help them.

- Have you spoken with people who have been in similar circumstances to learn how they navigated? Have you asked them what worked well and what didn't?
- Do you know a godly counselor you can hook the family member up with to head back to health and wholeness?
- Depending on the severity of the situation, have you spoken with an attorney to determine what you can and cannot do legally?
- Have you spoken with the University in question to let them know of your concerns in relation to your child? Have you sought their input?
- Do you know where you would send your drug addicted child once you rescued them? When I was a youth pastor, a straight A girl in my group became hooked on cocaine. Her parents eventually intervened and placed her in a caring facility in San Diego designed to help people like her break the addiction. I remember the last time I saw her at the hospital. She was skinny and weak, but she was free and healthy because family members loved her enough to do they hard thing.
- Have you spent ample time in prayer about what God would have you actually do?

If you have a "Lot" in your life that is captive to a cruel general, then it's time to stop thinking about yourself, gather the troops, and devise a strategic plan to save them. And let me add this one observation: Lot wanted to be rescued. He welcomed it. If you are "Lot," then act as he did. Recognize deliverance when it knocks on your door and get moving to life and liberty. It may be your last chance!

One final truth can't be missed from this passage about how to properly free a difficult relative from a bad predicament.

Act With Sacrifice

Follow carefully what Abraham did with all the loot he seized.

¹⁷ Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. ¹⁹ He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' He gave him a tenth of all.

Unfortunately, I don't have time to go into a lengthy discussion about who Melchizedek was. We'll save that for another study. Suffice it to say I believe he was the King and High Priest of Salem, which was the ancient name of Jerusalem. He met Abraham's

troops in the King's Valley, wherever that was, and brought them refreshment after their long and demanding trek.

After this godly King/Priest (and great Christ-type, cf. Hebrews 7) blessed Abraham by the name of the most High God, Abraham recognized the spiritual stature of this man and gave him ten percent of his take from the rescue. Ten percent was probably a hefty amount, too. Had he rescued \$10 million dollars from the enemy, then 10% of that figure would be more than what most people see in a lifetime. Why did Abraham do this? Abraham acted in this fashion to show he realized his victory was a direct result of the work of that Most High God in his life.

We've wrongly taken this as the model for modern day tithing when it has absolutely nothing to do with it. Contextually and theologically it is merely a good rule of thumb to follow when God blesses your life with a victorious rescue. So what about it? Has God richly blessed you because you have been obedient? Has He opened the windows of heaven and given you financial blessing you did not anticipate? Then I think you know what you should do. Worship Him and tell him "Thank you" by giving him ten percent of the proceeds.

Abraham's selfless and wise ways are really showcased in the closing verses of this historical narrative:

²¹The king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.'

After a military victory, it is only logical for the winner to divide the spoils. Abraham, however, would have none of this.

²²Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, ²³that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, I have made Abram rich. ²⁴I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share.'"

Why did Abraham do this? For one, God had already blessed him greatly, so he didn't need more. For another, he didn't want to be tied in any way, shape, or form to the king of Sodom, Bera. Interesting. If you align yourself with wicked people, the probability of their wickedness impacting you is amplified. Far wiser to be satisfied with God's provision and to walk away from whatever the godless may be offering you, as tantalizing as it might be. Abraham was a class spiritual act. Truly, he is someone we should all desire to emulate.

Conclusion

Sometimes during the summer, my parents paid my way to fly on PSA airlines from southern to northern California to visit my Uncle Tony, Aunt Roberta, and my cousin, Steven, who was, in many respects, like the brother I never had. My uncle, a very successful farmer, whose family emigrated from Spain at the turn of the last century,



didn't mind me taking care of his awesome lawn, and he frequently invited me out to his ranch to do a little work.

One particular day, he told me and Steven to take a tractor and a road planer out to the perimeter of a given sugar beet field to level it out. He informed us that he owned the road, but his Chinese neighbor, who spoke very little English, constantly fought him over land rights. He said we should be

fine as we worked, but if any issue flared up, he would take care of it. With that, we fired up the machinery and headed out to the road in question.

Steven drove the tractor while I stood on the road planer device, moving a massive blade up and down with the turn of a large wheel. It was really a lot of fun, and as I looked back over my shoulder occasionally, our work really made the road look better and it made it more conducive for pick-up trucks to drive on without tearing up their front ends. All of that changed with the approach of a fast-moving, kick-up-the-dust truck with a crazy, angry neighbor at the wheel. Believe me, I thought he was going to take us out the way he approached and then sped by us.

Within seconds, he blocked our advance with his truck, and then he quickly exited the vehicle like a SWAT officer heading to an active crime scene. I had never seen, nor encountered anyone that mad. He gave the phrase *hopping mad* a new name. As his fists pumped the air, his high tone words vacillated between English and Chinese. Ever tried reasoning with someone who is unreasonable? It doesn't usually work. It certainly didn't in this case. He just became more explosive.

Just when I thought we were going to get in a fisticuffs, up came my Uncle Tony in his blue and white Chevy Silverado. In all the years I had known him, I had never seen him angry, and I had never heard him raise his voice. That all changed as he exited his vehicle. The next thing we knew, the two men were literally chest to chest and eye to eye, yelling at each other as they both now pumped their fists in the air. Tony's point was forceful and true to the nasty neighbor: One, you almost hit these boys with your truck, and two, this is my land so get off of it.

After a few tense moments, eventually the nasty neighbor walked back to his truck and drove off onto his land. We never saw him again, and we were thankful Tony the Titan showed up to save us.

This story bears a strong resemblance to the one we just studied in Genesis. I guess you could say I was Lot that day to a limited degree, the nasty neighbor was Chedorlaomer, and my Uncle Tony was, well, Abraham. What did he do? He saved me (and Steve) from a bad situation, because that is what relatives do, especially if they are believers.

What about you? Are you Abraham today? Have you received word that Chedorlaomer has wreaked havoc on your nephew, Lot? I think you know what you need to do. It's time to pray and develop a strategic countermove to bring health and wholeness to the sordid situation.