

Part 15: I Need a Hero

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In 1942, the Bat-signal lit up the Gotham sky for the first time calling for their Dark Knight to rise to the occasion. And in 1984, Bonnie Tyler put out another clarion call for a world in distress: “Where have all the good men gone, and where are all the gods? Where’s the streetwise Hercules to fight the rising odds? Isn’t there a white knight upon a fiery steed? Late at night, I toss and I turn, and I dream of what I need.”

What does she need? “I need a hero, I’m holding out for a hero till the end of night. And he’s gotta be strong, and he’s gotta be fast, and he’s gotta be fresh from the fight.”

We love a good hero story. Because we’ve all been in situations where we feel like we need a hero. Unfortunately, for most of us, heroes only exist in the minds of songwriters and the myth of comic books. But our passage today in the book of Genesis is real history. It is real history ripe with drama, power and battles fit for the silver screen—and yet it’s a real story that gives us a glimpse into the life of real heroes.

But unlike a history book which speaks of something that was only good for those lucky enough to be alive then—this passage is part of how God shows himself to us today as the hero we need in our own day.

But this text has both danger and beauty. It’s dangerous because it seems self-evident. Abram was the hero Lot needed to save him from dangerous men. The title of our sermon today is “I need a hero.” But the beauty of the passage is that it moves our eyes from the problems which are easy to see in order to point us to the hero we need to see.

The dramatic rescue mission of Abram in the face of world superpowers points us to the greater Abram who is not just a hero-king, but a hero-priest.

And that’s what we will see today. Our main point is this: **We need a hero who is more than a king.** We will see this in three parts first, we will see **Big Kings and Bigger Problems**, then we will see **Big Kings and Bigger Promises**, and lastly **Big Kings and a Bigger Priest**.

Last week we saw the separation of Abram and his nephew Lot. Lot chose the greener acres southeast of the Promised Land, and Abram remained in the west.

Immediately after this, the author of Genesis directs our attention away from the line of Adam, Seth, Noah, and now Abram and focuses on this group of nine kings. This should strike us as unique, and intentional. This is not an odd historical aside, but instead it’s framing the drama of what is to come.

So far we’ve been focused on one man and nephew living in tents in the land God promised to give them. But now we are introduced to threats outside and around the Promised Land. These threats are big nations, with big armies, and powerful kings. Abram has God’s promise—but these kings seem to have all the power.

This is our first point today: **Big Kings and Bigger Problems.**

Verses 1-12 outline two broader conflicts that surround the Promised Land. The conflict stems between two alliances of superpowers. This map helps us get a lay of the land. In the north (red circle) you have the big four kings. Chief among these is King Chedorlaomer, King of Elam. He was one bad dude. He's who Jim Croce warned about when he introduced us to, "Bad, bad, Leroy Brown, baddest man in the whole downtown." In the south is the alliance of five kings, of whom Bera King of Sodom appears to be the primary figure (blue circle).

This passage speaks of two battles both fought in one place, the Valley of Siddim (the star). The first occurred fourteen years ago when the northern four invaded the southern five and conquered them. The result was that these five kings were now subjects to the northern four and they would be expected to pay tribute back to those kings.

However, after 13 years of this agreement, the southern five tribes rebelled. They stopped paying their tribute, and in year 14 Chedorlaomer and all their forces marched south once more for battle in the valley of Siddim. This is where geopolitics and God's promise collide in our passage today.

People who hear God's promise still live in a world of human powers. When kings go to war—so do our hearts and our hopes. The highest grossing movie franchise in history is the Marvel franchise bringing in over 31 billion dollars. It's not called "marvel" for nothing.

It's a world where big bad supervillains are fought off by a band of opposing superheroes. We aren't interested in what little people do against big people—we want big people who fight for our peace to fight against the big threats who would stand against it.

Today is the Super Bowl and I've noticed a trend of reporters asking players what their favorite Bible verse is. I don't doubt that some of these men are genuine believers—and that this is a wonderful platform for them to share the gospel. But most of the time I see these clips used by Christians as if to say, "See, we are powerful people too!"

It is not enough for us to have a powerful king in heaven—we want the validation and the protection that can come from the powers of fame and might that our world recognizes. This is probably what caused the southern five to rebel. They had their own kings, they had more of them, and they could defend themselves.

Isn't that what drew Lot closer to Sodom? Remember last week? Last week Lot was drawn as he lifted up his eyes and saw the land of Sodom was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.

While Abram was left believing in the promise he couldn't see, Lot was drawn further from the promise of God by the power and provision of things he could see.

John Bunyan wrote another allegory called "The Holy War," and in it he creative retells the story of how Satan took captive men's soul, and the battle the Christ would win to bring them back. He said that men initially dwelt safely in the kingdom that God had made—and it was guarded by five gates: the smell gate, the sight gate, the taste gate, the touch gate and the ear gate. And the enemy was able to entice us to

lower down our doors by appealing to our senses. They offered promises beyond our wildest dream, and they caused our guardian called, “Captain Resistance,” to peek his head over the wall only to take an arrow through the head.

Once Captain Resistance was dead, all of our senses were open to the promise of sin. Lot peeked over the wall. His sight gate went down, and he moved closer to Sodom despite its wickedness. He tasted the crops of their field. He smelled the grain crushed behind their walls. He heard the celebrations at night—and pretty soon his tent which was pitched outside of Sodom moved inside Sodom. He thought he was safe, he thought he had the kings he needed to protect him. Just far enough from sin—is always too close to sin. And when the big five moved to war—everything he hoped for was in a moment lost.

The five powers went out against four, kings against kings, hopes against hopes, and here’s what we read: **Genesis 14:10-12**, “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. So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, the son of Abram’s brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.”

The five kings in the south probably felt safe rebelling. They were powerful, and walking an army from Elam to Siddim was the equivalent of walking from Missoula to L.A.. Lot thought he was safe. He settled amidst wicked people, but they seemed like helpful people.

But in one fell swoop, they were all swept up together. The kings hid like groundhogs, and Lot found himself carried away as a consequence. If we put our hope in the worldly powers, provisions, and princes of this world we will inevitably be swept up by those of greater power, provisions and princes. It is a zero-sum game. Whatever human hope we have, it will fail. That’s the story of history. Whatever human power we find peace in. It will fail. Babylon fell, Rome fell, and so too will all human powers. And if your hope is in them—you will fall as well.

Yet, so long as we live, there is hope even for those who feel swept away. Here is our next point: **Big Kings and Bigger Promises**.

Let’s read on, **Genesis 14:13**, “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.”

Notice how Abram is introduced into this conflict. He is introduced as a Hebrew. That world identified him in two ways. First it marked him off as a people group, one from the line of ‘Eber. He’s not just a man, but he’s a representative of a people. But the world also means, “one from the other side of the river.” In other words, though he’s a people group—he’s an outsider. He doesn’t belong with the big leagues. And this checks out because his allies aren’t big league guys either. They aren’t even people groups—they are mostly other family clans that settled near him.

Moreover, Abram only has 318 men who have been trained for battle with him.

And relationally speaking, remember the last encounter between Abram and Lot. Lot, selfishly and shamefully, despised his uncle and took for himself the better portion of the Promised Land. And he didn’t even stay there! He was drawn out of it. He insulted Abram, he left the land, he went where he shouldn’t have gone, and if I’m Abram I think this is a great opportunity for Lot to learn from his own mistakes.

But that's not what happened.

Abram went. Why? Well, Abram had two things. First, he had God's promise. He knew what Lot learned the hard way. That what we have in the promise of the Lord is what we need to live wisely and well in the problems of life. If all Abram had was 318 men, going up against five kings, and if that's what God wanted—he had more than enough.

But second, notice what moves the one who is shaped by God's promise. Lot was moved to Sodom because he lusted for easy living. Bera was moved to war because he thought he could win his own battles. And Chedorlaomer mustered a long form military crusade to defend his own pride.

Sin moves us by fear, false confidence, and pride. But people of promise are moved to war out of love. It was Abram's love for Lot—his kinsman—that drove him to war.

Life in a sinful world means that sinners will often get swept away. But life in a sinful world means that righteous brothers will often need to step up to save others. Abram was willing to risk what he couldn't lose in order to bring back those who were already lost.

Here's what we see: **Genesis 14:14-15**, "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. And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people."

Armed with the promise, fueled by love, bolstered with hope—Abram put to flight the five kings who conquered the modern world.

Abram's confidence in the promise of God made him confident to enter into the problems of others, and it should for us too.

This is what motivates the Christian mission today. In Christ, through faith, our sins are removed. We have been set free from sin's slavery. We, by grace, learn to live further and further from the gates of Sodom. And yet there are others around us who are often swept away. Seeking them is costly. It requires us to get up and go. It calls us to cross social boundaries, enter into awkward conversations, open up our homes, miss out on our hobbies and to cross over into dangerous and hostile lands.

But we do so because Christ our true brother and chief shepherd pursued us. And he has given us not only a promise of future glory—but a present confidence and strength through his own Holy Spirit. The power we have to stir our hearts to love and our feet to battle is the very Spirit of God himself. For it was Jesus who sent the church out saying, **Acts 1:8**, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The promise we have in Christ doesn't only make us concerned about our own small portion of land—it draws us in love and fills us with strength to go out into all the lands, other lands defeating the kingdom of darkness by preaching the gospel of Jesus. If you want power, if you want security, here it is. Undefeated since eternity past. And he's calling you not into a life of disconcerted contentment—but of costly evangelistic service.

Jesus will build his church. The gospel will save the lost. Will you go out with Him for the sake of our brothers and sisters who are stuck in sin, and to those who need to hear the gospel in order to be set free from sin?

Abram did it. I hope we will too.

But here is where the real battle begins. While Abram was victorious on the battlefields of war—we are now drawn to the battlefield of peace. It is not war which tests us the most—but peace. What will you do when you’ve won what you wanted?

Here we enter into our last scene and final point: **Big Kings and a Bigger Priest.**

In verse **17**, Abram returns after slaying kings. He arrived in the King’s Valley. And out to meet him came the King of Sodom. Finally, Abram had what he wanted. He was no longer the man from across the river—he was the conquering hero who should have been seen as such.

His neighbors who ignored him, now came out to meet him. God had long promised to make Abram a nation, and to bless other nations through him. It was easy for Abram to think this is the fulfillment. Because as the King of Sodom came—so too would and offer.

The expectation would have been for Abram to return to Sodom her captives, and for the King of Sodom then to give to the victor all the spoils of war. To the victor would go the spoils and this exchange of goods would not only have been customary—but official. There would be a treaty and expectation of fellowship between Abram, Sodom, and the other four kings.

Isn’t this what Abram would have wanted? He would have been seen as respectable. He’d be acknowledged by the most powerful alliance as a real player, one worth of attention. He’d be an outsider no more. He’d add to his growing retinue of wealth, and he’d add allies he needed for security. Yet if he were to accept this token from the King of Sodom he would be officially entering into an alliance with them.

Would Abram have done it? Was he thinking about it? Would you do it? Isn’t this even what Jesus faced when tempted by Satan? He was offered the whole world, and all the spoils of it—if only he would bow down and worship Satan. Sometimes sin’s trap is most powerful not when it attacks our weaknesses, but when it sings songs of promise to our strengths. You deserve worship Jesus, come and be seen as who you are—the Christ. Abram is the conquering hero—don’t you want others to know that? I can make it happen. I can provide it for you. I can give you the recognition you’ve always wanted. Tell Captain Resistance to lend his ear.

But before the King of Sodom was even able to open his mouth. Another king showed up. A tenth king. **Genesis 14:18**, “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)”

There’s a number of contrasts that we should be able to see right off the bat. Melchizedek stood in opposition to the Bera King of Sodom. “Bera” is a name that can also be translated as “Son of Evil.” “Melchizedek,” as the author of Hebrews reminds us, can be translated as “Son of Righteousness.”

Sodom, as we saw, was a city of great wickedness. Melchizedek is from Salem, which is Jerusalem, and it means peace.

Coming to meet Abram is the Son of Evil from the city of wickedness and the Son of Righteousness from the city of peace. But Melchizedek is more than a king. He's a priest, a priest of God most high. And lest Abram strike his hand in pledge with Sodom—Melchizedek speaks first, blessing Abram.

Genesis 14:19-20, "And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

Do you see what Melchizedek did? He reminded Abram of the one who stood behind his promise. It was the Lord Most High who is possessor of heaven and earth. The role of the Big Cheddar is already taken. And it is the Lord who has delivered enemies into your hand. And it was Melchizedek who blessed Abram by leaving no room for doubt.

We don't just need a king to keep us safe on the outside, we need a king who is a priest to protect our hearts on the inside. The best way to not be swept up in Sodom, is to have a heart that sees nothing it needs from Sodom. That's what priests do—they intercede between God and man, helping men remember and approach the promise of the Lord with confidence.

And being so blessed and so reminded look at what happened next: **Genesis 14:20-24**, "And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share."

The King of Sodom gave his best. He tried to draw Abram in by offering all that Abram ever wanted. Respect, power, comfort and wealth. But Abram took nothing from Bera, and instead gave freely to Melchizedek. To the victor, goes the spoils.

And Abram turned to the King of Sodom and said, "I don't need your gifts. I need nothing from you except that which is necessary for my men. Because I have struck my hand in pledge not with any man, but with the Lord, God most High. He's the possessor of heaven and earth. He's the king I need." And then he walked away.

Abram didn't need to live like a King, but he needed to be saved by a priest.

This passage is one of the most profound passages in all of scripture. Why? Because who is Melchizedek? We don't know anything else about him. He was here, and this was it. But Abram, conquering Abram, was so blessed by him that Abram the hero indebted himself to Melchizedek by paying a tribute of his own.

The offering of the King of Sodom makes it obvious that Abram is the hero in the first scene. But Abram's offering to Melchizedek makes it obvious who the hero is in the second. He delivered Abram by reminding him of the blessing Abram had in the Lord.

And we don't hear anything else of Melchizedek until a long while later, King David, the King of the Hebrews, was writing a song under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and he wrote this: **Psalm 110:3-4**, "Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

Jesus himself quotes this very Psalm to align himself as the true king from the line of David. But the author of Hebrews reminds us that it also put Jesus as true king of David, and a priest like Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:7-10, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek."

Lot didn't cry out to Abram—but Abram acted when Lot was in danger. Abram didn't cry out to the Lord—but Melchizedek inserted himself when Abram was in danger. Jesus cried out for us when we ourselves would not. We have at times gone to war for our own hope in lust, pride and comfort. We have put ourselves in danger time and time again. But our hero is a priest and a king.

He already defeated sin and death. And he will come back one day to deal with the physical powers of this world. But right now his battle, our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the powers and principalities in the heavenly places. The main battle ground for that campaign is our hearts, and there we have a priest who works daily to defend us.

He directs us back to the Lord, reminding us that we have been delivered, and calling us to offer our worship to him and not to the world. Abram's greatest war wasn't where we thought it was—and neither is yours.

The Prince of Peace enters into the battle ground of peace—and he draws us away from the false promises of the world so that we might stand in his peace—true and abiding peace. A peace from which we will not be swept up and away by foreign powers. But a peace that one day will sweep us up into heaven forever. You need a hero. And you can find such a one as that in Jesus Christ.

So let us look to our King and know his campaign is still ongoing, and yet it is not contested. Let us say with Paul, "he has delivered us, and he will deliver us again." And while we are in the battles of the world—let it not be because we feel our hope is lost—but because there are others who are lost without hope. We will not be their king—but we know where they can find one.