

Genesis 14:8-24¹***Brother-Keeping Ministry: Saving Nephew Lot*****Introduction**

In Gen 4, God asks where Abel is after Cain has killed him. Cain replies, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?” The significance of these words extends far beyond the killing of Abel. It reveals the general reluctance of people to watch out for one another. Thus, by affirming that “I am my brother’s keeper”, you are saying that you will not only watch out for your own family, but you will also watch out for others. You will do your best to protect your literal or figurative brother—defend him, guide him, watch his back, take care of him, and keep him from harm.

Today, we want to look at a “brother-keeping” account in the Bible, not one about two brothers, but one about an uncle (Abraham) and his nephew (Lot).

Remember in Gen 13, Lot went down to Egypt with Abraham and there he got a view of the world ... and he loved it. He lifted his eyes and he saw the Jordan plain where the city of Sodom was situated. Gen 13:10 tells us that to Lot the whole region looked “like the garden of the LORD”. He had gotten a view of the world and its wealth, and was held captive by it. Come Gen 14, Lot had already moved into the city of Sodom, enjoying its wealth, but sadly, also participating in its sinful lifestyle.

In our text today (i.e. Gen 14:8-24), we see Abraham acting as a brother’s keeper to Lot by rescuing him from his captors—the four kings from the east. By the way, I will use the name “Abraham” to refer to “Abram” in this sermon today.

How can we be a brother’s keeper to one another like Abraham was to Lot?

I. The moral responsibility and authority of a brother’s keeper (14: 8-13)

V. 13 One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram.

In the verses preceding v. 13 (i.e. vv. 8-12), we are told that five small kings from around the area of the Dead Sea (Salt Sea) rebelled against King Chedorlaomer of Elam, whom they had served for twelve years. In the ancient world, one of the ways nations found protection was by subjecting themselves as vassals to a stronger king. After twelve years of serving as vassals, the five kings broke their allegiance, which later started a war. King Chedorlaomer and his three alliances from the east came down to fight against these five

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rebellious kings, including the king of Sodom. They defeated these five kings and took the spoils, which included Lot.

Abraham was many miles away, and he seemed unconcerned about what was happening ... until he heard that Lot was taken captive. Immediately, Abraham responded by preparing a rescue mission. The verses following v. 13 tell us that Abraham assembled his forces of 318 men, and together with his allies, he hastily pursued the captors of Lot.

I believe Abraham risked his life to save his nephew Lot because it was a matter of family honour. To fold up your arms and do nothing would simply mean dishonouring one's moral responsibility towards a family member as far as Abraham was concerned.

So Abraham divided his forces against the enemies by night, and defeated them. And he brought back his nephew Lot, together with all the other captured people and possessions.

Now, as we consider the narrative up to this point, in what ways can we see that Abraham had lived a life of separation?

We can see his separation in at least two ways.

- First, where was Abraham when he heard of the capture of Lot? He was not in Sodom. Though he was not in Sodom, he was still living in Canaan land. However, he did not live like Abraham a Canaanite, but he lived like ... look at v. 13 ... like "Abram the Hebrew". The root word for "Hebrew" is often used in the OT to refer to "an outsider who has crossed over from the other side".

Yes, Abraham lived in Canaan but he did not live like a Canaanite. The Canaanites were known for their pagan and sinful ways. Yes, even living in Canaan, Abraham lived a separate life—he's living in the world of Canaan land, but not indulging in the pagan and sinful ways of the Canaanites. That's why v. 13 identifies him not as "Abram a Canaanite" but "Abram the Hebrew"—i.e. he was very much viewed and known by the Canaanites as distinct from them; he was distinct like "an outsider who has crossed over from the other side".

- Second, when Abraham first entered Canaan, what did he do? Back in Gen 12:7, we are told that he built an altar after the Lord had appeared and said to him, "To your offspring I will give this land." In fact, Abraham never built a permanent house in Canaan land. Instead, he lived in tents the entire time he was in Canaan. Heb 11:9-10 says this of him—"By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents ... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." Abraham never really settled down; he considered himself a pilgrim on his way to somewhere better. I can hear him sing this song

in Canaan—“This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through. My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue ...”

As God’s people, we are called to be salt and light by remaining distinct. We are on a pilgrimage and this world is not where we will settle down eternally. And if nothing really distinguishes us from the world, we would be ineffective in impacting the world, or helping someone caught in sin, or ministering as brother’s keepers to one another.

Today, when the whole world (including our land) is battling this war against the COVID-19 pandemic, how can we stand distinct together as God’s people? I suggest two ways we can do that:

- *First, show the crowd that God’s presence is with us.* All the panic buying in the supermarkets, and hoarding of face masks and foodstuffs is a picture of everyone for himself. It is indicative that many are anxious and fearful at such a time. Many do not have a keen sense of help or higher power beyond themselves when facing such a crisis. Many feel that if they don’t help themselves at such a time, then nobody will.

We as God’s people are given three promises:

- In Deut 31:6, God has promised us this—“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified ... for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”
- In Matt 28:20, Jesus has declared that He is with us even to the end of the age.
- In John 14:16, we are promised the Holy Spirit who is our Comforter (or Helper), and who abides with us forever.

What does this mean? It means there is nowhere that we can be where God is not with us. It means even when alone in self-isolation, God is still with us.

Therefore, we can stand distinct at this time of crisis not by being panicky, but by presenting a posture of calmness and restedness because of God’s promised presence with us. Of course, we should exercise care, discretion, and social responsibility. But all these should be directed by the wisdom of God that we seek, not influenced by the fear of the crowd that we see.

- *Second, show the crowd that God’s light is with us.* The reality of COVID-19 means we must do what we can to be there for people. Just like the Good Samaritan who saw the beaten man on the road and stopped to help, we can intentionally stop and help those who are fearful and feeling alone. This doesn’t have to be in person. The fact is that it is sometimes wiser and more responsible not to do this in person. A simple phone call or a text message can make a world of

difference to someone who is fearful and feeling alone at this time (e.g. an elderly person who has to stay home because of greater susceptibility to infection).

Matt 15:6 says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Such a time like this is opportune time for us to spread and share the love of God with others in words and deeds. We are to seize the “Gospel moments” presented to show the crowd the light of God’s grace—pray and ask God to lead us to acts of love and kindness at such a time. For example:

- Instead of hoarding, we can give away items like face masks, foodstuffs, sanitizers, thermometers, health supplements, and even toilet papers—items that we can share with those who may need them more than we do.
- Show appreciation to encourage those whose work would require them to be in constant contact with people (even sick people), thereby being more exposed to the COVID-19 threat (e.g. healthcare professionals, front-desk staff).
- Bring the Gospel message to comfort those who are overwhelmed with fear and anxiety in a turbulent world today.

Yes, we are called to be salt and light in the world. For salt to be effective, it must be different from the medium it is placed on. And if we are to be light, we cannot live like the darkness.

How can we be a brother’s keeper to one another like Abraham was to Lot?

We need to be in the world, but not into worldliness—such a distinct life gives us that moral authority to correct and restore in God’s love.

We seek God’s help and wisdom to live distinct as His people, yet not distancing ourselves completely from the normal ways of life in where we are. Gen 13:2 tells us that God so blessed Abraham that he “had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold”—he stood distinct from the Canaanites, yet he stood equal with the top 5 richest men in Canaan.

Moving on ...

II. The vulnerability to temptations of a brother’s keeper (14:14-24)

V. 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).

We are told in the earlier verses 14-16 that Abraham called and rallied his 318 fighting men and his other allies when he heard of the capture of Lot. He then led them to fight against the combined might of the armies of the four eastern

kings. Probably outnumbered, but Abraham scored a decisive victory. He brought back all the captives, including Lot. He also recovered all the spoils of war that were taken away.

One can hardly fathom the temptation the victorious return of Abraham presented to him. His reception must be like the US victory parade in New York City at the end of WW II. If the king of Sodom personally came out to meet Abraham, how much more the people of the city, who had been hoping for the safe return of their loved ones, would want to do the same.

But if the king of Sodom had some words for Abraham, he had to wait because out of nowhere, the king of Salem appeared and said the words Abraham most needed to hear:

V. 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High.

V. 19 And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth;

V. 20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tenth of all.

I believe it was by divine design that Melchizedek's appearance interrupted the meeting between Abraham and the king of Sodom. Melchizedek is a crucial figure in this account because he places Abraham's victory in proper theological perspective. Melchizedek was a king and a priest. His words were intended to remind Abraham that the victory belongs to God, and his success was a result of God's favour on him.

Abraham's response was a testimony to his faith in the God worshipped by him as well as Melchizedek. His tithe was a visible acknowledgement that it was God who deserved the glory.

V. 20 says "... he (Abraham) gave him (Melchizedek) a tenth of all". What does it mean by "all" here—all of what?

Now note this—Abraham did not give a tithe of his own possessions. Abraham was not at home with his possessions. He was returning from battle to the Jordan plain with the possessions that the eastern kings had taken from the king of Sodom and his allies. The writer to the Hebrews informs us of the content of Abraham's tithe:

Heb 7:4 – "Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils."

After receiving Melchizedek's blessing, Abraham gave him a tenth of everything—i.e. a tenth of all the "choicest spoils" which he had regained for the king of Sodom and his allies.

Melchizedek was a king and priest. But the king of Sodom was a king and politician—he knew the politically correct thing to do, i.e. “the spoils belong to the victor; winner takes all”. He knew the best bargain he could strike was to get back his people and to surrender his possessions to Abraham.

So when it was his turn to speak, he said in v. 21b – “Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.”

But Abraham said to the king of Sodom in v. 24 – “I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”

The key reason why Abraham would not accept anything for himself from the king of Sodom is in vv. 22-23:

V. 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath

V. 23 that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’”

I believe the arrival of Melchizedek was a turning point for Abraham because it brought his victory into perspective. While men may give glory to men, the people of God must give glory to God because any victory or success ultimately comes from Him.

For this reason, Abraham could not accept the offer of keeping the goods of Sodom. To accept anything from a pagan king would imply glorifying himself, and even giving the king of Sodom the opportunity to suppose that his giving was responsible for Abraham’s success. The price of such goods was too high and so Abraham refused.

Melchizedek was the priest of God and, at the same time, king of Salem (which is another name for Jerusalem). In Psalm 110:4, David prophesied that the future messiah would not be a priest in the order of Aaron, but a priest from the lineage of Melchizedek—i.e. the future messiah would be both a priest and king (this is an Old Testament prophetic reference to Jesus Christ as the Messiah to come).

Melchizedek, the priest of God, discerned that this victory was not something Abraham could have done in his own power. That is why he blessed “God Most High”. The source of this victory was clearly divine. Abraham agreed with this when he gave a tithe to God Most High by offering it to Melchizedek.

The reason Abraham did not accept the king of Sodom’s offer was not only because he wanted to give glory to God, but also to protect himself from temptation. If he accepted the king of Sodom’s riches, he would be indebted to him, and he did not want any alliance with this pagan king.

It is important for us to hear this because ministering to those caught in some God-displeasing living can be a very dangerous ministry. It comes with many temptations. Abraham was tempted to be proud. The king of Salem saw only God Most High in this victory. But the king of Sodom only saw Abraham; he totally missed seeing God. Abraham was also tempted with the riches of Sodom, the very temptation that landed Lot in sinful Sodomite living.

Beware of this one insidious temptation:

When we minister as a brother's keeper to someone who has strayed away, that very straying can become our temptation.

It is like helping someone drowning. The person drowning, often to save himself, will cling to the rescuer in such a way that it could potentially drown both of them. So in humility, the brother's keeper would need to remain spiritually vigilant and dependent on the Lord as he ministers to the other person, lest he falls to the same temptation.

Also, the person who has been rescued might show his gratitude by glorifying the rescuer like a god.

Another insidious temptation faced by a brother's keeper is that of vainglory.

This implies covering oneself with the praises and glory that people we minister to are showering on us, and not giving all this back to God Himself.

Now this doesn't mean Abraham is always a perfect example from Gen 14 onwards. Proverbs 24:16 – “for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.”

Seven times is not meant to be a definite number; it is meant to represent many times. Yes, the righteous man can keep falling, but he also gets up again, and again, and again. Conversely, the wicked falls and stays down.

Don't let your failures deter you from making a commitment to God. Abraham was a righteous man not because he had never fallen, but he just kept getting up every time he had fallen.

What commitment is God calling you to make today?

Conclusion

The saving act of Abraham is indeed an encouraging account. But Abraham was not a perfect saviour. The Bible tells of a supremely greater Saviour than Abraham—i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

What commitment can you make today? If you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, I encourage you to consider committing yourself to know more about

Him so that you can one day believe and receive Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord.

In closing, I like to read this poem, "I Am My Brother's Keeper", written by Deborah Ann Belka, a contemporary Christian poet & song writer, as our prayer.

*I am my brother's keeper,
I help him to understand
that God wants him to put
his whole life in His hand.*

*I am my sister's keeper,
I help her to see the light
I encourage her to grow
and keep Jesus in her sight.*

*I am my neighbor's keeper,
I pray for their families needs
I support them to always listen
and follow where God leads.*

*I am my mother's keeper,
in her old age I help her out
I hold her hand when lonely
and keep away her doubt.*

*I am my father's keeper,
I lift to God his very soul
I pray every day and night
that God will make him whole.*

*I am my children's keeper,
I listen to their concerns
I pray as they become adults
God's will, they can discern.*

*The Lord is my keeper,
I pray to Him every day
to bring me anyone I can help
as I go about His way.*