

Providence Presbyterian Church

May 30, 2010

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OT Lesson: Genesis 14:8-15:6

NT Lesson: Hebrews 7:1-10

Introduction/context

- Today's message is from Genesis 14; a different type of message
- Instead of the standard 3 points and a poem, I want to tell a story
- (Done this twice in the past and heard no complaints)
- A story how I picture the events of Genesis 14 – where Melchizedek meets Abraham
- The general information is accurate, but I have embellished the details.
- Since this is a story, I want to ask that you use your God-given imaginations to picture these events.
- Join me in praying that shades of the Gospel would emerge from the text to encourage our hearts.

Chapter 1

The sun was setting as Abram leaned back against the mighty live oak tree in the plains of Hebron. He looked up at the sky that was quietly turning into a deep sea of blackness and where stars were taking their rightful place to begin their evening dance. All was quiet except for the familiar sounds of Sarai getting their spacious canvas tent ready for the night. He glanced back and saw her gentle silhouette projected on the wall of the tent. He loved her dearly but still felt ashamed for how he had treated her on their recent trek to Egypt. It had been over a year, and Sarah had forgiven him, but the memory of his foolishness still haunted him.

“Why was I so afraid?” he asked himself. *“God had made promises to me that I would be a father of a great nation. Why did I let the King of Egypt scare me? And how could I have made Sarai lie for me?”*

Abram's thoughts were interrupted by Sarai who had leaned out of the tent to ask, “Adoni, are you coming in soon?”

Adoni, thought Abram. *She still adores me and calls me her master.* He certainly didn't deserve it. After all, he had pulled her far away from her homeland, from her family, from everything familiar, all because the voice of God had called him. And here she is living in a tent. O, she deserves so much better.

“Adoni,” Abram heard a little louder as Sarai was walking barefoot through the grass coming to him. She kissed him on his head and sat own beside him under the spread of the great oak.

“It's nice, isn't is?” she asked while leaning her head on Abram's shoulder.

“What's nice?” Abram asked.

“The quiet. Life has been more peaceful since Lot and his family moved to the Valley of Siddim.”

The two reflected on this. Indeed life had been better. The conflict between Lot's shepherds and Abram's had reached a violent level. Something had to give.”

Abram broke the silence. "Do you miss them?"

"Would I be wrong in saying I didn't? Don't get me wrong, Adoni, I love your nephew and his wife and girls, it's just that..." She couldn't complete the sentence, and Abram knew why. Lot had two healthy children. Sarai was barren.

"You don't have to explain, Sarai. It's okay." He put his arm around her and held her close. He wanted to remind her again that God had promised to bless them with children. He wanted to hold up a handful of dust and show her again what God had said about how their descendants would be just as numerous – unable to be counted! But he had said such things so many times over the last few years that he wondered if even he believed it. And so, in the darkness of the night he simply held her.

Chapter 2

The next morning, Abram awoke in his tent to the sound of his servant, Eliezer.

"Abram Adoni, I am sorry to disturb you, but there is someone here you need to see."

Abram stood up and wrapped his robe around him. Sarai met him with a clay bowl of fresh water for him to wash his face before stepping into his sandals and into the morning air. His faithful servant was patiently waiting for him under the Oak. Eliezer smiled a morning greeting. Abram smiled back as he approached his servant and friend. Eliezer had been with Abram soon after they had left Haran. Abram acquired Eliezer in Damascus and changed his name to Eliezer – "My God is my helper." Eliezer had truly become God's helper to Abram and had always been faithfully by his side.

"What is it, my son?" Abram asked.

"A young man from Sodom arrived early this morning. He reports that your nephew Lot has been taken captive as plunder by the King of Elam."

"Where is this young man?" asked Abram in alarm.

"He's eating at the door of my tent. He has journeyed all night and arrived exhausted and hungry."

Abram sighed heavily and followed Eliezer as they walked to the tent. The sun had just broken the horizon as Abram and Eliezer approached the mouth of the tent. The young man, when seeing Abram, got down on his knees and bowed before him. Abram was old, but he was still a formidable man. Abram touched the man's head and told him to rise.

"My servant tells me you have news for me."

"Yes," began the young man. "The king of Sodom led a rebellion against the kings of Elam. He was aided by four other kingdoms – all of them defying their overlords. After the initial defiance, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela, readied themselves for battle. King Chedorlaomer arrived two days ago along with three other kings and all their armies. The battle was horrible. We weren't ready when the slaughter began."

"And what of my nephew, Lot?" Abram asked.

"Lot and I were taken captive along with hundreds more. We were all bound together by ropes and led north on the King's Highway. They took everything. As we entered this region, Lot told me that you lived at the Oaks of a certain Mamre. It was too risky for Lot to come. He needed to stay with his wife and two little girls. Being just a servant, I volunteered to escape and find you. And so last night, we created a diversion and I bolted."

"Where are they now?" asked Eliezer, who was listening intently.

"I don't know, but I would guess that they will continue to head north along the river until they reach the great lake. From there they'll head back to Mesopotamia."

Abram thanked him and then walked away with Eliezer.

"What are you thinking, Adoni?" asked Eliezer.

"He's my family," responded Abram, "we must go and rescue him."

Eliezer was silent for a few seconds and then said, "Adoni, let me take the men and we'll go. You're almost 80. Why risk your life?"

"No," answered Abram firmly, "I must go. God will not allow me to die. He has a promise yet to fulfill." Abram thought to himself, *now where did that come from?*

Eliezer smiled, "Yes, and I will do my part and protect you!"

Abram smiled back, "Go, get all our men ready for battle. I will go and ask our neighbors Mamre, Eshcol and Aner to see if they wish to help.

"Do you honestly think the three brothers will come?" asked Eliezer.

"I don't know," answered Abram. "They've been complaining about being bored ever since we settled here. We shall see."

Eliezer bowed to his master and ran to rally the servants. In the mean time, Abram mounted his horse and galloped to the farms of his neighbors. Surprisingly, all three men not only agreed to go, they seemed eager. *Maybe God has a plan in all this*, thought the great patriarch. He felt his faith strengthen as he rode home to pack for battle.

Chapter 3

By noon, Abram's small army had assembled at the giant Oak. 318 total. Not many men at all, but Abram knew this land like the back of his hand. Within the last year, God had instructed him to walk the whole area and he knew, deep down, that this was really his land, and that his children would one day occupy it all. Of course he had shared this with no one, especially not Mamre and his brothers. He always felt it odd that in their eyes, they were allowing Abram to dwell there, but in God's eyes, was it not Abram who allowed them to dwell there?

Abram sat on his horse and addressed his men: "My sons and brothers, we may be small, but the Lord is big. For several years I have told you about this God who called me out of Ur of the Chaldeans. Now I want to show you what he can do. He has promised to bless those who bless me, and he has promised to curse those who curse me. And now one arrogant king has unknowingly cursed me by reducing my nephew to poverty and servitude. We must pursue him and be God's hand to this defiant king. May my God be with us and show us his salvation."

Cheers and battle cries bellowed in the crowd, and Abram looked over at his tent where Sarai was looking up at him with deep admiration. There were no tears; there was no fear. She was looking at a man who was looking at God. She blew him a kiss as he turned his steed to the road. He was joined by his friends, the three brothers, each on a horse of their own. The army followed on foot at a fast pace. They hoped to catch up with the marauding kings before they reached Damascus.

Chapter 4

No sooner had they left the hill of the great oaks that Abram's doubts returned, this time stronger than ever.

"What am I doing?" thought Abram to himself. *"What am I thinking – marching my men into a battle against four experienced kings and their armies? Have I gone mad?"*

Abram tried to push these questions out of his head, but the thoughts kept pounding: *Perhaps God is punishing me for my stupidity in Egypt. That's got to be it. I'm on a suicide mission. Who am I to believe the one true God who created everything has singled me out to make me great. Did he really speak to me or was it my senile imagination causing me to hear folly?*

Abram's thoughts took him into dark and dreadful places. He tried to check his emotions but tears were trying to form in his eyes. *Should he keep on like this? Wouldn't it be better to abandon the chase and return home to Sarai? Was Lot so important? After all, it was Lot's foolish decision to settle in Sodom anyway.*

As Abram's thoughts focused on Lot, his mind drew him back to their final conversation before they had parted. Abram recalled how he and Lot had embraced, and how Abram had blessed him. It was soon after that when God spoke to him for a third. The words rushed into mind almost so strongly that Abram was mouthing the promise. God had said to him:

"Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

The words of promise came back to Abram like cool water rushing into a desert valley. He was strengthened inside and felt the emotional darkness slowly evaporate.

He sat up straight on his horse and scanned the road ahead. They were approaching the junction with the King's Highway. Ahead of them was the mighty Jordan River, and Abram began to hear it's babel over the rocks and boulders. As they approached the broad dirt road heading north, all along the road were thousands of footprints and animal tracks. The dung in and around the road was profuse. Flies were buzzing in what sounded like mini swarms, and the stench was overpowering.

"Looks like the marauding party stopped here not to long ago." said Mamre to no one in particular.

Abram responded. "Let's get beyond this point and stop for a break. The men need to rest."

They traveled on for about two miles and found a spacious place next to the Jordan. Eliezer helped Abram off his horse and asked how he could serve. Abram told him to tell the men to take a few minutes to eat and rest, and then they would move on.

After the break, the men picked up the pace and continued north until sunset. They reached the north side of the Sea of Galilee right as the sun slipped below the horizon. Abram dismounted and surveyed the land. They were not far now. Footprints were fresh and there was more debris scattered about.

Holding the leather reigns in his hand, Abram looked back at his men.

“We’re getting close to the city of Dan, which you’ve also heard it called as Laish. It a small town, and I predict the party has settled there for the night. This is our time, men. I suggest you eat some bread and catch your breath before we plan our attack.”

Over the next few minutes Abram divided his men into four companies. He then kneeled down on the beach with a stick and drew in the sand beside the lake bed. Eliezer held a blazing torch above his master as the men circled around. Abram drew a layout of the city and its surrounding geography. Eliezer nodded in agreement as Abram drew. Dan was close to Damascus where Eliezer had grown up. Mamre and his brothers looked on, greatly impressed by Abram’s knowledge of the terrain.

“When we approach the city,” instructed Abram, “I want company one to continue north, staying on the west side of the city. When you hear me sound the battle horn, move in to attack. Any soldiers who flee your way you are to ambush. Company two, you do the same on the south. Don’t let anyone make it to the river. Eliezer will lead company three who will ride in from behind and maneuver through the captives of war, quietly taking out the guards. Stay hidden among the spoils until you hear my horn. When you hear the battle horn, attack. I will lead company 4. We’ll head northeast from here and attack from the east side. Chedorlaomer and his allies will be towards the front. Archers will take out the night guards and then we’ll quietly move in to attack. Once the battle begins, close in on all sides. When all’s said and done, we’ll meet in the middle of the city.”

The men memorized the drawing and layout of the battle plan. Abram mounted his horse and led his company toward the city. They found a suitable spot to cross the Jordan and headed northeast along the River.

It took over an hour to reach the small city of Dan. The moon was full and it was a clear night so Abram made good time. Stopping at the headwaters of the Jordan, Abram climbed off his horse and washed his face in the cool water. He took off his outer robe and strapped on his sword. His men watched as they awaited final orders.

“Archers in front with me,” he said. “Once we climb this hill we’ll see the city wall. It’s not big, but is a simple rock wall about 6 feet tall. If there are watchmen, we’ll take them out with arrows. Once we’re in, I’ll lead the attack.”

Abram led his men out of the woods and up the hill leading to the city. As far as Abram could see there was no one posted at the wall. Chedorlaomer had most likely taken over Dan and plundered its own inhabitants. The men stealthily approached the wall and peered over it. About 50 feet away, they saw the kings’ tents guarded by several night watchmen. Behind the tents were several thousand soldiers bedded down for the night. Abram motioned for his archers to spread out and have an arrow on the string. Once in place, he held up his fingers and counted down 3, 2, and 1. As soon as he reached one, a dozen arrows stung through the air and felled most of the night guards. The sound startled the two remaining soldiers, but it was too late. As they drew their swords, Abram and his men were already on them. Abram pressed a ram’s horn to his lips and blew a horrific bellow. Eliezer, who had been just as successful on the west, began the assault on the soldiers. Abram, with drawn sword, hacked his way into the first tent and found a drunken king half awake and trying to stand. Abram thrust his sword through the king’s stomach and watched him slump to the ground. Abram pulled out his blade and rushed out. Soldiers were running everywhere, mostly trying to escape. His men were amazing

to behold. They fought their way through the fray and Abram followed. After what seemed like half an hour, though in reality it was less, Abram and his men met Eliezer and his company in the town center.

“Did you find Lot?” yelled Abram to his servant over the noise.

“Yes. He’s shaken up, but he’s fine. I untied him and asked him to organize all the captives and livestock.”

Assured of Lot’s condition, Abram looked at the battle and saw remaining soldiers fleeing northeast out of the city. At the same time, companies one and two were arriving in the center. The noise died down and the whole of Chedorlaomer’s army was either dead or fleeing. Abram looked at his men. As far as he could tell, he had lost none, including Mamre, Aner and Eshcol, who looked like they hadn’t had this much fun in years. They had seen the plunder and were already beginning to feel rich. Everyone was wide awake and full of adrenaline.

“We’re not done yet, men.” Abram called out. “Those who want to stay and rest can help Lot organize the captives. The rest of you, come with me.”

No one stayed behind. All Abram’s men ran with him in pursuit of the weakened army. They pursued them as far as the city of Hobah, which is a little bit north of Damascus, inflicting heavy casualties and collecting all they could carry – swords, shields, gold, silver, and clothing.

Chapter 5

At day break they rested and returned to the city of Dan.

Upon entering the city, Abram untied his horse where he had left it for the night and went in search of Lot. He found his nephew who had done a great job of tending to the captives. The elders of the city of Dan came forward and bowed low to Abram and his men. Abram blessed them and gathered his men and the spoils and began the trek home. The multitude was larger than Abram had imagined – citizens of five cities, all their families, and all their livestock. Everyone owed their lives to this great patriarch. Abram felt like a king. All this was his for the taking. He was, at this point in his life, the richest man in the land.

Lot joined Abram at the front of the pack. As they passed the day in travel, Lot told Abram all about the recent political events and about the culture of Sodom and her neighbors. Apparently Lot had become quite popular in Sodom and told his uncle that he sincerely hoped to be a good influence in the city, which was, to be honest, quite wicked and perverse.

While they were walking along the road, Lot heard his name called from somewhere down the road ahead.

“Sir Lot, is that you?” sounded the voice.

Abram looked at Lot; Lot cocked his head to listen.

“Lot, is that you?” called the voice again.

Lot called out towards the direction of the sound, “Yes, I am Lot. Who calls me?”

Sheepishly emerging from the trees of the Jordan came a disheveled looking man of royalty. It was Bera, the King of Sodom. He looked tired and appeared to have been living in hiding for the last 2 days.

“King Bera,” began Lot and he approached the king of Sodom, “It is so good to see you alive.”

“Yes,” responded the king as he came up to Lot and Abram, “I fled the battle and barely escaped. The other kings, I think, are no more. We fled at night, seeking refuge by passing through the fields of the tar pits.”

Lot grimaced. The tar pits were not far from Sodom and Gomorrah in the deepest part of the Siddim Valley. It was an area of land known for its stench, toxic air, and putrid heat. The land was dotted with cauldrons of molten tar and petroleum that bellowed from the deep pockets of the earth’s volcanic activity.

Bera went on, “We figured the armies would not track us in there, and they didn’t. Unfortunately, though, maneuvering through the land was worse than battle. The air is foul and we all became sick, aching all over and throwing up as we stumbled along. One by one my companions fell, and I am one of a few that’s left.”

Lot introduced the King of Sodom to Abram. The King bowed his head as a customary greeting to the patriarch.

When the king lifted his head, Lot said to him, “We owe our lives and all that we have to my uncle, Abram. He came on his own accord to rescue us and retrieve all our belongings.”

Bera bowed his head again to Abram and then looked back at all that was once his. *How much of it would Abram give back to him? Would he give any back at all? The king would indeed keep his kingdom, but he realized he was looking at a new benefactor; a new overlord. Would he be as cruel and demanding as Chedolaomer?*

The population slowly moved south, and the king of Sodom began to annoy Abram. He was constantly at Abram’s side, flattering him and thanking him. Abram pitied his insecurity. Why did Lot want to live under such a king?

At about noon the party stopped for a break. The lack of sleep was catching up with Abram, and he needed to rest. Most of the food was gone, and Abram was exhausted. He instructed everyone to halt the journey and he dismissed himself for some solitude. He went ahead about a stone’s throw away and sat down on a rock overlooking the Jordan River. He needed this time alone, time to think, time to thank the Lord for a triumphant victory.

What am I going to do with all this plunder?” he thought. He sat there listening to the endless rush of the water cascading over the rocks and roots of the riverbed. He thought again of the head waters where he had washed his face just before battle. *God replenishes this river everyday; it never runs dry.* Abram looked at the river. He then looked back at the vast population of people and livestock strewn along the King’s Highway for several miles.

“God, Adoni,” Abram looked up in prayer, “It might be uncustomary, but I refuse to claim all this plunder for myself. Just as you replenish your land with water, so I trust you will always provide for me. I make a solemn vow to you that I will not accept anything from Bera, King of Sodom, as a gift lest he should say he made Abram rich. You, Lord, are the one who enriches me.” The prayer felt good to have been prayed.

“Adoni Abram?” came a voice. It was Eliezer asking for permission to disturb his master.

“Yes, my son, what is it?” Abram replied.

“You need to come and see this.”

Chapter 6

Abram stood up and emerged from the shade of the river trees. He looked at his men and all the people with him. All of them were completely solemn and as still as statues as they looked down with heads bowed. Abram quickly looked towards the south. In the distance he beheld a vast multitude of people walking in perfect unison toward them. In the front were about a dozen regal men riding on muscle-bound stallions. In the foremost position leading them was a man –a king– for he had a glittering gold crown on his head. He wore a scarlet robe and was gently riding a white stallion. Abram watched, in wonder, as this royal delegation came closer. The king, along with his elders and soldiers were fearfully adorned, but for some reason Abram was not in the least bit afraid. He was more in awe.

When the royal king and his delegation reached Abram, he gently pulled on the reigns bringing his steed to a halt. The horse snorted and pawed the dirt with his front hoof. Without a moments hesitation, royally clad servants appeared from behind the cavalcade bringing out wooden tables, with their bases, and set them down along the road. More servants appeared and brought out chairs and benches, flasks of wine, and baskets of freshly baked bread.

While the tables were being set, the king dismounted from his horse and addressed Abram.

“Abram, you who are blessed by God Most High, I am Melchizedek, King of the great city of Salem and Priest of the Most Exalted God – the Master of Heaven and Earth. I bid you, come, along with your companions, come and be refreshed.”

Abram slowly came forward and sat at the head table where he was served bread and wine by this priest. Abram, along with Lot, Bera, Mamre, Eschol and Aner, were humbled to be served by such a noble king. It almost felt awkward, but no one dared to refuse. After pouring the wine, Melchizedek sat down across from Abram at the head table. Abram’s men and the nobles of the cities gathered at the other surrounding tables and were equally treated.

As the meal refreshed Abram, he was amazed at the glory of this royal priest, Melchizedek. Abram knew of the city of Salem and had seen it perched on the highest peak of the land. Its reputation as a peaceful city was legendary. But to see this King, so loved and honored by his people, was truly amazing. Unlike Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring lands, Salem was known as a city with moral standards and righteous laws. No wonder the king was literally known as the “King of Righteousness.”

When the last few morsels were eaten, Melchizedek rose from the table. Everyone watched as he came to Abram and placed his hands upon the head of the great patriarch. Abram, still sitting, bowed his head slightly and felt the warm, firm fingers of Melchizedek through his silvery hair to find rest on his scalp.

Melchizedek looked up to heaven and in a loud voice blessed the great patriarch:

“Baruch Avram l’El Elyon, quoneh shamayim va-eretz.” (Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth). *“Va-baruch El Elyon asher-migain tsa-ray-Xa b-yadeyXa”* (And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand).

Melchizedek lifted his hands and Abram looked up into his smiling face. Inside Abram was beaming. God indeed loved him, despite all of Abram’s former folly. Somehow by looking into Melchizedek’s eyes, he knew God would be faithful. All that God has promised Abram would come true. Why else would God have sent his priest? Melchizedek was God’s voice and God’s hands to Abram, and he drank in the blessing as he inhaled deeply. Before Abram looked

away, he studied Melchizedek's eyes. While the royal priest was still smiling, his eyes were gathering tears. It was as if Melchizedek was looking long into the future as he returned Abram's gaze. Abram wondered what deep insights were permeating this king's mind.

After a few seconds that seemed like minutes, Melchizedek bowed his head to Abram giving a customary salute goodbye. Abram interrupted his motion of departure.

He spoke directly to Melchizedek but loud enough so that those around could hear: "Because the Lord of heaven and earth has been so gracious to me, I hereby present to him one tenth of all that has been captured."

Abram then turned to Eliezer and Lot, "Lot, you know the inventory of the plunder. Separate out the very best of all the articles, goods and livestock – a tenth of the total. Gather it together and bring it here as a gift to Melchizedek. It is an offering of thanks to the Lord Most High."

Lot, assisted by Eliezer, jumped into action. They solicited the help of some of Abram's men and began to execute Abram's desire.

Bera, king of Sodom, who looked like a peasant next to Melchizedek, watched with pitiful sadness as Abram divided the spoils. He was deeply intimidated by Melchizedek and was obviously uncomfortable around him. In a voice of self pity, Bera looked at Abram and said, "Abram, I do owe you my life and the lives of my people. Please take all that you have acquired and return to your estate in peace and abundance. As for me, I will take my impoverished people and we will rebuild Sodom as the gods allow."

Abram looked at Bera who had cast his vision to the ground like a chastised dog with its tail between its legs. Abram already knew what he would do. He answered Bera.

"I have made a solemn vow to the Lord, the Master of heaven and earth, that I will not take anything, not a thread or even the strap of a sandal from you lest you should ever be tempted to say you made Abram rich."

Bera looked up hardly believing what he heard.

Abram continued, "I will take nothing from you except what my men have eaten from the bounty. That's my decision. I only ask that you let my companions, the three brothers Mamre, Eshcol and Aner, take a share that they feel is appropriate."

Bera bowed deeply to Abram and thanked him profusely.

After the offering was collected and presented, Melchizedek took his leave and returned south on the King's Highway to return to Salem. Time seemed to stand still as Abram watched his departure.

Chapter 7

Once the massive party was out of sight, Abram found he was anxious to get home. He addressed the King of Sodom and Lot, who were also itching to be back in familiar territory.

"Bera and Lot, it is here that we must depart. My men and I will ride on and take the west road back to Hebron. I trust you will make it back to the Valley of Siddim within a day or two."

Bera, King of Sodom, all grins and confidence now that he had been enriched with no great sacrifice of his own, thanked Abram again and entreated him to move to Sodom.

"Abram, I can see that you are a man of great wisdom and influence. Why don't you gather your family and servants and move to the city of Sodom? I will make you the chief of my

elders and you can be on the cutting edge of rebuilding our great city. Plus, I will build you a mansion of your own in the best of the land. No longer would you have to live in a floppy tent as I'd have my best architects design a house just for you."

Abram stoked his white beard. He knew he would refuse this generous offer, but the thought was tempting none-the-less.

"I'm sorry, Bera, but my days of city dwelling are over. The Lord has put in my mind better things." Bera had no idea to what Abram referred but he didn't press it. He and Lot said farewell, and Abram and his men separated from the multitude and headed home at a quick pace. It felt good to be a simple and small party again and they made great time on their journey home. It was much quieter now without the thousands of people and livestock they had been with, and most of the men remained silent, wanting to drink in the peacefulness.

As Abram, mounted on his horse, ascended the hills of Horeb, he looked out over the vast land that God had promised for his children. He imagined great cities and quaint villages, rich fields and choice livestock that would one day permeate the landscape. He imagined in the center of it all a great temple where all his children would come and worship and honor and give abundantly to his great God.

These thoughts entertained his mind for the last leg of the journey, and finally Abram saw in the distance the great oaks of Mamre. Sarai was out in front waiting patiently with Eliezer's wife. Several of the servants' children were running around playing among the trees. It was so good to be home.

Chapter 8

That evening, after unpacking, bathing and eating, Abram excused himself from the tent and walked out under the great oak. The sun had just set and the stars were growing brighter each minute.

A gentle breeze blew through the mighty branches of the oak, causing a stir in the leaves that sounded almost like an organic giggle. As the wind subsided, Abram heard the voice of the Lord. This time, it was much louder and clearer and deeper than Abram had ever heard it in the past. God's voice was so real that Abram felt he could put his hand into it as if it were a rushing stream.

"Fear not, Abram," said the voice. "I am your shield. I am your very great reward."

The words found rest deep in Abram's heart and God's assurance washed over him. *God was his shield, his protection.* The very God of the universe was his reward. When Abram thought of the massive booty of plunder he had earlier refused, it now seemed like a small heap of clay compared with the surpassing greatness of having the Lord as his treasure. Abram was deeply contented.

While enjoying these thoughts in the Lord's presence, Abram heard Sarai humming to herself in the tent. He thought of her inability to have children.

"O Lord, what do you plan to give me? As it looks now, I'm going to die childless. If this happens, I shall have to bequeath everything to Eliezer. You have promised me children, but children you have not given. And now my servant will inherit my estate."

There was silence for a while, and Abram wondered if he had gone too far. As he waited for the Lord to respond, he found it odd that his mind took him back to Melchizedek's eyes and the pain he had seen there. What did it mean?

God's voice interrupted his thoughts. God responded not in anger but with deep compassion. "Abram, this man will not be your heir. You will have a son, an heir from your own body. Come out from under the tree a bit. I want you to see something."

Abram walked a few paces from under the oak and waited for the Lord to speak again. "Look up, Abram, look toward heaven. Count the stars for me, that is, if you can."

Abram looked up. Never in his life had he seen such a clear sky. Billions and billions of stars laced the blackness, and Abram was awed by not only their number but by their beauty. He chuckled as the Lord, with humor in his voice said, "Just like this shall your children be."

"Yes," said Abram still gazing at the beauty above, "yes, Lord, I can see it. I believe you."

The words were barely out of his mouth that Abram felt a wave of peace pour through him. The breeze picked up again, this time stronger, and Abram heard the giant oaks laughing all along the hill. Or was it God laughing? Abram could not help but to laugh too. It was a deep, belly laugh that made his eyes water. He felt, as it were, completely and utterly right with God. There was no shame; there was no fear. It was a feeling of... righteousness. If God said Abram would have a son, Abram will have a son.

Eventually the wind died down and Abram returned to his tent. Sleep was coming on him fast as he lay down next to his wife. Sarai was half asleep but turned to rest under his arm. She asked him in a sleepy voice which was more like a whisper, "Adoni," she paused trying to find the sobriety to finish the question. "I thought I heard you laughing. Who were you laughing with?"

Abram smiled and inhaled deeply recalling the intoxication of the deep joy that had penetrated his heart. "My dear Sarai, I was laughing with my deepest friend in all the world. I was laughing with," and here he paused as the reality of his closeness with God sank in. "I was laughing with my Adoni, my God."

Sarai never responded. She slept soundly in the cradled arms of her husband. And Abram, who had never slept so soundly before, rested in the cradled arms of his God.