

# *In the Beginning: Genesis 1 to 25*

## Week 3

Monday, March 20th

Genesis 11: 1-9

1 At one time the whole world spoke a single language and used the same words. 2 As the people migrated eastward, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there. 3 They began to talk about construction projects. "Come," they said, "let's make great piles of burnt brick and collect natural asphalt to use as mortar. 4 Let's build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies--a monument to our greatness! This will bring us together and keep us from scattering all over the world."

5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 "Look!" he said. "If they can accomplish this when they have just begun to take advantage of their common language and political unity, just think of what they will do later. Nothing will be impossible for them! 7 Come, let's go down and give them different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other."

8 In that way, the LORD scattered them all over the earth; and that ended the building of the city. 9 That is why the city was called Babel, because it was there that the LORD confused the people by giving them many languages, thus scattering them across the earth.

### Points of Interest:

- 'At one time the whole world spoke a single language'—after having told us of the phenomenal diversity of the human race as it spreads to fill the earth, Moses rewinds to the time when there was still only one nation.
- 'a single language and used the same words'—knowing as we do all of the trouble that has been caused over the course of world history by our difficulties in understanding one another and working together, it's easy to look back with wistfulness to this time of apparent harmony and mutual understanding. We might look back with regret at the costly error these people made—if only they hadn't reached too high, we could still all be one! I imagine we're even tempted to blame God, suspecting him of punishing us too harshly for the long-ago mistake of the Babylonians.

I think a second look at the story will show us that Babel is not the wonderful utopia it seems to be on the surface, and that God's actions aren't as cruel or unfair as we might initially think. Our first hint that all is not right in Babel is in the fact that chapter 10 comes before chapter 11; Moses describes the diversity of human culture before he tells us the story of Babel. Diversity is not fundamentally a curse on humanity; rather, it's an outworking of God's blessing of fruitful multiplication on the family of Noah. In chapter 9, God blesses Noah's family to multiply and fill the earth. In chapter 10, we see the various nations and cultures that come from Noah's family: chapter 10 is a fulfillment of God's blessing. In that light, chapter 11 may be showing us a speed bump on the way to the blessing of human diversity, not the apex of human togetherness.

- 'Let's build a great city'—an echo of God's creative process in chapter one. He said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. They say, 'Let there be a city,' and there is one. They are being like God here, but probably not in the way God intended. We'll talk more about this topic in the next comment.
- 'a tower that reaches to the skies'—literally, 'that reaches to the heavens.' We saw earlier in the story of Genesis that people are created to be in God's image, and that a big part of that image is in imitating God's actions of bringing form and abundance to the earth. We also saw that there are two ways of going about being like God: by being partners with God, or by competing with God. Adam and Eve were offered the

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one, but—through the influence of the serpent—chose the other. Here we have yet another example of humanity setting itself up against God. The Babylonians plan to build a heaven-sized tower. Maybe they simply want to be as tall as God; or maybe they intend to either attack heaven or defend themselves against a heavenly attack.

- 'a monument to our greatness'—God created humankind to be a reflection of him. The Babylonians build this tower to be a reflection of themselves and their greatness.
- 'keep us from scattering all over the world'—here we get to the essence of their struggle with God: they don't want to multiply, and spread, and fill the earth. Their whole society is based on a rejection of God's purpose for them to multiply. It's rebellious against God's command. It's unnatural: they were created to multiply. It's also self-defeating: they are rejecting the blessing that comes with multiplying.
- 'Nothing will be impossible for them'—there is a real power that comes with the sort of unity the Babylonians experience. They are, in fact, able to accomplish some things they wouldn't otherwise be able to do. Their tower is impressive, impressive enough to cause God to take a closer look. But it comes at a great price: the obliteration of difference. Their unity is an enforced unity, working against God's purposes and human nature. Everyone must not only speak the same language, but say the same words. And they all do only one thing: make bricks. Babel is a totalitarian regime, like Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. By centralized control, Babel is able to focus its power. But that focused power comes from annihilating anyone or anything that walks out of line. It is awesome, but terrible, crushing—and ultimately monotonous and dull.
- 'let's go down'—while God is afraid of what they might do, it doesn't seem that he feels personally threatened: he has to come down to see their 'heavenly tower,' not being able to quite see it from where he is. And once he decides to scatter the Babylonians, they offer no real resistance. I think God is frightened about what they might do to one another and to the world, not about what they might do to him.
- 'the LORD scattered them'—they built the tower in order to resist being scattered, but their actions provoke an immediate scattering. In a way, God is only putting them back on track toward the original goal of reproducing and filling the earth. However, because of the rebellion of Babel, the resulting diversity comes with a curse (of not being able to understand one another) as well as a blessing (of multiplying and filling the earth with abundant diversity).

### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* While God's plan for the world always involved a wonderful diversity of cultures, because of the Babel experience that diversity comes to us with a great deal of misunderstanding and division. What are some ways you and your family have experienced the pain and disappointment that comes from these divisions between cultures? Is there something you would like to say to God or ask God about on this topic? If you have the faith, please spend a moment asking God to break down any godly divisions.
- *For our church:* Ask God to help our church to become a place where we experience the best parts of unity and diversity: where we are unified in our pursuit of God's purposes in the world, and simultaneously expressing God's glory through our diversity. Pray that God would particularly bless us in our continuing efforts to become the multi-ethnic community God wants us to be.
- *For our city:* While I would also say that they bring a lot of good to our city and the world, I think it's fair to say that the universities in our town—and particularly my

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beloved alma mater, Harvard—show some Babel-like tendencies: they expend an awful lot of effort to make a name for themselves; they will go to great lengths to defend themselves and expand their power, sometimes to the detriment of the people around them; and they frequently see themselves as setting up an alternative to God. Ask God to show mercy to our universities. Pray for a new spirit of humility to grow on our campuses. And pray that the best things about these places of higher learning would grow and increase and that the worst things about them would die away.

### **Tuesday, March 21st**

#### **Genesis 11: 10-27**

10This is the history of Shem's family.

When Shem was 100 years old, his son Arphaxad was born. This happened two years after the Flood. 11After the birth of Arphaxad, Shem lived another 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

12When Arphaxad was 35 years old, his son Shelah was born. 13After the birth of Shelah, Arphaxad lived another 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

14When Shelah was 30 years old, his son Eber was born. 15After the birth of Eber, Shelah lived another 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

16When Eber was 34 years old, his son Peleg was born. 17After the birth of Peleg, Eber lived another 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

18When Peleg was 30 years old, his son Reu was born. 19After the birth of Reu, Peleg lived another 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

20When Reu was 32 years old, his son Serug was born. 21After the birth of Serug, Reu lived another 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

22When Serug was 30 years old, his son Nahor was born. 23After the birth of Nahor, Serug lived another 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

24When Nahor was 29 years old, his son Terah was born. 25After the birth of Terah, Nahor lived another 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

26When Terah was 70 years old, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

27This is the history of Terah's family. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran had a son named Lot. 28But while Haran was still young, he died in Ur of the Chaldeans, the place of his birth. He was survived by Terah, his father. 29Meanwhile, Abram married Sarai, and his brother Nahor married Milcah, the daughter of their brother Haran. (Milcah had a sister named Iscah.) 30Now Sarai was not able to have any children.

31Terah took his son Abram, his daughter-in-law Sarai, and his grandson Lot (his son Haran's child) and left Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan. But they stopped instead at the village of Haran and settled there. 32Terah lived for 205 years and died while still at Haran.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'This is the history of Shem's family'—now that he has explained both the blessing and the curse of human diversity, Moses continues with his story, which will focus on the descendents of Noah's son Shem.
- 'This is the history of Terah's family'—we further narrow down our focus to the family of one man, Terah. When we get to the genealogy of Terah, Moses becomes much more specific. With the rest of Shem's descendents, we only hear of one son and other unnamed children. Moses gives us the whole breakdown of Terah's family, because they are the cast of major characters we will be dealing with for the rest of Genesis.

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- 'left Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan'—Ur is a major city of ancient Mesopotamia. In the last chapter, we saw an example of a group of people who tried desperately to avoid being sent outward from their home base. It brought about oppression in their own midst and eventual trouble for all of humanity. Here we get the counter-example of a family which decides to go willingly. As we will discuss tomorrow, Terah may be leaving home in response to a specific call from God. Or maybe he is simply captured by the adventurousness of the general call to multiply and spread out and fill the earth.
- 'But they stopped'—Terah doesn't make it to his destination. He and his family stop about halfway between Ur and Canaan. Maybe it starts out as a rest stop along the way, but it becomes a permanent settlement.
- 'the village of Haran'—Haran is the name of Terah's son who died in Ur. It seems that Terah isn't stopping at an already existing town. He founds this village, and names it in memory of his dead son. While it's not necessarily terrible to do something like that, in the context of our story it sounds something of an ominous note: the last person to name a city after his son is Cain. By settling in Haran, Terah settles for a life like Cain's.

### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Has you or your family ever uprooted and moved to a new place? What was it like? What were the hard things about it? The great things? It seems like one of God's key hopes for human beings is that they would live a life of outward motion, of moving forward into new places. How do you feel about that prospect? What's exciting about it? What's unpleasant? Spend a moment bringing up your excitement and your reservations to God. Do you feel like he has any responses for you?
- *For our church:* Terah starts out toward a destination, but he ends up stopping only half-way there. God has given us some goals as a church: goals of impacting our entire city with God's presence and his goodness, of seeing ten thousand people join us, of seeing two hundred other churches be born out of our church. Ask God to give us perseverance in holding on to those dreams. Pray that we would not settle down into something less than God has for us.
- *For our city:* When I moved to Boston, one of the first things that I noticed is that a lot of things are named after a few people. You see Harvard, Weld, Boylston, Emerson, Winthrop, Adams, Cabot, Lowell, Quincy, and Peabody everywhere; towns, streets, schools, dormitories, museums, and public buildings all have a pretty high likelihood of having one of these names. While there's something great about celebrating a proud past, it can also keep us from moving forward into a new future. I think that's something that happened to Terah; he looked backward to the memory of his dead son, rather than forward to the place he was going. Pray for our city that, while honoring its past, it can also look forward to a fresh, new future.

### **Wednesday, March 22nd**

#### **Genesis 12: 1-9**

1Then the LORD told Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. 2I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. 3I

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will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

4So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 5He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth--his livestock and all the people who had joined his household at Haran--and finally arrived in Canaan. 6Traveling through Canaan, they came to a place near Shechem and set up camp beside the oak at Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.

7Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I am going to give this land to your offspring." And Abram built an altar there to commemorate the LORD's visit. 8After that, Abram traveled southward and set up camp in the hill country between Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar and worshiped the LORD. 9Then Abram traveled south by stages toward the Negev.

### **Points of Interest:**

- 'Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house'—this is exactly what Terah did. It's a frightening thing to do. Abram is being asked to leave everything and everyone that is familiar. Furthermore, as I've mentioned before, in the absence of a strong central government, your family and tribe would be someone's best protection. Abram would be leaving that protection behind. It's hard to know whether it would be harder or easier for Abram to make this decision, having seen his father do the same thing. On the one hand, he has seen first-hand that such a choice can lead to a good life. On the other hand, what he is being asked to leave behind is the city he has watched his father build with his own hands. They came to Haran with nothing, and they built a life for themselves; now God is asking Abram to leave that life behind.
- 'I will bless you and make you famous'—Abram is being asked to leave behind the comfort and security of home, but he's not being invited into a life of misery. God has great promises for him. In fact, God is promising to give him the very kinds of things that people have been trying to grab for themselves. The people of Babel try to stay in one place so that they can become famous; God promises Abram that if he goes out, God will make him famous. The people of Babel try to make a city for themselves; God promises to give Abram a new land. Cain tries to become God's favorite by killing off the competition; God freely offers his favor to Abram. Lamech boasts of his ability to protect and avenge himself; but God promises that he will be Abram's protection. God wants to give people the kinds of things that they truly need and even desire. In the garden, Eve decided that she needed to grab for herself something that God wanted to give to her—his likeness. We've seen many other people follow Eve's example, grasping at blessing, even trying to grab it away from God. These attempts have only resulted in misery. Now, God intends to make Abram an example of what can happen if someone chooses to allow God to give him what he needs instead.
- 'I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you'—a promise that God will take on the role that a tribe would usually provide.
- 'All the families of the earth will be blessed through you'—the blessing Abram receives will not be over and against the other people of the world. Instead, Abram will become a source of blessing to the rest of the world. Abram will be like the river that flowed through the garden of Eden, which overflowed its abundance to the surrounding lands. Abram will be the fulfillment of God's intention for humanity: he

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will carry goodness and abundance to the whole world. It will be a gift of God, not a human effort.

- 'Abram departed as the LORD had instructed him'—a rare example of trusting obedience to God. The only other good example of this trusting obedience was Noah, who saved himself, his family, and the world.
- 'Lot went with him'—his nephew decides to share in the adventure.
- 'and finally arrived in Canaan'—it's a journey that started a generation earlier. Terah intended to bring his family to Canaan. He stopped halfway, but his son Abram completes the journey. I wonder if Terah received a promise from God similar to Abram's, a call to go out from his home and receive the blessing of God. Perhaps what makes Abram unique is not the promise he receives, but the fact that he acts on that promise. Perhaps God has the same offer in mind, not just for Terah, or for Abram, but for anyone who will put his or her trust in God. After all, all God has really promised Abram is that he will fulfill the purpose God has placed in all humanity: to be a multiplier of God's image and his goodness in the world.
- 'I am going to give this land to your offspring'—Abram as yet has no children. He is married to Sarai, who is barren.
- 'Abram built an altar there to commemorate the LORD's visit'—like Noah, Abram responds to God's grace with worship. Here, we have another contrast, with Babel specifically and with other examples throughout Genesis: the Babylonians build a city and a tower as a memorial to their own greatness; Cain builds a city in memory of his son; even Terah founds a city in the name of his son; but Abram builds an altar instead of a city. Abram chooses to remember his moment with God, rather than his own abilities or the hopes he has in his son. He will live the life of a wanderer, but he carries with him the promise of special greatness for his own name and for his descendants.

### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* God gives Abram a promise that his family will be a source of good things for all of the families of the earth. This is a huge destiny, but not, it seems, unique. What we've read in Genesis makes me think that God intends for every family—not just Abram's—to be a multiplier of God's image throughout the entire earth. That means that your family has a world-changing destiny. Take a moment to let that idea sink in a little today. Say to the rest of your family sometime today, 'We are world-changers!' If you can't talk to your family today, say it instead to a housemate, a friend, or a co-worker. And pray that your family would fulfill its role of being a source of good for the world.
- *For our church:* The Babylonians built a tower to remember their own greatness; Abram built an altar to remember that God visited him. Pray that we as a church would say no to the temptation to testify to our own greatness. Ask God to give us the grace instead to leave signs of God's presence wherever we go.
- *For our city:* God is constantly speaking the message, to everyone, everywhere, 'Leave the life you know and follow the path I give you, and I will make you great.' Pray for a flood of people in Boston and Cambridge saying, 'yes,' to that invitation.

### **Thursday, March 23rd**

#### **Genesis 12: 10-20**

10At that time there was a severe famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to wait it out. 11As he was approaching the borders of Egypt, Abram said to Sarai, "You are a

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very beautiful woman. 12When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife. Let's kill him; then we can have her!' 13But if you say you are my sister, then the Egyptians will treat me well because of their interest in you, and they will spare my life."

14And sure enough, when they arrived in Egypt, everyone spoke of her beauty.

15When the palace officials saw her, they sang her praises to their king, the pharaoh, and she was taken into his harem. 16Then Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her-- sheep, cattle, donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

17But the LORD sent a terrible plague upon Pharaoh's household because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18So Pharaoh called for Abram and accused him sharply. "What is this you have done to me?" he demanded. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? 19Why were you willing to let me marry her, saying she was your sister? Here is your wife! Take her and be gone!" 20Pharaoh then sent them out of the country under armed escort-- Abram and his wife, with all their household and belongings.

### **Points of Interest:**

- 'went down to Egypt'—Egypt was one of the most established civilizations of the time. It was also more insulated from famine because of the fertility of the land along the Nile River.
- 'This is his wife. Let's kill him'—remember that Abram is alone and vulnerable. It would have been perfectly culturally appropriate for the Egyptians to take what they could get from this person without nationality or tribe—including his wife.
- 'if you say you are my sister'—Sarai is, in fact, Abram's sister. People would tend to marry within their tribe. Since Terah had gone out on his own and started a new tribe, the marriage choices would be limited to close family members.
- 'and they will spare my life'—even Abram ends up settling for his own scheme to save his life, rather than trusting God to protect him as promised. He's willing to sacrifice his wife to save himself. This isn't his proudest moment.
- 'But the LORD sent a terrible plague upon Pharaoh's household'—Abram may have abandoned Sarai, but God does not. God comes through on his promise to protect Abram's family, despite Abram's cowardice, his unfaithfulness to his wife, and his distrust of God.
- 'Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?'—Pharaoh somehow figures out that the plague was God's way of protecting Abram's wife.
- 'What is this you have done to me?'—it does seem a bit unfair that Pharaoh is punished because of Abram's lie. It could be, though, that Pharaoh is being a bit duplicitous. As far as we can tell, Abram read the situation correctly; apart from God's intervention, Pharaoh could very well have killed Abram in order to take his wife.

### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* It's a wonderful thing that the fulfillment of God's intentions depends much more on his faithfulness than on our own. Abram receives lavish promises from God of protection, abundance, and greatness; then he immediately caves in to fear of famine and of death, to the extent that he's willing to sacrifice his wife and sister in order to save himself. Thankfully, God remains faithful to his promises, rescuing Sarai and Abram, and even providing for them richly in the process. Take a deep breath, and thank God for bearing most of the weight of seeing his promises come true in your life.
- *For our church:* Pray that God would protect us as a church from fear or anxiety. Pray that we would operate out of a deep and unshakeable confidence that the key to our

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success lies in God's supernatural power, not in circumstances or in our own ability to make things happen.

- *For our city:* Our city is full of people who have been disappointed or betrayed by people who are representatives of God, or at least claim to be. Abram failed Sarai, but God did not. Ask God to prove himself faithful to these people who have been betrayed or disappointed. Ask him to rescue them, to make good his promises, and to bring them new, fresh, and life-giving opportunities to connect with Him.

**Friday, March 24<sup>th</sup>**

### **Genesis 13**

1So they left Egypt and traveled north into the Negev--Abram with his wife and Lot and all that they owned, 2for Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold. 3Then they continued traveling by stages toward Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where they had camped before. 4This was the place where Abram had built the altar, and there he again worshiped the LORD.

5Now Lot, who was traveling with Abram, was also very wealthy with sheep, cattle, and many tents. 6But the land could not support both Abram and Lot with all their flocks and herds living so close together. There were too many animals for the available pastureland. 7So an argument broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.

8Then Abram talked it over with Lot. "This arguing between our herdsmen has got to stop," he said. "After all, we are close relatives! 9I'll tell you what we'll do. Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want that area over there, then I'll stay here. If you want to stay in this area, then I'll move on to another place."

10Lot took a long look at the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley in the direction of Zoar. The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the LORD or the beautiful land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11Lot chose that land for himself--the Jordan Valley to the east of them. He went there with his flocks and servants and parted company with his uncle Abram. 12So while Abram stayed in the land of Canaan, Lot moved his tents to a place near Sodom, among the cities of the plain. 13The people of this area were unusually wicked and sinned greatly against the LORD.

14After Lot was gone, the LORD said to Abram, "Look as far as you can see in every direction. 15I am going to give all this land to you and your offspring as a permanent possession. 16And I am going to give you so many descendants that, like dust, they cannot be counted! 17Take a walk in every direction and explore the new possessions I am giving you." 18Then Abram moved his camp to the oak grove owned by Mamre, which is at Hebron. There he built an altar to the LORD.

### **Points of Interest:**

- 'into the Negev'—the Negev is the desert that lies between Canaan and Egypt.
- 'Abram was very rich'—because of God's rescue of Sarai, the Egypt situation turned out quite well for Abram. He leaves Egypt quite wealthy because of all of the gifts Pharaoh had given him.
- 'argument broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot'—they are so wealthy that their combined herds are too large for their pastures. The shepherds begin to fight

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over the good grass and water, and loyalties start to divide between Abram's people and Lot's people.

- 'At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land'—Moses continues to remind us that Abram and his family are merely guests and wanderers, a small minority among a larger population of strangers.
- 'Lot chose that land for himself'—it makes sense (although it's not exactly fair, polite, or respectful) that Lot would choose the valley. There's plenty of water and plenty of grass. Furthermore, there are large, well-established cities. From what he could see, he would get the best of both city and country.
- 'The people of this area were unusually wicked'—of course, one thing that we've seen throughout Genesis is that merely trusting our eyes can often lead us astray. Lot's choice of the better pastureland also brings him into the midst of unusually wicked people.
- 'I am going to give all this land to you and your offspring'—this time around, Abram trusts God to provide for him, rather than trying to manipulate the situation. God abundantly awards that choice.
- 'he built an altar to the LORD'—Abram once again builds a small monument to the memory that God has spoken to him.

### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Are you or your family facing a major decision right now? It can often be difficult to know which is the right direction to go. Lot chose the way that looked best to him from what he could see, but it turned out to be the lesser option. Ask God for wisdom regarding your decision. Ask him to open your eyes to implications you cannot see, and ask him to increase your trust in his goodness as you step forward into your decision.
- *For our church:* Abram and Lot are fulfilling God's mandate: they are multiplying, and spreading, and filling the earth. The immediate impact on them is a little bit of annoyance and trouble, as their shepherds start to trip over one another. Basically, Abram and Lot are experiencing growing pains. That's something that we as a church are somewhat familiar with; we're almost constantly outgrowing ourselves, and we're always learning on the fly how to adapt to our new size. It can cause annoyance, offense, and tiredness. Pray that God would give us grace and patience with one another as we continue to grow and to adapt. And pray that God would continue to provide us with all the resources we need as he continues to grow us and multiply us.
- *For our city:* God gave Abram a vision of what he wanted to do in Canaan. As you walk around our city today, ask that God would give you an eye for the new things he intends for it. Take a moment to bless the things you see God doing or wanting to do.

### **Saturday, March 25th**

#### **Genesis 14: 1-16**

1About this time war broke out in the region. King Amraphel of Babylonia, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Kedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim 2fought against King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (now called Zoar).

3The kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela formed an alliance and mobilized their armies in Siddim Valley (that is, the valley of the Dead Sea). 4For twelve

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years they had all been subject to King Kedorlaomer, but now in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

5One year later, Kedorlaomer and his allies arrived. They conquered the Rephaites in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in the plain of Kiriathaim, 6and the Horites in Mount Seir, as far as El-paran at the edge of the wilderness. 7Then they swung around to En-mishpat (now called Kadesh) and destroyed the Amalekites, and also the Amorites living in Hazazon-tamar.

8But now the army of the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (now called Zoar) prepared for battle in the valley of the Dead Sea 9against King Kedorlaomer of Elam and the kings of Goiim, Babylonia, and Ellasar--four kings against five. 10As it happened, the valley was filled with tar pits. And as the army of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some slipped into the tar pits, while the rest escaped into the mountains. 11The victorious invaders then plundered Sodom and Gomorrah and began their long journey home, taking all the wealth and food with them. 12They also captured Lot-- Abram's nephew who lived in Sodom--and took everything he owned. 13One of the men who escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was camped at the oak grove belonging to Mamre the Amorite. Mamre and his relatives, Eshcol and Aner, were Abram's allies.

14When Abram learned that Lot had been captured, he called together the men born into his household, 318 of them in all. He chased after Kedorlaomer's army until he caught up with them in Dan. 15There he divided his men and attacked during the night from several directions. Kedorlaomer's army fled, but Abram chased them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16Abram and his allies recovered everything--the goods that had been taken, Abram's nephew Lot with his possessions, and all the women and other captives.

### **Points of Interest:**

- 'About this time war broke out in the region'—this is basically a war between the kings of Canaan (now Israel and Palestine) and the kings of Mesopotamia (now Iraq and Syria).
- 'as the army of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled'—Moses doesn't even describe the actual battle. Next thing we know, the Canaanite kings are running away.
- 'They also captured Lot'—Lot has settled near Sodom and Gomorrah; so he is also affected by this defeat. Lot's predicament resembles what happened to Eve: she took the fruit because it looked good to her, and she ended up naked and ashamed; Lot takes the land that looks good to him, and ends up a poor prisoner.
- 'He chased after Kedorlaomer's army'—Abram and his neighbors decide to intervene in this multinational conflict with only a handful of men. The same person who just a couple of chapters ago sacrificed his wife out of fear of being executed by a king now has the boldness to chase down five kings.
- 'Abram and his allies recovered everything'—a fulfillment of God's promise that God would bless those who are with Abram and curse those who are against him.

### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Do you have a family member or close friend who is in real trouble? Ask God to rescue him or her. What part can you play in that rescue? What do you need from God in order to do that?
- *For our church:* It seems certain that a major ingredient in Abram's lopsided victory against a much stronger foe is God's favor on him. But he also had a good battle plan,

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which took the greatest possible advantage of the situation. In our effort to multiply to more than one site this year, ask that God would give us both his favor and good plans.

- *For our city:* Abram had a band of friends and allies that were willing to undertake this crazy adventure with him. Pray for allies and partners for our church as we try to pursue the dreams God has given us of bringing his goodness and abundance to our city. They could be other churches, schools, neighbors, community leaders, business leaders, politicians, or who knows what. We want as many friends as possible to pursue God's intentions for our city. Pray that anyone who does partner with us would experience success and God's blessing, as Abram's allies do.

### **Sunday, March 26th**

#### **Genesis 14: 17-24**

17As Abram returned from his victory over Kedorlaomer and his allies, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18Then Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought him bread and wine. 19Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Creator of heaven and earth.

20 And blessed be God Most High,  
who has helped you conquer your enemies."

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.

21The king of Sodom told him, "Give back my people who were captured. But you may keep for yourself all the goods you have recovered."

22Abram replied, "I have solemnly promised the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, 23that I will not take so much as a single thread or sandal thong from you. Otherwise you might say, 'I am the one who made Abram rich!' 24All I'll accept is what these young men of mine have already eaten. But give a share of the goods to my allies--Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre."

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High'—we don't know where this mysterious priest-king comes from, and we don't know what happens to him from here. It's not a big surprise that David (in psalm 110) and the writer of the book of Hebrews both consider Melchizedek to be a foreshadowing of the Messiah: Salem means 'peace' (it's basically an Anglicization of the word shalom); so we have here the Prince of Peace and the priest of the Most High God.
- 'brought him bread and wine'—a sign of welcome and an act of hospitality. In light of the connection of Melchizedek to the Messiah, it's hard to avoid associations with the bread and wine of communion also.
- 'blessed Abram with this blessing'—the word bless is repeated two more times over the course of these two verses. Melchizedek is lavish in his intention to bless. Blessing is essentially offering your well-wishes and good hopes to someone, with the belief that God will back those intentions with his power.
- 'who has helped you conquer your enemies'—Melchizedek recognizes that Abram did not accomplish this victory on his own. He sees that Abram has God's favor.
- 'Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered'—this is the first example of a biblical custom, called tithing, which we continue to this day. Abram

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gives a tenth of what he has gained to this priest, as an offering to God of faithfulness for his provision and as a testimony to his faith that God will continue to provide.

- 'I will not take so much as a single thread or sandal thong from you'—Abram is perfectly willing to accept the hospitality and the blessing of Melchizedek, and he considers Melchizedek a proper recipient of his offering to God. In stark contrast, he won't take any reward at all from the king of Sodom. He suspects the king of Sodom of trying to horn in on the credit for this victory. The king of Sodom was utterly defeated and had to be rescued by Abram, but he's trying to play the part of Abram's sponsor and benefactor. Abram knows it is God alone who is responsible for his success, and he wants to give the king of Sodom no pretext to boast. Meanwhile, Abram recognizes Melchizedek as a trustworthy source of true blessing.

### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* We sometimes call what Abram experiences with Melchizedek a divine encounter; a divine encounter is when, seemingly out of nowhere, God brings someone into our lives at the exact right moment to bring wisdom, help, encouragement, direction, or company. Have you ever had such a divine encounter? If so, thank God for bringing that Melchizedek along at the right time.
- *For our church:* Pray that God would do such things through our church that neither we nor anybody else, but only God, would be able to take the credit. Ask God to make the story of our church a testimony to his existence and his goodness.
- *For our city:* We see the examples of two very different kings in this story: the king of Sodom, who is unable to provide for his people but who is constantly looking for good PR opportunities; and Melchizedek, who brings both peace and blessing where he goes. Pray for good government for our cities. Pray for our city halls and Beacon Hill to be full of Melchizedeks.