

Key idea:

To teach that – Abram’s choice says “My God keeps his promises”.

After his victory, Abram choice before Melchizedek and the King of Sodom affirms his trust in the Lord God as the faithful promise keeper.

Application:

So that – those listening would see that Abram’s trust in God’s promises was well founded...and so their own trust in His promises will be equally well founded.

Repeated phrase – His choice says “My God keeps his promises”.

PRAY

Genesis 14

In those days King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim² waged war against King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, and King Shemeber of Zeboiim, as well as the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).³ All of these came as allies to the Siddim Valley (that is, the Dead Sea).⁴ They were subject to Chedorlaomer for twelve years, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.⁵ In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the

Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, ⁶ and the Horites in the mountains of Seir, as far as El-paran by the wilderness. ⁷ Then they came back to invade En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they defeated the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who lived in Hazazon-tamar.

⁸ Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and lined up for battle in the Siddim Valley ⁹ against King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar—four kings against five. ¹⁰ Now the Siddim Valley contained many asphalt pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, but the rest fled to the mountains. ¹¹ The four kings took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food and went on. ¹² They also took Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, for he was living in Sodom, and they went on.

¹³ One of the survivors came and told Abram the Hebrew, who lived near the oaks belonging to Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and the brother of Aner. They were bound by a treaty with Abram. ¹⁴ When Abram heard that his relative had been taken prisoner, he assembled his 318 trained men, born in his household, and they went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ And he and his servants deployed against them by night, defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah to the north of

Damascus. ¹⁶ He brought back all the goods and also his relative Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the other people.

¹⁷ After Abram returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the Shaveh Valley (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was a priest to God Most High. ¹⁹ He blessed him and said:

*Abram is blessed by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth,*

*²⁰ and blessed be God Most High
who has handed over your enemies to you.
And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

²¹ Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people, but take the possessions for yourself."

²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand in an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, ²³ that I will not take a thread or sandal strap or anything that belongs to you, so you can never say, 'I made Abram rich.' ²⁴ I will take nothing except what the servants have eaten. But as for the share of the men who came with me—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre—they can take their share."

1. Intro

As you now know, you can get lost pretty easily in this passage.

So, I'm just going to let know where we're going today.

First, I'm going to try simplify the whole battle as the big shots throw their weight around Canaan.

Then we'll see Abram's choice to trust his God and go and rescue his nephew.

But after God gives him the victory, he's faced with another tough choice. What will that choice say about his God?

We'll see how an impossible choice Jesus makes says something about that same God. And how our choices do the same.

As we go, we'll see a lot of choices that say, "My God keeps his promises".

2. The big shots throw their weight around...

So, let's jump right into the battle scene. Here are the players.

We've got King Ched-or-la-omer of Elam and mates, 4 kings in all. We'll call them King Cheda. They're from up north of Canaan.

And we've got King Bera of Sodom and mates. 5 kings in all.

We'll call them King Sodo. They're from the South.

King Cheda and King Sodo.

But King Sodo's had 12 years under the thumb of King Cheda and he's sick of it.

Well Cheda up hears about it and he's coming. On the way he defeats a bunch of armies. And not just any armies. Some of these people are the one the Israelites later call "Giants! We were like grasshoppers to them." Rephaim and Amorites. And King Cheda's just squashed them, as a side show, on the way to the main game.

And that main game plays in a valley of tar pits. King Cheda's four kings trounce King Sodo's five and chase the survivors into those tar pits or up the mountains. They go back to collect the booty. Job done.

But we'll pause here in the story and ask a question.

Why has the author, Moses, included all this about squabbling kings? Well one, all those kings might be big shots but they're about to meet the little guy God's keeping watch over.

But two, Moses wants to show that King Cheda and his mates were very, very powerful. Look at all the giants they've just flattened. And that's important for what's coming later in the story.

So that's our first point, and now we'll see how it fits into Abram's story.

3. ...but God has other plans

King Cheda didn't know what he was getting himself in for. When they dragged Lot away along with the rest of the people he'd camped near (remember last week) that's Sodom and Gomorrah, the big shots were also messing with his uncle Abram. But more importantly, mess with Abram, mess with his promise keeping God.

Now at least one of the survivors of the battle of the nine armies didn't end up in a tar pit or in the hills.

He runs a marathon distance to tell Abram all about the battle, and Lot. Poor old Lot. His big hopes for a prosperous life over in the fertile valley didn't last long did they. But he's not abandoned. At the time Uncle Abram's living with some locals, Mamre and his brothers under some oaks they own. Abram's made a "you-watch-my-back-,I'll-watch-yours" treaty with them. Now imagine this conversation when they get the news.

Abram: "Ok, fellas, we've got a job to do. We need to go and rescue my nephew."

The Mamre Bros.: "It's a bit late for that mate. Marathon man just told you. He's captured already and by King Cheda! Did you miss that part."

Abram: "He absolutely has, there's no time to lose. If we go now we'll catch them. Round up you guys. I'll round up mine. I've got 318 men."

318 men. We don't know how many his pals had, but I think the author makes his point don't you? He numbers Abram's fighting force down to the last man. 318 against, the armies of four separate kings. Likely outnumbered 10 to 1.

318 men.

Abram's chooses to rescue Lot against all odds. What are the chances survival? Not worth thinking about.

But what does Abram's choice say about what he's counting on. Does he just feel ten feet tall and bulletproof? Maybe stoic obligation but not much hope?

No, I think Abram's choice says "My God keeps his promises. He kept them in the past, didn't he?"

Verse 14

¹⁴ When Abram heard that his relative had been taken prisoner, he assembled his 318 trained men, born in his household, and they went in pursuit as far as Dan.

They start out at Mamre (imagine Narrabri) and pursue the armies as far as Dan. Now how far would that be from Narrabri? The Wheat Research Station? Bobbiwaa Creek? Edgeroi? As far as Bellata? Nope, further. Moree. Narrabri to Moree. That's a 20 hour march that says "My God keeps his promises."

They catch King Cheda off guard, defeat him, and chase him and his giant-conquering mates up past Damascus (that's half way to Boggabilla).

And then v16

He brought back all the goods and also his relative Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the other people.

Abram's choice to go said "My God keeps his promises". Now God hadn't actually said to Abram "If you go to rescue Lot, I'll give you victory over King Cheda." But God *had* said to him,

I will make you into a great nation,

I will bless you, I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,

I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt,

and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

And God had certainly kept his promises while Abram was in Egypt, through Abram's lack of trust. Despite Abram's lack of trust. So, Abram's trust was well founded wasn't it. God does keep his promises. But Abram's got another challenging choice coming up.

4. Abram's Choice – 800

a. King Melkizedek

The last few years have seen a lot of prayer for rain haven't they. Some of those prayers have been from people who may have never prayed before. But desperate times bring desperate acts don't they. And in this part of the state God has answered those prayers. For many, the desperately dry time has passed. Praise God. Now wouldn't it be wonderful if...

Some of those who prayed for the first time were to see it's been raining because God's answered their prayer. Wonderful if they're stopped in their tracks and turn to Jesus in faith. Even though the desperate time has passed to turn to God and acknowledged him as the giver of life. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

Well Abram was in a desperate situation wasn't he. But now he and his band are safe, what will he think now?

The danger's past, and Lot's been saved, they've collected the people and the booty. The Mamre Bros are still in a state of shocked relief. And what about those rescued? "A-bram, he's our man! A-bram, he's our man!" Surely Abram's the man of the hour as he heads back to his home among the oak trees.

So what's this tough choice?

It takes the form of the two kings who meet him as he nears home. There's King Sodo who pops down from the hills now it's safe. We'll hear from him in a moment.

And there's King Melchizedek. He's a mysterious character. His city, Salem, was left alone as King Cheda headed back up north.

And this Melchizedek is both a king and a priest of God. He's an earthly representative of the same God who made promises to Abram. Somehow, he and his people have maintained worship to the true God amidst all the foreign gods of Canaan. So, he's a king and he's a priest, and he's got an eternal flavour about him because we have no idea where he came from.

Now just as an aside, King David says years later "Hey, look! This Melkizedek is an eternal priest king. He's a bit like God's Chosen King, isn't he?" And the writer of the Hebrews then says "And of course the real eternal priest king is Jesus!" But I think the *actual* Melkizedek is just a regular human, but one who plays an important part in this story.

He's God representative and he recognises who Abram is. As Melkizedek brings out refreshments to the victors he declares,

V18

*Abram is blessed by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth,*

*²⁰ and blessed be God Most High
who has handed over your enemies to you.*

Melkizedek understands what has just happened up north.

“Abram, you are the one blessed by God.

Approved by the God who owns everything.

God gave you that victory.

Now let’s approve God because He did that for you.

He gave those enemies to you, because you have his approval.”

In a sense Melkizedek sees the events as God sees them.

But, will Abram see it that way? Abram looked to God when things were desperate, but what about now he’s on top. What does he do?

V20

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Abram gets it too doesn’t he. Standing before him is the earthly representative of the God. Abram shows his thanks to God by giving to God’s man, a share of what God gave to him.

It’s a tangible “Amen” to all Melkizedek’s just said.

‘Absolutely God’s just blessed me. Absolutely God’s kept his promises. Absolutely I’m going to thank him. I approve him as he approves me. Here Melkizedek, have some booty.”

His choice to give loot to Melkizedek says “My God keeps his promises”.

His choice says “My God keeps his promises”.

b. King of Sodom

And what about King Sodo? What’s he got to say? Well, it sounds like a very generous offer.

V21

“Give me the people, but take the possessions for yourself.”

Wow. He’s offering Abram all the stuff King Cheda could carry, including the king’s own stuff. That’s quite a swag. And all King Sodo wants is for Abram to hand over the people. Maybe he’s not so bad after all.

But hang on a sec. Last time we saw King Sodo he was fleeing with his tail between his legs. Now Abram’s just done the King’s job, saving his people, and the king’s trying to strike a deal?

But the plunder belongs to Abram. Didn’t we just see that? He had the right to give a tenth of it to Melkizadek.

King Sodo, you’ve got nothing. You can’t call the shots. You’d be better off begging, or even saying “Er, Thanks for saving my little Kingdom”. It’s not time to talk business.

And how does Abram respond?

Will he say “Wow, thanks King Sodo, you’re a champ!”? Hardly. He’s holding all the aces. He’s got a right to the loot. Will he let

King Sodo think he's doing him as favour? I wouldn't think so. Perhaps he'll say, "Hey buddy, I won this plunder fair and square. Don't try to give me what I already own. You can take your people, but I'll keep what's mine thanks. See you later." He'd have a right to.

But he doesn't. He's thinking about the promises God made to him.

"I will bless you; I will make your name great."

"If I take this plunder", thinks Abram, "King Sodo will claim *he's* the one who's blessed me, *he's* made my name great. No way pal, God's promised to do it. If keeping that plunder means you'll take the credit for what God's done, I don't want a bar of it."

So what does he say?

V22

"I have raised my hand in an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth,²³ that I will not take a thread or sandal strap or anything that belongs to you, so you can never say, 'I made Abram rich.'

"You can keep your stuff King Sodo."

But Abram wants to be fair to his allies. They put their lives on the line so....

“In case you didn’t get it King Sodo. We *all* have a right to the plunder, but I’m giving up my right so you can’t steal God’s glory, but they’ll take what theirs thanks.”

V24

I will take nothing except what the servants have eaten. But as for the share of the men who came with me—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre—they can take their share.”

Abram’s choice to give up his right says “My God keeps his promises.”

5. Jesus’ choice

And we know God continued to keep his promises to Abram. And the rest of the Bible story pretty much answers two questions.

1. How does God keep those staggering promises to Abram and his family?

and

2. How do people get to be part of those promises if they aren’t part of Abram’s bloodline?

In the next few weeks we’ll hear part of those answers.

But right now, I want to zero in on just one the moment in that bigger story, the moment when God is about to do everything needed to keep those promises.

Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knows he's God's answer to the promises made to Abram. But he knows what it will cost him to be that answer. He knows if God's going to keep those promises he himself will have to go to his death. He knows he'll be cut off from his Father as he does. But believes with all his heart that as God's Chosen he'll rise again from the dead and be crowned as King.

We read it in Psalm 16

"You will not allow your faithful one to see decay...at your right hand are eternal pleasures."

So, with only the word of his Father as a guarantee, Jesus willingly submits to His Father's will, and to death.

Jesus' choice says, "My God has given me his word, his promise, that through *my* death and resurrection, he will keep his promise to Abram."

Jesus' choice to die says, "My God keeps his promises."

5. Your choice

Now what about you? How do you fit into the story?

If you're a person who's joined to Jesus, then all he's done to keep the promises to Abram, he's done for you too.

Just like Abram, there's nothing you can do to earn those promises or to add to them. Joined to Jesus they're yours for

keeps. God promised he would bless Abram, promised he was *for* Abram. Joined to Jesus, God promises he's for you too.

Now if we were convinced God is for us what a difference that would make to our choices! Choices in all areas of life.

I remember only one line from Steph and my wedding sermon.

“Don't insure yourselves to the point you don't allow God to miraculously provide for you.”

Or we could put that advice like this. “Because you know God is for you, you can choose not build your own refuge, but let God be your refuge like he promised.”

And since then Steph and I have seen him provide in many ordinary, but unexpected ways.

Or perhaps you've just received some terrible news. It awful when you do isn't it? The bricks in the pit of your stomach. The world somehow looks different from the minute before. Life might now be defined in terms of before or after that moment.

“Can God really be keeping his promises to me right now?”

What you choose to do will tell a story won't it? Your choice to rage against Him, or take Him at his word. His word that he's for you. Pray your choices at that moment will say “My God keeps His promises.”

Or perhaps you're looking back, like Abram on the battle. Do your choices show you know God's kept his promises to you?

I went to Steph and asked “Can you think of a situation where the choice someone makes *now* shows they’ve seen God’s kept his promises?” She told me a story from her own life. Like many mums, Steph would often have a frazzling day with the kids. As part of her afternoon de-frazzle, she would find a spot out in the paddock and watch the sun go as she smoked a cigarette. For years there was great satisfaction in that ritual. Or so she thought. One day she just said “I’ve been kidding myself. The satisfaction I thought I got from this ritual is nothing compared to getting to know Jesus better.” She’d been giving credit to the smokes, but God was actually the place she’d been finding deeper and deeper contentment. Her choice to give up the smokes said “My God keeps his promises. He’s for me. He promised to be my satisfaction and he has been. I don’t need these now.”

Her choice said “My God keeps his promises.”

Perhaps it’s a choice to say or not say something at work. Or to your wife, or husband, or parents. A choice that says, “My God has kept his promises and he will. I don’t need to defend myself here. *God is for me!*” or “I can speak up here and say what’s right. It doesn’t matter what they think. God keeps his promises. He’s promised to be for me.”

Oh, that our God might so turn our hearts towards himself we would know that joined to Jesus he is *for us*. That our choices,

our whole lives, like Abram, like Jesus, would be a public monument that says, “My God keeps his promises”.