

# **THE JOURNEY FROM BARRENNESS TO HOPE**

## **Part IV – A Dangerous Journey**

When I was in seminary a classmate was sharing with me about his family's mission experience in Africa. They were called to minister to a nation in the middle of a brutal civil war. He recalled many days and nights when he, his wife and children would scamper to safety every time they heard gunshots piercing through the sky. They were taught to keep their eyes open at all times for any signs of civil disobedience. He evoked memories where he could not trust anyone since anybody could be an enemy. Though he and his family tried very hard to serve the community of faith, deep down he was constantly worried that his two young children would be shot to death in the middle of a crossfire. He remembered the day his mission agency called his whole family back to America because their safety could no longer be guaranteed. As he entered the car that was to take him to the airport, he turned around and saw many of his Christian native friends waving goodbye with tears streaming down their cheeks. My classmate was torn between his family's well-being and the church he knew he may never see again. My classmate ended his sharing by declaring that following Jesus is a dangerous journey.

Abram's journey from barrenness to hope is reflective in my classmate's powerful testimony. To journey with God is not always an easy road to trek. In fact, such a journey is hazardous with many risks involved. Abram's story in Genesis 14 presents us with a picture of such a dangerous journey. Peril becomes intertwined with blessing. And it is in a threatening environment that God advances his message of hope for us.

Text: Genesis 14:1-24 (NLT)

<sup>1</sup>About 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 <sup>2</sup>fought 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).

<sup>3</sup>The 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). <sup>4</sup>For twelve years they had all been subject to King Kedorlaomer, but now in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

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

<sup>8</sup>But 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 <sup>9</sup>against King Kedorlaomer of Elam and the kings of Goiim, Babylonia, and Ellasar--four kings against five. <sup>10</sup>As 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. <sup>11</sup>The victorious invaders then plundered Sodom and Gomorrah and began their long journey home, taking all the wealth and food with them. <sup>12</sup>They also captured Lot--Abram's nephew who lived in Sodom--and took everything he owned. <sup>13</sup>One 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.

<sup>14</sup>When 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. <sup>15</sup>There 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. <sup>16</sup>Abram 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.

Abram's journey towards hope is not looking too good at this particular time. He was to inherit a land that at this moment he had none. He was to be a father of a great nation even though he and Sarai remained childless and they were getting old by the second. A famine ravaged through the land he was supposed to possess, forcing him to leave the area and settle down in Egypt. While in Egypt he almost jeopardized his physical existence by lying to the Pharaoh about Sarai not being his wife. To top it all off, Abram handed the most fertile of lands to his nephew Lot. What could be worse for a person whom God promised land and generations to?

How about a war? Abram's head must be spinning by now. The land he was supposed to be heir of was in the midst of a political violence. The land of promise was currently occupied by destruction, rebellion, and conquest. How could a journey of hope look like this?

1. **Expect constant threats** when you journey towards hope. (vv. 1-13)

Following God's calling does not mean that all will be well in our lives. In fact, when we choose to abide in God's will we will have to undergo threats against us that are deliberate and harmful. The reason for this is that we are living out a journey of hope in an imperfect sinful world. Our spiritual environments are full of evil tyrants and selfish motives. When God desires righteousness in us we automatically go against the wicked nature this world propagates. Satan does not want us to experience real joy and love that God offers; hence, he will bombard us with brokenness, hurt, false identities, and the like. The sight of a war could have persuaded Abram to give up on his journey towards hope. He could have said, "Enough is enough. I cannot handle all of this devastation anymore. I would rather settle for emptiness in my life."

Therefore, do not be surprised if your life seems to be spiraling downward when you choose to follow God. A journey towards hope always points us to the Deliverer who can sustain us, protect us, and uplift us when Satan tries to break us down. The suffering that we must endure can build up our faith in God for it compels us to trust in him even more. Do not give up on the promise of hope when things seem to be falling apart. God is watching over us continuously and committedly; he desires for us to grow more and more in dependence in him.

2. **Expect total deliverance** from God when you journey towards hope in faith. (vv. 14-16)

The hope that can come out of constant threats is that when we fully lean upon God's sovereignty we will experience total deliverance from God himself. Abram's life testifies to this. On the surface it seemed like Abram was at a disadvantage. First of all, he was up against four of the most powerful kings during that time, led by King Kedorlaomer. Secondly, Kedorlaomer and his allies were able to defeat many other people-groups with ease. (vv. 5-12) Third, Abram went into battle against Kedorlaomer with only 318 men. But, Abram never ran away from this threat. He understood that God's purpose was to be fulfilled: the land belonged to God and Abram was to possess it. Acting on his faith in the Lord, Abram was able to conquer and defeat Kedorlaomer and his allies. And, note the full completion of the victory:

*Abram 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. (v. 16)*

God delivers us from all harmful threats when we journey in faith. We must never allow our circumstances to shrink our faith in the Lord. When situations oppress us into submission, look towards the Initiator of the promise. God will rescue us; God will bring victory; God will establish full restoration in our lives. Everything that Satan manages to steal away from us God will reinstate in us. In hopelessness Satan identifies us as losers, insignificant, and useless. But, hope in God restores us to our original names – precious, worthy, child of God.

But, we must act in faith. We must become like Abram, willing to face our opposition in boldness because God will bring the victory to us. Unfortunately, many of us would rather sit in barrenness and count all of our life difficulties instead of waging a battle against the enemy. Claim the promise of God instead. Rely upon the hope of God. Remember that God wants his promise to come into fulfillment in each of our lives. All it takes for that to come true is to live in faith.

<sup>17</sup>As 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). <sup>18</sup>Then Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought him bread and wine. <sup>19</sup>Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:

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

<sup>20</sup> 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.

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

<sup>22</sup>Abram replied, "I have solemnly promised the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup>that 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!' <sup>24</sup>All 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."

3. Experiencing hope in danger requires **an acknowledgment of God's true identity**. (vv. 19-20, 22)

After the tremendous victory over Kedorlaomer and his armies, Abram had a meeting with Melchizedek, King of Salem. Melchizedek, recognizing the impressive triumph, blessed Abram by praising 'God Most High.' (vv. 19-20) *El Elyon* ('God Most High') was the high god of the Canaanite pantheon. But, Abram knew that his success on the battlefield did not come from a false deity; instead, it came from the true God, *YHWH* ('LORD, God Most High'). (v. 22)

If we want to experience hope in a danger-filled journey we must put our faith in the one true God. We have to know where we place our allegiance upon. In today's world it is so easy to praise other things for our success in hope: we praise our careers, our relationships, even our own hard work. But, those are not where hope comes from; the source of true hope comes from the LORD himself.

In order to identify God as LORD, we must allow him to be LORD over us. He must be LORD over all areas of our lives, which include the physical, the emotional, the mental, the spiritual, the psychological, our possessions, etc. Abram received victory in the battlefield because he recognized God as LORD over everything, including the war itself. That was why he could defeat four of the greatest kings at that time with so few men – his faith rested upon the LORD almighty. If we want to experience victory throughout a dangerous journey of hope, acknowledge God as our LORD and submit to him in obedience. We will encounter hope in us when we surrender ourselves to the Divine.

4. In a dangerous environment **always choose God's provision over justified blessings**. (vv. 21-24)

And when we acknowledge God as our LORD, we know that all blessings, all hope, all triumphs, come from him alone. Abram rightly deserved the spoils from the war. He earned what was entitled to him from the king of Sodom. But, Abram did not want to promote himself nor claim that the king of Sodom made

him rich. Abram wanted everybody to recognize that it was God, his LORD, who brought about the victory! Abram chose to acknowledge God's provision. He never dared to justify his own actions or assert that he was the reason for the win on the battlefield. His journey in discovering hope, a journey racked with danger and turmoil, came to a blessed end because of God's sovereign grace upon him. Hence, he chose to bless God instead of blessing himself or anybody else.

When we journey through dangerous paths in search of hope, we must believe that God will carry us through to the end when we can experience the end goal of hope itself. When we face treacherous obstacles meant to sideswipe us from reaching our destination, we must accept in faith that God's provision is more than enough to bring us to fulfilled hope. And when we constantly acknowledge God's merciful provision for us every step of the way, we will come across victory upon victory in our lives. The road towards hope is a dangerous expedition to travel, but it is a journey loaded with God's incredible blessings for us. Always choose God's ways, praise him for his sovereignty, and surrender to his lordship. True hope awaits us at the end.

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