

Walking the Way of Faith Genesis 14:17–24

I've been thinking about how much the way we get travel directions has changed. We've quickly gone from giving each other directions or using a road atlas or fold-out map, to printing directions from a website like Mapquest, to using a GPS device mounted on the dashboard, then to using an app on a smartphone. And nowadays, many newer vehicles even have GPS navigation built-in.

Jokes about men being unwilling to stop and ask for directions are becoming obsolete, but jokes about men being unwilling to read instructions when assembling things are still safe!

How we find our way on the roads has changed; but what about how we find our way in life? What about how we discern between the right way - God's way - and the wrong way?

The Scriptures teach us that going God's way does not come naturally to us. We are drawn to a self-centered way, a self-preserving and often self-glorifying way. We are attracted, over and over, to a way that aims to put us in control rather than God.

But Jesus came into the world to enable us to discern and follow God's way. It's not always the easy way, but through Christ, trusting and obeying God is possible.

And it should be our goal. AQ: But how do we discern and follow His way? God's way requires faith on our part, and the end of Genesis 14 gives us principles for walking the way of faith that have not changed, even though Abram experienced these so many ages ago. God is the same, and at the core, people have not changed.

This passage of Scripture makes it clear that to walk the way of faith you must do three things. You can find this outlined on page 6 in your worship guide. You must recognize the two ways before you (vv.17-18), revere the one God above you (vv.19-20) and reject the many temptations around you. (vv.21-24)

Recognize the two ways before you (vv.17-18)

Now in chapter 14 we continue to follow the life of Abram. His name will later be changed by God to Abraham. God promised to give Abram a land and many descendants. But the land was inhabited by a wicked group of people, and as far as having descendants, Abram and his wife Sarai were not yet able to bear even one child. Abram must hold to God's promises by faith.

Verse 17 finds him returning from battle after taking a small army to defeat the enemies of Sodom and Gomorrah and rescue his nephew Lot, who was taken captive. In addition to Lot, Abram brought back all of the possessions as well as the people who had been made prisoners. And upon his arrival, these two kings come out to meet him.

Look again at verse 17, *“the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh,”* and verse [18] *“Melchizedek king of Salem.”* Sodom has already been mentioned. Genesis 13 says, *“the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.”* Their king is representative of that.

This other king is more mysterious. We don't know his background or his lineage, but there are some clues. The name *“Melchizedek”* is related to righteousness or justice in the ancient Hebrew language. This is confirmed in the NT. An obvious comparison is being made between the two kings. Abram is being presented with two different kings before whom he may choose to bow.

Also, notice the rest of verse 18, Melchizedek *“brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)”* This was long before the office of priest was established in ancient Israel. Long before the tribe of Levi, long before Aaron and the sacrificial system of worship, we see a priest from “Salem,” which archeologists believe is what came to be Jerusalem.

This man was a priest, a mediator between God and man. And Abram had a choice to make.

Have you ever gone to a restaurant and been overwhelmed by the menu? You felt there were too many choices, which made it difficult to decide. Maybe you wanted the choices reduced to just a few.

Abram's choices are very clear. There are two ways. As Abram aimed to continue walking by faith, he needed to be able to recognize the difference between the two ways before him. As it turns out, Abram is not just distinguishing between two kings; he is choosing between faith and sight, between two opposite ways. He is choosing between God-centeredness and man-centeredness.

Now certainly, many decisions that we make don't boil down to right or wrong. Cookie dough ice cream or mint chocolate chip ice cream - you can't go wrong either way.

Many choices are like that. But you will find that in your life, as you seek to follow God's way, you will be continually presented with faith vs. sight. You will be confronted with trusting man or trusting God.

Can you recognize the difference? We must grow in our understanding of the contrast between faith and sight. This is why the human conscience must be shaped and informed by the Word of God. We are all susceptible to believing things that are not true. We can be deceived. And when you begin to slide down that slope, you can't always recognize true or false.

This is why the OT book of Proverbs says things like, *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death”* or *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.”* Maybe you've heard this one: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own*

understanding.” You need the discernment that comes from God in order to recognize the two ways before you.

Revere the one God above you (vv.19-20)

Now notice what Moses says next about Melchizedek. Verse [19] *“And he blessed him.”* Melchizedek blessed Abram. Blessing was basically wishing him well, but Melchizedek is a priest of God. He recognizes God’s favor on Abram.

He acknowledges that God gave Abram the victory. Melchizedek discerns the blessing of God. Verse 19, he says, *“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; [20] and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”*

Hebrews 7 describes Melchizedek as *“without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.”* Some have imagined that he was perhaps an angel or even an appearance of the Son of God.

However, that goes beyond what the Scriptures tell us. He held earthly titles from a real place. Melchizedek was mostly likely from the area of Canaan, which would later be Israel. But he was unique in the ancient world in that he was apparently a monotheist. He believed in only one God who created the universe.

But interestingly, Moses records that Melchizedek does not use God’s covenant name, Yahweh. You can tell because there is no “LORD” in all capital letters.

Now, as a side note, Moses was writing Genesis first of all for the Israelites. And for those people, Abraham was the top. He was the man, the founder of their nation. So they would sit up and take notice when they heard this next sentence, verse 20: *“And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”*

Abram gave a tithe from what he brought back from the battle. This predated the law’s command to give a tenth to God. But here is Israel’s hero, the great Abraham, humbling himself before this mysterious ancient priest, who, strangely, is somehow also a king.

This was foreign to the Israelites. Priest and King were two separate offices in Israelite government. Each was perhaps meant to keep the other in check, much like our branches of government. Melchizedek was both a priest and a king, and Abram shows reverence to Melchizedek and, ultimately, to God.

Early on in my Christian life, I thought that reading God’s Word and praying was for the purpose of satisfying God so that He would do what I wanted Him to do. And with that wrong thinking, my worship of God became very transactional. *“If I do this, then God will do that.”*

Thankfully, God is patient, and I came to learn that the Word and prayer are a response to what God has done and they are gifts used by God to shape how we think and approach life.

Proverbs 9 says, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”* Wisdom is born out of worship.

In the next verse, Abram rejects the evil king of Sodom, but the order of things here is important. Abram’s show of reverence to God in worship makes him bold to reject temptation.

As we humble ourselves before the one God above us and learn about Him and His ways, we begin to revere or respect Him more and more, and He gives us the ability to distinguish between the way of faith and the way of sight.

This is how you come into the worship service every Sunday. All of this is presented to you; what do you make of it? How will you respond to it? Through worship, God supplies the strength to walk in that way.

This is why I urge you toward personal worship each day and family worship each day. 17th century pastor Jonathan Edwards says that *“when there is much praise in our homes, the atmosphere of heaven inevitably comes down.”*

Our worship shapes our lives. What comes between you and a reverent daily way of life? Are you thanking God, remembering who He is and what He’s done, and praising Him? Are you giving back to God in worship out of all that He has given to you? If you would walk the way of faith, you must revere the one God above you.

Reject the many temptations around you. (vv.21-24)

Now in these last verses, Abram faces something that we all face. It’s somewhat understated here, but look again at verse [21]: *“And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.”*

Scholars note that if Abram takes this payment, he will be seen as a mercenary. It could be assumed that saving his nephew Lot was only a pretense for going to war, as if what Abram really wanted was the riches. If Abram takes this offer, then it would appear that this wicked king is the one who made Abram wealthy. And Abram would be indebted to that king.

You might imagine that after his victory in battle, Abram could tell himself, *“Well, I am the one who put together the army. I stuck out my neck and led the way. Plus, I already gave the LORD His due, with an offering to His priest. This can be mine, right here. Matter of fact, I deserve this. Why not take it?”*

But Abram had already been reminded that it was God who gave him the victory. Abram had already been invited into humble worship. And so Abram was made strong to perform a key element of walking in the way of faith. He was made able by God to resist temptation.

Look at verse [22] *“But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, [23] that I would not take a thread or a sandal*

strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'" [24] I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share."

Abram swore that he will not take anything from this wicked king. He gives his word; he invokes the name of Yahweh, the one true God. And by invoking Yahweh's name, he rejects the riches in accordance with God's standard. He appeals to the highest authority. The decision is made out of conviction, on principle, complying with God's moral standard. He is doing what is right in God's eyes.

What temptations present themselves to you each day? For Abram, accepting the riches would mean trusting in them. And that's the question that accompanies every temptation: where is your trust?

Temptations will come at you from all different directions, often tailor-made to your weakness. Have you been attempting to fight temptation in your strength? This is an example of fighting temptation in the strength that God supplies.

Are you trying to fight in your power? Are you working so hard to affect change in some situation, but you're trying to power through it without God?

In Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul writes, [10] *"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.* That sounds great. How would you do that? He goes on, [11] *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.* [12] *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*

There is a greater battle going on in the spiritual realm. How do we fight? Paul says, [13] *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.* He then lists these things that God gives to us as we engage in personal, relational worship of the triune God.

You put on this spiritual armor through worship, and God makes you able more and more to reject the many temptations around you.

Now, we know Abram was not a perfect man. Not many weeks ago, we looked at Genesis 12, and we saw Abram trust in his own methods, in his own wisdom. But God was patient with Abram; He had made promises to Abram, and shows Him grace. And by God's grace, Abram did what was right here. He took the way of faith.

Abram did not always recognize the two ways before him, or revere the one God above him, or reject the many temptations around him. But the life of Abram helps us understand the one man who did keep these perfectly. His name is Jesus.

Not only did Jesus do these things; He did them in the place of His people. And in Jesus we find the power and strength to walk in the way of faith.

With Jesus, we see through the lens of truth.

With Jesus, we can offer right worship to God.

With Jesus, we can say no to ungodliness.

In Titus 2, Paul told the churches, *“The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”*

Walking the way of faith will be difficult. We are sinners; we cannot do it in our own power. By grace God saves us, and by grace we will walk by faith.

Have you experienced the joy of God’s grace?

Do you know this love that Jesus has for His people?

Have you turned from your sins to trust in Jesus Christ? He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Let’s bow together in prayer.