

BE LOYAL TO THE LORD YOUR GOD

14 At the time when Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim were in power, ²they waged war against Bera the king of Sodom, Birsha the king of Gomorrah, Shinab the king of Admah, Shemeber the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, (which is also called Zoar). ³These latter five kings joined forces in the valley of Siddim, (which is the Salt Sea).

⁴For twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. ⁵Then in the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer came with the kings who were allied with him. ...

⁸Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, (which is Zoar,) marched out and drew up their battle lines against those kings in the valley of Siddim; ⁹namely, against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against the five. ¹⁰Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, that is where some of the men fell. Those who remained alive fled to the mountains.

¹¹Chedorlaomer and his allies took all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as all their food, then they went their way. ¹²They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who had settled in Sodom, and his possessions, and they departed. ¹³Now one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew. At the time Abram was living near the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, (Mamre was a brother of Eshcol and Aner; and these three were in alliance with Abram.) ¹⁴Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he mustered his trained men who were born in his household—three hundred and eighteen in all—and pursued after them as far as Dan. ¹⁵During the night he divided his forces between himself and his servants. Then he routed the enemy and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. ¹⁶Abram retrieved all the possessions; he also brought back his brother Lot, together with his possessions. Abram also brought back the women and the rest of the people who had been taken captive.

¹⁷The king of Sodom went out to meet Abram at the valley of Shaveh, (which is the King's Valley), after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him. ¹⁸And Melchizedek king of Salem brought bread and wine; now he was priest of God Most High. ¹⁹And Melchizedek blessed him saying, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰and blessed be God Most High, the One who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And Abram gave him a tenth of all the spoils.

²¹And the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the people, but keep the spoils for yourself. ²²But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have raised my hand in oath to Jehovah, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, ²³that I will not take so much as a thread or a thong of a sandal or anything else that belongs to you, so that you may not say, I have made Abram rich. ²⁴The one exception being that which the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them take their share.

15 After these things the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am your shield, and your reward shall be exceedingly great. ²And Abram said, O Lord Jehovah, what will you give me, seeing that I am childless, and the one who

shall inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? ³And Abram said, To me you have given no offspring; so a servant born in my household is my heir. ⁴Then the word of Jehovah came to him, saying, This man shall not be your heir; rather, he who shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir. ⁵And Jehovah brought him out to the open field and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. ⁶And he believed Jehovah; and Jehovah credited it to him as righteousness.

⁷And he said to him, I am Jehovah who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, in order to give you this land to inherit. ⁸And he said, O Lord Jehovah, how shall I know that I shall inherit it? ⁹And he said to him, Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat and a three-year-old ram, also a turtle-dove and a young pigeon. ¹⁰Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two, and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹Then the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

¹²And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and a horror of great darkness fell upon him. ¹³And he said to Abram, Know for sure that your descendants shall be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and they shall serve the inhabitants of that land; and that nation shall afflict your descendants for four hundred years. ¹⁴But also know that I will judge that nation whom they shall serve; and afterward shall they come out with great possessions. ¹⁵But you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶And in the fourth generation your descendants shall come back here again; because the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

¹⁷When the sun went down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between the pieces of the divided animal carcasses. ¹⁸On that day Jehovah made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your descendants have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the Euphrates: ¹⁹the land of the Kenite, and the Kenizzite, and the Kadmonite, ²⁰and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Rephaim, ²¹and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Girgashite, and the Jebusite. (Gen. 14:1-15:21)

Introduction

Young Ryan Schmitz, a 3rd grader at Cleveland Elementary School (Cleveland, WI), received the following letter one day:

Dear Ryan,

I understand that you are a big Viking fan and that everyone else in your school cheers for the Packers. I know that is a tough situation. I hope that you will at least consider cheering for the Packers. I hope you will think about joining us, Ryan!

Mike Holmgren (Head Coach of the Green Bay Packers)

“No, I’m not going to join him.” Ryan said, “They’re never going to talk me into it.”

Despite the peer pressure of his fellow classmates, despite the efforts of his teachers to make him a Packer fan, despite a letter from the Packer's head coach himself, Ryan Schmitz was determined to be loyal to his team, the Minnesota Vikings. (*The Sheboygan Press*, 11/19/96)

May we as Christians learn from the example of this young boy and exhibit a far greater loyalty, loyalty to the LORD our God. Because He is worthy of our loyalty, let us be loyal to the LORD our God.

I. Be Loyal to the LORD Your God, Even When It Means Making a Sacrifice

Lot had initially chosen to settle in the Plains of the Jordan in the suburbs of Sodom, because of the economic potential he saw in the fertile fields. But before long he would come to regret his decision.

Not only was his righteous soul tormented by the wicked lives of the men of Sodom, as the Apostle Peter informs us,

... righteous Lot ... was distressed by the conduct of lawless men living in licentiousness—⁸for by what he saw and heard as he lived among them day by day, that righteous man felt his righteous soul tormented by their lawless deeds . (2 Pet. 2:7-8)

he also witnessed the beginning of the LORD's judgment upon that society.

Before the final judgment fell from heaven, (as recorded in Genesis 19:24-25, printed below,)

Then Jehovah rained brimstone and fire upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah— from Jehovah out of heaven. ²⁵He overthrew those cities, and the entire Plain, and all the inhabitants of those cities, and also the vegetation of the land. (Gen.19:24-25)

the LORD administered a preliminary judgment in the form of a foreign oppressor. For 12 years the city-states of Sodom and Gomorrah were forced to pay a hefty financial tribute to a powerful confederacy under the leadership of a warlord named Chedorlaomer. When, in the 13th year, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah rebelled, Chedorlaomer launched a military campaign against them. The outcome resulted in the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah being defeated, their cities plundered (14:11,) and many captives being carried away into slavery, included among them was Lot and his family (14:12.)

One of the captives managed to escape, and he made his way back to Canaan; there he reported to Abram what had happened to his nephew, Lot (14:13.) Abram summons his trained militia to prepare for battle. He and his troops

overtook Chedorlaomer's army, launched a surprise attack in the middle of the night, and redeemed the captives and recouped the losses (14:14-16.)

Now, as Abram returns in victory with the spoil, he is met by two men: the grateful king of Sodom and the mysterious Melchizedek. Melchizedek, indentified as "*priest of God Most High,*" 1) supplies brings bread and wine (for a communion meal,) 2) blesses Abram in the name of God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, and 3) blesses God Most High who gave Abram the victory. The king of Sodom, on the other hand, requests Abram to return the citizens to his city, and offers to allow Abram to keep all the spoils of war for himself.

Consider how Abram responds to these two men, and why he responds as he does. Abram gave a tenth of the spoil to Melchizedek, as a tithe to the LORD, (acknowledging that the LORD is Possessor of all and the Giver of victory over the enemies of His people.) Abram returns all the rest of the spoils to the king of Sodom. Why did he do so? First, in order to honor his vow to the LORD (14:22-23.) Second, in order to avoid having the king of Sodom become his benefactor and his lord to whom he would be indebted. Apparently Abram vowed that if the LORD gave him the victory, he would give God the glory and not allow the king of Sodom to become his benefactor.

Abram did what he did, even at a personal sacrifice, in order that he might be loyal to the LORD his God, and that he might not become indebted to the pagan king of Sodom. Abram realized that the blessing and favor of the world comes with strings attached, strings that can turn into cords of bondage. Abram rightfully acknowledged that the LORD God alone is our only Lord and true Benefactor.

Let us be loyal to the LORD our God, even when it means making a sacrifice. Like Abram, may we realize that the "blessings" the world offers come with strings attached—when men bestow their blessings upon us, there is often times the expectation to receive reciprocal benefits or obligations. Like Abram, may we recognize that the LORD our God is our supreme Lord and true Benefactor,

Jehovah God is a sun and a shield. Jehovah will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. ¹²O Jehovah of hosts, blessed is the man that trusts in you. (Psl. 84:11-12)

II. Be Loyal to the LORD Your God, by Trusting in His Word

Genesis 15:1 informs us, "*After these things,* [i.e., after Abram's refusal of the king of Sodom's offer], *the Word of the Jehovah came to Abram.*" Once again—as occurred earlier when Lot departed, note Genesis 13:14-15, (printed below)—following a difficult, but godly choice, the LORD draws near to Abram with renewed assurance.

After Lot had separated himself from him, Jehovah said to Abram, Now lift up your eyes from the place where you are and look northward and southward and eastward and westward; ¹⁵because I will give to you and to your offspring forever all the land that you see. (Gen. 13:14-15)

By means of a supernatural vision the LORD speaks to Abram: *“Fear not, Abram, I am your shield, and your reward shall be exceedingly great.”* Once again, here is a word of assurance that Abram’s faith and loyalty shall be rewarded and not forgotten.

Notice how Abram responds with a reverent boldness: *“O Lord Jehovah, what will you give me?”* Abram is asking, What is the reward You are going to give me? He goes on to “inform” the LORD, *“I am childless, and the one who shall inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus [Abram’s servant], to me you have given no offspring.”* Abram protests, O LORD, You promise to give me a great reward, but what will become of that reward? You have not yet fulfilled Your initial promise to give me a descendant to whom I can pass on the reward You now promise to give me.

The LORD assures Abram, *“this man [Eliezer] shall not be your heir, but you will have a son who shall be your heir”* (15:4.) Again the LORD renews His promise to give Abram a son and descendants as numerous as the stars. Abram, in turn, demonstrates his loyalty to the LORD by believing in His Word (15:6.) Abram put his trust and confidence in the integrity and the ability and the Word of the LORD, as the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 4:18-21,

[Despite all the obstacles standing] against hope, [Abraham] believed with hope, so that he might become a father of many nations, just as it had been spoken to him, So shall your offspring be. ¹⁹And without becoming weak in faith, he acknowledged that his own body was now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and he acknowledged the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰Nevertheless, looking to the promise of God, he did not waver through unbelief, but grew strong through faith, thereby giving glory to God, ²¹being fully persuaded that what God had promised, he was also able to fulfill. (Rom.4:18-21)

Let us be loyal to the LORD our God, by trusting in His Word. One great expression of loyalty is accepting God’s Word with confidence and by His grace resting in it and acting upon it.

III. Be Loyal to the LORD Your God, Relying upon His Covenant

The LORD reminds Abram of His divine identity and purpose. He declares, *“I am Jehovah.”* He is the sovereign God and the covenant God. Note Exodus 3:14-15, where the LORD reveals Himself to Moses in the same way, *“God said to Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM.’ ... ¹⁵Furthermore, God said to Moses, ‘This is what you shall say to*

the children of Israel: Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.” The LORD then goes on to remind Abram, *“I brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees in order to give you this land to inherit.”*

Abram, who had just expressed his faith in the LORD’s Word (15:6,) now is emboldened to ask for a divine token or sign to bolster his faith (15:8.) The LORD honors Abram’s faith and condescends to Abram’s weakness by granting him a tremendous token of assurance: the LORD enters into a formal covenant with Abram (15:9-21.)

What is described in verses 9-21 is a covenant-making ceremony typical of that day. The parties involved would bring several animals, which would be sacrificed and the carcasses would be split in half. The divided carcasses would then be arranged to form a corridor. The parties entering into covenant would then pass through the corridor of the divided carcasses, thereby pledging themselves to fulfill the covenant on penalty of death (Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament, The Pentateuch*, Vol.1, p.214.)

There is one significant difference between this particular covenant and the typical covenants of the day, in this covenant only the LORD passed through the corridor of death: *“a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between the pieces [of the divided animal carcasses]”* (15:17.) The *“smoking firepot and flaming torch”* were representing the LORD’s own presence and are comparable to the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire described in Exodus 13:21, *“By day Jehovah went before them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.”* The LORD was actively taking upon Himself the obligation to fulfill the covenant, while Abram was to passively rely upon the LORD’s faithfulness.

In the making of this covenant, the LORD also explained to Abram what would happen and why. Abram’s descendants would become foreigners in a strange land, they would be oppressed; then, after 400 years would come their salvation. Abram’s descendants must wait until the fourth generation to inherit the land, *“because the iniquity of the Amorite had not yet reached its full measure”* (15:16.) Abram’s descendants must endure while God’s long-suffering patience allows the sin of the world to come to full fruition.

The LORD honored Abram’s faith and condescended to his weakness by establishing with him a formal covenant. It was a covenant that provided Abram with an added measure of assurance, but one that also exposed him to the awesomeness of God. Abram was exposed to the awesome Person of God as revealed in Genesis 15:12, *“when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and a horror of great darkness fell upon him.”* Abram was also made acquainted with the awesome way of God as revealed in Genesis 15:13-16,

And he said to Abram, Know for sure that your descendants shall be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and they shall serve the inhabitants of that land; and that nation shall afflict your descendants for four hundred years. ¹⁴But also know that I will judge that nation whom they shall serve; and afterward shall they come out with great possessions. ¹⁵But you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶And in the fourth generation your descendants shall come back here again; because the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. (Gen. 15:13-16)

Abram was made to realize that the LORD's promises are fulfilled in His time, and may require much patience and the endurance of much hardship before their fulfillment is accomplished. We may note how this very truth is expressed by the hymn writer, John Newton, speaking from his own experience:

Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; grace has brought me safe this far, and grace shall lead me home. (*Amazing Grace*, John Newton)

Let us be loyal to the LORD our God, relying upon His covenant, the covenant the LORD established at Calvary, the covenant to which all the covenants of the Old Testament pointed, the covenant of which the Lord's Supper is the symbol and reminder,

This cup [represents] the new covenant [ratified] by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me. ²⁶Whenever you eat this bread and drink from the cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death—until he comes [again]. (1 Cor.11:25-26)

Here is the covenant, which is the pledge that God will surely fulfill all His promises,

However many may be the promises of God, in Christ is the yes [of their fulfillment]. (2 Cor. 1:20)

Conclusion

That young boy, Ryan Schmitz, was determined to be loyal to his favorite sports team; despite the pressures he faced to betray that allegiance. May we as Christians exhibit a far greater loyalty: loyalty to the LORD our God.