

Series: God & Abraham #1186

Title: Genesis 14.14-15

Abram Is A Competent Commander

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. I hope you enjoyed the weekend and you are ready to return to...war! And by war, I mean the historical war, the first war in the Bible; more like the battle after the war, a one-sided takedown by a clear winner. We are at this juncture in Genesis chapter 14 when the armies of the four kings from the northeast marched down south and successfully attacked the armies of the five kings of the south. Then, celebrating their success, on their way home they happened to file by near where Abram was then living.

And when the fugitive came running and told Abram the Hebrew that his nephew Lot was held captive by those armies from the northeast, Abram's response was immediate. He set out to rescue Lot! We are getting into the action soon, but as we do so I remind you that Abram's actions speak to his underlying, strong and godly character. That is, Abram was able to do what he did because God had shaped and molded his character. The Lord had prepared him for what was coming. And when the moment came, Abram did not hesitate.

Thus far, we have had three insights. Do you remember them? **First, God shaped Abram's character so that he is the leader of his household. Second, God shaped Abram's character so that he is prepared. Third, God shaped Abram's character so that he is courageous and brave.** Each insight came with some commentary and so if you were not with us last week, be sure and get up on the podcast by visiting godisministry.org, that's the website godisministry.org.

As we get rolling in a new week, I have a fourth insight for you. Here it is: **fourth, God shaped Abram's character so that he is a competent commander.** For you note takers, I repeat: fourth, God shaped Abram's character so that he is a competent commander. I find that by reading this in Genesis chapter 14, verses 14 and 15. **"¹⁴When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵[Abram] divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus."**

I think most of us find these verses surprising. When we think of Abram (or Abraham – his name change is still forthcoming)...when we think of him we do not picture a military commander. Do we? We remember Abraham as a man of faith, and we remember episodes from his life like when God commands him to take his own son Isaac's life on the mountain. Abram was prepared to go *that far* in obedience, but the Lord spared Isaac (and Abraham)! But because Genesis 14 is rarely taught (or even read) *and* because when it is other lessons are drawn, many readers of the Scripture miss Abram the military strategist and leader. *And*, not only is Abram the commander of a small force, he is a *competent* one.

I am of the opinion that men and women of strong, godly character are competent people. One of the ministries the Spirit of God has within our character is to make us competent. How so? Well, take whatever it is you do. Are you a business person? Do you make money? Do you teach? Are your students learning? Are you a janitor? Are the floors so clean people could eat off them? Are you server at a restaurant? Do customers (patrons) tell everyone who visits your restaurant to make sure they get you as their waiter or waitress because you're so good at it? Do you work in a supermarket stocking shelves? Do customers know just where to find what they need and is there plenty of product to meet demand? Are you a lab technician? Are accurate results returned to doctors and patients in a timely manner?

These are just some examples. You get the point. It should be the testimony of Christians that we are competent at what God has given us to do, and that is because the Lord has made us capable people. There should be no reason whatsoever why we are *incompetent* in our profession. If you are competent in your work that speaks well of your character.

Sometimes (can I say often?) in Christian community there is an emphasis on character over and above competence. We do not see how competency is a part of godly character. We tend to think that

competency is secondary, or in some way detached from our character. So there is (properly) an emphasis on believers being people of high morality. We are to be ethical, principled, marked by right thinking and right behavior; law abiding. That is true. That is *very* true. God expects this of us, and He has given us His Holy Spirit to help us live like this. *But* we should not prize character to the exclusion of competence. This is my point, derived from the Scripture.

I have to admit that I've seen the following happen too often in Christian communities (like churches, Christian schools, and para-church ministries, such as mission organizations): as long as someone is really living for God, he or she exhibits the fruit of the Spirit, maintains sexual purity, and so on, ah then whether or not this individual is competent – capable, knowledgeable, skilful in their ministry – really does not matter. In fact, sometimes the less competent a spiritually mature person is, the greater their opportunity for advancement, promotion, within their ministry. We seem to have a tough time criticizing the *work* of a spiritually mature person who is *incompetent*.

Brothers and sisters, this should not be! There needs to be an integration of competency within one's character. And when someone is spiritually mature, but lacks an ability to do the work, what is loving is to turn that individual in the direction of another ministry that will draw on their skillset. And the same is true in the marketplace. How many Christians have actually failed in their witness for Jesus Christ because they could not do the job they were paid to do? Friends, what we find in Abram in this passage is a man who was called upon to lead a small band of men into the war, and he did so with competence *derived from* his character.

Perhaps it will be of help if I solidify my point by giving you another example, from within the Scripture, of a person God shaped for a specific task – developing competency within his character. His name is Bezalel and we read about him in the Book of Exodus, chapter 31, verses 1-5. As context, this is the period in which the Lord has given detailed instructions to Moses for the building of the tabernacle of God. After laying out the blueprint for *exactly* what He wants, God then speaks again in Exodus 31, verses 1-5. Listen to what He says.

“Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²‘See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.³ I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *kinds of* craftsmanship, ⁴ to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, ⁵ and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all *kinds of* craftsmanship.”

There he is: **Bezalel** another person whom God has equipped to be very competent in craftsmanship. Notice the connection between God filling this man with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge that results in an artist's work in gold, silver, in bronze, in the cutting of stones for settings *and* in the carving of wood! All of you artists and craftsmen and women, masons, designers, and builders out there – your work matters to God and if you are good at it this speaks to your competency *and* your character. Do it all for the glory of your King, Jesus!

God shaped Abram's character so that he is a competent commander. Today we have looked at the part that is competency. Tomorrow we will dig on him as commander. The Bible gives testimony to this: the Living God really cares about our work. As believers – people of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – we must humble ourselves before Him and invite His character shaping hand in our lives. This will involve making us competent – capable and skilful – in what He has called us and equipped us to do. Each of us have gifts and talents and these are to be used for His honor and glory. This is what our father Abraham did. And we ought to do the same.

Always be teachable, learning, and growing in your profession. The same applies to me and to anyone teaching the Bible. I definitely desire the Spirit of God to further develop me. If we want to be people of godly character then, like Abram, we should spend time before the altar in our hearts – built for God – and we should wait on Him there to prepare us for what is ahead. I hope that God will speak to you today, applying these lessons to your mind and heart...and to your work. Join me tomorrow because God Is.

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