

Genesis 14:1 – 24

¹ And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, ² that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). ³ All these came as allies to the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). ⁴ Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but the thirteenth year they rebelled. ⁵ In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim and the Zuzim in Ham and the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, ⁶ and the Horites in their Mount Seir, as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness. ⁷ Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and conquered all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, who lived in Hazazon-tamar. ⁸ And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah and the king of Admah and the king of Zeboim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim, ⁹ against Chedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim and Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar--four kings against five. ¹⁰ Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country. ¹¹ Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed. ¹² They also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom. ¹³ Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. ¹⁴ When 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 He 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. ¹⁶ He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people. ¹⁷ Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. ¹⁹ He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' He gave him a tenth of all. ²¹ The king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.' ²² Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, ²³ that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, 'I have made Abram rich.' ²⁴ I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share.'

Historical and Cultural Background

- Abram had said to Lot, 'We are brothers' (Gen.13:8). Where else have we seen brothers?
- *A Regional War:* Amraphel of Shinar is from Babylon. Arioch king of Ellasar may be from eastern Asia Minor or perhaps the southern coast of the Black Sea. Chedorlaomer was king of Elam, a powerful state in southwestern Persia east of the Jordan River during the early second millennium BC. Tidal king of Goiim may represent the Hittite kingdom in Anatolia, central Turkey.
- *Sodom and Gomorrah:* The kings Bera and Birsha echo the words 'evil' (*ra*) and 'wickedness' (*rasha*).
- *Melchizedek, King of Salem:* The name/title Melchizedek means 'my king is righteousness' or 'king of righteousness.' Salem means 'peace.' Salem was the precursor city to Jerusalem (city of peace).

Questions

1. Check out a map. Understand this conflict.
 - a. This is a huge regional war!! Babylon is to the east. If this spans the Black Sea region and central Turkey to the north as well
 - b. 'There are three sets of double place-names, Astheroth-Karnaim, Shaveh- Kiriathaim and Hazazon-Tamar. In each case, the second name is known to us from Israelite times...[while] the first name represents the archaic pre-Israelite designation strange to later generations.' (Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1966), 112)
2. What's going on with Lot?
 - a. Where was Lot the last time we read about him? Living outside Sodom in his tents (Gen.13:12). Now he is living inside it (Gen.14:12).
 - b. What do you think the conversations were like between Abram and Lot on the way home?
3. What happens to Abram here? How do we see him grow?
 - a. Has he been encouraged by God's promise to him, and how God protected him against Egypt? That concerned Sarai. This now concerns his nephew Lot, whom he called 'brother.'
 - b. He acts on tremendous courage and love for Lot
 - c. He is his brother's keeper. He reverses the sin of Cain, who killed his brother. Abram does not let his 'brother' die. He rescues him. Abram is learning about God's concern for the integrity of the marriage relationship, and the brother-brother relationship, two of the major relationships commented on by Genesis 2 – 4. He will soon learn about the father-son relationship, which is the last major relationship illustrated as affected by the fall.
 - d. He is generous towards all he rescues
 - e. He becomes a leader in the region! Author Bruce Feiler writes, 'When Lot is taken captive in a war pitting four kings against five, Abraham leads the coalition to rescue him. Our pitiful, impotent geriatric suddenly becomes a war hero! And the world takes note. He begins to negotiate treaties with local leaders. The king of a Canaanite town, Melchizedek, blesses him and praises his Creator, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth." Abraham responds by giving Melchizedek a tenth of everything he has. One wants to cheer, rooting for Abraham's growth, the power he accumulates, his dignity. Abraham is not merely a man of faith, he's a man of strength and tolerance, too. He's not Machiavellian, Draconian, Napoleonic. He's Abrahamic – measured, moral, middle of the road.'¹
 - f. Abram knows that the victory belongs to God. So he tithes, and refuses to keep anything for himself. This incident seems to anticipate the encouragement of Deuteronomy 20:1 about having faith in God when having to fight.
4. Who is this Melchizedek? Why does he show up here?
 - a. To show us that not all Canaanites were like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. This guy worshiped God, like Abram did.
 - b. Because he was an ally and friend to Abram. Or wanted to be.
 - c. Because he recognized that Abram won a spiritual victory, and not just a physical victory. Abram believed God's promise which implied that he had to stay alive until he had a child. Abram also believed the general character and scope of God's promise, that others would be blessed through him and because of him. As a result of his faith, Abram had just delivered Lot and others from the clutches of the foreign kings.
 - d. That means Melchizedek was a spectator to what God did through Abram. Melchizedek recognized that the character of God is to deliver people from the oppressor, and bring them back to the garden land.
 - e. The bread and wine that Melchizedek served are a foreshadowing of Christian communion! Jesus believed in God's faithfulness, so he won a victory, delivering human nature from the clutches of sin, death, and the devil. Then he comes back in resurrection power to offer his Spirit-infused new humanity to us, and serves communion – bread and wine! Melchizedek became a foreshadowing of Jesus, who is the true king of righteousness and true king of peace, who reunited the roles of king and priest (Psalm 110:5). *This is a Christus Victor motif, for those of us who appreciate atonement theology!*

¹ Bruce Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), p.62

5. The king of Sodom: Is this his replacement? Is he grateful to Abram? Begrudging? His terse expression suggests that he was embarrassed at his own failure, and the fact that Abram was able to rescue Lot and the people and goods of Sodom where he himself (or his predecessor) had failed as king.
6. Why does Abram walk away from success? What does this suggest to us about how God wants us to handle success?