

Genesis 14 – Abram Meets Melchizedek

Review

Last time, we talked about God’s calling Abram to leave his father’s house in Haran and journey to Canaan. We saw that although God didn’t tell Abram exactly where He would lead him, Abram obeyed. When Abram arrived in Canaan, God promised to give the land to Abram’s descendants (זרע *zera* - seed).

We also looked at Abram’s sojourn in Egypt due to a famine in Canaan and Abram’s and Sarai’s deceit of Pharaoh saying she was Abram’s sister rather than his wife. Finally, we saw that when Abram and Lot returned from Egypt they separated. Abram remained in Canaan as he had been commanded by God, and Lot moved eastward into the Jordan valley and then southward toward Sodom.

The Capture and Rescue of Lot

The first part of Genesis 14 details a series of battles that took place between two alliances of kings. After the culminating battle of this war, Abram’s nephew Lot was taken captive before the invading armies returned to their homelands beyond Damascus. Genesis 14:1-3 gives us an “executive summary” of this war, and Genesis 14:4-12 fills in the details.

¹In the days of Amraphel [אֲמֶרָפֶל 'amrāpēl – sayer of darkness] king of Shinar [שִׁנְאָר šin'ār – country of two rivers], Arioch [אַרְיוֹךְ 'aryôk – lion like] king of Ellasar [אֵלְלָסָר 'ellāsār – God is chastener], Chedorlaomer [כְּדֻרְלָאוֹמֶר k'dārlā'ōmer – handful of sheaves] king of Elam [אֵילָם 'ēlām – eternity], and Tidal [תִּדְאֵל tid'āl – great son] king of Goiim [גֹּיִם gōyim – nations, people, Gentiles], Genesis 14:1 (ESV)

The kings listed in verse 1 ruled various provinces in Mesopotamia and southwestern Iran. The leader of this alliance – Chedorlaomer – ruled the area along the northeastern shore of the Arabian Gulf known in the time of Abram as Elam. Almost nothing is known of Chedorlaomer apart from this account in Genesis 14. We are already familiar with שִׁנְאָר šin'ār – Shinar from the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Recall that this plain is the area where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow together in what is now southern Iraq. Recall also that this area is where Ur of the Chaldeans – Abram’s hometown – was located.

The word גֹּיִם *gōyim* means nations, peoples, or Gentiles.

²these kings made war with Bera [בֶּרָע bera' – son of evil] king of Sodom [סְדוֹם s'dōm – burning], Birsha [בִּרְשָׁא birša' – with iniquity] king of Gomorrah [גְּמֹרָה 'āmōrā – submersion], Shinab [שִׁנְאָב šin'āb – splendor of the father] king of Admah [אֲדָמָה 'admā – red earth], Shemeber [שֵׁמֶבֶר šem'eber – lofty flight] king of Zeboim [צִבְיִים 'āhā'im – gazelles], and the king of Bela [בֶּלַע bela' – destruction] (that is, Zoar [צֹרַר šō'ar – insignificance]). ³And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim [סִדְדִּים sidīm – field or plain] (that is, the Salt Sea). ⁴Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. Genesis 14:2-4 (ESV)

The five kings listed in verse 2 ruled over the “cities of the plain” along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea (Salt Sea). God later destroyed four of these cities by fire from Heaven with only בֶּלַע *bela* (צֹרַר *šō'ar*) being spared. Notice the meanings of the names of these kings and their cities. Some of these might indicate that possibly these places weren’t known by these names until after God destroyed them. Recall that in Genesis 12 & 13 Moses used the name בֵּית־אֵל *bêt-'ēl* for one of the places that

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Abram camped, although the place wasn't yet known by that name when Abram first came there. Here in Genesis 14:2 Moses may refer to the cities of the plain by names they were given after God destroyed them. But let me emphasize that this is mere speculation on my part.

Evidently, Chedorlaomer had subdued the cities of the plain sometime previously, and had been exacting tribute from them since then, but after paying him and his allies tribute for 12 years, they rebelled against him. As we shall see, that turned out to be a mistake because Chedorlaomer led an alliance of armies into the area the following year to bring them back into line.

5In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim [קַרְנַיִם רִפְאִים *rīpā'im – giants*] ***in Ashteroth-karnaim*** [קַרְנַיִם אֲשֶׁת־רֹת *'aštrôt qarnayim – Ashtoreth of the two horns or peaks*], ***the Zuzim*** [זֻזִים *zûzîm – roving creatures*] ***in Ham*** [חַם *ham – hot*], ***the Emim*** [אֵמִים *'êmîm – terrors*] ***in Shaveh-kiriathaim*** [שְׁנֵי קִרְיָתַיִם *šāvē-qiryātayim – two cities of the plain*], ***6and the Horites*** [חֹרִי *hōrî – cave dwellers*] ***in their hill country of Seir*** [שַׁעִיר *šē'îr – hairy or shaggy*] ***as far as El-paran*** [אֵיל פָּרָן *'êl pā'rān – palm of Paran*] ***on the border of the wilderness.*** ***7Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat*** [עֵין מִשְׁפָּט *'ên mišpāt – spring of judgment*] ***(that is, Kadesh*** [קָדֵשׁ *qādēš – holy*]) ***and defeated all the country of the Amalekites*** [אֲמָלֵקִי *'āmālēqī – people of lapping*], ***and also the Amorites*** [אֲמֹרִי *'ēmōrî – sayers*] ***who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar*** [חַצְצֹון תְּמָר *ḥaṣṣôn tāmār – dividing the date palm*]. Genesis 14:5-7 (ESV)

Look at the Genesis 14 Battle Map reference.

Recall that Chedorlaomer and his allies had set out from their homelands in Mesopotamia and Elam (Iran) to quell the rebellion of the cities of the (Dead Sea) plain. As we mentioned when we discussed Abram's journey from Ur to Canaan, the direct route across the desert was not the best. Instead – like Abram before them – the four-king alliance traveled up the Euphrates, then back southward to Damascus, and along the Kings Highway from Damascus toward Egypt through the mountains east of the Dead Sea. This route would have prevented the peoples of the Dead Sea valley from detecting the invaders until they came down to attack them. After defeating the peoples mentioned in this passage – no doubt exacting renewed tributes and sacking the cities they overcame – Chedorlaomer's alliance headed for home – this time along the western shore of the Dead Sea with the great cliffs of the Judean mountains on their western flank.

Carefully note Moses' reference to the Amalekites in Genesis 14:7. He writes that Chedorlaomer's alliance defeated “***all the country of the Amalekites.***” Certainly, this country was occupied by someone during the time of Abram, but not by Amalekites. The Amalekites were descended from Abram's great great grandson Amalek the grandson of Jacob's twin brother Esau whose descendants lived in mountainous northern Seir southwest of the Dead Sea as shown on the map. The Amalekites were noted for their large physical stature. Ten of the twelve spies sent up to survey the land after the Israelites' exodus from bondage in Egypt reported seeing descendants of Amalek to whom the Israelites would appear small as grasshoppers. The Philistine giant Goliath was apparently also a descendant of Amalek.

8Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim ***9with Chedorlaomer king of Elam,***

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Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five. ¹⁰Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. ¹¹So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. ¹²They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way. Genesis 14:8-12 (ESV)

As Chedorlaomer's alliance began to head for home, the kings of the cities of the valley saw their opportunity to attack them in the Valley of Siddim south of the Dead Sea. No doubt they hoped to rid themselves of their vassal status under Chedorlaomer with its associated tribute payments. This was a serious miscalculation. Chedorlaomer's alliance routed them and put them to flight. After the disastrous defeat of the five-kings alliance at the Valley of Siddim, Chedorlaomer's alliance sacked the cities of the valley, taking plentiful spoils and numerous prisoners including Abram's nephew Lot before resuming their return trip home.

Notice that although Lot had gone eastward into the rich valley of the Jordan when he and Abram separated after returning from Egypt (Genesis 13), he had since moved southward until finally we find him here in Genesis 14:12 living **in** the city of Sodom itself.

¹³Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew [עִבְרִי 'ibrî – one from beyond], who was living by the oaks of Mamre [מַמְרֵ' mamrē' – strength] the Amorite, brother of Eshcol [אֶשְׁכּוֹל 'eškōl – cluster] and of Aner [אֲנֵר 'ānēr – boy]. These were allies of Abram. ¹⁴When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan [formerly לַיִשׁ layiš – lion]. ¹⁵And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah [חֹבַב hōḇā – hiding place], north of Damascus. ¹⁶Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people. Genesis 14:13-16 (ESV)

Genesis 14:13 is the first instance where we find the name Hebrew (עִבְרִי 'ibrî) meaning “one from beyond.” Note that Abram wasn't called an Israelite. How could he or any of his contemporaries be, since his grandson Jacob after whom the Israelite people derived their name had not yet been born?

The meaning of the name Hebrew is interesting. It could mean one from beyond the Euphrates. Abram having come originally from Ur of the Chaldeans, qualifies as such. From the Canaanite perspective, the name might mean one from beyond the Jordan, which would also apply to Abram. But I digress...

In Genesis 14:14 we read that Abram pursued the armies of Chedorlaomer as far as Dan. In Abram's time though that place was called לַיִשׁ layiš. It was renamed as Dan many hundreds of years later during the time of the Judges by the descendants of Abram's great grandson Dan, the son of Jacob.

This is intriguing. If as we have assumed, Moses was the scribe who first wrote down the history recorded in the book of Genesis, he could **not** have written Genesis 14:14 as we read it today – not as a strictly human scribe anyway. Moses had long since died by the time לַיִשׁ layiš received its new name. So, either Moses was not the human author of Genesis (at least not **all** of it), God's Spirit

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divinely inspired Moses to record the story using the town's later name, or the text of Genesis 14:14 was later modified to its current form.

ASIDE – The story of how **שַׁיִשׁ לַיִשׁ layiš** received its new name (Judges 18) is a particularly dismal one even by the appalling standard set by the entire book of Judges. The original tribal allocation for Dan when the Israelites settled the land under Joshua's leadership, was a small one along Canaan's central coast and extending into the Judean mountains west of Jerusalem. The Israelites had not been able to fully conquer the lands of the Philistines along the coast to the south of Dan's allocation, so the tribe of Dan was squeezed into a small territory insufficient for them. Searching for a new homeland for their tribe, the people of Dan made a foray northward and found an unsuspecting and peaceful group of Sidonians living in **שַׁיִשׁ layiš**. These Sidonians were isolated from the government and defenses of Sidon along the Lebanese coast, so the Danites easily defeated them and seized their territory for themselves.

Along the way, a party of five spies whom the Danites had sent on ahead acquired a Levite whom the Danites installed as their tribal priest. He was a renegade Levite who had been employed by an Ephraimite named Micah to establish a private cult based around an ephod Micah had constructed himself and idols Micah had commissioned a silversmith to make out of silver Micah had stolen from his own mother (but later returned to her). Micah himself then "ordained" the Levite as his private priest thinking God would make him prosperous because he had his own Levite.

When the Danite spies passed through the land of Ephraim, Micah gave them lodging in his house. When they left Micah's home to continue their quest for land, they stole Micah's renegade Levite priest, the ephod, and the silver idols. After taking **שַׁיִשׁ layiš** from the Sidonians, the leaders of Dan established the Levite as their own tribal priest who continued to minister the idolatrous cult he had set up for Micah.

This would not be the last idolatry in which Dan indulged. When the kingdom of Israel was separated from the kingdom of Judah following the death of Solomon, one of Solomon's servants Jeroboam – son of Nebat became king over ten of the tribes of Israel in the northern half of the land. Seeking to prevent the people from going to Jerusalem to worship and make their offerings, Jeroboam made two golden calves placing one at Bethel and the other at Dan, saying just as Moses' brother Aaron had said of the original golden calf he made in the wilderness of Sinai...

28b ...Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. ¹ Kings 12:28b (ESV)

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17After his [Abram's] 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 [שָׁוֵה šāvê – plain or level plain] (that is, the King's Valley). Genesis 14:17 (ESV)

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Absalom's Monument

The location of the King's Valley is debatable. Its only other mention is in 2 Samuel 18:18 in reference to a monument King David's rebellious son Absalom had erected to himself. There is a burial monument in Jerusalem today in the Kidron Valley near the eastern wall of the city that is traditionally called Absalom's Monument, but it likely dates from sometime in the 1st century AD, and the idea that Absalom is buried there conflicts with the report of 2 Samuel 18:17 that Absalom was buried in a pit in the Wood of Ephraim on the east side of the Jordan River.

Furthermore, as can be seen from this photo, the Kidron Valley could hardly be called a "plain" or "level plain" as the name Shaveh implies. In fact, most of the Jerusalem area is quite hilly. Yet this King's Valley must have been somewhere in the vicinity of Jerusalem (formerly Salem), since Melchizedek also came to meet Abram there...

18 *And Melchizedek* [מַלְכִי־שֶׁדֶק malkî-šedeq – *king of righteousness or justice*] *king of Salem* [שָׁלֵם śālēm – *peace*] *brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High* [אֱלֹהֵי עֵלְיוֹן 'el elyôn]) **19** *And he blessed him and said,*

*“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor [or Creator] of heaven and earth;
20 and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”*

And Abram gave him a tenth [מַעֲשֵׂר ma'āšēr – *tithe or tenth part*] *of everything.* Genesis 14:18-20 (ESV)

Recall that at the time of this encounter, God's written Law had not yet been given, although by the time Genesis was written down (assuming Moses first recorded this history), the Law had been given personally to Moses by God Himself! Under the Law, the priesthood of Israel was taken from the tribe of Abram's great grandson Levi beginning with Moses' brother Aaron. Hundreds of years later (1 Samuel 16), God commanded the prophet to anoint David from the tribe of Judah to become king over the nation after the first king – Saul of the tribe of Benjamin – died. Under the Law, the priests of Israel were to be taken from the tribe of Levi, and by God's command to Samuel the kings were to come from the tribe of Judah. Thus Jesus – the King of Kings – was descended from Judah in the line of David. This fulfilled the Messianic prophecy Jacob pronounced upon Judah just before he died.

10 *The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.* Genesis 49:10 (ESV)

Yet here in Genesis 14:18 hundreds of years before the Law was given and even longer before Samuel anointed David, we find Melchizedek – who was both a king and a priest of God Most High before the priestly tribe of Levi and the royal line of Judah through David ever existed. Melchizedek's name

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means “king of righteousness or justice,” and the name of the city over which Melchizedek reigned means “peace.”

Furthermore, we see that Melchizedek offered Abram bread and wine just as Jesus did to His disciples in the upper room on the night He was betrayed to be taken and eventually crucified.

²⁶Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” Matthew 26:26-29 (ESV)

Finally at the end of Genesis 14:20 we read that Abram gave Melchizedek a tribute of a tenth of the spoils taken from the armies of Chedorlaomer, although Melchizedek did not participate in either the rebellion against Chedorlaomer or Abram’s mission to rescue Lot.

All this symbolism points to the idea that Melchizedek was no ordinary king and priest. In fact, I believe Melchizedek was none other than God Himself manifested in the flesh of a man just as Jesus of Nazareth was (and is) God with us – עִמָּנוּאֵל ‘immānū’ēl.

Melchizedek is mentioned two other places in God’s Word. King David recognized the special nature of Melchizedek’s roles as both a priest and a king – comparing Melchizedek to the LORD Jesus who was to come.

A Psalm of David.

¹The LORD says to my Lord [יְיָ אֲדֹנָי]:

***“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”***

***²The LORD sends forth from Zion
your mighty scepter.***

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

***³Your people will offer themselves freely
on the day of your power,
in holy garments;***

***from the womb of the morning,
the dew of your youth will be yours.***

***⁴The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,***

***“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”***

***⁵The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.***

***⁶He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;***

***he will shatter chiefs
over the wide earth.***

***⁷He will drink from the brook by the way;
therefore he will lift up his head.*** Psalm 110 (ESV)

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David recognized that Melchizedek's priestly authority differed from that of the Levitical priest who obtained their authority from the Law. Notice in Psalm 110:2 David says that God sends his LORD's power to rule forth from Zion, which is of course another name for Jerusalem (Salem).

ASIDE – Notice that two instances of the title Lord in Psalm 110:1 & 5 are not printed in uppercase as are the other instances of the title in this Psalm. This is because the underlying Hebrew in these cases is אֲדֹנָי 'ādōnāy while the remaining instances of LORD in this Psalm are יְהוָה Y'hōvâ.

Jesus used Psalm 110 as a rebuttal to the Pharisees' answer when He asked them whose son the Christ is.

***41** Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, **42** saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” **43** He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,*

***44** “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”?”*

***45** If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?”* Matthew 22:41-45 (ESV)

The Hebrews writer too gives us an extensive exposition of the eternal and unique nature of Melchizedek's priesthood and compares Jesus to Melchizedek based on Psalm 110 and Abram's encounter with Melchizedek here in Genesis 14:18-20.

***6:19** We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, **20** where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*

***7:1** For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, **2** and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. **3** He is 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.*

***4** See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! **5** And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. **6** But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. **7** It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. **8** In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. **9** One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, **10** for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.*

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¹¹Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? ¹²For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

¹⁵This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷For it is witnessed of him,

*“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”* Hebrews 6:19-7:17 (ESV)

²¹And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” ²²But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, ²³that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ ²⁴I 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.” Genesis 14:21-24 (ESV)

As we have already seen, Abram was quite wealthy. He had no need for any of the spoils taken from Chedorlaomer’s armies. Yet he did not forbid his allies from taking a share. Abram had chased after Chedorlaomer for Lot’s sake. If they hadn’t taken Lot prisoner, Abram might not have ever joined in the war between the two alliances of kings.

Furthermore, Abram wanted to ensure he didn’t misrepresent the LORD our God by profiting in earthly wealth from the success of his mission to which God Himself had called him and in which God had granted him success. Abram wanted to make sure the kings whose bacon he had pulled from the fire understood why and how Abram had defeated Chedorlaomer’s large forces with only 318 men after the much larger force under the kings of the cities of the valley had been routed by Chedorlaomer.

There is also an object lesson here for all of us who render services in the Name of God. Our successes in these endeavors are **always** by God’s power within His sovereign will. We must certainly understand this ourselves. But just as importantly, we must make sure that everyone who witnesses our successes gives honor to God for them rather than giving it to us. We are after all only God’s poor tools in the service of His will. He alone empowers and enables us to accomplish His purposes.

Looking Ahead

Next time, God willing, we’ll look at the covenant God made with Abram and God’s reiteration of His promise to bring Abram a son through whom all the earth would be blessed.