
GENESIS: IT ALL STARTS HERE

GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S GRACIOUS PROVISION

GENESIS 14:1-24

1 In the days of (1) Amraphel king of Shinar, (2) Arioch king of Ellasar, (3) Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and (4) Tidal king of Goiim,

2 these kings made war with (1) *Bera* king of Sodom, (2) *Birsha* king of Gomorrah, (3) *Shinab* king of Admah, (4) *Shemeber* king of Zeboiim, and (5) the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).

3 And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea [or Dead Sea]).

4 Twelve years they had served *Chedorlaomer* ["servant of Lagamar" – a pagan goddess], but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. 5 In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, 6 and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as f El-paran on the border of the wilderness. 7 Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh) and defeated all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar.

8 Then 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 9 with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five.

10 Now 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. 11 So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. 12 They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.

13 Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram. 14 When 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. 15 And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 Then he brought

back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

17 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. (He was priest of God Most High.) 19 And he [Melchizedek] blessed him [Abram] and said,

"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!"

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. 21 And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." 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."

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world that seems dominated by those with the biggest stick or the most wealth. Truly, in many cases power and wealth do win the day. However, the Bible reminds us that things are not always as they seem, and God is the real King of everyone and everything. In Genesis 14 we encounter a story that seems familiar in many respects. Powerful and ruthless kings take advantage of lesser rulers, and people are caught in crossfire. However, the victor in this exchange is ultimately the one upon whom God's blessing resides. This is a reminder to us all: God is King, and those who love and trust Him enjoy His providential blessings.

MESSAGE OUTLINE:

- (1) SETTING THE SCENE – PLAYERS, POWER, & POSSESSIONS**
- (2) THE LORD'S VICTORY & BLESSING**
- (3) ABRAM'S RESPONSE OF GRATITUDE**
- (4) LIVING WITH ASSURANCE & GRATITUDE TODAY**

(1) SETTING THE SCENE – PLAYERS, POWER, & POSSESSIONS

◆ PLAYERS

- The Players are “kings”
 - This is the first time the word “king” shows up in the Bible, and it appears *twenty-eight times* in Genesis 14. This is the chapter of sovereigns and supremacy for sure!
 - **The 4 mighty kings**
 - Chedorlaomer of Elam – Named as a servant of the pagan goddess – *Lagamar* (“goddess of the underworld” or “ruler of eternity”), Chedorlaomer is a vague character. The point of his headship in this portion of the Genesis record does not seem to be his earthly kingdom necessarily, but he is the head representative of pagan deities.
 - Amraphel of Shinar – Some have thought this king to be the great Hammurabi, but there are problems with this association.¹ This king is at least a very powerful Babylonian ruler, as “Shinar” is that original location of Babel’s ziggurat and city.
 - This name too denotes significant spiritual import. Amraphel means “ruler of the place of rebellion.”
 - Arioch of Ellasar – Little is known about this king, but Ellasar was a city just north of Ur in Babylonia. The city was also a center for sun-god worship (in distinction but similar to Ur’s moon-god).
 - Tidal of Goiim – This king is also uncertain, but “Goiim” is an interesting attribution. It is a general term, meaning “nations” or “gentiles,” but it most likely refers to early

¹“There would therefore appear to be no sound reason for maintaining that Amraphel can be identified with Hammurabi, particularly as such a procedure is unsubstantiated by Mesopotamian archeology and history. If HAMMURABI were really Amraphel, it is difficult to see why he should be occupying a subordinate position to that of Chedorlaomer, unless Hammurabi happened to be a crown prince at the time. But here it has to be recognized that the Palestinian expedition itself has not been discovered to date among the recorded campaigns of Hammurabi.”

Hittites – a multitudinous people descendant from Canaan (the cursed son of Ham).

▪ **The 5 vassal kings**

- Bera of Sodom – Nothing is known of Bera, but Sodom is perhaps one of the most familiar of ancient cities. Sodom was a wealthy and wicked city (Gen. 13:13). It is notoriously wicked, and the population is utterly decimated by God soon after it is overrun by earthly kings (Gen. 19:24-25).
- Birsha of Gomorrah – Birsha too is quite unknown. However, Gomorrah joins Sodom in wicked infamy and in divine destruction (Gen. 19:24-25).
- Shinab of Admah – Shinab is the Hebrew form of an Akkadian name “*Sin-a-bi*” which means “[the moongod] *Sin is my father.*” Though lesser known, Admah was also destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 29:23). These cities and kings seem to have been of like mind.
- Shemeber of Zeboiim – Shemeber is also unknown, but Zeboiim was included in the divine destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 29:23). Once again, these cities and kings were a collection of worldly power and attention.
- Unnamed of Bela/Zoar – Interestingly, the king of this city is not named, and the city’s name itself means “insignificant” or “small.” Furthermore, Zoar/Bela is the city to which Lot flees when the other four cities mentioned in this coalition are destroyed (Gen. 19:19-22). It seems that, more surprisingly, Zoar has survived even the onslaught of history.²

²“Zoar is mentioned frequently in postbiblical sources... Josephus (BJ iv.8.4 [482]) placed Zoara at the south end of the Dead Sea and stated that it was still called *Zoôr* in his own day (Ant. i.11.4 [204])... Eusebius also placed it S of the Dead Sea and stated that it had a garrison of Roman soldiers and was known for its balsam and date palms (Onom 231, 261). It apparently had some ecclesiastical significance around this time, for it had a bishop in the 4th cent. and was represented at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451)... The sixth-century Madaba Map pictures it as a fortress city surrounded by palm trees, lying SE of the Dead Sea. Medieval Arab geographers often referred to it (by the name *Zughar*) as an important commercial center S of the Dead Sea, two days from Jericho on the well-traveled trade route between Jericho and the Gulf of Aqabah; it was known for its dates, indigo, and sugar. At *eş-Şâfi* the remains of a flourishing medieval town still exist, including ruins of old sugar mills and slag from old smelting operations... This medieval town is apparently not the exact site of biblical Zoar, since soundings there have revealed only Byzantine and Arabic ruins. *Eş-Şâfi* is a large site, however, and it has not yet been fully excavated. Thus biblical Zoar was very

▪ **The 1 Priest-King**

- Melchizedek of Salem – Very little is known about this priest-king, but his mystery is only more intriguing because of his inclusion in Christ’s priestly lineage.
 - Hebrews 6:20 – “Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”
 - Hebrews 7:2-3 – “[Melchizedek] is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. 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.”
 - To be sure, Melchizedek is at the very least a type of Christ.
 - “Melchizedek” means *king of righteousness*
 - “Salem” is associated with *Jerusalem* (Ps. 76:2), and means *peace*
 - Melchizedek provides a banquet for Abram (Gen. 14:18).
 - The “bread and wine” (v18) refers to a plentiful meal, though it is tempting to see a shadow here of the Communion Table of Christ
 - Melchizedek mediates God’s blessing to Abram (Gen. 14:19).
 - Melchizedek accepts Abram’s offering to God (Gen. 14:20).
- One major reason for the inclusion of this priest-king at this point in the narrative about kings and battles is to bring the reader’s attention to the greatest King – God

likely at another area of the site, since there are indications that parts of the site were occupied in biblical times (in both the Early Bronze Age and the Iron Age).”

Howard, D. M., Jr. (1979–1988). Zoar. In G. W. Bromiley (Ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Vol. 4, p. 1203). Wm. B. Eerdmans.

Himself – who is the providential sovereign over all of these events. That is the point of this record.

- **The 1 Blessed “Hebrew”**

- Genesis 14:13 is the first time that this distinction is applied.
 - It refers to a certain line of people (“descendent of Eber” [Gen. 10:21]), but this line was the special people of God (Gen. 12:1-3).
 - Abram, then, is specifically designated here in contrast to the kings around him.
 - There are earthly kings at war with one another over temporal treasure, and there is a divine King who actually owns it all. Abram is under the blessing of that divine King!

◆ POWER

- **The Power of the 5 kings**

- Sodom was the lush “Eden-like” place that drew Lot’s attention as a great place to settle (Gen. 13:10).
- All of these cities were located relatively close to one another in the Jordan Valley.
 - The Valley is situated alongside the Jordan River, which gave life to all things near it.
 - The Jordan River was precisely what drew Lot, for he desired its consistent supply of water rather than relying upon God’s providential rain (like Abram did).

- **The Power of the 4 kings**

- The Elamite king, Chedorlaomer, seems to have single-handedly ruled all 5 of these lesser kings for 12 years.
 - In a mob-like structure, Chedorlaomer collected an annual payment from these kings, his “servants” (Gen. 14:4).
- The coalition of Chedorlaomer and his 3 partner-kings are portrayed as juggernauts.

- Chedorlaomer stops receiving payment from his vassal kings, and then he organizes his punitive party. These 4 kings take their armies on a rampage to subdue all of the tribes and peoples in the area so that Chedorlaomer's rebellious vassal kings will have no one to call to their aid.
 - During this rampage, the 4 kings simply march across the land and defeat all in their path.
 - 6 different peoples fall to their armies: the *Rephaim*, the *Zuzim*, the *Emim*, the *Horites*, the *Amalekites*, and the *Amorites* (Gen. 14:5-7).
- **The Power of the *Great King***
 - Melchizedek is the kingly representative of the Most High God, and his clarifying statement leaves no doubt as to the reason for Abram's victory.
 - God is the one who “**delivered [Abram's] enemies into [his] hands**” (Gen. 14:20).
 - Nearly nothing of the battles are mentioned, but the 4 powerful kings defeated 6 tribes and 5 kings easily. Abram now defeats these 4 powerful kings with the same ease, and drives them completely out of Canaan (Gen. 14:15).

◆ POSSESSIONS

- The 5 kings possessed Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela/Zoar; and all the people, power, and wealth that these cities could provide.
- The 4 kings possessed Shinar, Ellasar, Elam, and Goiim; and all the people, power, and wealth these cities provided.
 - Note further that Chedorlaomer of Elam also possessed the 5 kings as his servants. This is indicative of the great power and wealth of these 4 kings.
- The Great King – God Most High – possesses “heaven and earth” (v19)!

(2) THE LORD'S VICTORY & BLESSING

◆ EARTHLY KINGS AND THE KING OF GLORY

- Earthly Kings
 - The first time in Scripture that “war” is mentioned, there are 4 warrior-kings on a rampage.
 - These earthly kings are juggernauts in their time – uncontested mob-like rulers.
 - The servant of a pagan goddess, Chedorlaomer, heads this organized tyrannical regime
- The King of Glory
 - God has demonstrated Himself to be sovereign over worldly power in the flood of Noah, at the tower of Babel, and now in the affairs of multiple earthly kings.
 - Even juggernaut kings who consider themselves servants of elite pagan deities are utterly insignificant by comparison.
 - He is God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed forever!
 - The prophet Daniel proclaimed, “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation” (Dan. 4:34).
 - The Psalmist said, “Blessed by His glorious name forever...” (Ps. 72:19).

◆ VICTORY AND BLESSING

- Victory
 - This record does not emphasize military strategy or kingly conquest.
 - The mention of battles and victories is merely the canvas upon which the picture is painted. Even the number of men and the nighttime assault (some details we are given in Abram's battle) are so quickly mentioned and quickly dismissed.
 - The emphasis here is upon God's victory!
 - God delivered the enemies into Abram's hands (v20).

- Blessing
 - This record is full of earthly power and pagan rulers, and then Abram stands alone in stark contrast.
 - The contrast does not pit pagan power against Abram's.
 - No! The contrast is between earthly power and divine blessing.
 - Abram is “blessed,” not because of his victory; Abram is victorious because he enjoys the blessing of God.
 - God had already said to Abram, “**I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.** I will bless those who bless you, and **him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed**” (Gen. 12:2–3).

(3) ABRAM'S RESPONSE OF GRATITUDE

◆ MELCHIZEDEK'S BLESSING

- Once again, this mysterious priest-king mediates God's blessing to Abram.
 - Melchizedek came out to meet Abram with a full meal (v18).
 - He blessed Abram (v19).
 - Abram acknowledged Melchizedek's superiority to himself by giving him a tribute (a tenth) of all he had (v20).

◆ THE KING OF SODOM'S WORLDLY ATTENTIONS

- First, he comes out empty handed to meet Abram (v17).
 - What a brash and worldly king is this king of Sodom!
 - He has been defeated by the king who once dominated him and required an annual payment from him. He has no claim to victory whatever, but only defeat and shame.

- Additionally, he now approaches the conqueror of his conqueror with nothing in hand and no words of thanks.
 - He merely comes to see what crumbs he might steal from the table, and take advantage of whatever he may.
- Second, he is quite concerned about what Abram has (v21).
 - *“Abram,”* says the brash and worldly king... *“Abram, you can have all of the goods, but give me the people.”*
 - The defeated Sodomite king must have been aware that Abram entered into warfare only for the sake of his nephew. And, he had just seen Abram give away a tenth portion of everything. These two things must have been what motivated the arrogant king to such an aggressive request.
 - The request was not only for immediate gain, however...
- Third, he is quite concerned about Abram’s politics (v21).
 - The Sodomite king’s request for the people Abram has comes with an offer... Once again, the king owns nothing and he has nothing to offer! And yet, he offers Abram worldly stature, an earthly kingdom, and the power that money can buy.
 - Oh! Here we see the ancient foe! The devilish serpent reveals himself, and he cannot help it.
 - *“Abram! You are trusting in a promise that cannot come. Your God is not what you think He is, and you will only be disappointed...”* The serpent-king hisses, *“I can offer you a kingdom now! And you will be the ruler of this land. What Chedorlaomer once was you will now become!”*
 - Like the serpent spoke to Eve (Gen. 3:4-5), so the Sodomite king speaks here to Abram; but like the God-man who answers a similar request two millennia later (Lk 4:6-8), Abram here answers well.

◆ ABRAM’S DIVINE AFFECTIONS

- Abram demonstrates his separation from worldly affections
 - To the king of Sodom’s offer (political alliance and a massive tribute of wealth), Abram said, **“I have lifted my hand to the Lord** [i.e. *“I*

have sworn and oath”] that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours...” (v22-23).

- Abram demonstrates his trust and gratitude towards God
 - First, he gives Melchizedek a tenth of everything (v20).
 - While there is much that might be said about a “tithe” here, I do not believe that this is the time for it.
 - The point of this “giving of a tithe” is not (from this passage) to convey an established rule for giving – either in the Old Testament or the New.
 - Rather, this tithe (or giving away of 10% of everything) is a demonstration of what Abram believes.
 - Remember that the 5 kings were “servants” of Chedarlaomer, and they owed him a tribute that acknowledged his authority over them. Now the king of Sodom offers Abram a similar tribute, but Abram gives a tribute away to another King instead!
 - Abram understands that he is the servant of God, and he must perceive Melchizedek in some way as a mediator of God as well.
 - Second, he gives the plunder of battle to the allies who risked themselves alongside him (v24).
 - While this is quite generous (it would have been acceptable for Abram to give them their portion, but he gives them his portion as well), Abram’s generosity is only one aspect of this exchange.
 - Abram is giving away this wealth as a massive and tangible gesture of his trust in God. God is his provider, and Abram believes this with his actions – not just his words.

(4) LIVING WITH ASSURANCE & GRATITUDE TODAY

◆ GOD IS THE SUPREME KING

- God is King of kings and Lord of lords!
 - God says, “Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me... There is no Rock [besides me]” (Is. 44:7-8).

◆ GOD CAN BE TRUSTED

- What worldly circumstances seem insurmountable to you today?
- What foolish plans do you have of ruling anything?
 - 1 Peter 5:6-7 – “**Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God** so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

◆ GOD IS THE PROVIDENTIAL PROVIDER

- God is possessor of heaven and earth! He is the source of all good the things we have and enjoy.
 - Psalm 84:11 – “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

◆ GOD DESERVES OUR GRATITUDE

- If I asked your spouse, your kids, or your closest friends if you are grateful for God’s provision, What would they say?
- Are your thoughts filled with discontent? Are you consumed with gaining just a bit more ground?
- What plans have you made to further your fortune? Your career? Your prestige? Are these plans grounded in a trust and gratitude towards God?
- We may say that we are grateful for God’s provision, but how are we demonstrating such gratitude?
- Indeed, we may rest assured that God is our provider, and He is worthy of our thankful appreciation.

MY PRAYERS

- May God forgive us for thinking so highly of earthly power and authority.
- May God cleanse us from our own affections for this world and its things.
- May God make us to trust Him and live with perpetual gratitude towards Him.

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