



Part 34 – Abram Among the Kings

Genesis 14:1-24

“Abraham continues to face conflicts and temptations that test his faith in God’s promises for the land. Abraham’s leadership in this scene signifies a much different Abraham from the cowardly man who endangered his wife just two scenes previously. His loyal defense of his foolish nephew reveals the depth of his honorable brotherly love. His refusal to accept

the plunder from the king of Sodom also demonstrates his continuing reliance on God – and not the spoils of war – to provide the blessing.”¹

1. The fate of kings and nations is in the hands of the Lord.

Vv. 1-16

- The righteous seed now walks upon the stage of world politics and power and is once again in conflict with the seed of the serpent. The drama revolves around a conflict between four overlord kings from the East and five kings in the region of the Dead Sea. The five kings of the smaller city/states rebelled against their Eastern overlords. So the four kings from the East led a campaign to reassert their control over the region. The forces of the four Mesopotamian kings routed those of the five rebel kings and in the process took hostage Abram’s wealthy nephew Lot.
- When Abram learned of Lot’s capture he gathered his men, which were numerous at this point. Remember that after his sojourn in Egypt, Pharaoh sent him away not only with cattle and wealth but also with female and male servants. Once again, God was using the material resources of the wicked to provide for his covenant man. Abram and his men pursued the forces of the four overlords to Dan, north of the Sea of Galilee, where they recaptured Lot.
- The word “king” appears 28 times in chapter 14 of Genesis. Four kings of Mesopotamia, five kings of Canaan, and Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem are all players in the events described. The kings, nations, and city/states mentioned in this passage are part of world history. But their significance is found in their relationship to Abram. In other words, Abram is not a bit player in the stories of the kings. The kings are playing a supporting role in God’s chosen covenant partner, Abram.

2. Abram’s courage returns.

Vv. 13-16

- In chapter 12 Abram leads his family into Egypt in order to flee the famine in the land God had given him. Once there he lied about Sarai stating that she was his sister, suborning her to repeat the same lie. He did this because he was afraid that the men of Egypt, seeing that Sarai was beautiful, would kill Abram if they knew he was her husband. Abram’s flight to Egypt and his lie concerning Sarai were born in fear. As chapter 14 unfolds, we see once again why Abraham will become the great exemplar of faith in God.

a) Faith and brotherly love

- As we saw in chapter 13, faith gave Abram a large and generous heart. He gave away to Lot the most fertile land in Canaan. When we trust in God for our present and our future we do not have to greedily grasp everything for ourselves and seek advantage over others. That same heart shaped as it was by faith in God, moves decisively to rescue Lot from his foreign captors.
- We see God’s sacrificial love not only for his friends but for his enemies in the dying of Christ. Jesus laid down his life for his people while they were still his enemies (Romans 5:8). Jesus commands his followers to love one another even as he has loved them (John 15:12-13).

¹ Bruce Waltke, Genesis: A New Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) p. 225

b) Faith and overwhelming odds

- Abram set off against the kings of the east with 318 men plus his allies which probably totaled around 1,000 men. But against 4 kings each commanding an army Abram's numbers would have seemed paltry. The journey from Hebron (Abram's base) to Dan is just over 100 miles. From Dan to Damascus is another 40 miles.
- Abraham's courage in the face of overwhelming odds would certainly have been an encouragement to the people of the exodus who themselves were surrounded by hostiles at times. Not only that, they had to rely upon God's daily provision of food and water in a desert wilderness.

c) Faith and means

- Sometimes it pleases the Lord to act directly within creation. Typically, God uses secondary means. As a result, there are times when faith is expressed passively as when Abraham offered to Lot the choicest of the land. In the events described here, however, Abraham takes direct action by taking up the sword and going to war with the kings who kidnapped his nephew. He trained his men to fight. He designed a plan of attack using the cover of night. He divided his men in such a way as to keep a group of fighters fresh for battle against the battle-weary eastern armies.
- Trusting God does not mean taking no action. If you receive a diagnosis which requires medication and treatment then make use of those means. If you are ignorant, read. If you are tired, rest. If an innocent is threatened by an evil-doer, defend him. If a neighbor is hungry, feed him.

3. Abram honors the right king.

Vv. 17-24

- After his successful campaign against the 4 kings of the East, Abram encounters two very different kings, the king of Sodom and the king of Salem (probably Jerusalem). But the king of Sodom plays a bit part in the drama. Salem's king Melchizedek is the real focus. Melchizedek brings out to Abram "bread and wine" (vs. 18). We are also told that Melchizedek was "priest of God Most High."
- The king of Salem is a mysterious figure to say the least. He is a king-priest of that city which will become in time the holy city of God; the place of his dwelling among his people. In the midst of rampant paganism, Melchizedek had been blessed with knowledge of the true God. Notice how he goes out to meet and bless Abram in contrast with the arrogant presumption of Sodom's king (vs. 21). The king of Sodom was seeking to direct Abram's actions for his own enrichment. But Abram honors the king who is worthy of honor. He honors Melchizedek by offering him a tithe (a tenth of his possessions). Abram will not be a servant of Sodom. Nevertheless, the choice remains before Lot. Where will he find his sufficiency? Will he seek it in the resources of Sodom or in the gracious bread and wine of Salem?
- The choice is grounded in the most basic of God's commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me." The servants of Sodom are always looking for fellow compromisers. There is always a deal to be made in Sodom; always a compromise to be had; always an angle to be taken advantage of. But Salem is all about God, the Maker of heaven and earth. With him there is no compromise; no advantage to manipulate. He is the One who brings us the bread and wine of divine sufficiency.
- In this way, Melchizedek is a forerunner of the Lord Jesus who is the ultimate Priest-King. He is the one we honor with our lives not because we supply something which he lacks. We honor Creation's King simply because it is right to honor the right King. And like Melchizedek, Jesus comes to us. He leaves his throne to meet us in our path and he brings to us the bread and wine our souls crave; the forgiveness of sins at the cost of his own life.
- In the garden, the serpent wooed the woman into sin with his command, "take and eat." Those words of death, out of which so much evil and suffering has sprung, have been overcome by the gracious invitation of our Priest-King Jesus:
 Now 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." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28).