

# Ministry of Grace

## Lesson 4 – A Nighttime Rescue and a Tenth

### Genesis 14:1-24

<sup>1</sup>In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, <sup>2</sup>these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). <sup>3</sup>And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). <sup>4</sup>Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. <sup>5</sup>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, <sup>6</sup>and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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 <sup>9</sup>with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. <sup>12</sup>They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.

<sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup>Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

<sup>17</sup>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). <sup>18</sup>And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) <sup>19</sup>And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; <sup>20</sup>and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. <sup>21</sup>And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." <sup>22</sup>But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup>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.' <sup>24</sup>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."

## Synopsis

In the previous chapter we learned that Lot separated himself from Abram by moving down to the well-watered lowlands of the Jordan River Valley where his animals would be well fed and life would be easy. We don't know for sure how much time elapsed since that departure. It was probably about 6 years. What we do know is that he had become directly associated with the people of Sodom and was now living in their city (verse 12). Also, enough time had elapsed that Abram had established cordial relationships with several of the other inhabitants of the land. He was living by the oak grove belonging to an Amorite man named Mamre. Life in the highlands of Hebron, though accompanied by hard work and dependence on God, seemed to be peaceful and calm.

Meanwhile, down in the valley, trouble was brewing. For the five towns of the lower valley, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar, life was tenuous at best. A year earlier they quit paying tribute to the kings of the east and ever since they quit paying the tribute they must have been fearful that reprisal would be coming at any moment. And sure enough it came. Chedorlaomer and his confederates marched down through Canaan defeating no fewer than 6 clans of giants, then set up battle lines against the five cities of the plain. After a rousing victory, Chedorlaomer's army ransacked the defeated cities and carried off the people and goods.

When Abram learned that his nephew had been captured, he didn't waste any time, immediately deciding to go rescue Lot. Keep in mind that only a few years earlier Abram had given Lot the choice of taking the northern part of the land or the southern part of the land. But, Lot didn't like those choices and, instead, took the eastern fertile grassland, leaving Abram with the much harsher mountain lands. Abram could have decided that Lot got what he deserved for being so greedy, but that does not appear to be how Abram thinks about others. Besides, Lot was family! So Abram armed his trained servants and defeated the armies of Chedorlaomer, bringing back the people and possessions of the five defeated cities. What happened next tells us a great deal about Abram.

### Genesis 14:1-3

**In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea).**

“king” – Hebrew *melek*, which means “a king.” As it is used here, this term is simply a general term, denoting an individual with power and authority. Conceptually, it is related to a number of other Hebrew words that are usually translated as lord, captain, prince, chief, or ruler. Most, if not all, of the kings mentioned in this passage appear to be rulers over cities or localities, not nations.

“Shinar” – This is located in the land of the Chaldeans (the Kurdish people in present day Iraq), later to be known as Babylon. It is the plain where the Tower of Babel was built (Genesis chapter 11). It is believed by some that Amraphel is the grandson of Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-12).

“Ellasar” – Believed to be the area either north or south of Shinar.

“Elam” – A son of Shem. This represents the land of Persia (present day Iran).

“king of Goim” – Or king of nations. Goim (Hebrew *Goyim*) is believed by some to have been an earlier name for the region of Galilee. This is questionable, however, since the other rulers who came with Chedorlaomer are from the area of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It is more likely that confederates would all be from the same general geographic area. *Goyim* refers to a group of peoples or clans. It could be that a collection of peoples gathered together in one place. Galilee was later called “Galilee of the nations” for this reason.

“these kings made war with” – Some scholars have questioned whether rulers in the land of Babylon and Elam would venture as far as the Jordan Valley for conquest. They believe that these four kings were rulers of settlements somewhere in the land of Canaan having kept the names of their motherlands. However, based on the extent of their conquest delineated in verses four through nine, and the fact that they were overtaken by Abram (verse twelve) in Dan and chased to Damascus, it is reasonable to believe that these armies did, indeed, travel from the land of the Tigris and Euphrates.

“Sodom, ... Gomorrah, ... Admah, ... Zeboiim, ... Bela (that is, Zoar)” – These five towns are believed to all have been in the same region, with Sodom being the largest and Zoar the smallest. They were perhaps located in the area which is now covered by the southern region of the Dead Sea.

“Valley of Siddim” – This is likely the area covered by the Dead Sea today.



Figure 1 - Conquests of Chedorlaomer

### Genesis 14:4-6

**Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. 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, and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness.**

“Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer” – Either they had previously been conquered by the army of Chedorlaomer, or these towns were settled by people from the area of Shinar and Elam and had thus been the subjects of Chedorlaomer.

“Rephaim” – Plural form of *raphe*,’ which is from a primitive root meaning “to mend or stitch.” Some see these people as “the stitched together ones” who they believe to be the result of the sons of god having offspring with the daughters of men (**Genesis 6:1-4**).

“the Rephaim ... the Zuzim ... the Emim ... and the Horites” – All these are referred to as giants elsewhere in Scripture, and are said to be descendants of Anak who was one of the Nephelim (translated “giants” in **Genesis 6:4**).

### Genesis 14:7-9

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

“Then they turned back and came ...” – Having defeated all the cities of the giants as far as the present day Gulf of Aqaba, the conquering armies turned northwest and defeated the people of the country later known to be inhabited by the Amalekites and then they defeated the Amorites. This would have completed a circuit all around the area of Sodom and Gomorrah.

“Valley of Siddim” – *Siddim*, from *sadeh*, meaning a broad, spread-out area.

### Genesis 14:10-12

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

“bitumen pits” – Such pits, or wells, ejecting bituminous tar, or asphalt, can still be found along the southern shores of the Dead Sea.

Perhaps the armies of Sodom and Gomorrah thought that these asphalt pits would hinder the battle tactics of the armies of Chedorlaomer, but apparently the opposite was true. The defeated armies ran east to the highlands and the conquering armies plundered the defeated cities, taking the goods and people with them.

“They also took Lot ... who was dwelling in Sodom” – Lot was no longer living outside the city with his tent “... as far as Sodom.” He had moved and was now living in the city.

**Genesis 14:13, 14**

**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. 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.**

“one who had escaped came and told Abram” – Apparently this was someone who knew the relationship between Abram and Lot. Abram was living near present day Hebron.

“Mamre the Amorite” – From this we learn that Abram’s allies were Amorites, and from verse seven we know that the invading armies had defeated their kinsmen at Hazazon Tamar. Thus, they were motivated to go with Abram not just because of their friendship, but because Chedorlaomer and his armies were now a common enemy.

“he led forth his trained men ... 318 of them” – From this we learn that Abram had a very large number of servants who had been born in his household. However, compared to the invading army, this must have seemed to be but a meager little band of men.

“Dan” – This is probably the Dan located in the extreme northern part of present day Israel, since verse 15 here indicates that the armies fled from Dan to Hobah, north of Damascus. This also is an indication that the armies of Chedorlaomer had very likely come from the land of Shinar (Babylon).

**Genesis 14:15, 16**

**And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.**

“divided his forces against them by night” – According to the historian Josephus, it was the night of the fifth day after Abram heard of the defeat of Sodom & Gomorrah. Abram’s strategy is one that is still used today in tribal conflicts. The unexpected nighttime attack would find the enemy asleep or drunk and the ensuing confusion would cause widespread panic with the army running away in disarray, resulting in very little loss of life on the part of the attackers.

“he brought back all the possessions ... and the women and the people” – Although Abram was initially only concerned with Lot, he rescued all that had been taken captive from Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities.

**Genesis 14:17-20**

**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). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.**

“Valley of Shaveh” – This is very likely the valley between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives, in present day Jerusalem. Jerusalem was originally called Salem. There is an ancient road from the Jordan Valley, passing beside present day Jericho, that goes up into the mountains and

passes by Jerusalem through this valley, then continues on to the main road which goes down to Hebron. This is the route Abram would have reasonably taken when returning from Damascus.

“king of Sodom went out to meet him” – This may have been Bera, king of Sodom, as mentioned in verse 2, having escaped during the defeat of his army by Chedorlaomer. It is also possible that this is the newly seated king of Sodom (though it appears that most, if not all, of the inhabitants of Sodom had been taken captive.)

“Melchizedek king of Salem ... priest of God Most High” – This is truly an enigmatic individual. We learn some about him from the seventh chapter of Hebrews:

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 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. 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. (*Hebrews 7:1-3*)

Melchizedek (Hebrew *malkiy-tsedeq*) means “king of righteousness.” Salem (Hebrew *shālēm* or *shalom*) means “peace.” As both the king of righteousness and the king of peace as well as the priest of God Most High, he is a “type” of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is King of Righteousness, King of Peace, and Priest of God Most High.

According to both the Targum of Jonathan and the Targum of Jerusalem, this Melchizedek is Shem, the son of Noah. It seems unlikely, however, that Shem would be living in the middle of the sons of Canaan with no evidence of other Shemites around. Notice, however, that given the genealogies and ages listed in the Masoretic Text (Hebrew version of the Old Testament), Shem would still have been alive at this time. However, given the genealogies and ages in the Septuagint text (Greek version of the Old Testament), Shem would have been dead for about 500 years at this time.

Others believe this to be Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate bodily form, since the passage in Hebrews says that he was “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.”

“God Most High” – Hebrew *el elyon*. Melchizedek makes it clear that the God he worships is the God of creation (*Possessor of heaven and earth*).

“brought out bread and wine” – Although these are the same as the elements of our communion, this was not the purpose of the bread and wine, for a memorial (communion) cannot precede that which it memorializes (the death of Christ). The purpose of the bread and wine were most likely to refresh and invigorate Abram and the others who had fought in the battle.

“And he blessed him” – Not only did Melchizedek bless Abram, but he offered a blessing to God. These are two of the functions of a priest, who is to be an intercessor between God and man.

“And Abram gave him a tenth of everything” – This is the first example of giving of a tithe (tithe means “a tenth”). In Genesis chapter four we have the first offerings to God. In *Genesis 8:20* Noah built an altar and offered a sacrifice. Upon arriving in the Promised Land Abram built an altar in Shechem. Then, between Bethel and Ai Abram built an altar and called upon the name of the LORD.

Much has been made by Christian preachers regarding the giving of tithes in following Abram's example. Note, however, that the only mention of tithing in the New Testament is in Hebrews, in which the priesthood of Jesus is described to be after the order of Melchizedek. On the other hand, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians makes it clear that there are no set maximums or minimums on giving, rather it is the attitude of the giver that He is most interested in:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

### **Genesis 14:21-24**

**And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, 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.' 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."**

“Give me the persons” – After Abram's interaction with Melchizedek, the King of Sodom asked Abram to surrender his subjects. Keep in mind that Abram was under no obligation to do so. As the conquering leader, he had the right to keep all that they had gained in defeating Chedorlaomer.

“I would not take ... anything that is yours” – Instead of being worldly and keeping the spoils of war, Abram released everything back to the king of Sodom (except what had already been consumed, what had been given as a tithe, and the portions rightfully belonging to his confederates).

“lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'” – Abram's rationale was two-fold. First of all, he did not want anyone to take credit for his wealth except God alone. Secondly, he had learned that God would (and already had) abundantly blessed him. This is a lesson that is difficult for wealthy people (Christian and secular alike) to learn. Because of our human nature, no matter how wealthy we are, we always want more. Abram had learned that “stuff” is not the mark of God's blessing.

## **So What?**

### **Rescue the Perishing**

In this chapter we see a different Abram than we have seen in the past. Previously, especially during his excursion into Egypt, he appeared to be more focused on himself than anyone else, even to the point of asking Sarai to lie for him. While he was under his father's roof, we weren't told anything about his character except, perhaps, that he was reluctant to separate himself from his father. As he travelled into the land of Canaan though, we observe his relationship with God growing as evidenced by the altars that he built and the fact that he called on the name of Yahweh. His trip into Egypt is the first glimpse we get of his sin nature and the focus on self that it produces. However, when he and Lot discuss their necessary separation, we begin to see a

different Abram. Instead of claiming what was rightfully his, Abram defers to Lot and even lets Lot take advantage of his generosity.

Approximately six years have gone by now and we see Abram settled down by the Oaks of Mamre, enjoying the kind of peace that only God can provide. But that peace was interrupted with the news that his nephew had been carried away captive by an army from the east. Considering the safety of Lot of greater importance than his own, Abram immediately took up arms with his entire household and, being joined by his neighbors, he headed north to rescue Lot from the conquerors. From a human perspective, this seems a bit foolhardy, given that he and his people were peace-loving shepherds going up against an army of trained soldiers. Nonetheless, considering the good of others more important than his own good, Abram marched north and, with a nighttime surprise attack, sent the armies of Chederlaomer and his confederates scrambling for their lives.

As Abram returned from the battle, the road back to his homestead took him through the valley next to the city of Salem (modern day Jerusalem), where he was met by the enigmatic Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. After receiving a blessing from Melchizedek, Abram offered to this priestly king a tenth of all the riches he had gathered during his defeat of the invading army. Abram was also met by the king of Sodom, who demanded that Abram give him back his subjects, saying that Abram could keep the spoils of war. Notice that the king had no legal right to make such a demand and Abram was under no obligation to do so. Nonetheless, considering the good of others more important than his own, Abram agreed to surrender the people. Then, in an act of selflessness, Abram freely surrendered not only the people of Salem but the spoils of war as well. He could have stopped there, but there was still the matter of his friends Mamre, Eschol, and Aner. They had risked their lives also and deserved to collect some of the bounty. So, Abram made sure that they received what was due to them.

Truly, Abram had learned to consider the good of others as more important than his own. The Apostle Paul expressed his admonition to live this way in his letter to the Christians at Philippi:

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

And in his letter to the Christians at Rome, he put it this way:

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; (Romans 12:10) [NKJV]

It is clear that God wants us to be just as concerned about the welfare of others as we are our own welfare. When Christ was asked what was the first and great commandment, he responded:

... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)

How about you? Does your love for self out rank your love for others, or do you spend your days looking for ways to make life easier for others in spite of your own circumstances? Well, don't feel bad if you tend to live your life selfishly. We all have a sin nature and it is constantly trying to get us to focus on ourselves. But through the Spirit of God we can learn to change that focus. We need to stop and consider that none of us deserve eternal salvation. What we really deserve is



eternity in the fires of Hell. But, because of God's grace, we have been set free from slavery to sin and our penalty has been completely paid for by the blood of Christ. Therefore, we should all be striving to become more Christ like and seek the good of others rather than our own.

We should be especially focused on the good of other Christians. After all, Christians are all relatives, and not distant ones at that, we are all brothers and sisters; we have the same Father. As we have seen in this lesson, Abram is clearly growing in his devotion to God and his desire to be a blessing to others. How about you, my Christian sister or brother, are you ready to shift your focus from taking care of yourself and be a blessing to others?

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