



## **A Lot is at Stake**

### **Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #25**

**Genesis 14**

**David Sunday**

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Father, You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords. All of Your enemies will become Your footstool. You reign forever as King and Priest, and You never need to make another sacrifice for sins. Once for all, You offered Your own blood as a sacrifice for all who will ever trust in You. We thank You that through You we have gained access into the throne room of God Almighty, King of Kings, where we can receive mercy and help in our time of need. God, we pray that You would strengthen us today in our weakness. We also pray, Lord, that in whatever ways we find ourselves strong, that we would realize our strength only comes through You. May we give You the glory, for from You through You, and to You are all things. To You belongs all glory—only to You—forever and ever. Amen.

How much would you be willing to sacrifice for someone who had demonstrated he is not willing to sacrifice much for you? How much would you be willing to risk for a person who is unlikely to risk a lot on your behalf? This question confronts the nations of the Western world these days, as tens of thousands of people from Syria are fleeing the borders of their nation and spilling into Western Europe. And they will be coming to our country as well. How much would we be willing to sacrifice? How much would we be willing to risk in order to provide rescue and refuge to people in need?

Often, when we are confronted with the question of whom we should help, we ask questions like this: Does this person deserve my help? What will it cost me? Will I be inconvenienced in order to provide help to this individual? These are the kinds of questions that confronted Abram in Genesis 14. Turn there in your Bible.

There was a conflict in the land. It was a conflict in Abram's neighborhood. This is the first account of a battle in Scripture. It was a classic, ancient military campaign, led by a king whose name starts with Chedor. (No, he was not from Wisconsin.) He was the king of Elam, a

powerful king from the area of Iran, and he had three allies with him. They came to fight against the kings of the Dead Sea region, who were vassal states. These kings of the Dead Sea region got tired of being vassals of Chedorlaomer, and they said one day, “Hey, we’re not going to pay our taxes anymore.” A year later, Chedorlaomer said, “I’m going to show you who’s boss.” That is the scene before us in the first 11 verses.

I thought about asking one of our pastors to read this passage, but that would be cruel and unusual punishment. So I will do my duty and read for you the scene that is before us, beginning in 14:1-4:

*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). Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.*

“Enough of this Chedorlaomer bossing us around! We can manage life on our own. He is way over there in Iran. We are down here by the Dead Sea. We don’t want to pay him any more taxes.” But that did not work.

Verse five continues, “*In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came...*” They were making their way down toward the Dead Sea region where the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar lived. However, on their way down, they took a circuitous route through the trans-Jordan region, probably following the King’s Highway. Just to show how strong they were and how much anyone who tried to rebel against them should tremble and fear, they conquered a few other territories on their way. They decided, “As long as we’re down in this neighborhood, let’s defeat a few other kingdoms while we’re at it.”

We read about this beginning in verse five:

*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. 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.*

If news reports were reaching the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar, they should have been shaking in their boots. Chedorlaomer was showing the world who was boss. We find that the people he had come to subdue encountered him in verse eight, which says:

*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.*

So Chedorlaomer only had four kings and he was fighting against five. However, the man with the four was much stronger than the group with five. The kings who lived in the Dead Sea region began to run in fear.

Verses 10-11 say, *“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.”* So far it seems like a dry record of ancient annals of Bronze Age battles going on here. What does this have to do with us? What does it have to do with Abram?

It is ironic that the area from which Abram came—the Iraq/Iran region—produced kings who came down to the area God had promised to give Abram and his seed. They plundered the land that God had promised Abram. However, it seems like it would have been easy for Abram to just bide his time and remain a pacifist, waiting for these guys to leave with the enemies’ possessions. After all, God was kind of clearing out the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and all the surrounding regions. In a way, He was making it easier for Abram to settle there and take possession of the land. So Abram did not really need to get involved if it were not for verse 12.

We read in verse 12, *“They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.”* That is why I titled this message, “A Lot is at Stake.” We are not just talking about Lot here. A lot is at stake for Lot; a lot is at stake for Abram; and a lot is at stake for us in Genesis 14.

### **A Lot is at Stake for Lot**

What would it be like to be taken captive—to have your home invaded in the middle of the night, your wife and children bound, and everything you have taken away? How scary would that be? How bad would it be if you realized that it was your decisions and choices that put your family in this vulnerable situation? Lot was not in Sodom by accident. Remember Genesis 13:10? *“And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)”*

Lot lifted up his eyes and saw an Eden-like territory, but he did not realize there was a snake in the grass that would be coming. He did not realize the dangers of getting close to Sodom. He only saw the allurements and appeal of a wealthy commercial area, thinking of all the opportunities he could take advantage of if he got close to Sodom. That is the way it often is with worldliness. We do not want to dive all the way in; we just want to get close. We want to see how close to the edge we can get and how much we can benefit from the world.

So Lot made a choice that we read in 13:12: *“Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.”* He was facing Sodom. In chapter 13, Lot was in a tent on the outskirts of Sodom, looking in. He was getting close.

However, something happened between chapters 13 and 14. Look at what 14:12 says: *“They also took Lot, the son of Abram’s brother, who was dwelling in Sodom...”* Lot was no longer in a tent looking at Sodom. He became a homeowner, paying property taxes. He became a member of this community, living in Sodom. Someone has said, “It is hard to live in a pigsty without starting to smell like a pig.” The influence wears off on us.

It is easy to settle in—to get comfortable with this world’s system. John said, *“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world”* (1 John 2:16). If we love this world and allow ourselves to become intoxicated by what this world’s system has to offer, we can become ambushed and then assimilated. It is not easy to remain godly while in wicked company.

So Lot made a choice that put him in wicked company. We read about the kind of company he was with in 13:17: *“Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.”* This choice that brought Lot into wicked company also brought him into captivity. That is the story of many lives. A foolish choice. A shortsighted choice. An opportunistic choice. A choice by sight, not by faith. A choice that looks only at what this world can afford leads to wicked company, which, over time, brings us into captivity. Choices lead to company; company leads to captivity.

That was Lot’s story, and it has been the story of many of our lives. The question is who will come to our rescue? A lot is at stake for Lot. He was helpless. He needed to be rescued.

### **A Lot is at Stake for Abram**

Verse 13 says, *“Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew...”* This is the first time someone is called a Hebrew in the Bible. It takes us back to 10:21 which refers to

Shem, the father of all the children of Eber. So Abram was from the line of Shem and from the people of Eber. He was a Hebrew.

Someone came and told Abram, a Hebrew who *“was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner.”* He was right where he was when we left off in chapter 13. He had a tent and settled by the oaks of Mamre. He built an altar to the Lord there, so he worshiped the Lord and was in communion with God. Meanwhile, someone came and told him about Lot being taken captive: “Your nephew is in trouble, Abram!”

The question is, Will Abram come to Lot’s rescue? It is not a no-brainer. Think of all the things Abram could have said. “Well, he made a stupid choice; let him live with it. He needs to learn a lesson about bad company corrupting good morals. After all, he really did not think much of me when we chose the better land. He never said, ‘Is there a way we both can have the best of the land here?’ He did not show any deference to me. What is in it for me?”

Abram could have been thinking all kinds of thoughts like this. He also could have thought, “What is it going to take for me to rescue my nephew. After all, he has been taken captive by King Chedorlaomer, who has just come through our territory and bulldozed everyone in his path. This is a powerful enemy we are up against here, and stepping in is going to be a risk.” Abram could have thought about all those things, but there is no indication in the text that he even took a moment to consider. It says that Abram acted right when he heard.

Look at verse 14. When Abram heard that his kinsman, his nephew, had been taken captive, he acted in a heroic fashion. He acted in a way that demonstrated true brotherly love. *“When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them...”* Abram was already a pretty great man here. God was making him great as He had promised. Three hundred and eighteen trained men were with him. He gathered his trained men and went in pursuit. He had a goal and he pursued it as far as Dan, way on the northern extremity of Palestine. So this is quite a distance here.

Verse 15 continues, *“And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus.”* It is a good picture of what leadership needs to do. There needs to be men who are trained and equipped. They need to be summoned and there needs to be pursuit of a goal. There needs to be strategy—divide and conquer—and Abram did these three things.

However, it is also a picture of what we need to be doing in the world today. There are people in need of rescue in our lives—people who have been taken captive by a world’s system of empty promises. There are people all around us who are in bondage to the evil one. Who will go

and rescue the perishing? Who will go, leave comfort and safety behind, and say, “I must pursue those who are lost; I must gather them; I must free them from captivity”?

This is a role that belongs to every one of us. Let me read a couple passages from the New Testament. When we see someone who wanders away from the truth and finds himself in trouble as Lot was, what is our attitude supposed to be?

- Galatians 6:1: *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”* We should not ask, “Do they deserve it? Can I afford it?” Instead, we should have an attitude of going, rescuing and restoring.
- James 5:19-20: *“My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”* That is the attitude that Abram took. He went to rescue and save. That is also the attitude Jesus took for us. When we were still enemies, Christ came to rescue us.
- Galatians 1:3-5 describes the gospel: *“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”* The word “deliver” literally means to “rescue.” We were held captive by this world and Jesus gave Himself for our sins. This is an illustration of Christ’s redemptive work. He left heaven and came to earth. He routed the forces of evil. He raided the strong man’s house and liberated the captives. We have been set free. We have been redeemed, ransomed and rescued through the rescue operation of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We who have been rescued ought to be intent on rescuing others. Abram did this and the result was amazing. Look at verse 16: *“Then he brought back all the possessions...”* All what possessions? From all of these different kingdoms that had been conquered by Chedorlaomer. He brought back all of it. He was richer and wealthier than he had ever been. Furthermore, Abram *“also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.”*

So the man who was an ordinary, wandering nomad climbed to the top of the world. He was like a king of kings at this moment. He triumphed over all these kings of the east. He triumphed over the kings of the Dead Sea region and rescued them. Abram was in his glory at this moment. It was a shining moment for him. Someone has called it his “Mount of Transfiguration” moment, when his glory was temporarily revealed. We can see what a great man Abram was.

In a worldly sense, this would be a great place to end the story. There was triumph and victory. However, that is not the climax of this narrative. It is not the point of this story. The point of the story is what happened after the victory. Let's listen to Derek Kidner describe it:

Such a climax shows what was truly at stake in this chapter of international events. The struggle of kings, the far-ranging armies, and the spoil of a city are the small change of the story. It's not the main point. The crux of the story is the faith or failure of one man. How is Abram going to respond to this great victory that the Lord has given him?

That is the crux of the story. The climax is not the rescue of Lot; it is Abram's response to his victory. More hinges on this than the most resounding victory or the fate of any kingdom. So how did Abram respond? That is what we are waiting for in verse 17. Let's look at this last section.

*"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..."* Salem means "peace" and is short for "Jerusalem." Melchizedek means "king of righteousness," and king of Salem means "king of peace." Melchizedek came out and brought bread and wine. He offered Abram a simple sufficiency from the earth, from the gifts of creation. Bread and wine were often brought to kings when they had a royal victory.

Melchizedek was a king of peace and righteousness. We are also told in verse 18 that he was *"priest of God Most High."* He was both a king and a priest. There is no genealogy for him. We don't know where he came from, which is unusual in the book of Genesis. Furthermore, he did not appear after this. But here he is in this one shining moment of Abram's life. It is his highest moment of victory up to this point, and this king-priest from Jerusalem shows up and begins to bless Abram.

Melchizedek became a very important figure in the rest of Scripture. We read about him earlier in Psalm 110:4, where David speaks of a priest who is going to rule in the order of Melchizedek. Also, the book of Hebrews, which the women are studying this fall, deals with Melchizedek, saying that Jesus' priesthood came from this man's line, not from the sons of Abram or from the Levites. Rather, Jesus came from this one who has no beginning and no end. It is an eternal priesthood and Jesus is superior in His priesthood because He comes from the order of Melchizedek. So Melchizedek is pointing us toward another King-Priest Who comes and blesses the people of God. Let's focus on what Melchizedek did in verses 19-20: *"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!'"*

What did he focus on there? He focused on the Giver, not the gift. He focused on Who God is. He is God Most High. He alone is worthy to be worshiped. He alone deserves all glory. He is the Creator and the Possessor of heaven and earth. Psalm 24:1 says, *“The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein...”* Melchizadek, this mysterious figure, brought the bread and wine and said, “Abram, give glory to God because God has delivered you. God has delivered your enemies into your hand. God is the One Who has given you the victory.” That is what Melchizadek wanted Abram to remember.

Abram needed that reminder. He needed to remember that victory comes from the Lord. Abram recognized that something was very unique about Melchizadek. This king-priest deserved more honor and glory than even Abram did. Melchizadek was superior to him and Abram showed that in verse 20 by giving him a tenth, a tithe, of everything. He honored Melchizadek.

Then in verse 21, we see the other king. *“And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.”* “Now, wait a minute, King of Sodom, who do you think you are? Who just delivered you? Who just won back all your possessions? Who just put his life on the line for you? It was me, Abram, not you, Sodom, who got the victory here.” The king of Sodom did not come to say, “Thank you, Abram, for delivering my men and rescuing my goods.” He did not bow down and honor Abram. The first words out of his mouth were “give me.” He wanted to strike a deal with Abram.

Abram anticipated his motive. He knew the king of Sodom was thinking, “If I leave you with some of the goods, then later on I can say that I made Abram rich. Then Abram will owe me part of his wealth and I can use it to manipulate him.” But Abram did not have anything to do with this. The offer from the king of Sodom reminds us of another King-Priest Who was on a mountain. A ruler of this earth came to Him and said these words: “All this I will give You if You will bow down and worship me.”

Praise God that this King-Priest said, “Depart from me, Satan. You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.” He gave glory to God alone. Praise God that was Abram’s response as well to the offer from the king of Sodom.

Verse 22 says, *“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.’”*

He recalled the words Melchizadek spoke about Who God is and God strengthened Abram’s heart with faith as a result. Abram said, “I will not take one red cent from you, King of Sodom. My treasure is not going to come from you.” Think of it. This could have been a real shortcut for Abram to the Promised Land. He was enriched by the wealth of all the surrounding



nations and he could have gotten a glide path to victory. But he said, “No, I’m going to wait for God to bless me. I’m not going to take it from God’s enemies.”

Satan offers us all kinds of shortcuts. Just think about sexuality. “You can have the blessings of sexuality and intimacy. Don’t worry about marriage,” he says. Think about money. “Just keep more for yourself, and you will be satisfied. Don’t worry about things like tithing and giving to the Lord.” These are shortcuts. But Abram said, “I’ll have none of that. God will be the One Who blesses me. God will be the One Who enriches me. Glory will go to God alone.”

Verse 24 says, *“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.”* In other words, “The men who helped me can take whatever they want. As for me, I’m not taking anything from you.” Abram passed the test with flying colors. Even in his moment of greatest glory, he recognized there was one greater than he—Melchizedek. Abram honored him and he honored the Lord, Who gave him the victory.

### **A Lot is at Stake for Us**

What do we do in our moments of victory? We, too, are in a spiritual war? Ephesians 6:12 says that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly realms. God gives us the victory in Christ and we will experience spiritual victories in this life. However, when the test comes, what will we do in our moment of triumph? Will we return glory to God and God alone for what He has done for us? Will we ever rob God of the glory that belongs to Him alone?

Proverbs 27:21 says, *“The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise.”* You are tested at your moments of victory. You are tested at your moments of success. Sometimes, right after your moment of greatest success will come the greatest temptation to steal glory from God—to be enriched by the flattery, praise and possessions of this world. Abram stands as an example to us of returning to God the glory that is due to His name, recognizing that all I have—my joy, my success, my comfort, my prosperity—comes from Him. And all glory goes back to Him for what He has done for me.

Alan P. Ross, an Old Testament professor at Beeson Divinity School, says, “The people of God may win spiritual struggles, but in the limelight of their success they may give away all the glory to some pagan pretender who would be delighted to rob God of the credit for spiritual success.” That’s a temptation that faces Christians and a temptation that faces churches—to rob God of the glory due to Him.

Ross continues, “Victory over the world and promised blessings come from God alone.” We need to discern the danger of accepting worldly benefits, wait for the untarnished blessing and wait for God to enrich us. Say to God, “You and You alone are my Treasure.”

I wonder if that is what the writer of this hymn had in mind. I wonder if he was thinking about Abram, Melchizadek and God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, when he said, “High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art.” Let’s offer this as our prayer to the Lord, and let’s express our resolve to be captivated by His glory and to live for His glory alone. May we keep from robbing the glory that is due to His name.

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