

Background: This is the first war mentioned in the Bible—the first specific account of a military engagement.

The first block of nations was that of the four Mesopotamian kings of the east (14:2). Kedorlaomer, king of Elam (modern Iran), seems to have been dominant. The second alliance was made up of five kings, including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah (14:2). After twelve years as vessels of the four eastern kings, the five southern kings attempted to throw off their shackles. But the eastern kings could not allow such rebellion to go unpunished. The economic results of ignoring the insurrection were too devastating to contemplate. The five southern kings controlled the territory known as the “way of the kings” which was the land bridge through which commerce between Egypt and the four eastern kingdoms passed. Whoever controlled this land bridge maintained a monopoly on international trade.

The end result was Sodom and Gomorrah were sacked. Everything and everyone that could be carried off was. The four kings conquered the five kings and retained control of the trade route.

Why did the Lord record this? What’s the value to us? It reminds us that God is in control of secular history. He isn’t just involved with this little Jewish community. On the surface this international incident may look like a power struggle with economic supremacy as the object, but the implications are much bigger.

Events which appear to be only secular often have a much deeper spiritual purpose and significance. In this case, God is able to tie all this together in a sovereign plan that involves these kings and Abram and Lot. It’s hard for Lot to see that right now as he’s being carted off to some distant land. It is much easier to see the sovereignty of God in retrospect.

This incident shows us how Abram interacted with secular leaders. He had to interact with the outside secular world just like we do.

Lot chose the lush part of the valley and what were the consequences? All that Lot seemed to have gained by taking advantage of Abram was lost in an instant, and (from his perspective) seemingly by chance—he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was caught in the middle of an international incident. Can you imagine the thoughts which went through Lot’s mind as he and his family and all their goods were being carted off to a distant land? He was viewed as one of the Sodomites and treated as such by the conquering kings. He who had been so shrewd was now a slave, and all because of his selfish choice.

Where was Lot living? In Genesis 13:12 Lot had moved his tents *near* Sodom. In Genesis 14:12 Lot was living *in* Sodom.

What was Abram’s perspective on Lot’s capture? Abram could have said that Lot got what he deserved—that he chose to live in Sodom—therefore let him learn his lesson in captivity. Abram could have said that Lot deliberately chose to take advantage of him, now let him pay the price. But he didn’t. Abram immediately responded to Lot’s need.

Application: Abram going after Lot is an example of grace. At one time, we were all “Lots” living in sin. God loved us and chased us down in spite of who we were. How has God shown grace to you? How are you showing grace to those around you?

How many men did Abram take to war? 318

How many did they go up against? The armies of the four kings

What does that imply about Abram? He had great faith and trust in God (and his men). Lot’s rescue was a family honor issue, also. Abram has grown and matured in his relationship with the Lord since returning from Egypt.

Upon his victorious return from battle, two men came out to meet Abram. Two kings, rulers of two different cities, came to him in the King’s Valley, each with an opportunity to offer. As is so often the case, success and victory bring on their heels a critical moral and spiritual choice.

Application: Perhaps no test a man faces is greater than that of success. How did Abram handle his success? He gave glory to God. Abram was able to look beyond the riches of this world to the grander prospects God had in store for him. His tithe was tangible evidence that it was God who deserved the glory in Abram’s eyes. How do you respond when being honored for success?

Who were the two men who met Abram? The king of Sodom and Melchizedek.

Who is Melchizedek? What do we know about him? He is a mysterious figure. This was his only appearance in the Bible. He is both King of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of God Most High. Melchizedek was a king and a priest, not a king and a politician. Some say he was an angel or the pre-incarnate Christ. There is no mention of his death.

“This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means ‘king of righteousness’; then also, ‘king of Salem’ means ‘king of peace.’ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.” Hebrews 7:1-3

What was God’s purpose in having Melchizedek appear on the scene? At a critical point in Abram’s life, God sent Melchizedek to keep him from taking success too seriously. His presence was designed to counter the king of Sodom, and make sure Abram’s focus was right and God got the glory.

Melchizedek’s words were intended to remind Abram that the victory was God’s, and that his success was a result of God’s blessing. Abram’s tithe was tangible evidence that Abram understood that it was God who deserved the glory.

Why did Abram accept Melchizedek’s blessing and food and even tithe to him? What did this gesture demonstrate?
Submission and recognition of God’s authority.

Application: Have there been any Melchizedeks in your life? Are there people God has sovereignly put in your life for His purposes?

What did the King of Sodom propose to Abram? That he keep the spoils of battle. Basically he said, “Abram, I have a deal for you. Take everything!” He offered to him not only the spoils of Sodom and Gomorrah, but also the spoils of all of the others that the eastern kings had defeated. Thus, he said, “You succeeded, and you deserve to be rewarded for your accomplishment as a great general. You deserve all the glory and all the riches that go with it.” Underlying this statement was the idea that having made riches available to Abram, the king was guaranteeing a future alliance.

Why did Abram refuse to accept what was offered by the King of Sodom? Abram, like Melchizedek, was now jealous for God’s glory to be God’s alone. Abram refused to accept anything from this pagan king or become indebted to him. So, Abram refused what was rightfully his and stated, “You will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich’” (Genesis 14:23). There would be no future relationship between them.

Abram had a clear choice to make. He could choose the word of Melchizedek which gave credit to God and fall on his knees in humble worship of the One who had accomplished this amazing victory, or he could choose the message of the king of Sodom which offered wealth and fame. This was a tantalizing choice which could not be made any clearer as the two men stood there, each extending his offer.

Application: The same choice/challenge lies before each of us continually. Who gets the credit? It’s nice to get some glory every now and then—especially among our peers—and be recognized as one of the best. Who gets the credit? Either we claim we did it ourselves and deserve everything we get, or God did it and should receive all the glory, and our offerings. Every day the two kings come before us in the valley and make us the same offer. Either you take the credit, or God gets the credit. And we make eternal decisions when we make this choice. Who gets the credit in your life?

What does this say about alliances? Abram was very selective in his alliance, and serves as a model for us. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.”

This event provides us with a beautiful illustration of the salvation of God. Lot chose to go his own way, seeking his own interests over the promise of God to bless men through Abram. As a result of his self-seeking, Lot had to face the consequences of his sin. Rather than peace and prosperity he found shame and slavery.

At the point where Lot was able to do nothing to correct his errors or to free himself from bondage, Abram, at great personal risk, won the victory and Lot’s release. Saving Lot was the sole reason for Abram’s daring rescue. In spite of Lot’s disregard for Abram, Abram rescued him from the consequences of his own sin. Just like Jesus has done for each one of us!