

“Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled” (Genesis 14:4).

In Abram’s era, there were many land areas that lacked the political boundaries and national governing structures that exist among modern-day nations. Instead, many geographic regions of that time were ruled by “city-states.”

City-states were independent communities that controlled relatively small areas. Each city-state functioned as a sovereign nation, complete with its own government and laws. However, their size was more comparable to a contemporary town or village.

These political structures offer insight into the various events that will unfold here in Genesis chapter fourteen. You see, this chapter relates the account of five kings who ruled over their respective city-states and their revolt against a reigning coalition of four other city-states. Genesis 14:4 tells us that those five city-states had been subject for twelve years to a man named Chedorlaomer, the presumed leader of the four-city confederacy.

A ruler who was “subject” to another ruler during that period typically provided financial compensation to the governing king. This payment was known as a “tribute,” and it functioned much like an ancient version of protection money. This ensured that the controlling nation would not invade or otherwise make life miserable for the subject nation.

So Genesis 14:4 tells us, ***“For twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they revolted” (CEB)***. In other words, these five city-states refused to pay any further tribute to Chedorlaomer and the other members of his coalition. This was akin to a declaration of war, and it's easy to guess what happened next...

“And 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 joined together in battle in the Valley of Siddim against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of nations, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five” (Genesis 14:8-9).

This numerical advantage seemingly favored the five-king alliance, but what does this have to do with Abram? Well, the answer is nothing- until a certain “someone” got dragged into the fight.

“Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains. Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way” (Genesis 14:10-11).

So this declaration of war by the five-city alliance led to some disastrous consequences. The armies of the four-king confederacy responded by taking everything of value in Sodom and Gomorrah, including their provisions. But those acquisitions didn’t end there...

“They also took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed” (Genesis 14:12).

This was more than a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time for Lot. You see, Lot’s involvement in this situation resulted from his earlier decisions. The first decision involved [his determination to move to that area](#) before he sought God’s direction.

Next, ***“...Lot settled among the cities in the valley and camped near Sodom” (Genesis 13:12 GNT)***. So Lot first established his camp “near” Sodom. But notice that Genesis 14:12 tells us that Lot was living “in” Sodom at the time of his capture.

Now we’ve already been told that Sodom was a place where the people were exceedingly wicked (see [Genesis 13:13](#)). This made Lot’s decision to move to Sodom bad enough on its own. However, Lot’s

decision to establish his residence in Sodom exposed him to the same danger faced by the other residents of that city when these enemy troops invaded. So Lot's choice put him in a dangerous position that culminated in some dire consequences.

This brings us to an important message for today. Remember that Lot willingly chose to reside with an exceedingly wicked group of people. Because of this, he effectively became "collateral damage" when things went bad. Lot probably didn't expect to become a prisoner of war when he first moved to Sodom, but that's what happened.

In like manner, we may pay [a similar price](#) if we [choose to associate](#) with [bad company](#). The New Testament epistle of 2 Corinthians offers some guidance that can help us make good decisions in this area...

"I wrote to you in my earlier letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. But I wasn't talking about the sexually immoral people in the outside world by any means—or the greedy, or the swindlers, or people who worship false gods—otherwise, you would have to leave the world entirely!

But now I'm writing to you not to associate with anyone who calls themselves 'brother' or 'sister' who is sexually immoral, greedy, someone who worships false gods, an abusive person, a drunk, or a swindler. Don't even eat with anyone like this" (1 Corinthians 5:9-11 CEB).

"Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram. Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan" (Genesis 14:13-14).

So Abram refrained from getting involved in this altercation until he discovered that his nephew had been taken captive. Of course, Abram might have responded by saying, "*Lot must live with the consequences of his decision.*" Instead, Abram graciously chose to rescue Lot.

This highlights the weight of responsibility that can fall upon God's people when their loved ones make poor decisions. That responsibility often involves prayerful deliberation and Godly counsel in seeking to determine the proper response.

For instance, genuine love may require us to allow others to face the consequences of their choices ([1 Timothy 1:19-20](#), [Mark 10:21-22](#)). It might also involve some corrective or disciplinary measures ([Revelation 3:19](#), [Hebrews 12:5-11](#)). Nevertheless, we must extend grace to others just as God has extended grace to us (see [Romans 5:8](#)).

While Lot should have known better than to move to Sodom, Abram didn't let that stop him from helping Lot in his time of need. When faced with the responsibility of assisting those who are facing the consequences associated with their poor choices, we can draw inspiration from Abram's response.

So Abram mobilized his three hundred and eighteen member army to rescue Lot. Now, anyone with the financial means to maintain a standing army of that scale must have been extremely wealthy. Nevertheless, three hundred and eighteen soldiers doesn't sound like a sizable army.

With this in mind, it's important to remember that this conflict did not involve two warring nations. Instead, it was more like Abram's faction engaging in a military effort against a rival faction. When we consider these hostilities in those terms, this military contingent sounds much more impressive.

“[Abram] divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people” (Genesis 14:15-16).

So Abram advanced against the enemy from multiple directions under the cover of darkness. In today’s military parlance, that tactical decision is akin to a “guerrilla attack.” While this strategy proved effective, it’s clear that God was with Abram, for he successfully defeated a four-king alliance with three hundred and eighteen fighters when a five-king alliance failed to do so.

As a result of that great military triumph, a delegate from the liberated populace will soon approach Abram to express his gratitude. But someone else will visit Abram as well- someone who will prove very different from his first visitor.

“And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him.

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' And he gave him a tithe of all” (Genesis 14:17-20).

So following this successful military campaign, Abram received visits from two different people. We will discuss the first person, the king of Sodom, later in this study. The second individual was Melchizedek, king of Salem.

Melchizedek is a rather enigmatic figure. Other than his role as the king of Salem, the only additional information we have about Melchizedek is that he was a priest of God. This means there are several key elements missing from these verses.

For instance, this passage fails to disclose Melchizedek’s background, the circumstances of his meeting with Abram, his priestly role, or how Abram became acquainted with him. We only know that Melchizedek was present at this meeting, he brought bread and wine, and received a tithe from Abram.

Now it is possible to view this meeting in a straightforward manner. For example, we can say that Melchizedek was an important official who welcomed Abram home following his success on the battlefield. After providing Abram with the hospitality of a meal, Melchizedek blessed Abram and Abram honored him with ten percent of his spoils.

But let’s consider the limited information we’ve received concerning Melchizedek in this passage. First, we’re told that Melchizedek was the king of Salem. The word “Salem” means “peace” and is believed to be the earliest designation for the city of Jerusalem. ⁽¹⁾ With this in mind, we can say that Melchizedek was the “king of peace.”

The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” ⁽²⁾ Melchizedek thus held the uncommon distinction of serving as both a priest and a king. In addition, Melchizedek brought out bread and wine, two elements that hold great significance in respect to Christ (see [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#)).

Finally, it is significant that Melchizedek blessed Abram, for it was customary for a greater person to bless a lesser person in that culture. Therefore, the fact that Abram received a blessing from Melchizedek establishes Melchizedek as a greater spiritual figure than Abram.

(1) See “Salem” *The Online Bible Thayer’s Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4532/kjv/tr/0-1/>

(2) “Melchizedek” *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers

This information makes it possible to draw several parallels between Melchizedek in the Old Testament and Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

For example, Melchizedek was the king of Salem (a word that means “peace”). Romans 5:1 tells us that “...***we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***” The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” 1 Corinthians 1:30 says that Jesus “...***has become ... our righteousness***” (NIV).

Melchizedek was a priest and a king. The New Testament book of Hebrews tells us “...***we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...***” (Hebrews 4:14). In Jesus’ discourse with the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked, “***Are you the king of the Jews?***” Jesus subsequently replied, “***It is as you say***” (Matthew 27:11). So Jesus was a priest and king as well.

Genesis 14:18 tells us that Melchizedek “***brought out bread and wine***” when he met with Abram. Jesus also partook of these elements with His disciples during the last supper...

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” (Matthew 26:26-28 NIV).

Israel’s king David was later inspired to write the following regarding the Messiah: “***The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek’***” (Psalm 110:4 NIV). Although the High Priests of David’s time were descendants of Aaron ([Exodus 28:1](#)), this passage tells us that God’s Savior would serve as a priest in Melchizedek’s order.

Finally, the New Testament book of Hebrews tell us that Melchizedek was, “***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 7:3 NIV). This dual role of priest and king was a unique distinction reserved for only two figures in Israel’s history: Melchizedek and Jesus.

This has led many to conclude that Melchizedek was a Christophany, or an Old Testament appearance of Christ prior to His incarnation. This seems unlikely, for Hebrews 7:3 tells us that Melchizedek was “...***made like the Son of God.***” Nevertheless, Melchizedek is a type or symbol of Christ, at the very least.

That brings us to Abram’s meeting with the other king mentioned in this passage.

“Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself.’

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’— except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion’” (Genesis 14:21-24).

According to the custom of that time, Abram had the right to keep anything he gained from his victory over those who had seized his nephew Lot. This explains why the king of Sodom told him, “***All I want are my people. You can keep everything else***” (Genesis 14:21 CEV).

But Abram’s reply was clear and direct: “***...I solemnly swear before the Lord, the Most High God, Maker of heaven and earth, that I will not keep anything of yours, not even a thread or a sandal strap. Then you can never say, 'I am the one who made Abram rich'***” (GNT).

Abram’s example serves as a cautionary reminder when selecting those to whom we owe a debt. For example, it may be unwise to accept an offer just because it’s seemingly “free.” Instead, Abram was perceptive and discerning in choosing to reject the king’s offer.

Abram clearly wanted to disassociate his financial and material wealth from anything related to Sodom. It also seems as if Abram was determined to avoid any type of obligation to the leader of a city with Sodom’s reputation. God enabled Abram to secure a victory over this four-king alliance, and thus, he rejected any form of indebtedness to the king of Sodom.