

To God Be the Glory — To Him Alone

A study in Genesis 14:1–24

Who gets to say they made you who you are?

Think about the biggest turnaround of your life. The moment things stopped falling apart and started working again. Now ask yourself, honestly — who's been taking credit for that ever since?

Because somebody usually steps forward. The friend who "was there for you." The program that "turned your life around." Sometimes it's even you — telling the story like you did it all on your own will and determination.

I've told that story about myself before. I've also let people take credit that wasn't fully theirs to take. And I've done it to God too. There have been seasons where God genuinely turned something around in my life — and by the time I'd told the story to enough people, I'd quietly started sharing His credit with everybody except Him.

You've done this too. The turnaround in your finances you now credit to a good decision instead of God's provision. The relationship that healed, that you now credit to finally "communicating better" instead of grace. The addiction you walked out of, that you now credit to willpower instead of the One who gave you the will to fight.

All of us are guilty of rewriting our rescue stories in real time — quietly handing the credit to whoever's standing closest.

There's a man in Scripture who faced this test publicly, immediately, with someone standing right there ready to take the credit for him. This passage shows how he protected something most of us give away without even noticing — God's right to the glory only He is owed.

But before we see how the story ends, we have to see how it begins. Because in this story, the fight for God's glory doesn't open with a victory. It opens with Lot's mess in Sodom — spilling over and pulling Abram into a war that wasn't his to fight.

Genesis 14 gives us four observations to walk through together.

1. The Decisions We Make for Immediate Advantage Often Carry Unintended Consequences

Genesis 14:1–12

"In those days King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim waged war against King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, and King Shemeber of Zeboiim, as well as the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). All of these came as allies to the Siddim Valley (that is, the Dead Sea). They were subject to Chedorlaomer for twelve years, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled."

Nine kings. Four in the east. Five in the west. Twelve years of tribute. One year of rebellion. This is the ordinary business of the ancient world: big kings extracting money from smaller kings, smaller kings eventually saying enough, and a war breaking out somewhere in between.

For the first few verses, it looks like it has nothing to do with Abram — like this is here simply to give us information about world history. The eastern coalition sweeps down the King's Highway east of the Jordan: Rephaim, Zuzim, Emim, Horites, Amalekites, Amorites. Then they turn west toward the Dead Sea valley. And then verse twelve lands:

"They also took Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, for he was living in Sodom, and they went their way."

Three phrases, each one landing with weight. *Abram's nephew* — that's family. *For he was living in Sodom* — the parenthesis of judgment. *They went their way* — the world moves on, without noticing what it has just done to a family.

From chapter 13 through chapter 14:12, the text hands us four verbs for Lot. He chose. He journeyed. He pitched his tents toward Sodom. And now — he was living in Sodom. Every choice Lot made from the moment he separated from his uncle Abram moved him further from God and closer to destruction. You don't have to live in Sodom to know how this story ends.

In May of 2010, in Nashville, Tennessee, the Cumberland River rose twelve feet above flood stage in thirty-six hours. In a low-lying neighborhood in East Nashville, a family named the Fogelmans watched the water come up their front steps. They had bought the house for the view. The neighbors on higher ground had warned them at purchase. They bought it anyway. And when the water came, it took the house, it took the cars, it nearly took the family. Later, when the father was interviewed, he said something no father forgets having heard: they loved the view — they didn't love it enough to lose everything for it, but that's what happened anyway.

Lot chose the view. The war took Lot. The Fogelmans chose the view. The flood took it back.

Alexander Maclaren preached on this text over a hundred years ago, and he said it better than most of us ever could: *the neighborhood we choose in our prosperity determines the enemies we face in our disaster*. Where you locate yourself is never trivial. Every one of us has moved from being close to something, to actually being involved in something we thought we could handle — the relationship we knew wasn't good for us, the habit we swore we had under control, the corner we cut to avoid heavier taxation, the disagreement we let sit instead of addressing it, the job that felt off from the first day. And when war came, we didn't see it coming. Like Lot, we got swept up in it. Lot picked the view. But the war picked him.

2. Self-Serving Decisions Never Stay Personal — Eventually, Somebody Else Pays the Price

Genesis 14:13–16

"One of the survivors came and told Abram the Hebrew, who lived near the oaks belonging to Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and the brother of Aner. They were bound by a treaty with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken prisoner, he assembled his 318 trained men, born in his household, and they went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he and his servants deployed against them by night, defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah to the north of Damascus. He brought back all the goods and also his relative Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the other people."

This is the first time the word *Hebrew* appears in the Bible. Not Abram the wealthy shepherd. Not Abram of Mamre. Not Abram the covenant one. In the moment of crisis, the messenger calls Abram by the identity that separates him from every kingdom on the map. Abram is not one of Sodom's citizens. Abram is not one of Elam's tributaries. Abram is different — separated unto God.

Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner are real people — Amorite chieftains bound to Abram by treaty. This matters, because Abram doesn't act alone. God's grace did not make him a lone warrior; grace blessed him to be a man with allies. It's good to know that in times of trouble, we have people we can lean on no matter what. Abram has 318 men, born in his household, trained by his hand — not mercenaries. Abram's rescue is family fighting for family.

Consider what the rescue required. When the attack happened, Abram was roughly 120 miles away — about the distance from Raleigh to Wilmington. This was not a quick trip; it would take days of hard travel through unfamiliar, hostile territory. And when Abram finally caught them, he did not stop after freeing Lot. He pursued them another thirty-five miles north of Damascus. This is more than a rescue mission — Abram is driving the enemy so far back that they will think twice before ever trying that again.

Abram spent days of his life, and risked the safety of his entire household, for a nephew who chose Sodom. Lot, on the other hand, was powerless to help himself. His rescue cost him nothing. The outcome: everything — all the goods, all the people, Lot, the women — a complete rescue.

Earlier, we counted four verbs for Lot, all moving toward Sodom, all moving away from God. Here, the text hands us five verbs for Abram: he heard, he assembled, he went in pursuit, he attacked by night, he brought back. Five verbs, all moving in one direction — rescue. Lot moved four times toward Sodom, away from safety. Abram moved five times toward his nephew. The direction you go is the point.

Like Abram, who is that person for you? The one who — if the phone rings at three in the morning — you already have your shoes on before you fully know what's going on. The one you would drive through the night for. The one you would spend the money you don't have for. The one you would pray unceasingly for if you heard troubling news about them. That love, that instinct to help, to rescue, is the closest most of us will ever come to feeling what the Bible calls unconditional love. No matter what they do, you can't help but be there for them.

Abram mobilized his whole household because one man was in trouble — even though that one man had made every wrong choice on the way to needing a rescue. God's unconditional love moves us to fight for those who need rescuing the most.

3. Because God Gave the Victory, the Glory Is His Alone to Keep

Genesis 14:17–20

"After Abram returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the Shaveh Valley (that is, the King's Valley). Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was a priest to God Most High. He blessed him and said: Abram is blessed by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High who has handed over your enemies to you."

Abram returns from battle victorious, and two kings come out to meet him. The king of Sodom is named first — and then he's interrupted for three verses while Melchizedek does his work. The author freezes the king of Sodom in place while a priest speaks a blessing over Abram. Heaven speaks first — before the world can claim your victory. In this context, the one who speaks first makes all the difference.

His name is Melchizedek. In Hebrew, *melek* means king, *tsedeq* means righteousness — king of righteousness. He is called king of Salem, from the word *shalom* — king of peace. One priest-king, two titles: righteousness and peace.

He comes bearing gifts, bread and wine — the same two elements that, thousands of years later, another Priest-King will lift up and say, "This is my body. This is my blood." We cannot read Genesis 14 as Christians and not hear Luke 22, the Lord's Supper, in the background.

Notice the order of things. Melchizedek blesses Abram. Melchizedek blesses God. Then Abram gives a tenth. Blessing first, tithe second. Grace first, response second. Behavior flows from blessing — that's the order of every gospel exchange we will ever have with God.

The text hands us three actions from Melchizedek: he brought out bread and wine, he blessed Abram, he blessed God. Three actions — not one of them is a request. Not one of them is, "now this is what you can do for me."

A priest with no genealogy. A priest with no beginning of days. A priest with no end of life. You don't read that and think, "that's good biblical insight." You read that and understand what David meant a thousand years later when he wrote, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." You understand what Hebrews meant when it said Christ's priesthood has no beginning and no end.

This is where the passage stops being about how Abram rescued a loved one, and becomes about who owns your soul forever. Our priest is right now interceding for us at the right hand of the Father. The Priest does not run out. The Priest does not retire. The Priest does not have a genealogy to end. The Priest is forever.

And here is the part that everything else has been building toward: that Priest blessed Abram before Abram had brought Him anything. He asked nothing in return. He didn't charge for the bread. He didn't send a bill after the blessing. He didn't wait to see if Abram was worth it. He didn't ask him to prove he needed it. He set the table, filled the cup, and spoke the blessing — before anything was brought to Him.

All of us know what it's like to receive help that came with expectations tied to it. The favor came with a bill. The kindness came with a follow-up phone call we already knew was coming. But God is different. Grace blesses without requiring anything in return.

There's a trap sitting right here in the text that deserves attention: the trap of jumping to the tithe before the blessing lands. If the takeaway becomes "give ten percent of your paycheck in order to receive from God," the point has been missed entirely. Melchizedek did not come to fundraise. He came to bless — to give, not to receive. The tithe follows the blessing; it never precedes it.

4. No Matter Who Shows Up to Claim the Credit, the Victory Still Belongs to God

Genesis 14:21–24

Now Melchizedek steps back, and the king of Sodom — who has been standing there this whole time, waiting for his turn — finally speaks.

"Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the people, but take the possessions for yourself.'"

Sounds generous, doesn't it? It's not. Under the standard convention of the ancient Near East, the recovered goods already belonged to the rescuer. Abram had every legal right to keep everything. The king of Sodom has no claim. What he's doing is manufacturing a favor — trying to look generous by offering Abram what already belongs to him, in exchange for the credit of having enriched him. He wants to look good, and he wants Abram on the hook for owing him. This is a transaction dressed up as gratitude.

Look at Abram's response:

"I have raised my hand in an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth."

Notice the past tense — *I have raised my hand*. Already decided. Before he ever departed to go get Lot, the decision was made long before the present moment required it. A decided faith empowers you to respond in the moment without hesitation, so that when pressure comes, you're not scrambling to figure out how to respond — you already know.

Notice, too, Abram's words. He refers to God as "God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth" — Melchizedek's language — but Abram adds "the LORD." He is identifying Melchizedek's God, the one this pre-Israelite priest-king serves, as his very own covenant God. Same God, same throne, same author of every rescue.

Abram continues: "Not a thread. Not a sandal strap. Not anything that belongs to you." Thread and sandal straps — the smallest, most insignificant things Abram could name. Abram is saying, I will not touch any of it. This is bigger than the value of the goods. Abram is refusing the entire transaction. He will not let Sodom put him in their pocket.

Then Abram drives it home: "So you can never say — 'I made Abram rich.'" That's what this whole refusal is about. It's not about money. It's about the naming rights of Abram's story. If Abram accepts, Sodom will forever be able to say, "we made Abram what he is." For Abram, that's a non-starter. God alone gets to say what made Abram who he is.

It's worth pausing to address an honest objection here. Someone might reasonably say: Abram fought a real war. He led three hundred and eighteen trained men into combat. He recovered real people, real property, real captives. And we're being told that refusing his legitimate share of the recovered goods is the height of piety. If a single mom in Raleigh did that, we'd rightly worry about her. Reward-refusal is a luxury virtue — a thing only people who already have enough can afford. This story only works because Abram was already made wealthy by the time he left Egypt in the previous chapter. So preaching this text to financially fragile people teaches them to say no to legitimate wages in the name of piety. That's not good theology — that's a rich man dressing up his wealth as morality.

That objection lands on the surface of the text, but it misreads the ground Abram is actually standing on. Abram did not refuse payment because he had enough. Abram refused payment because he was already owned. His wealth had already been given, not earned. His identity had already been set. It was not up for negotiation. What Abram actually refused was not payment for services rendered — it was the naming rights on his rescue.

And that kind of no is available at every income level. Anyone — everyone — who is a child of God can and should say no, because their identity has been secured by God Himself. They belong to Him. The gospel does not ask poor people to refuse compensation. It asks all people to know whose they are at all times, before they receive any form of compensation. That's the difference.

In verse 24, Abram gives us the scope of his no: one refusal, one exception, one deferral. He refuses to take a thread or sandal strap. He only accepts what his servants have already eaten. He defers his allies' share to the allies themselves, signifying that his oath, his refusal, is his alone. This is not a group policy — Abram is naming the ground he stands on, and leaving the other men free to answer for themselves.

Every one of us has accepted help, and later discovered it came with strings attached, because the help came with ulterior motives. Abram's refusal only becomes possible because he had already been claimed by the Great and High Priest we met earlier. His oath was rehearsed before the offer.

The bottom line is this: no one can serve two masters. Misplaced credit creates an unworthy master. Rightly placed glory keeps you free to serve only God. The rescue was God's. The victory was God's. And the credit — well, that belonged to Him too.

God gave the victory. To Him alone it belongs.

The Priest Behind the Shadow

All of this only makes sense in light of who Melchizedek was pointing to. Melchizedek was a shadow — but shadows point to something, and for us, as Christians, that something is the most important reality of our lives: Jesus.

There was a priest with no genealogy, who blessed Abram before Abram had brought him anything. And there's a Priest right now, still doing the same. He is the reason Abram could say no. He is the reason you can say no. He is the ground you stand on instead of serving an unworthy master.

Maybe you've never received a blessing like that. Maybe every blessing in your life has come with strings attached, and you've never been sure whose you actually are. The Priest who blessed Abram is still blessing — even right now. He's not asking you to prove you need Him. He's not asking you to earn what He's offering. He's offering you the chance to be saved, to know Him as Lord and Savior. His name is Jesus, and He's waiting for you to receive what He has for you.

To the rest of us — the ones who have already been claimed by that Priest — here's the charge for this week. Somewhere between now and a few days from now, somebody is going to offer you something that comes with a bill attached to it. A favor with a string. A kindness with terms. A rescue with the invoice folded inside. Before you respond to them, remember this: you have already been blessed. You have already been claimed. Your identity has already been set. You already know whose you are. And you can respond in that assurance.

Because there's a Priest — with no beginning of days, no end of life, no genealogy to end — whose blessing is on your name. Right now. Forever. With no strings attached.