

LIVING IN A DECLINING SOCIETY

Genesis 14

Each week, read the entire Scripture passage before you begin. Record the verses where you find your answers.

Discuss review questions from the previous lesson.

DAYS 1 AND 2: GENESIS 14:1-16—THE DANGERS OF LIVING IN A DECLINING SOCIETY

1.
 - a. List the names and the cities of the kings who join together to invade the Valley of Siddim.
 - b. List the names and cities of the local kings who united to defend themselves against the invaders.
 - c. What prompts the invasion?
2.
 - a. Why is the outcome of the battle so significant for Abram?
 - b. What action does Abram take when he learns of Lot's capture?
 - c. List at least four things we can learn about Abram from verses 13-16.
3.
 - a. Why would Abram have been justified in not getting involved in Lot's trouble?
 - b. Have you ever had to decide whether or not to come to the rescue of someone who made bad choices or wronged you? What did you do, and why?
 - c. Can you recall and share a time when God rescued you from a difficult or dangerous situation of your own making?

DAYS 3 AND 4: GENESIS 14:17-20—ABRAM'S MEETING WITH THE KING OF SALEM

NOTE: Melchizedek, King of *Salem* (later called *Jerusalem*) is a mysterious figure mentioned in Scripture in Genesis 14, Psalm 110, and finally in Hebrews 7 as a *foreshadowing* or *picture of Christ*.

4. What information does each of these passages give us about Melchizedek?
 - a. Genesis 14:17-20
 - b. Psalm 110:1-4
 - c. Hebrews 7:1-5

5. a. What does Melchizedek bring to Abram when they meet in the Valley of Kings?

b. How was this symbolic of the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 22:14-20)?
6. a. What significant gift does Melchizedek bestow on Abram at this time?

b. This gift helped Abram put his victory in proper perspective. Why was this important?
7. What does Abram, in return, give to Melchizedek? What is the significance of this?
8. a. What does Hebrews 7:24-28 tell us about the priestly work of Christ on our behalf?

b. What aspect of Christ's ministry as High Priest is especially meaningful to you, and why?

DAY 5: GENESIS 14:21-24—ABRAM'S REJECTION OF THE KING OF SODOM

9. a. What can we conclude about the King of Sodom from Genesis 13:13; 18:20-21; and 19:1-13?

b. Why do you think he offers to give Abram the spoils of victory?
10. a. Why does Abram refuse his offer of riches?

b. What does this tell us about Abram? (See also Hebrews 11:8-10; Psalm 24:1.)
11. What evidence of Abram's growing faith in God do you see in this chapter?
12. Has there been a time in your life when you had to choose between "*the riches of the world*" and "*the things of God*"? Could you share what influenced your choice?

DAY 6: PARTICIPATE IN CLASS

APPLY what you have learned. Abram is a smart strategic thinker—but unlike his selfish cleverness down in Egypt, trying to pass off his wife, Sarai, as his sister (Lesson 6)—here he devises a brilliant military move to rescue his nephew Lot, even though Lot has treated his uncle selfishly. Again he uses strategic thinking in refusing the king of Sodom's riches. Never would that king be able to come back and claim any right to rule over Abram and his household. What has made the difference? Faith in "*the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth*" (Genesis 14:22) is enabling Abram to use his mental sharpness and his resources in a godly way. Trusting God fully can do the same for us. In fact, that's the smartest strategic move we can make!

DAY 7: LIVING IN A DECLINING SOCIETY

Genesis 14

Lot separates from Abram and exchanges a place of blessing for life in a wicked society. Abram's decision to trust God to provide for him is confirmed. By contrast, Lot is captured in the fall of Sodom and its sister cities. Abram risks his life to save Lot and declares the sufficiency of *Yahweh*, God Most High, before the king of Sodom. Abram shows strength of character and God-honoring faith.

THE DANGERS OF LIVING IN A DECLINING SOCIETY City-states like Sodom often paid taxes to the most powerful kings in their region. The leading king of the region at this time was Kedorlaomer of Elam. The small cities aligned with such leaders sent them funds every year, to secure the king's assistance if their thrones or their cities were threatened. The kings of the five city-states of the lower Jordan valley finally rebel against Kedorlaomer, whose allies are willing to fight because of the potential plunder. It takes a year for the northern kings to ally themselves, equip their armies, and move south. Once underway, the invaders prove unconquerable, attacking not only the cities of the plain, but a host of other towns as well. Lot's family and possessions are considered part of the invaders' plunder of Sodom. He is soon headed north with the northern army, probably expecting to spend the rest of his life as a slave.

THINK ABOUT grace. Lot's selfish choices have put him in a serious predicament. He showed utter disrespect for his uncle in choosing the best pastureland and a total misunderstanding of the dangers of living in a hostile, ungodly environment. Abram, who had trusted God to provide for him and who understood the danger of consorting with evil, had not been attacked by the marauding, avenging four northern kings led by Kedorlaomer. When an escaped captive came to tell Abram about his nephew's capture, Abram went immediately to help Lot. Abram, who was not young, could have understandably refused, but God was transforming his character. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. When Abram acted in grace toward Lot, God acted in grace toward him. He gave him victory in battle although he was greatly outnumbered.

THE DUTIES TOWARD A DECLINING SOCIETY Along the journey north, one of the people of Sodom has escaped. He finds the Patriarch near Hebron and reports his nephew's capture. In verse 13, Abram is called "*Abram the Hebrew*." This term appears here for the first time in the Bible. Abram felt a responsibility to rescue his nephew when he was taken captive by the invading kings. He was able to call on 318 trained men born in his household, the offspring of his servants. Abram apparently trained them to defend his property from attack by local bands of raiders, who might find his huge flocks tempting targets.

Has this account been embellished? Some argue that no group of 318 men would be able to defeat the armies of four battle-hardened northern kings, but the text does not say that Abram's soldiers take on the entire armies of the invaders. Abram and his friends likely pursue a slow-moving portion of the larger force—consisting of women, children, the elderly, and plunder—and catch up with them at Dan, at the northern extremity of the Promised Land. Abram's band performs very well, hiking over 125 miles, probably with little rest, and attacking the northern army at night. Abram's companions continue the attack against the raiders for another 50 miles. Along the way, they recover all the people and possessions taken away from Sodom. Again, Abram proves to be a blessing—not only to Lot and his family, but to all who were forced from their homes in the Jordan Valley.

THE TESTIMONY OF FAITH BEFORE A DECLINING SOCIETY The people of Sodom and their king meet the triumphant Abram upon his return. Moses injects an important figure into the account: Melchizedek, king of Salem. The contrasts between the king of Sodom and the king of Salem are significant. The king of Sodom comes to improve his political position. The king of Salem comes to bless Abram. The king of Sodom falsely poses as Abram's generous-hearted benefactor. The king of Salem brings gifts to sustain a weary but victorious Patriarch. Abram is benefited and strengthened by Melchizedek.



Melchizedek appears only in this portion of the Hebrew Scriptures, though Psalm 110:4 refers to him briefly. He is regarded by the New Testament as a highly important person (see Hebrews 7). He and Abram share in the worship of God Most High. Melchizedek, whose name means *king of righteousness*, is both a king and a priest. He serves as a type of Jesus Christ and arrives with no fanfare. Even the omissions in the account are highly significant. Melchizedek appears “*without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, [and] like the Son of God he remains a priest forever*” (Hebrews 7:3). Jesus is declared to be a High Priest according to Melchizedek’s order (Psalm 110:4). It is also significant that Melchizedek brings bread and wine—another connection to Christ—symbolizing His death on the cross (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Melchizedek sees God’s hand in Abram’s victory. Abram offers to the great priest a 10th of the spoils of that battle, acknowledging that God Most High is the true Source of all his blessings.

The king of Sodom comes to him posing as a benefactor, wanting to appear before Abram and the people of Sodom as a liberator rather than the coward he is. He “generously” suggests to Abram that the Patriarch keep the possessions gained in the battle. The king wants only the citizens of Sodom to return home with him.

THINK ABOUT benefiting from an unholy alliance. Given the opportunity to profit as richly as Abram would have by receiving the plunder from his victory, could you have resisted? He won the battle and earned the reward. Abram believed that to capitalize from the victory would tarnish his reputation and weaken his testimony to his pagan neighbors. The New Testament warns us against forming alliances with unbelievers, no matter how profitable they might be. “*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?*” (2 Corinthians 6:14). Whether the partnership is a business or personal alliance, we must be careful. How we make money can affect our reputation and our witness to the unbelieving world. Money itself is not evil; it’s the love of it that gets us in trouble. Before the temptation ever occurs, spend time with the Lord and settle the question.

Abram is too wise to yield to the king of Sodom’s tactic. He refers to an oath he previously took, that he will not allow himself to be enriched by the king. That wicked king will never be able to go before the world and announce that he has made Abram rich. Abram depends on God Most High and on Him alone. The only “wages” he will accept are the modest amounts of food consumed by his trained force. The Gentiles who ally themselves with Abram are blessed, and Abram maintains his testimony before the pagans of the Promised Land.

PERSONALIZE this lesson. We will probably never go to war with the likes of King Kedorlaomer. But whether we realize it or not, we all do battle with “rulers” on a daily basis. We are in a spiritual battle. To be prepared, we need to know what our resources are and how to use them. Genesis 14 is a picture of a battle well-fought, and we can learn from it. Abram was not afraid to fight; he was ready to engage the enemy. God will go into battle with us as He did with Abram, and in His strength, we will win. But we must obey His commands. Be ready! Stand firm! “*Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power*” (Ephesians 6:10).

REVIEW: LIVING IN A DECLINING SOCIETY

13. What spiritual principle from this week’s lesson do you want to apply to your own life?
14. What did you find especially interesting or helpful in the teaching or Commentary?