

## READ

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Genesis 14

## REFLECT

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The fourteenth chapter of Genesis offers readers a glimpse of the socio-political world of the ancient world, especially in the area known as the Levant (modern Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan). It was a far different world than what we know now, with each large city being its own kind of independent state and with its own king. We read of alliances formed and broken, and of the struggles each city-state faced in that ever-evolving political reality. In the midst of all that mess was Abram and Lot. They'd separated from one another in the previous chapter, and Lot settled near Sodom, which became a hotbed for action. The kings of both Sodom and Gomorrah had the incredible misfortune of falling into tar pits and their cities were looted. Lot was kidnapped in the coup and Abram was called upon by one of the survivors to save his nephew. He gathered all his loyal men – which we learn was 318, he truly had a huge estate! – and they attacked the kings who'd sacked Sodom and Gomorrah and kidnapped Lot. Their fight took them all the way north of Damascus, more than 150 miles away from where Lot had lived near Sodom. The long travel was worth it, though, as Abram proved victorious. Not only did he free Lot, but he recovered all the property that was stolen from the looted cities.

In his heroic return, Abram was met by two kings, Melchizedek, the king of Salem (which hadn't been mentioned before, strangely) and Bera, king of Sodom. Melchizedek was not only king, but a priest, and he arrived with bread, wine, and a blessing for Abram in the name of God Most High (or El Elyon, depending on your translation). The shared religious identity proved to be important, and in response to the blessing Abram gave 1/10<sup>th</sup> of his possessions to Melchizedek. Sodom's king witnessed this exchange and wanted in on the action, seeking people over property, but Abram refused because he'd promised God (at some unknown point previously) that he'd not be indebted to Sodom's king in any way. All of this is kind of a strange interlude in Abram's story, but it sets the stage for much more to come, both with Melchizedek and Sodom.

## REACT

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- The socio-political world we encounter in this chapter is kind of overwhelming. There seems to be an incredible amount of turmoil and not much stability. One of the things God promised Abram is that he'd be a blessing to all the earth – and it really appears that regular people, who were likely struggling in the face of all that political turmoil, needed a blessing. Abram's victory and recovery of property is one of the first tangible ways that he became a blessing. How might you become a blessing to others in the midst of our own kinds of political and/or social turmoil?
- Abram ends up looking like a superhero in this chapter of Genesis – he quickly gathered his troops and successfully battled the forces of four kings in order to save his nephew. It's exciting to think of such a battle in the name of familial love. Think about your own life and family – to what ends would you be willing to go in order to save them?

## RESPOND

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Ritual of blessing: *Melchizedek responded to Abram's victory with a blessing. It was a way to thank him for his actions and God for bringing the victory through Abram. Blessings have a very long and storied tradition in our faith, but we don't much practice them these days, save for a blessing of a meal. Think about other things you might be able to bless – homes, relationships, special moments, difficult moments, the list can go on and on. Creating a ritual around blessing all kinds of things is a great way to continually engage our faith and recognize where God is working in the world. Consider the following 17<sup>th</sup> century blessing used in home worship settings and based on Numbers 6:24 –*

*God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit bless, preserve, and keep us. The Lord mercifully with look on us with his favor, and fill us with all spiritual benediction and grace, that we may live godly, righteously, and soberly in this life, and in the world to come we may have life everlasting. Amen.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> From: *Short services for family worship: arranged chiefly from the Book of common prayer* by John Gibson, 1844