

The gospel according to Abraham, week 6

Genesis 14: The battle at Siddim Valley, & Melchizedek blesses Abraham

*Grace Evangelical Presbyterian Church
Sunday, October 25, 2015*

Purpose: Understand the events of Genesis 14 and how they fit into the general narrative of the life of Abraham. Understand how Melchizedek is interpreted in the New Testament book of Hebrews as a type of Christ. See how biblical typology is grounded in the way that the Bible interprets itself.

Summary: Genesis 14 details two major events in Abraham's life, the first of which precipitates the second: (a) a battle involving rebel kings opposing Mesopotamian powers that eventually leads to the capture of Lot, his nephew, and (b) Abraham being blessed by Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High.

During the battle at the Valley of Siddim, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and all their possessions – including Lot – were taken. When Abraham hears of this, he pursues king Chedorlaomer and his allies to rescue Lot. Abraham returns victorious and is greeted by Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God Most High. Melchizedek blesses Abraham, and Abraham gives him a tenth of his spoils.

In the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews sees Melchizedek as prefiguring Christ, Priest-King who is after the order of Melchizedek and not in the line of Levitical priests. As such, Christ's priestly office is superior, and in this office He offers the perfect sacrifice of Himself to offer true salvation. Since Christ is not weakened by death, He continues as priest forever by the power of His resurrection life and intercedes for us still today.

1 Introduction

» *Read: Genesis 14*

How does Genesis 14 fit in the narrative of Abraham's life? What do we learn about Abraham, and God's work in his life?

Why does the Bible (in Psalms and especially in Hebrews) make so much of a seemingly obscure character whose sole and sudden appearance is in three verses of Genesis 14?

- Melchizedek serves as a type of Christ
- Melchizedek thus offers a rich way to see the gospel in the life of Abraham because the narrative of this event in Abraham's life serves as a foundation for later interpretation of how and under what authority Christ achieves the Gospel through His person & work

2 Geographical orientation

Draw map!

([Map 2-2: The Battle of the Valley at Siddim](#) from Crossway's [ESV Bible Atlas Maps](#))

3 The Battle at the Valley of Siddim (Gen. 14:1-16)

vv. 1-4: Setting the stage for the battle

SIDE 1: FOUR KINGS OF THE EAST			SIDE 2: THE FIVE REBELS		
<i>King</i>	<i>King of</i>	<i>Location(?)</i>	<i>King</i>	<i>King of</i>	<i>Location</i>
Amraphel	Shinar	Sumer/Babylonia (modern Iraq)	Bera	Sodom	SE of Dead Sea
Arioch	Ellasar	Assyria (modern Iraq/Syria/Turkey)	Birsha	Gomorrah	
Chedorlaomer	Elam	Caspian Sea to Persian Gulf (modern Iran)	Shinab	Admah	
Tidal	Goiim	eastern Turkey (modern day)	Shemeber	Zeboiim	
			?	Bela	

TABLE 1. *Mesopotamian powers who fought at the Battle of the Valley of Siddim.*

- The kings remain obscure, historically (Walton et al., 2000: 45; Hamilton, 1990)
- Why did the 5 kings rebel? We are not told; it may be that they were challenging a suzerainty (Hamilton, 1990: 402-403) seen as invaders¹
 - All we are told is they rebelled in the 13th year of serving Chedorlaomer

vv. 5-7: Itinerary & conquest

- Itinerary of conquests regularly appear in “chronographic texts” (Walton et al., 2000: 45)
- The route follows the King’s Highway (Numbers 20:17): A path along a mountain range east of the Jordan Valley in the Transjordan (Hamilton, 1990; Walton et al., 2000)
 - Used for trade, caravans, military expeditions, etc.
 - Deuteronomy 1-3

¹ Gentry and Wellum (2012: 237) state that the four kings from the east “come to punish Canaanite rulers who have refused to pay the required tribute exacted in conquests fourteen years earlier.”

- The same route followed (in the opposite direction) by the Israelites following the Exodus when they left Sinai in the wilderness to conquer Canaan/Palestine
- The listing of other peoples subdued may evidence that the rebellion of the 5 kings was part of a larger effort
 - Among those defeated are the Rephaim, Zuzim, and Emim
 - Considered “giants” (Deut. 2:10-12, 20-23), which makes Abraham’s later defeat of Chedorlaomer & the other kings all the more impressive

vv. 8-16: Lot is captured & rescued

- Chedorlaomer & his allies cause are victorious
- Kings of Sodom & Gomorrah fled or hid in tar pits
 - Possessions & people – including Lot – were taken
- Abraham (still “Abram”) is living at the oaks of Mamre
 - Where he settled and built an altar in Gen. 13:18
 - Where the LORD appears to him in Gen. 18:1
- Abraham referred to as “the Hebrew”
- “Led forth his trained men” – 318 servants/recruits/retainers
 - This is about the size of the armies of city states at this time
 - Possible significance of 318?

What do we learn about Abraham, his character, and God’s promise in Gen. 14:1-16?

4 Melchizedek blesses Abraham (Gen. 14:17-24)

Upon returning from battle, Abraham is greeted by two kings just south of Jerusalem:

- Bera, king of Sodom
 - Offers Abraham possessions
 - Abraham denies possessions & requests Lot
 - His actions & words may show maturation from the Egypt incident (Gen. 12:10-20)
- Melchizedek, king of Salem
 - Regional king that receives portion of the booty (the tithe)
 - Common custom at the time (sharing with non-combatants)
 - Melchizedek shares a communal meal with Abraham
 - Indication of peaceful agreement (Walton et al., 2000: 47)
 - Melchizedek could be reaching out to Abraham, who just showed such strength
 - Abraham’s tithe acknowledges Melchizedek’s status
 - Could be offering nourishment to those returning from battle (Hamilton, 1990; Bruce, 1991: 157)
 - Blesses Abraham, calling God “God Most High” (a common way to refer to the chief Canaanite deity) and “Possessor of heaven and earth”

What do we learn about Melchizedek and who he is in verses 18-20?

- King of Salem (= Jerusalem?; see Psalm 76:2)
- Priest of God Most High
- Name = 'king of righteousness'

- Just reading these verses & this chapter, would you expect Melchizedek to have *any* theological import or significance?²
 - Importantly, the Bible provides its own explicit evidence for Melchizedek and his significance as a type of Christ
 - The writer of Hebrews expounds upon this in much detail, treating Melchizedek as a type that anticipates (by divine providence) Christ as the antitype

“[God] is Lord of history. He comes *into* history. He works *within* history through his people and through anything else he chooses to use.” (Mickelsen, 1977[1963]: 245)

5 Melchizedek as a type of Christ

Melchizedek “suddenly emerges from the shadows and as suddenly retreats into oblivion” (Sarna, 1989:109). Why, then, does the Bible later make so much of him?

» *Read: Psalm 110 & Hebrews 6:19-7:28*

What does Psalm 110 reveal about the ministry of Jesus? It reveals a dual anticipation about the Messiah and His office (Beale and Gladd, 2014: 139):

- A *kingly* Messiah:

The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.” (Psalm 110:1)

- A *priestly* Messiah:

The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:4)

² One possibility that we won't get into because of time is that Abraham himself is also functioning as a king-priest (see Gentry & Wellum, 2012: 337-238 for an example of this).

The main thrust of Hebrews is that Christ is superior. For example, Jesus is portrayed as:

- Greater than the angels and humans (chs. 1-2)
- Greater than Moses (ch. 3)
- Greater than Joshua (ch. 4)
- The superior High Priest who:
 - offers a superior sacrifice
 - serves in a better sanctuary
 - abides as priest forever

Principles drawn from seeing
Melchizedek as a type of Christ

The most elaborate treatment of Melchizedek in Hebrews is introduced by an explicit connection between Christ's priesthood/kingship and the Abrahamic covenant (Hebrews 6:13-20).

- The "two unchangeable things" in Hebrews 6:18 are the promises in Psalms 110:1 and 110:4 (Guthrie, 2007)
 - These demonstrate to "the heirs of the promise" that God's purpose in the Abrahamic covenant is "unchangeable" (Hebrews 6:17)

What specific aspects from Genesis 14 does Hebrews build on, and what do they tell us about Christ?

- Melchizedek's name
- Melchizedek's dual office
- Melchizedek's (lack of) genealogy
- Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham
- Melchizedek's receiving of tithes from Abraham
- (Note: Hebrews does not mention the bread & wine, though many early Christians saw this as a sign of the Eucharist)

In Hebrews 6:19-8:7 we learn that Christ, with authority granted by God (Hebr. 5:10; 7:21) through an oath (Brown, 1982; Bruce, 1991):

- Is a (better) priest (Hebr. 7:15-16)
- Is a king
- Is both righteousness and peace
- Has a superior priesthood (Hebr. 7:11-10)
- Is the final priest
- Continues as (high) priest forever (Hebr. 6:20; 7:24)
- Gains us entry into God's presence (Hebr. 6:19; 7:19)
- Introduces a better hope (Hebr. 7:19)
- Has completed His redemptive work
- Offers a better/perfect sacrifice
- Is the final sacrifice (Hebr. 7:27)
- Saves completely/perfectly (to the uttermost) (Hebr. 7:25)
- Intercedes for us (Hebr. 7:25)
- Is the guarantee of a better covenant (Hebr. 8:7)
- Is perfect forever (Hebr. 7:28)
- Serves at the true tabernacle (Hebr. 8:2)

Hebrews directly links Jesus' dual priest-king role to the promises given to Abraham in Genesis 12 (see Hebrews 6:13-20), which we inherit through faith (Hebrews 6:12; Galatians 3:7-9, 14). Jesus, as the sinless high priest, offers the perfect sacrifice of Himself, enabling us to draw near to God. By the power of His resurrection life, He continues as priest forever, making intercession for us.

6 Additional points for discussion

Why is Christ a priest? Why do we need a priest, and one that continues “forever”? And, why does the writer of Hebrews care so much about a seemingly obscure character who takes the scene for a few verses in Genesis 14?

- It is important to bear in mind the larger biblical theme of the temple from Genesis to Revelation (see Beale, 2004, 2005; Beale & Kim, 2014)

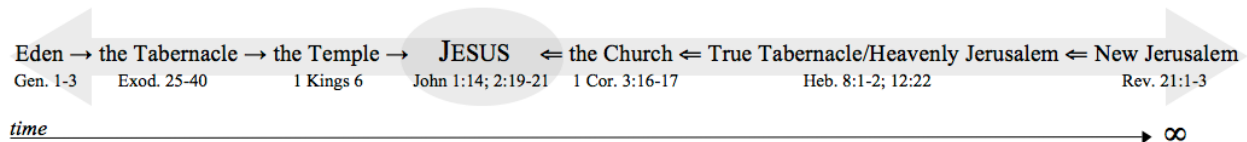


FIGURE 1. *Expressions of the temple theme in Scripture.*

- The temple is a theme that persists in Scripture, beginning in the Garden of Eden and culminating in Revelation (Beale, 2004)
 - The tabernacle
 - The various expressions of this theme point to Jesus
 - Jesus imbues these expressions with meaning
- Jesus serves at the true/archetypal tabernacle as the true Great High Priest
 - By identifying Jesus with the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews shows that the relevance of Christ’s priesthood well preceded the tabernacle & Solomon’s temple

Closing thought: Priesthood of all believers

“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:4-5)

- Our priesthood is intimately tied to and only meaningful through Christ’s

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