

# Genesis 14:17-24, The Beginning of Hope in the Promises of God: A Life of Abraham,

Preached by Michael Gunn @ Harambee Church on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008

*"It wasn't if Abram thought, 'I'll submit to God and then I'll get the prize.' It's rather that he understood a very basic truth in my religion... which is that in the final analysis, all there is, is God. All we have is transitory. It comes and goes because of God."*

Azizah Y. Al-Hibri

## Intro

Imagine being called into a strange land, and that strange land was a dangerous place for you and your family. I wonder how Sarai felt about this "Calling" that God had on Abram? Can you imagine what it would be like to leave the comfort of friends and family for the complete unknown, and then realize the area you are led to is not a very friendly place, especially for your people? This is the reality of our crew from Ur. They are called "Hebrews" (Outsiders) by the locals (see **Genesis 14:13**), and they simply aren't welcome. In our story today we see Abram and his family embroiled in an area dispute that kidnaps his nephew Lot as the spoils of warfare. This is a brutal area where violent gangs and "Lords" of all kinds vie for power and influence in the area. Ur was familiar; the gods were understood, and Abram was an "Insider" who knew what he was doing, and how the system worked. Now he was an outsider trying to stay away from trouble and follow the call that God had placed on his life. In this segment of scripture we see a couple of things that are intriguing. **First**, Yahweh is greater than any obstacle you will face, and **secondly**, He is also responsible to defeat the obstacles that would hinder His call on your life. Let's journey on with Abram and Sarai, as God continues to reveal Himself and His vision to them in quite unconventional ways.

## From the Head...

After Abram and his men returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and his allies, and had taken Lot back in Rambo style, the story shows that he is met by two the King of Sodom and Melchizedek, King of Salem. In this scene there appears to be 3 players (As mentioned), yet it becomes quite obvious that there is a 4<sup>th</sup> player; El Elyon (God Most High). The terms "El" and "Elyon" were used as a generic term for Canaanite gods, but the compound "El Elyon" (Most High God) was never seen in ancient Ugaritic texts.

The stage set for the meeting was in a place called the "King's Valley," which Jewish historian Josephus said was just south of Jerusalem.

What we have is a study in contrast between these two kings. King of Sodom, is literally the "King of Fire" while Melchizedek is the "King of Righteousness." The King of Sodom hales from Sodom where the men were "*Great sinners against the Lord*" (**Genesis 13:13**), while Melchizedek is from Salem (Shalom or "Peace"), and **Psalms 76:2** helps us understand this as a possible reference to Jerusalem or Zion (God's holy city). King of Sodom asks for something (**Genesis 14:21**) while Melchizedek gives Abram bread, wine and a blessing (**Genesis 14:18-20**). Abram responds to Melchizedek by paying him homage (**Genesis 14:20**) while he clearly refuses to do business with the King of Sodom (**Genesis 14:22-24**).

Once again our story is a bit of conundrum. Who is this Melchizedek? Is he a Canaanite king, who becomes a type of Christ, or is he a pre-incarnate Christ? Or is he (As the Jewish Talmud says) Noah's son Shem? The term that Melchizedek uses in his blessing (Which pretty much every commentator sees as a form of liturgical/poetic blessing) is El Elyon, which indicates that he most likely is a monotheist that is the sole creator of heaven and earth. As stated earlier ancient pagan writings did not refer to their gods as both El and Elyon together. The author of Genesis does utilize cultural wording in the place of Yahweh the Jewish God, and only true God. This may tell us something about the use of the word God in context? I think we can say at least a couple of things in this passage are clear.

First, Melchizedek is representative of the only true God. If he is truly a gentile King and not the pre-incarnate Jesus, we can understand God as a missional God who is working outside of the called people group (The Jews/Church). God is sovereign and working in this world, and there are those that God is preparing and working with outside the normative means of salvation. God may have called Abram, but He doesn't need Abram. In the same way God has called his church out to be His witness, as a privilege, He doesn't need us!

Secondly however, I do think the coincidences and the story are a bit much to not see at least a clear type of Christ, our priest/king. First Psalm 110 explains that the scepter (Ruling power) of David would not be removed from Zion, and that this ruler (Messianic in its language) would be a priest "Forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (**Psalms 110:4**). The author of Hebrews picks up on this aspect of Melchizedek and tells us that he has no mother, father or genealogy (**Hebrews 7:3**), and that He was greater than Abram (**Hebrews 7:7**) and the Levitical priesthood (**Hebrews 7:4-12**). Melchizedek is a priest/king whose name is the King of Righteousness, King of Peace (Shalom). He come out with bread and wine and blesses Abram with two truths. God is greater than all gods, and He is the creator of everything, as well as

the fact that it is he who sovereignly delivered Abram in this battle, because Yahweh not only called Abram, He is sovereignly bringing forth His promise through Abram whom He called.

Subsequently Abram responds to the King of Sodom, which represents a worldly, wicked rejection of God, and rejects gaining any power or alliance through ungodly means. Later on we see Abraham capitulating, but here in the presence of King Melchizedek, he rejects any offer from the King of Sodom, and pays homage to Melchizedek, the King/Priest of the "Most High God."

### **...to the Heart**

Adverse circumstances come in to our lives all the time. How much do you feel you can control them? Are you living to gain security, or are you living to live out the mission that God has called you to live out? When God does that he provides and protects, as well as overcomes obstacles so that the mission He has called you to will be accomplished, but we must first, in act of obedience, go where He says to go, and do what He says to do. This may not be comfortable, and it most likely won't be easy, but it will be the best place to be, in the will of our Most High God!

**Books for further study:** *Genesis*, Walter Brueggemann, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*, Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, Bruce Waltke, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis*, Gordon J. Wenham, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, John H. Walton, *Creation and Blessing*, Allen P. Ross

**Next Weeks Verses:** Genesis 15

To dialogue with the sermon go to [www.sermonrant.wordpress.com](http://www.sermonrant.wordpress.com) and express your thoughts