

Faith or failure?

Genesis 14: 1 – 15: 21

Chapter 14 provides an account of the first war recorded in the Bible – when four kings from the east (including Babylon / Iraq and Persia / Iran) went to war against five kings who held territory in what is now Israel and Jordan. After Abram’s victory against the four invading kings, including his rescue of Lot, he meets the mysterious person Melchizedek, followed by the king of Sodom. To these rival benefactors Abram signifies his Yes and his No, refusing to compromise his call. Such a climax shows what was truly at stake in this chapter of international events. The struggle of kings, the far ranging armies and the spoils of a city are the small change of the story: the crux is the faith or failure of one man... In Chapter 15 we read about God’s famous covenant with Abram...

Abram rescues Lot (Genesis 14: 1 – 24)

- Why do you think this particular war was recorded in the Bible (and not the many other wars that were raging around the world at this time)?
- What happened to Lot (v 12) and why? Where was Abram, and what was he doing at this time?
- With only 318 ‘crack troops’ Abram defeated the four kings and their armies. Why do you think Abram’s military venture was so successful?

‘Melchizedek’ was a title meaning ‘king of righteousness’; he was the king of Salem (i.e. Jerusalem). He was also a priest (v18); he offered Abram ‘bread and wine’ and blessed him. Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything (v 20). The writer of Hebrews takes great pains to explain that Melchizedek is like Jesus, that Jesus “has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6 v 20), and that the priesthood of Melchizedek (and therefore the priesthood of Jesus) is superior to the Levitical priesthood inaugurated by Moses. Note that in Old Testament Israel, kings came from the tribe of Judah and priests came from the tribe of Levi – the offices of priest and king were never combined.

- Abram’s victory prompted the king of Sodom to offer Abram a reward (v 21). Why did Abram refuse it (v 22 – 24)? What would you have done? What gave Abram the strength of character to refuse the king of Sodom’s reward? What ‘reward’ did he receive instead (15 v 1)?

God’s covenant with Abram (Genesis 15: 1 - 21)

- How are God’s words in verse 1 exactly related to Abram’s circumstances? What gave Abram the hope of having descendants? What else did Abram gain by his response to God in v 6?
- How did Paul use the simple statement in verse 6 to show that a man is justified (counted righteous before God) by faith and not by good works? See Romans 4 v 1 – 5.
- Verses 9 – 19 describe an ancient ritual in making a solemn covenant or contract. Normally the two parties would walk in a figure of eight between the two halves of the cut carcasses. However, in this case, Abram “fell into a deep sleep” (v 12). What do you think is the significance of this? (Hint: was Abram able to walk between the pieces of cut carcasses? See v 17)

Closing thought – the offices of priest and king are combined in only three people (or groups of people) – (1) Melchizedek; (2) Jesus; (3) Who else? See 1 Peter 2 v 9...