



# FIRST LIGHT CHURCH

# SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Date: 1/28/24

Series: Genesis Study-Abram

Text: Genesis 14:17-24

**BIG IDEA: Faith in Jesus is the Victory that Overcomes.**

**ICEBREAKER:** Describe an experience in life that changed your values or priorities.

**CONTEXT:** Abram had just finished fighting a war with four kings from various regions in the Valley of Siddim because they had taken his brother, Lot, captive. This is an account of the first war read about thus far in scripture. Abram defeated these armies with 318 men and had just received the spoils of war from his miraculous victory. The king of Sodom is now meeting with Abram to negotiate the goods, possessions and people that were gained from the victory. Melchizedek, king of Salem and great high priest of God, is also there to greet Abram regarding his divine win.

**PASSAGE:** Have volunteers read Genesis 14:17-24.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

1. Why does Abram tell the King of Sodom that he would take nothing from him?
2. What is significant about the offering of ten percent of the spoils to God?
3. Melchizedek was a "priest of God Most High." How is he different from Levitical priests?
4. Why is our faith in God so much more important than our rewards?
5. What does it mean to bless God?
6. How does our obedience to the Lord reflect our faith in Him?

#### **APPLICATION:**

7. How can the level of our faith be measured?
8. What is something that you are hanging onto that you need to surrender to the Lord?

#### **K4 CONNECTION:**

An example of faithfulness to those around us is reflected in our obedience to the Lord. Many may ask why do you give your resources, time and skills/talents to the church? Yes, our obedience through giving and serving is a testimony to our faith in the Lord, but it is also our act of worship. As others observe our actions and attitudes, it reflects what is truly in our hearts. This is one of the things that should set us apart from the rest of the world. It makes people interested or at least curious which opens avenues for Gospel conversations. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16 KJV).

#### **CARE AND PRAY:**

- Ask God to help you identify things in your life that you need to surrender to Him.
- Ask God to give you the boldness to have a Gospel conversation with someone this week.
- Pray for our church staff and leaders as we seek God's continued guidance and His plan for our mission to bring the Gospel to our world.

## COMMENTARY

"This text narrates Abraham's encounter with two kings concerning the disposition of the spoils. A meeting with the unnamed king of Sodom (vv. 17, 21–24) brackets a meeting with Melchizedek, king of Salem (vv. 18–20). Narrative position seems to point to the meeting with Melchizedek as the central one. Both Melchizedek and Salem are unknown to us outside of this text except for a couple of passages that refer directly to this narrative (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5–7). It is likely that in the biblical Melchizedek is understood as the king of Jerusalem. This "king priest" pronounces benediction on Abraham using characteristic formulas from Canaanite religious tradition: God Most High and maker of heaven and earth. In meeting with the king of Sodom, Abraham's speech uses the same two phrases, but ascribes them to Yahweh (v. 22).

One dynamic to observe in the narrative of these two meetings involves the interaction between God and the religious traditions of the Canaanite population. On the one hand, Abraham's speech (vv. 22–24) asserts Yahweh's supremacy over the other gods (Ps. 82). Yahweh, not El, is the "God Most High," "Creator of heaven and earth" (NIV). But on the other hand, the use of these two Canaanite liturgical formulas unites the traditions of the indigenous population with the religion of this "new" family. The religion of the Abrahamic family, while uncompromising in some moments—as with the king of Sodom (vv. 22–24)—cannot be described solely with the words "exclusive" or "sectarian." Abraham receives ritual bread and blessing from the Canaanite priest and gives to this priest a "tithe" (Westermann, 1985:203–204). Whether or not this exchange is meant to call to the listener's mind the function of the later Israelite priests in Jerusalem, in this context the priest is Canaanite. Collegiality, perhaps even covenant, characterizes the relationship between the Canaanite Melchizedek and the Hebrew Abraham.

Distance, not collegiality, marks the interaction between Abraham and the king of Sodom (vv. 21–24). The king of Sodom makes a very generous offer: return the people but keep all of the goods won in the war (v. 21). Abraham, invoking an oath not mentioned previously in the narrative, refuses to keep anything for himself. Perhaps the proverbial character of Sodom, introduced in 13:13, accounts for the reaction of Abraham. The narrative does not explain to us why Abraham received the ministry of the king of Salem and would have nothing to do with the king of Sodom. The two scenes stand side by side. With one Canaanite king, Abraham will covenant, from another he will accept nothing.

### The Text in Biblical Context

The church's interpretation of the text has focused on the figure of Melchizedek perhaps more than any other aspect of these three stories. Elsewhere in the Bible only Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7–8 mention Melchizedek. In Psalm 110 the psalmist announces that the coming king will also be a priest, even as Melchizedek held both offices. The writer of Hebrews builds on the fact that Melchizedek mysteriously slips into and out of the saga of Abraham to talk about the wonder of Christ. Hebrews describes Melchizedek as being superior to all priests in the line of Aaron and Levi. Christ as the fulfillment of the Melchizedek priesthood is thereby elevated still further (Heb. 7:1–28). It is this affirmation of Christ as the fulfillment of all royal and priestly expectations, not commentary on Melchizedek, that concerns this New Testament writer.

The writer of Hebrews is not alone in appropriating the Melchizedek tradition. In the Qumran scrolls found near the Dead Sea, fragments of a manuscript (first or second century B.C.) have been found dealing with Melchizedek (11 Q Melch). In the manuscript Melchizedek is portrayed as a heavenly figure functioning as both king and priest in the "last days." We can suspect that the tradition concerning this mysterious figure spread even further than our documents show. We know that the tradition concerning Melchizedek grew in the post New Testament church, even relating the bread and wine of Genesis 14:18 to the sacrament of communion. In the third century Cyprian encouraged further use of the Melchizedek material, but Luther some 13 centuries later objected to such speculation. We know so little about Melchizedek that Luther appropriately warns us to err on the side of caution" (Roop, 1987, pp. 107-108).

Reference: Eugene F. Roop. (1987). Genesis : Believers Church Bible Commentary. Herald Press.

## WHERE'S THE GOSPEL

We are helpless to provide restitution for our sins. We can offer God nothing in exchange for our salvation. We cannot be good enough to attain favor with God, nor can we do enough good deeds to make up for our shortcomings. In fact, Isaiah 64:6a states that "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." We are destitute in the presence of a Holy God because of our sinfulness. Abram had much material gain from the spoils of war, yet it was nothing to him. His faith in God was what he valued and God was to receive the glory. Jesus provided us the victory over sin and our reward is not from our own efforts, it is because of God's love and unmerited favor that we are saved. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9 ESV). Our faith in Jesus Christ's saving work at Calvary is how we are victorious over the penalty of sin, which is death. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23 ESV). God gets all the glory for the victory over sin and death because of Jesus.