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Better than Theater

A Prophetic Picture of Epic Proportions

by Chris Tiegreen

I was cruising along in my Genesis reading—it was still early in January, when all Bible-reading plans are pursued with great zeal—when I got a crazy idea.

It happened precisely at chapter 14, the story of a foreign invasion, the capture of Lot and his family, Abraham's pursuit and recovery of the victims, and Abraham's resulting encounter with the priest-king Melchizedek. I was struggling through this story, not because it isn't interesting, but because it's laden with long names that really should have mattered only to the people of that day. But, I thought to myself, God saw fit to preserve all these names in the eternal Word. Why?

In search of an answer to this nagging why—which is the question that prompts most crazy ideas, I'm convinced—I started looking up the meaning of all the names of the invading kings, the defeated kings, and the places they inhabited. (This is what happens when an employer hands over the keys of Bible study software to people like me.) Then I recast the story without using any proper names to get a sense of what it must have meant to people who lived then. I also injected a few interpretive generalizations only implied by the text. This is how it went:

In the days of the hordes of hell—the secret king of pride, the great king of rebellion, the powerful king of

It was 4 against 5, but it was still easy for the wicked kings. (The time for the fallen race to serve the hor

So the kings of the fallen race prepared by joining forces in the valley of death and judgment, a valley full

But one person escaped and ran to tell the high father. When this redeemed father found out that the sp

On the father's way back, the fallen king of the burned-up wasteland came to meet him in the high king's

When the fallen king of the burned-up land arrived, he told the high father that he wanted all the people

There's a lot of room for interpretation in that story—the significance of the veil (Lot's name), for example, which could perhaps represent God's revelation of Himself to humanity. But however each element is interpreted, there are some pretty intriguing lessons on spiritual warfare, the incarnation of Jesus (the Melchizedek figure), and personal consecration.

In fact, I think this piece of history may be a prophetic picture, a divine drama depicting the story of the human race from about Genesis 3 to about Revelation 19. There's a vicious enemy, an entire country of defeated victims, a representative of the people of God whose mission it is to recover what was lost, an encounter with a Messiah-like priest-king (replete with bread and wine), and a commitment to remain pure and serve God. Sounds a lot like the Bible in a nutshell to me.

In many ways, it also sounds like our mission—yours, mine, every Christian's. Like the disciples on whom Jesus bestowed authority to go to all nations and make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20), trampling on snakes and scorpions along the way (Luke 10:19), Abraham was sent to fight the worst kind of evil and recover what was lost. By association with Jesus, that's our mission too.

The bottom line is that you and I are characters in an epic of good and evil and redemption. Genesis 14, along with many other parts of Scripture, is the script. It's a rough battle but a great adventure, and one day in the screening room of heaven we may even get to see the film.

But for now, be brave and fight hard. Pursue the captives, overtake the enemy, and recover what's been lost. And never forget to spend some time in worship and gratitude toward the priest-king who comes to meet you after battle.

[[more information](#) on the names and symbols of Genesis 14]