

# The bread and wine

## Part 1 – Looking into history for a precedent

This is the first in a series on what Jesus was getting at in **Luke 22:19-20**, when “he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’”

But why did Jesus choose bread and wine? Looking into history for a precedent seemed like a good idea, but where does one begin, and how far back in Scripture can we go?

There’s a clue way back in **Genesis 14**, in a story not long after Noah’s Flood, when empires are building and wars between competing groups of kings are raging. Genesis 14 lists their names too (many of which are written on monuments we can see today). There was Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, all of whom had joined forces against a second group of kings, Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Zoar. And the reason for this great clash of kings was the bully king Kedorlaomer who for 12 years had kept the second group of kings under his thumb, and eventually they’d had enough of him and rebelled.

Kedorlaomer was a force to be reckoned with, however, because he’d already smashed the Rephaites, Zuzites, Emites, Horites, Amalekites and the Amorites (verses 5-8). He was well on the way to building himself a sizable empire, so the second group of kings thought they’d better put a stop to this brute before his quest for power and glory sucked them all in.

So they took the fight to him in the Valley of Siddim at the south end of the Dead Sea. They couldn’t have chosen a worse place, however, because Kedorlaomer soon had them on the run and drove them back into an area full of sulfur tar pits, into which many of them fell. Kedorlaomer then ransacked Sodom and Gomorrah, took all their valuables and food, and their people too, among whom was a man vital to what happened next.

The man's name was Lot, the nephew of God's chosen man Abram, and when Abram got wind of what the bully Kedorlaomer had done to his nephew, and how he'd stolen everything Lot owned in the city of Sodom, he got thoroughly steamed up.

Abram was not the kind of chap you'd want to get steamed up either, because he'd returned from Egypt a wealthy and powerful man. He'd made his money in livestock and invested much of it in silver and gold (Genesis 13:2), and with his wealth and influence he'd built up a mini-empire of his own. He had powerful allies among the Amorites (14:13), but purely from the men born in his own household Abram could muster up an army of over 300 trained soldiers (14) - all in fighting trim and ready for battle at a moment's notice.

Abram was like a typical baron in Medieval England. He owned a huge estate, his own private army, and enough money to defend himself against a stropky neighbour. So when a member of his family was dragged off by that lout Kedorlaomer, Abram put out the call to arms and stormed out with his men after Kedorlaomer, chasing him all the way up north to Damascus, about 250 kilometres - or 160 miles - away. Abram was no wilting wallflower. He was ready for a fight with the biggest bully in the land - and a bully who hadn't lost a fight yet too.

When he found Kedorlaomer's camp, Abram waited until nighttime, and then launched his attack. And with less than 400 men he sent Kedorlaomer's much larger coalition army packing. Abram pursued them even further north until he'd rescued his nephew, and got all Lot's family, servants and possessions back, and all the other prisoners taken from Sodom and their possessions too.

And if you're wondering how all this ties in with the bread and wine, the mystery will soon be over, because it's on the way back to his hometown of Hebron that Abram is met by the very thankful king of Sodom. We're now down to **Genesis 14:17**.

But in **verse 18** there is another king who comes out to meet Abram as well, the Canaanite king of Salem, the shortened name of Jerusalem. All three men, the kings of Sodom and Jerusalem and Abram then meet together in "the King's Valley" (17), the Kidron Valley on the east side of Jerusalem. The name of the king of Jerusalem is Melchizedek - from the words *malki* and *sedeq*, meaning "king of righteousness."

Abram, meanwhile, is exhausted. He'd marched his men 160 miles north at top speed, fought the largest army and the most powerful king in the entire country, and chased him even further north to get back everything the king had stolen. Abram then arranges for the long journey home, including women, children, animals and cartloads of goods, and marches them all, including his exhausted army, back south for another 200 miles or so. And now in his dog-tired state he's in a meeting with two kings.

And in response to all this, what does the king of Salem do? It's mentioned in **Genesis 14:18**. He "**brought out bread and wine.**" He doesn't pester Abram with questions, or want to hear the whole story of what happened. Instead, he has Abram sit down, and he serves him bread and wine.

It's the first mention in Scripture of bread and wine being served, and the reason for it being Abram's immediate need. He is completely done in, so the king of Salem has Abram sit down and put his feet up, and he brings Abram bread and wine to get his strength back. And nothing more would need to be said of this incident, other than Melchizedek obviously being a good man.

But it's the next sentence in **verse 18** that hints at there being something more going on here, because this thoughtful king meeting the exhausted Abram's need to get his strength back through bread and wine is also "priest of God Most High." And the way it's phrased like that - as just "priest," and not "**a** priest" - suggests he's the **only** priest of God Most High. And he's the only king to hold that title too, because none of the other kings mentioned in Genesis 14 do.

So in this one man we've got both titles of king and priest. He's also the king of Jerusalem, meaning "city of peace," a title it got long before any Israelite arrived, so was it Melchizedek who gave Jerusalem that title, because peace was his focus, rather than war like the other kings? And then we have his name too, meaning "king of righteousness." So here we have a king of righteousness and king of Peace City handing out bread and wine in his office of priest of God Most High to bring some life back into a man who's dead on his feet.

It's an interesting setting for the first mention of bread and wine in Scripture, but does it help us in our quest to find out what Jesus meant when he handed out bread and wine to his disciples too? Well, the story hasn't finished yet, because In **Genesis 14:19** the priest of God Most High is about to pronounce a blessing on Abram as well.

So it's not just bread and wine Melchizedek gives to Abram to enable him to recover; it's a blessing too. But both are for the same purpose, to meet Abram's need, as we'll see, because Abram at this point in time isn't just exhausted he's also scared.

And we know that from the first verse in the next chapter when God in a vision tells Abram, "Don't be afraid." But why would Abram be afraid? Well, for a start, he's just taken on the biggest bully and the only king with an undefeated record of smashing anyone who dares oppose him - and Abram has just humiliated him by catching him napping at night and sent the king and his army packing with less than 400 men. Well, is Mr. Bully Boy Kedorlaomer going to take that lying down? Not likely. He'll be stomping down south again at any minute, fuelled with such rage and revenge that he won't stop until every member of Abram and his clan are hanged from the highest tree. You don't mess with psychopaths.

Can you blame Abram for thinking, "Oh boy, what have I done?" Does he start to question himself and worry that maybe this campaign of his was a really stupid decision based purely on runaway emotions, and now he's put his whole family in danger, perhaps with fatal consequences? What must God think of him now?

But Melchizedek is sensitive to that too, because in his blessing in **Genesis 14:19-20** he says, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be (or 'praise be to') God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand."

Imagine being Abram hearing that. You're worrying about old Bully Boy turning up thirsting for revenge - and you're probably thinking you deserve what he dishes out too, because of your rash actions - but to greet you on your return is none other than the priest of the one great God who confers on you a blessing that's totally in tune with what you're worrying about. Melchizedek looks you in the eye and says, "The Creator of everything is on your side, Abram, because it was he who gave you the resounding victory over your enemy. So, calm down and let him take care of things," which God himself backs up a few verses later in Genesis 15:1, when he says, "Don't be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward."

So here we've got God's own priest zeroing in on Abram to meet Abram's needs exactly. The timing is exquisite, and the bread and wine and the blessing are perfectly tailored to easing Abram's exhaustion and worries.

But the story doesn't end here either, because in **Genesis 14:21**, "The king of Sodom says to Abram, 'Give me the people, but keep the goods for yourself.'"

Well, that was tempting, because charging after Kedorlaomer had cost Abram a great deal. He'd had to feed his army for a week while marching up north, then spend another week up there fighting, chasing and gathering prisoners, and another two weeks trekking home with a huge crowd of women and children and animals in tow. Add all that to the usual losses suffered in battle, and a huge chunk had been knocked out of Abram's savings.

So that was another worry for him. But along comes the king of Sodom offering a quick and easy solution: "Whatever goodies Kedorlaomer took from my city, Abram, you can have them. Just let me have my people back."

But ringing in Abram's ears is the blessing he'd just been given by Melchizedek, that God had - and obviously would in future - provide everything that Abram needed, no matter what life threw at him. That's what a "blessing" meant. It meant God would take care of all his needs, so have absolute confidence in God and trust him.

Immediately after the priest's blessing, though, the king of Sodom approaches Abram with a **human** solution to his financial problems. So Abram is tested right off the bat. Will he take the offer or trust **God** to take care of his expenses? Well, In **verse 22**, Abram tells the king, "I have raised my hand (sworn) to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'"

So even if this campaign had been a terrible mistake, and Abram had stupidly blown his budget because of it, he wasn't going to resort to human means to solve it, like lottery tickets, or a risky investment, or a handout from someone who might then get to thinking he was Abram's saviour. It must have been tempting to accept the king of Sodom's offer, though, just like it was in one church area I was in when a rich man started attending church and was very generous with his money. Members flocked to him for help and he helped them, so people looked to him as their provider, and he became their saviour. And that's what Abram wanted to avoid - for the king's sake - that the king would not get to thinking he was Abram's saviour, rather than God. So Abram refused any money or goods from the king for himself.

It was Melchizedek's blessing that had given Abram the confidence to trust God with his needs, and not resort to quick and easy human solutions. But how does all this help us understand Jesus and the bread and wine in Luke 22?

Well, what we've got at the end of Genesis 14 is a revived Abram trusting God to meet his needs. And was that important? Oh yes, because the future of the entire world revolved around Abram. There was no more important man on the face of the planet than Abram, because through him "all peoples of the earth would be blessed," God said.

So how did God help Abram with his worries and needs? It was through the ministry of Melchizedek, and what that man did for Abram and said to him. So who on earth was this chap? Well, according to Genesis 14 Melchizedek was a typical king of that time and ruler of a city. He was special in that he was a priest as well, and that he believed in the same God Abram believed in, but what really sets him apart in Scripture is that he was there just when Abram needed him, and he provided exactly what Abram needed.

Is it any surprise, then, that a direct parallel is made between Jesus and Melchizedek in **Psalm 110**? In **verse 1** we have "the Lord saying to my Lord. 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet,'" which is clearly referring to Jesus, who is then described in **verse 4**, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." It's clear, then, that whoever and whatever Melchizedek was, his place in Scripture was to be a type of - and a forerunner of - Jesus' ministry.

We now have a clear picture of Jesus' ministry, therefore, in the ministry of Melchizedek. And where do we have a clear picture of Melchizedek's ministry? It's in what he does for Abram in Genesis 14.

But why would Jesus' ministry need to be like Melchizedek's ministry? Because the same need would exist. Abram, for instance, has just been faced with the daunting proposition in chapter 12:3 that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you," but it's clear here in Genesis 14, only two chapters later, that he is totally unprepared for such a job. He flies off the handle when Lot is kidnapped, charges off with his own private army to take on the biggest bully in the region without even considering the cost in life or money, and nor is there any mention that he consulted God before he left either. The man is a loose cannon.

Now jump ahead to when Jesus arrives. The same daunting proposition of “all peoples on earth being blessed” still exists, and who is given the job this time? It’s given to Jesus’ disciples, who, take note, wanted to bring down fire from heaven to destroy those who opposed them (Luke 9:54), and they liked the idea of trading in their coats for swords later on too. In other words, they were just like Abram. They reacted emotionally, flew off the handle, charged into things without thinking - like Peter lopping the ear off the high priest’s servant - and again, like Abram, they preferred violence to trusting in God.

But it’s on the shoulders of these disciples, as it was on the shoulders of Abram, that the future of the world depends. In fact, the blessing of all nations was about to begin in earnest from that point on, with the gospel going to the whole world, but it’s going to be done through a group of twelve disciples who are just as unprepared for the job as Abram was.

So what does God do? He provides another Melchizedek in the person of Jesus, who, just like the original Melchizedek in Genesis 14 is also a king and priest, and a king of peace and righteousness too. It is this new Melchizedek, therefore, from the priestly order of Melchizedek predicted by David in Psalm 110, who will now do for the disciples what the original Melchizedek did for Abram. So let’s go back, then, to what Melchizedek did for Abram in Genesis 14.

The first thing he does is give the exhausted, scared, and muddle-headed Abram bread and wine. The king of Sodom, meanwhile, didn’t think to do that, even though Abram had just knocked himself out recovering everything the king had lost. The king’s first concern was getting his people back; it wasn’t the exhausted Abram. But Abram was Melchizedek’s first concern, just as the first concern of Jesus in Luke 22 was his disciples, because in giving them bread and wine he said, “this is my body and blood which I give and pour out FOR YOU.”

Jesus’ primary concern in the bread and wine was his disciples, to prepare them for his death, because he knew they’d feel lost and utterly shattered when he died. So he reassures them that what he’s about to do is for them. Jesus is also looking into the future knowing his disciples will have their share of big bully Kedorlaomers and exhausting battles too. They too will face endless temptations to trust in human solutions and human emotions, rather than trust in God. And they too will doubt themselves when things they think God wanted them to do leave them exhausted and discouraged. All the things that happened to Abram, in other words, will happen to them too.

Which is why Jesus told his disciples to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance **of him**. It would focus their minds on him, because he would now be for them what Melchizedek was for Abram. So when life for them became exhausting and worrying, just like it was for Abram, Jesus himself would be the bread and wine to meet **their** need.

But notice too, that Jesus also “gave thanks” to God in Luke 22 when giving his disciples the bread and wine. Well, so did Melchizedek in Genesis 14:20 when he blessed Abram, saying, “Praise be to God Most High” - but look what it was praise and thanks to God **for**. It was for delivering Abram’s enemies into his hand. And how practical is that for us today as Jesus’ disciples too?

It’s practical because we face the same enemies today as Abram and Jesus’ twelve disciples faced. We live in a culture full of Kedorlaomers trying to bully us Christians into going along with their political agendas, so many of which are in total opposition to God and his ways. And the constant pressure and stupidity of our cultures’ nonsense exhausts us, just like the bullies of Abram’s day exhausted him. So we too will be tempted to charge in all guns blazing like Abram, and resort to typical human anger and emotion, rather than trust in God.

But that just makes us into loose cannons like Abram. We’re no good to God or to the job he’s given us of blessing all peoples with his ways instead. So what does God do for us? He has us remember Jesus in the bread and wine, that Jesus now does for us exactly what his predecessor did for Abram in Genesis 14.

And that’s important, because like Abram, we too need to be immune to the world’s fears and temptations, and not be overwhelmed by our own personal worries and problems either. But how in this world are we going to do that, when we’ve got a whole ton of Kedorlaomers to deal with too, like the scary world of climate change and financial collapse, and the rapid destruction of everything we Christians believe in? And how on earth, with our health and circumstances, can we stay positive and not get discouraged? And how can we not doubt our usefulness to God when it seems like we’re accomplishing absolutely nothing?

But Melchizedek also blessed Abram, and look what that blessing did for him. Abram’s confidence soared, enabling him to resist the king of Sodom’s human solution to his financial problem, and instead of worrying about money Abram gave Melchizedek “a tenth of everything.” A blessing was meant to produce confidence and trust in God, and it certainly did that for Abram.



It's not surprising, then, that in Luke 22 Jesus "gave thanks" - a blessing - with both the bread and the wine too, because the one thing his disciples needed more than anything else was trust and confidence in him, that he would now deliver all their enemies into their hands, just as God had for Abram. And it certainly did that for them too, because Jesus' disciples weren't intimidated by anybody, and their trust in God never wavered.

And that same blessing is there for all Jesus' disciples, because our need is exactly the same. We too, just like Abram and the twelve disciples, need our sagging spirits revived, our fears calmed, our confidence restored, our trust strengthened, and our resistance to temptation and human solutions to our problems built up and bolstered.

And, fortunately, we have a precedent for Jesus doing all those things for us. It's back there in Genesis 14, when the original Melchizedek "brought out bread and wine" for Abram and gave a blessing.