

Abram and War in the Valley

Genesis 14

Abram Against the Four Kings

Genesis 14:1-16

Abram's Predicament: *Genesis 14:1-12*

Coalitions

War and violence will continue in this world until Jesus returns. Why, because mankind loves money, possessions, and power. Abram and Lot separated due to these earthly treasures and nine of the ten kings mentioned in this chapter fought over them.

We are immediately given the nine kings or nations involved in the conflict. They were divided into two coalitions, the invaders made up of outside nations seeking control over the valley and the defenders consisting of nations in or around the Vale of Siddim.

The Invaders: the Four Kings.

1. *Shinar: King Amraphel* – from the Babylonian plain, the southern portion of Nimrod's kingdom (Genesis 10:8-10).
2. *Ellasar: King Arioch* – believed to be Syria, the northern portion of Nimrod's kingdom.
3. *Elam: King Chedorlaomer* – Elam was also known as Persia and Chedorlaomer, the apparent leader of the coalition, was a conqueror seeking to enlarge his empire.
4. *The Nations: King Tidal* – perhaps a unified group of small nations.

The Defenders: the Five Kings.

1. *Sodom: King Bera* – city located in the Vale of Siddim.
2. *Gomorrah: King Birsha* – city located in the Vale of Siddim.
3. *Admah: King Shinab*
4. *Zeboiim: King Shemeber*
5. *Bela or Zoar: King unknown* – perhaps unmentioned due to his character.

Conflict

The war was the result of a rebellion. For twelve years the five nations of the valley served Elam and King Chedorlaomer. The valley was probably desired by foreign nations because of its flourishing land and strategic location between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Whoever controlled the valley, also controlled travel and communication going through the area. The five nations in the valley, being tired of oppression, rebelled in the thirteenth year and gained their independence. The following year, after preparing and planning, Elam and its allies struck back.

The powerful army came from the north looking to reclaim their authority over the land. The coalition forces marched down the Jordan Valley and overcame the inhabitants one after another. Upon reaching the Vale of Siddim, later called the Valley of the Salt Sea or Dead Sea, they went eastward and began to encompass the Five Kings. South of the valley, they turned to the northwest, conquered the inhabitants and successfully surrounded the Vale of Siddim where the Five Kings encamped. At this point, being near Hebron where Abram resided, they focused their attention on the rebellious nations. The Five Kings, including the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, met the invaders in the Vale of Siddim. They were quickly overcome. The death toll was probably great and the survivors fled, many falling into the slimepits. Sodom and Gomorrah were plundered and the residents were taken captive.

Captive

Apparently Lot lived in Sodom, or close enough to the city to be taken. Lot lost his earthly treasures, all that he loved and what separated him from Abram. He put his trust in the things of the world and came up empty (1 John 2:17). Lot also lost his freedom. He was not like the people of the wicked cities but associated with them and when they were taken, he was taken. Though he was righteous, because he lived near the world he shared in their difficulties. Be careful whom you associate with (Proverbs 1:10-16).

During this time Abram remained in the plain of Mamre at Hebron. It was located over the mountains southwest of the valley. He never isolated himself but continued to live separately from the wicked cities. Abram made an alliance with three Amorite brothers, probably for protection. They may have joined forces when they heard of the powerful army sweeping down the Jordan Valley. Abram remained where God placed him and was protected.

Abram's Pursuit: *Genesis 14:13-16*

Abram Prepared

An escaped prisoner managed to make his way to Abram and provided a report of the battle and its results. Abram's location was known and evidently his power and authority were respected. Abram listened carefully and responded when he heard Lot was taken captive. It is evident he was not upset or bitter with Lot and would do his best to rescue him. Abram was prepared to sacrifice his life to save a friend. He was willing set aside differences to help a righteous man in trouble (Galatians 6:2).

Abram gathered his servants that were trained for war, a total of 318 men. Abram was a man of peace but understood he lived in a world of sinners and wisely prepared himself for troubles. The Bible encourages preparation, when possible, so we might withstand temptations and trials (Proverbs 30:24-28). Abram and his servants hurriedly pursued the coalition forces to Dan, which is in the northern part of Israel. Abram was courageous and bold as any warrior that has ever lived.

Abram Victorious

Abram strategically divided his men and attacked the enemy at night. The victorious soldiers may not have expected being pursued and threatened by a well-trained force. The surprised coalition army fled and Abram continued the pursuit past Damascus. Eventually, Lot and the others were reclaimed. In all, Abram pursued the enemy about 120 miles. His rapid pursuit and military tactics equal

any general that has ever taken the battlefield. When needed, Abram took decisive military action. It was not to enlarge his possessions but to rescue Lot. It was noble and the correct thing to do.

Abram returned with Lot, the people, and all the goods. It appears that Abram did not suffer any losses, which was a great blessing. Abram also rescued the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He generously helped those he could (Galatians 6:10). Believers are commanded to love and assist all, even those that despise and attack them (Matthew 5:43-48). To many this seems odd, but love is evidence of a life changed by God (John 13:35). When we allow the Spirit to work in our life, He will produce love for others (Galatians 5:22).

Abram Meeting the Two Kings

Genesis 14:17-24

Abram and the King of Salem: Genesis 14:17-20

Meeting with Abram

Abram returned victorious and was met by Melchizedek the King of Salem. This king is a mystery and his sudden appearance produces many questions. Who was he, where did he come from, and where did he go? Nothing else is said of Melchizedek until he is mentioned in one of David's Psalms, about 900 years later (Psalm 110:4). Another 1000 years pass before the Spirit leads Paul to reference Melchizedek as a type of Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest (Hebrews 7).

Melchizedek is the only king in this chapter that had no involvement with the conflict. He met a victorious Abram with refreshments, offering him bread and wine, both elements of the Lord's Supper. Nothing is said concerning the bread and wine but they likely pointed to the future Redeemer (1 Corinthians 11:26). Melchizedek, acting in a priestly manner, blessed God on Abram's behalf. The King praised God as the 'most high' and 'possessor of heaven and earth', reminding Abram that God was the power behind his victory. The LORD deserves the credit for the blessings we enjoy (Psalm 29:2). Abram gave the priest tithes, a tenth, from what he had. Abram willingly gave back to God a portion of what he had been blessed with.

Melchizedek the King and Priest

The identity of this King has been debated. Some believe he was Shem, Noah's son, who was alive at the time. But several questions arise, why did he change his name, and if it was a title why was it not clarified? Others believe it was Jesus Christ in the flesh. However, it seems odd to make Jesus Christ a type of Himself (Hebrews 7). Several are convinced he was simply an earthly king that loved God.

Either way we know Melchizedek was the King of Salem, which may refer to Jerusalem (Psalm 76:2) He was a priest by divine appointment and able to receive tithes. He loved God and worshiped Him as Abram did. Melchizedek was raised up to be a type of Jesus Christ, his identity may remain a mystery to us but his record is exactly how the Spirit wanted him portrayed (2 Peter 1:21).

Abram and the King of Sodom: Genesis 14:21-24

Encounter

Abram met with another king upon his return, but he was nothing like Melchizedek. The King of Sodom was probably Bera, having escaped from the enemy or crawled out of the slime pits. This earthly king approached Abram with what appears to be a generous deal. He requested the people and offered Abram all of the goods. It was audacious, because Abram was the conqueror and earned the right to decide what he would keep. The king wanted the souls and Abram could have the wealth. The devil works in a similar fashion, he is willing to give riches in exchange for souls. Many parents have made this trade, living for the world and neglecting their children. Even churches have taken this deal, seeking earthly treasures while forsaking eternal souls. This worldly king desperately wanted to keep his servants; he was no better than King Chedorlaomer of Elam, whom had placed all of the people in subjection. A sad testimony to human depravity is seen in the endless desire of men to oppress others.

Abram was tempted with the riches of Sodom. He was offered all of the goods; we can only wonder what was going through Lot's greedy mind at this time. The temptation for instant wealth was made greater by the fact it came from the king. If accepted, nobody could argue or take away the treasures from Abram. The temptation of riches is what causes many to stumble (1 Timothy 6:10). They lose sight of eternal blessings and live for worldly treasures. In doing so, they bring many troubles and hardships into their lives.

Excellent Testimony

Abram withstood the temptation and refused the goods. He verified this with an oath, by raising his hand unto the LORD. Abram refused to take anything, wisely not wanting to have his blessings associated with Sodom. His reputation would have been as a mercenary or hireling, living only for personal gain. Abram restored both the people and the goods to Sodom. Had he accepted the offer, he would have been no different than the four kings that spoiled the land. Abram lived by faith and this is evidence that he looked for a heavenly city (Hebrews 11:10). He had the opportunity to establish a worldly kingdom but instead chose to honor God.

Abram's soldiers received their rations, rightly so since they risked their lives to rescue the people and riches. Abram's allies received their portion. He made his decision before the LORD and allowed others liberty to do likewise. Abram lived for the LORD. It becomes easier to turn from temptations when we abide with Christ. When your relationship is right with God; your decisions and actions will glorify and honor Him.

Conclusion

Lot chose to live near the world and in so doing faced the hardships with the world. Abram remained with God and in time of need found God's strength. After his victory Abram neither forgot God nor His greatness. Today, God is still great and mighty. You can trust in His strength in times of need and find Him faithful. He is able to deliver you from your troubles. *Humble yourselves therefore*

Life of Abraham: Genesis 12-25

Genesis 14: Abram and War in the Valley

under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. 1 Peter 5:6-7

Point to Ponder

Abram was more concerned with God's honor than his personal gain.

Quote

"When one walks in the right paths, he has God for an ally." John G. Butler

Questions

Do you believe Lot was living in the correct place? Why or why not?

What was Abram's response to Lot's problem?

What was the importance of Abram's meeting with Melchizedek?

Why did Abram refuse the King of Sodom's offer?

What new truth have you learned from this lesson?