

Abram Rescues Lot

Genesis 14:1-16

When it comes to describing humanity, there's no book more accurate than the one God wrote. If we could sum up history in a phrase, I believe the most fitting summary would be "Man's failure and God's faithfulness." Time and again, from man's sin in the midst of a PERFECT CREATION to Abram's BETRAYAL of his wife (giving her away to save his own skin) RIGHT AFTER GOD MADE HIS COVENANT WITH HIM, humanity has blown it...yet God remains faithful, His promises sure. Despite Abram's flaws, God's unconditional promise to bless him wouldn't be broken. Aren't you glad that God doesn't stop keeping His promises to us when we fail? Truly, as we follow Abram's story, the LORD is in full view, always good, always faithful.



It's why we titled this series, "The GOD of Abraham." Abram took God at His Word, trusting Him to fulfill it. It was his confidence in God's promises that enabled him to forget himself and give Lot his choice of the Land, as we saw last week. AFTERWARD...

Genesis 13:14-18

14 The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. 17 Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you. 18 So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

God promised to BLESS Abram, and tonight we'll see a dramatic display of that blessing as it comes in the form of VICTORY over impossible odds. In Genesis 14, we read...

Genesis 14:1-3

1 In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, 2 these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). 3 And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea).

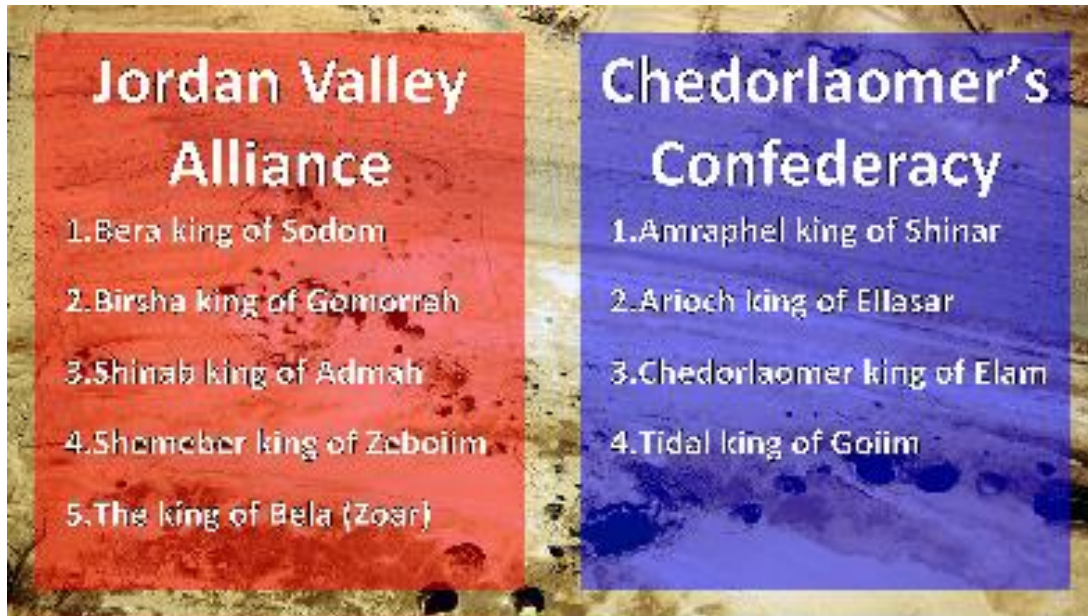
This passage could've fit neatly into our last series "In the Beginning God" with all the FIRSTS that we pointed out and laid atop of the foundation of God. In this scene, we see the FIRST RECORDED WAR in the Bible unfold. However, I believe it fits better in this series, "The God of Abraham," because we really only know about this war because it affected Abram.

Before we too much further into the account, let's talk about who we're dealing with, and with that, allow me to give you a bit of a DISCLAIMER. Archaeologists and historians haven't been able to definitively link the kings of this passage to historical kings that we know of through archaeological discovery. However, this isn't a problem or cause for concern because any time we've made new archaeological discoveries, they've always backed up the claims of the Bible; they don't detract from them. We simply haven't found the remains of these kings or the evidence that ties this biblical description and event to those that we have already found.

That said, we have been able to identify most of the regions and civilizations they ruled. SHINAR (also referred to as Sumer throughout Scripture) is BABYLONIA (modern day IRAQ), the kingdom originally ruled by Nimrod. ELAM, which was east of Shinar, is PERSIA (modern day IRAN), and ELLASAR corresponds to an ancient way of referring to ASSYRIA (modern day SYRIA and TURKEY). Goiim is the MOST obscure reference; it literally just means "nations," and because that doesn't seem to make a lot of sense (given that the other places seem fairly concrete), translators simply put the Hebrew pronunciation (as best as they could discern) into the English text. "Goy-eem."

Also, while the four kings haven't been identified, their names match the types archaeologically uncovered from this period in the ancient Near East. The name "Arriyuk," similar to **Arioch**, was found at Mari. **Chedorlaomer** matches the name "Kudur," and "Tudhalia," similar to **Tidal**, is attested in early Hittite literature.

Finally, their battlefield, **the Valley of Siddim** or the **Salt Sea** is just an older name for the Dead Sea Valley, the area many scholars believe to be the realm of the FIVE KINGS. So, just to sum up, here's the breakdown of the two warring factions...



What stirred up this hornets' nest? What did the Jordan Valley Alliance do to incur the wrath of Chedorlaomer? Keep reading...

Genesis 14:4

Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

The Jordan River Valley was lush with abundant resources. Last week we saw that that was the very reason Lot chose it for himself. Such rich (not necessarily powerful) kingdoms were often targeted by more powerful kingdoms for their resources. Kings like Chedorlaomer would demand TRIBUTE from those kingdoms to help make provision for their own, and in exchange, the larger kingdoms wouldn't invade and wipe out the smaller kingdoms. It was basically an ANCIENT, INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION RACKET, and for TWELVE YEARS, the five kings went along with it. However, in the thirteenth year of this arrangement, they'd had enough of not being able to enjoy their own abundance, and they STOPPED SENDING TRIBUTE.

Conflicts like these were TYPICAL in the ancient world, but make no mistake, this was a MASSIVE INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT, especially when you take into account the DIMINISHED POPULATION of a world what was mere generations removed from the worldwide flood. Chedorlaomer couldn't ignore the rebellion of these FIVE KINGS and risk the rebellion growing and becoming too large from him to put down, but it takes TIME and PLANNING to pull off a successful military campaign, which is why the Bible says that Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him invaded in the FOURTEENTH YEAR. Now ordinarily, I'd have the scripture I'm about to read up on the screen, but to give you a visual representation of this campaign as we go through it, the guys in the back are just going to throw up a map...



... and let you follow along in your Bibles if you want to see the text. So...

Genesis 14:5-7

5 In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, 6 and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness. 7 Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh) and defeated all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar.

As Chedorlaomer's Confederacy advanced toward the battle with the Jordan Valley Alliance, their warpath followed a path called "The King's Highway" (Numbers 20:17; 21:22), and they made an IMPRESSIVE SHOW of it. They obliterated multiple nations on their way to punish the kings who had rebelled against them. Perhaps this was to cutoff any potential, future aid to these five rebellious kingdoms, but in a lot of ways, it feels like an intimidation tactic.

It makes me think of pregame warmups when basketball players just start dunking, you know, to show the other team what they're up against and break their spirits before the game even starts. Chedorlaomer and his confederates marched menacingly toward the Valley of Siddim, where the BATTLE OF NINE KINGS would soon take place.

(It sounds like we need "Lord of the Rings" "Helm's Deep" music playing with that description.)

Genesis 14:8-12

8 Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim 9 with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five. 10 Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. 11 So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. 12 They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.

Now, did you catch verse ten? The battle took place in the Valley of Siddim, essentially in Sodom and Gomorrah's BACK YARD! The Jordan Valley Alliance had them outnumbered FIVE KINGS AGAINST FOUR with the HOME COURT ADVANTAGE, but they were still routed in battle! Some scholars say that the soldiers were literally "[falling] into" the tar pits (horrible way to go) while others have pointed out that the word for "pit" is the same word used translated elsewhere as "well," indicating that these were hewn structures used to extract this resources, and that soldiers were *lowering themselves into them* in hopes of hiding from Chedorlaomer's onslaught. In either case, Sodom and Gomorrah's forces were completely overwhelmed. What happened?! Well, other passages of scripture go on to shed light on the softness of these cities. In Ezekiel, God said...

Ezekiel 16:49-50

49 Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.

The defeat we just witnessed was a prelude to their ultimate destruction that's coming in a few chapters. However, their wickedness is nowhere in view in this passage. This war began because of their refusal to continue to send tribute to Chedorlaomer. However, who's to say that the LORD didn't manipulate the situation to cause them to want to cut off shipments of tribute in order to bring about punishment for their notorious wickedness??? Proverbs says that, **"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will"** (Proverbs 21:1), and Pharaoh in Moses' day and King Rehoboam and the division of the kingdom are powerful examples of God enticing wicked rulers to make such destructive decisions (like cutting off tribute). Sodom's wickedness is well attested; just last week we read that...

Genesis 13:13

Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

Now, whether this was punishment from God for their wickedness or not, they were decimated, and as the saying goes, *"to the victor goes the SPOILS."* The four invading kings took all of Sodom and Gomorrah's POSSESSIONS and FOOD, but they didn't stop there. Among the spoils of war was LOT. He wasn't oddly singled out as a POW; everyone was taken, and the Bible makes it very clear that *THIS* is

why he was taken: "[he] was dwelling in Sodom." Had this not been the case, Lot would've never been taken, and this war would've likely been forgotten and lost to history.

Lot was taken while living in Sodom. There's an important lesson for us here regarding the cost of COMFORTABLY LIVING NEAR SIN. Today, many complain of things like racial profiling, cops taking a harder look at some because of their skin color, but not all people of color experience this. Such a complaint is really more of an excuse for getting arrested or treated like a criminal BECAUSE OF ONE'S ASSOCIATION WITH THEM! When your life so closely resembles that of the lawbreaker's, you don't get to complain about being treated like them when you've broken no law; you're headed in that direction. God's Word doesn't give us permission to "flirt" with sin. Instead, God says...

1 Thessalonians 5:22

Abstain from every form of evil.

Literally, it means to avoid the very APPEARANCE of evil. If you don't do anything that even LOOKS wrong, you'll never come close to doing the ACTUAL WRONG or to EXPERIENCING THE CONSEQUENCES of it like Lot did. As it's been said, *"If you spend all your time doing 'the do's,' you won't have time to do 'the don'ts'."*

That said, we can't be too hard on Lot. After all, how is he described later in Scripture? **"Righteous Lot" (2 Peter 2:7)**. Can you think of ANYONE else in Scripture who is given the nickname "righteous?" There's NO ONE, and given that description, we can understand that, like Abram, he had FAITH in the LORD. That makes what's getting ready to happen not only a BLESSING for Abram, but also a rescue mission from the LORD for Lot. God's Word says...

Genesis 14:13-16

13 Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram. 14 When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

A FUGITIVE escaped and related these events to Abram. WHY did this fugitive SEEK OUT ABRAM? Was he just the first person he saw after he escaped? I don't know, but I doubt it. Did LOT send him? You know, *"Get word to my uncle in Hebron. He'll come for us,"* and he slipped away unbeknownst to his captors? Or perhaps the vastness of Abram's wealth and house were renowned. Or even more precious than this, perhaps it was just because this fugitive, likely a wicked denizen of one of these wicked kingdoms, knew of Abram's goodness and his love for Lot, and he knew Abram would respond and help.

I say this last scenario is "PRECIOUS" because, under any other circumstances, this fugitive likely

would've had disdain for meeting with Abram. Abram's God-honoring life would've been an affront to him, his mere presence convicting him of his wicked lifestyle. Yet, in his hour of need, he knew exactly who he (and the rest of Sodom and Gomorrah) needed. Isn't this the case with the difficult people in your life, people you love but who are living in REBELLION against the LORD? They take offense at you, claiming that you "judge" them, when the REALITY is that your life is CONVICTING to them. They may even mistreat you when their circumstances are good, but when the bottom drops out in their lives, who do they come to? YOU. Suddenly they're so humble; suddenly you're worth a little more than dirt! WHY? Because they see that you live, NOT PERFECTLY, but with PEACE, and while they may refuse to confess the SOURCE of this peace in your life, they can't deny the REALITY of it, and they're drawn to it.

People who disregard the LORD and His love for them, refusing to admit their sin and their need for Him, are destined to live an insecure life. They undulate between times of relative security and utter disaster. They regularly forget the kindness we showed them in their previous valley, mocking and mistreating us from the mountaintop, but their life will inevitably lead them into the valley once again, and they'll return to our doors. ABRAM'S TESTIMONY before this Sodomite is a CHALLENGE to us to make sure we keep them open, for who knows? After enough cycles of this, we may finally get the opportunity to introduce them to the Prince of Peace. Meanwhile, the felt consequences of sin continue to do their work because they are, after all, the goodness of God, meant to encourage us to resist the deceitful allure of sin and drive us into His arms instead.

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah weren't the only nonbelievers Abram was getting involved with either. He had ALLIES in Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner, the people among whom he sojourned. When the Word says that they were "**allies of Abram,**" it means that they were allies *by treaty*. When someone came after Abram or his family, they were coming after Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner as well. Though they believed differently than him, and though he was "**Abram the Hebrew,**" literally Abram *THE OUTSIDER*, he maintained such a testimony and relationship with them that they were ready and willing to ride into war with him. Abram modeled and challenges us to model Paul's words when he encouraged the Colossian believers to...

Colossians 4:5-6

5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Abram may have been the "outsider" in the land, but his life was attractive to the ACTUAL outsiders IN his life. Without compromising (and, yeah, we know he wasn't perfect), he was CONNECTED. While remaining SEPARATE, he wasn't isolated. We can't make an impact in this world without being IN THIS WORLD. There's a TENSION there for which we must rely on the Holy Spirit to get right. Warren Wiersbe said it well when he asked, "***If Christians don't carry their share of the common burdens of life, how can they be the salt of the earth and the light of the world?***"

That said, Abram didn't immediately engage in the war....again, that TENSION. He, no doubt, knew of the movements of these kings and their armies, but he hadn't engaged them because it wasn't his war.

It only became his war upon receiving news that his nephew had been taken. LOT WAS CAUGHT UP IN THE CHAOS OF IT ALL BECAUSE HE HAD GROWN COMFORTABLE WITH LIVING AMIDST WICKEDNESS, but Abram remained in a position from which he was free to make his own decisions rather than having them made for him.

Today, there are SO MANY CAUSES we're expected to take up that have NOTHING to do with the Great Commission, and if you don't COMPLETELY REORIENT YOUR LIFE to champion these causes, you're a racist bigot who wants everyone else to DIE. You've heard the inane chants, "*Silence is violence.*" "*Complacency is complicity.*" Such hostile sloganeering attempts to FORCE you to take a side in what's portrayed as a TWO-SIDED CONFLICT. However, Abram didn't. He had taken a THIRD SIDE: GOD'S. You see, the conflicts that we see causing such uproar today, just like the conflict between Chedorlaomer and the Jordan Valley Alliance, are usually TEMPORARY, WORLDLY ISSUES. Addressing them rarely, if ever, impacts ETERNITY; in fact, doing so often distracts us from our ETERNITY-DRIVEN, GOD-GIVEN OBJECTIVE. Abram was only drawn into the conflict when it endangered his family.

HOW DO YOU GUARD AGAINST BEING NEEDLESSLY DRAWN INTO THE CULTURE WARS OF OUR DAY? It's by SEEING THE ACTUAL SPIRITUAL WAR in which we're already engaged, remaining focused on accomplishing the OBJECTIVE our LORD has given us, the GREAT COMMISSION, and asking the Holy Spirit to make it clear to us, how the issue in question affects carrying out the Commission in our homes and communities, if at all. We must rely on Him for discernment. As Paul taught Timothy...

2 Timothy 2:4

No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

Abram joined the battle when it became absolutely necessary, but so far as we can tell, Abram was no warrior. He was a NOMADIC HERDER. There is no recording of his involvement in any warfare before or after this incident. Nevertheless, he was READY IN EVERY WAY. Look at his response again...

Genesis 14:13-14

13 Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram. 14 When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

First off, we see that HE HAD 318 MEN TRAINED TO FIGHT. Abram's household was MASSIVE. This number only represented the fighters; not the herders, the cooks, or other servants, not unless they could FIGHT. What's more, all 318 MEN were BORN IN HIS HOUSE, which means that they were EXCEPTIONALLY LOYAL. They may not have been related to Abram, but to them, he was as much family as he was master. They were ready to die for him.

Upon hearing of Lot's predicament, there was NO HESITATION. God's Word says that Abram "**led forth his trained men.**" The Hebrew for the phrase literally means that he **EMPTIED OUT his trained men** as

one would *empty out* a sheath when he drew his sword. Abram didn't shy away from battle; he DECISIVELY UNSHEATHED HIS 318 TRAINED MEN and CHARGED! Abram's alliance with Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner only strengthened his numbers.

Abram RELENTLESSLY pursued Lot's captors.



He pursued them all the way to Dan, which refers to LAISH or LESHEM, a city eventually captured by the Danites and named after their ancestor (Judges 18:29) located beyond the Bashan north of the Sea of Galilee! THAT'S 140 MILES FROM HIS HOME IN HEBRON! In verse 15 we see the STRATEGY of Abram. God's Word says...

Genesis 14:15-16

15 And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

Abram DIVIDED HIS FORCES, which means he attacked MULTIPLE TARGETS, immediately dividing and weakening the enemy forces. He also utilized the tactic of NIGHTTIME AMBUSH, surprising and disorienting his enemy, further ensuring his victory. In fact, we read nowhere that Abram suffered any loses. After defeating Chedorlaomer and the other three kings and their armies, Abram continued NORTH ANOTHER 100 MILES until he caught up with the PRISONERS of war, freeing EVERYONE at HOBAH, north of Damascus. Abram was VICTORIOUS, but if we look ahead at verse 19 we see who actually fought the battle. Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, blessed Abram, saying...

Genesis 14:19b-20

**Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
20 and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!**

One man's HOUSEHOLD (plus GOD) did what FIVE KINGS AND THEIR KINGDOMS couldn't, and as we observe how they devastated the people of the Jordan Valley, it's clear that they were no insignificant foe.

What LESSONS do we take from this EPIC scene in history and in Abram and Lot's lives???

There IS a BATTLE. Sometimes it's RAGING visibly in the CULTURE around us, demanding our allegiance. Other times it's a covert battle felt in the wicked cravings of our flesh and the insidious infiltration of the world's message into our homes through various media and those we allow to influence us. May we remember that our enemy is Satan, not those he has deceived into carrying out his will.

"Righteous Lot" was caught up in chaos because he was comfortably living too closely to sin. As Pastor Dale pointed out last week, Lot **looked at** Sodom, **moved toward** Sodom, and eventually was **dwelling in** Sodom. This is a picture of us any time we sin. We initially look at it. We haven't sinned yet, but we're tempted; that's the time to NIP IT, as Barney Fife would say, to flee the temptation and cling to the LORD. However, when we don't, we MOVE TOWARD it the longer we CONSIDER IT, and having considered it at length, we PLUNGE headlong into it. Lot is a picture of the miserable believer who attempts to follow the LORD and the world at the same time. Unlike his uncle who was a **"friend of God" (James 2:23)**, Lot was much more easily influenced by the world, so he shared in the consequences of its sin, just like we do when we befriend the world.

Though Abram isn't pictured as a warrior anywhere else, his life was ORDERED in such a way that enabled him to be READY to DECISIVELY RESPOND to the battle. That requires a life that's CONSISTENTLY SUBMITTED to the LORD BEFORE the battle arrives. Such a testimony is what led nonbelievers like the escaped fugitive to turn to him when their lives were falling apart. No, Abram wasn't perfect, but his faith in the LORD gave him the confidence to wade into battle, as well as the FREEDOM to determine when to do so (unlike Lot, whose previous decisions literally drug him into it). FINALLY, Abram's ULTIMATE CONFIDENCE was in the LORD, who alone gives us VICTORY.

So, if you're taken a side in the battles of this life, whose side have you taken? It's so easy to get caught up in the agendas of groups in this world, interests that will never matter in eternity. Like Abram, I hope you've chosen the LORD'S side, NOT INDIFFERENT to the issues of this world (after all, Abram intervened) but ENGAGING THEM ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL. May we walk and guide our families to walk so closely with the Christ, the CAPTAIN OF HEAVEN'S ARMIES, so that when the devil's world system sets out to destroy us and our families, his attacks are met with the MIGHT of GOD MOST HIGH. May we live like those **"born of God..."**

1 John 5:4

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.