

Genesis Lesson 11: Genesis 14-15

- First off, none of the kings recorded here are recorded in contemporaneous or other historical writings.
- However, despite this, the names of the kings and the names of their kingdoms are too precise to simply dismiss out of hand.
- Some of the place names we recognize, as we see them named elsewhere in the Bible:
 - Sodom
 - Gomorrah
 - Zoar
 - Seir
 - In Numbers 20:9-12, Meribah Kadesh plays a role when the Israelites are wandering in the desert with Moses and start to grumble because there is no water. Moses strikes a rock with his staff to produce water, and it is this act which condemns Moses to not entering the promised land with the Israelites.
- Some place names are not familiar, such as Elam, which was a generic term for the whole land east of Mesopotamia from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf (modern Iran).
 - Genesis 10:22 says “the sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram.”
- Some of the place names did not exist until the time of Moses.
- Lastly, we recognize some of the tribes (Amalekites and Amorites) because they were perpetual enemies of Israel.
 - Other tribes, such as Zuzites, Rephaites, and Emities are unknown.

- Boiling down the story, we know that 5 Canaanite kings allied themselves against Kedorlaomer and his 3 allies after being subject to him for 12 years.
 - We can understand the term “being subject to” as meaning that these kings had been paying tribute to Kedorlaomer. This suggests that they had been previously conquered by Kedorlaomer.
 - Kedorlaomer and his allies were all from Mesopotamia.
 - We can identify the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zoar as being from the Dead Sea area. We do not know the location of the other 2 kings.
- The 2 groups of kings fought battles from the top to the bottom and back to the top of Canaan.
 - There are 4 distinct battles:
 - In the 1st battle (chapter 14, verses 1-4), Kedorlaomer and his 3 Mesopotamian allies meet the 5 Canaanite kings on their home turf in the Dead Sea Valley.
 - In the 2nd battle (chapter 14, verses 5-7), Kedorlaomer and his allies defeat various Canaanite inhabitants.
 - In the 3rd battle (chapter 14, verses 8-12), Kedorlaomer and his allies defeat the Dead Sea kings, seize the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and capture Lot, who was living in Sodom. (One man escaped and reported what had happened to Abram.)
 - In the 4th battle, Abram and his trained men defeat Kedorlaomer and his allies in the northern part of Canaan, in the area of what would become the tribe of Dan.
- Abram is referred to as “Abram the Hebrew.” He was the first person in the Bible to carry this designation.
 - Here, however, it is not an ethnic term but rather a descriptive name of people known as Habiru/Apiru who were characterized as immigrants who did not own property.
- Abram has 3 allies at Hebron which we learn about in verse 24: Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre.

- Abram sets off after Lot with his 318 trained men and likely men from his allies.
- The fact that Abram had 318 trained men is a mark of his wealth. This was an exceedingly small attack force against much larger armies.
- But Abram divides his forces and attacks at night, successfully rescuing Lot, his possessions, the women, and the other people who had been captured.
- As Abram and Lot are returning from the North of Canaan, they are greeted by the king of Sodom and the king of Salem.
- Melchizedek, king of Salem, brings out bread and wine, an offer of hospitality and friendship. Melchizedek, not a participant in the recent war, may have wished to make peace with Abram.
- Melchizedek was priest of God Most High (El Elyon).
 - This was likely the Canaanite god El.
 - Being both king and priest was not uncommon in the Near Eastern cultures of the time.
 - However, Bible commentaries differ on this topic with some stating that Melchizedek worshipped Yahweh. Reform theological scholars are firm that this was Yahweh and that Melchizedek's appearance was a theophany.
- Melchizedek blesses Abram by saying that he is blessed by God Most High and that God Most High is to be blessed for delivering Abram's enemies into his hand.
- In acknowledgement and perhaps as a gift, Abram gives Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of war.
- Not to be outdone, the King of Sodom demands to be given the people (other than Lot's people) whom Abram captured and tells him to keep everything for himself.
 - Note the contrast between Melchizedek's blessing and hospitality and the King of Sodom's demands.
- Abram replies that he has made an oath (raised his hand) to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, to keep none of the spoils of war for himself so that he will not be beholden to anyone. He only plans to keep the share belonging to his allies.

- Abram’s use of the term “the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth” is a clear acknowledgment that Yahweh, not El, is the creator of heaven and earth and is the most high God (singular).
- Had Abram accepted anything belonging to the King of Sodom, the Canaanite king could claim right of kingship over Abram.
- We next see God speaking to Abram in a vision.
 - Note the language of Genesis 15:1: “After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.”
 - This is the exact language used elsewhere in the Old Testament to typically introduce a prophet. Later, in Genesis 20:7, God tells Abimelech that Abraham is a prophet.
 - God tells Abram that he will be his shield and his very great reward.
 - God’s words have a martial overtone. The Hebrew words for great reward are the term for a mercenary’s pay. Coming so close upon Abram’s victory against Kedorlaomer, the words are appropriate for the context.
 - And, for the first time, we see Abram questioning what God has promised him.
- Abram has no children so far, so he has named his servant Eliezer of Damascus as his heir. This is interesting indeed. Why didn’t he name Lot as his heir?
 - Scripture is silent on this topic, but we can tease a few pertinent reasons from it.
 - When Abram and Lot agreed to separate because their herders were quarreling over the land and likely also over the water, Abram offered Lot first choice of the land. It would have been more appropriate for Lot to defer to his elder uncle and let Abram have first choice.
 - Later, in Genesis 19, we are going to get a good view of Lot and his lifestyle choices. He chooses to live in a city which the Scripture has already called sinful; he is willing to let his daughters be raped; he gets drunk and has sexual relations with his daughters.
 - Has Abram already seen in Lot a man who does not have a heart for God?
- God reaffirms that Abram will have a son and that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

- Genesis 15:6 says, “Abram believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness.”
 - Not to get too technical on the underlying language here, but this is not the technical, imputed righteousness associated with justification (New Testament).
 - Rather, God credits Abram with righteousness because he took God at his word.
 - It is the rightness of Abram’s faith rather than the rightness of Abram’s actions.

- Next, God reminds Abram that he brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees to give him “this land” and to take possession of it.
 - Again, Abram questions God. Genesis 15: 8 says, “But Abram said, ‘O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?’”
 - This is not an unreasonable question considering Genesis 14. Abram has just fought a war throughout Canaan, which is ruled by multiple kings, both local and from afar.
 - Will Abram and his descendants have to fight war after war to gain possession of the land?
 - Abram’s words, “how can I know?” are a call to God to affirm his promise in a tangible way.

- What transpires next is a unique ritual involving animals and birds, with the animals cut in half.
 - Abram falls into a deep sleep and God confirms his covenant by passing through the cut pieces in the forms of a smoking firepot and a blazing torch. (Think of the representation of God to Moses – a burning bush and a pillar of fire.)
 - In ancient times, parties solemnized a covenant by walking down an aisle flanked by pieces of slaughtered animals.
 - The practice signified an oath “May I be cut in half if I do not keep my oath and pledge.”
 - Clearly, God is not human and cannot be cut in half. But he is ratifying a serious covenant in the terms of a sacrificial practice that Abram would relate to and understand.

- And what does God promise Abram?
 - His descendants would be given the land from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates. There is perhaps some hyperbole here, because the Promised Land is Canaan, and its boundaries were more restricted as documented in Numbers 34:2-12. Only during Solomon's rule did the boundaries of Israel come close to approaching the geography of Genesis 15:18 and even then, it did not approach the Nile.
 - But the land would only be theirs after his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign country for 400 years.
 - God would punish the nation who enslaved them, and they would come out of bondage with great possessions.
 - Abram, on the other hand, would live to a ripe old age and would die in peace, without enduring the hardships his descendants will face.
 - Further, in 4 generations, Abram's descendants would return to Canaan.
 - A generation was the age of a man when his first son (from a legal standpoint) was born.
 - Abram will be 100 when Isaac is born. So, it will be 4 generations – 400 years – before the Israelites return.
 - And it will take 400 years for the sin of the Amorites (representing all the Canaanites) to reach the point of no return and then God will exercise his full judgement against them.
 - And during this period of sin, God will be protecting his people in Egypt. It will be a difficult time, as they are slaves, but they will not be subjected to the sins of the Canaanites.
 - God will also use this period of 400 years to weaken the Canaanites so that they can be conquered by the Israelites.

Genesis Lesson 11: Genesis 14-15

Blessed are you, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Deuteronomy 33:29

1. Read Genesis 14:1-12.

- a. Name the Canaanite kings who were subject to King Kedorlaomer of Elam.
Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboyim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) Genesis 14:2
- b. Name the kings of the east who were allies of King Kedorlaomer of Elam.
At the time when Amraphel was king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goyim, Genesis 14:1
- c. Why were these 2 groups at war?
Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboyim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). ³ All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea Valley). ⁴ **For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. Genesis 14:2-4**
- d. What happened at Sodom and Gomorrah?
Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboyim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim ⁹ against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. ¹⁰ Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. ¹¹ The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. Genesis 14:8-11
- e. How did this conflict impact Lot?
They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom. Genesis 14:12

2. Read Genesis 14:13-16.

- a. What did Abram do when he heard the news about Lot?

When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. Genesis 14:14

- b. How successful was Abram?

During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶ He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. Genesis 14:15-16

- c. Why do you think Abram was successful?

- He attacked at night.
- God was with him.

- d. Why do you think Abram went to rescue Lot?

- Lot was Abram's closest relative outside of Sarai. Abram felt responsible for Lot since his father was dead.
- Lot was captured just because he lived in Sodom. He really was not a part of the war between the 9 kings.

3. Read Genesis 14:17-24.

- a. What do you learn about Abram's success from verse 17?

After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Genesis 14:17

- b. Which kings come out to meet Abram?

The king of Sodom and the king of Salem

- c. How is Melchizedek described?

- He was priest of God Most High Genesis 14:18
- His name means "king of righteousness."

- d. What did Melchizedek bring out?
Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. Genesis 14:18
- e. What did this symbolize?
It could symbolize a gesture of hospitality or possibly a sacramental meal.
- f. What blessing did Melchizedek bestow upon Abram?
“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰ And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Genesis 14:19-20
- g. To whom did Melchizedek attribute Abram’s success?
He attributes Abram’s success to the power of God Most High.
- h. What did Abram do in return?
Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Genesis 14:20
- i. Why do you think Abram did this?
- A tenth was a king’s share of the spoils.
 - The tenth honored Melchizedek and may have been a gift.
- j. What did the King of Sodom want?
The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.” Genesis 14:21
- k. What was Abram’s reply?
But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, ²³ that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ ²⁴ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.” Genesis 14:22-24
- l. Why do you think Abram said this to the King of Sodom?
Abram did not want to be beholden in any way to the King of Sodom. If he were beholden to him, he might be called in to assist him in a future war.

- m. Contrast the actions of the King of Salem and the King of Sodom.
- The King of Salem was generous and greeted Abram with a ceremonial meal.
 - The King of Sodom was petty and surly. The victorious army (Abram's) was entitled to the spoils of war as payment. The King of Sodom was due nothing, but he still wanted his people back.

4. Read Genesis 15:1-6.

- a. How did the Lord appear to Abram?
After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision Genesis 15:1
- b. What did the Lord say to Abram?
“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” Genesis 15:1
- c. What was Abram's response?
But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”³ And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” Genesis 15:2-3
- d. What did the Lord promise to Abram?
Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.”⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Genesis 15:4-5
- e. What was the result of Abram's faith?
Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6
- f. What typically would make a person righteous in the Old Testament?
One's righteous behavior in God's eyes

5. Read Genesis 15:7-20.

- a. What did the Lord tell Abram?
He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.” Genesis 15:7

- b. What was Abram's response?
But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" Genesis 15:8
- c. What did the Lord instruct Abram to do?
So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." Genesis 15:9
- d. How did Abram prepare the items?
Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Genesis 15:10
- e. What happened that night?
As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Genesis 15:12
- f. What statements did the Lord make to Abram?
Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." Genesis 15:13-16
- g. How long would it be before Abram's descendants fully possessed the land of Canaan? Why?
- 400 years (4 generations)
 - The sin of the Amorites had not received its zenith. When it did, this would warrant God dispossessing them of their land as a divine punishment.

- h. What did the smoking firepot and the blazing torch represent?
They represented God's presence.
- i. What did the Lord's actions represent? (Hint: see Jeremiah 34:18-19.)
- Those who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. ¹⁹ The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, Jeremiah 34:18-19
 - The Lord's actions represent his execution of the covenant with Abram. The practice signified his oath to the covenant.
- j. What was the covenant with Abram?
On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites." Genesis 15:18-21
- k. Are there any conditions associated with this covenant?
No, this was a unilateral covenant.

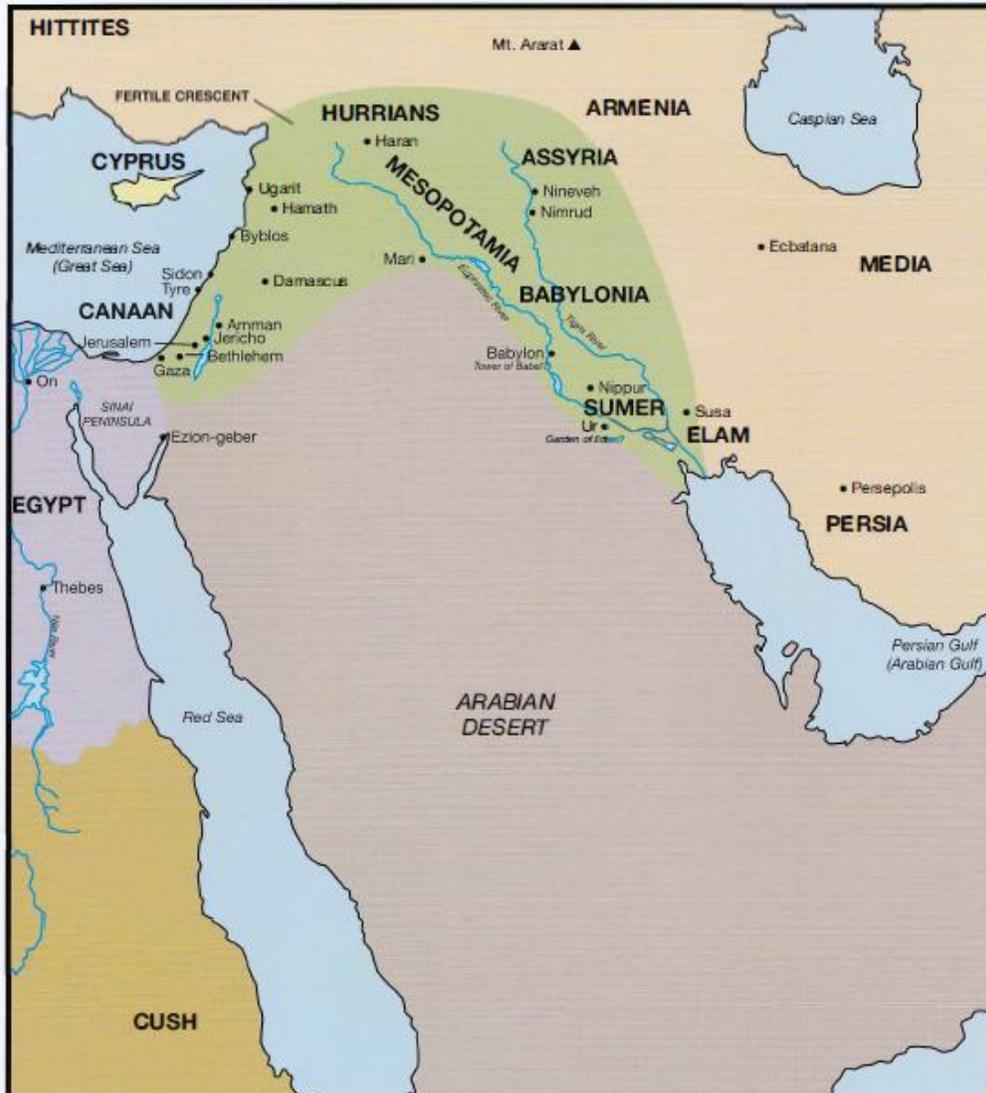
Genesis Lesson 11

Genesis 14-15

Genesis 14 People and Placenames

- Some Placenames Are Named Elsewhere in the Bible: Sodom; Gomorrah; Zoar; Seir; Meribah Kadesh (Numbers 20:9-12)
- Elam Is a Generic Term for the Whole Land East of Mesopotamia from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf (Modern Iran); Genesis 10:22
- Some Placenames Did Not Exist until the Time of Moses
- We Recognize the Amalekites and Amorites (Perpetual Enemies of Israel)
- The Zuzites, Rephaites, and Emities Are Unknown

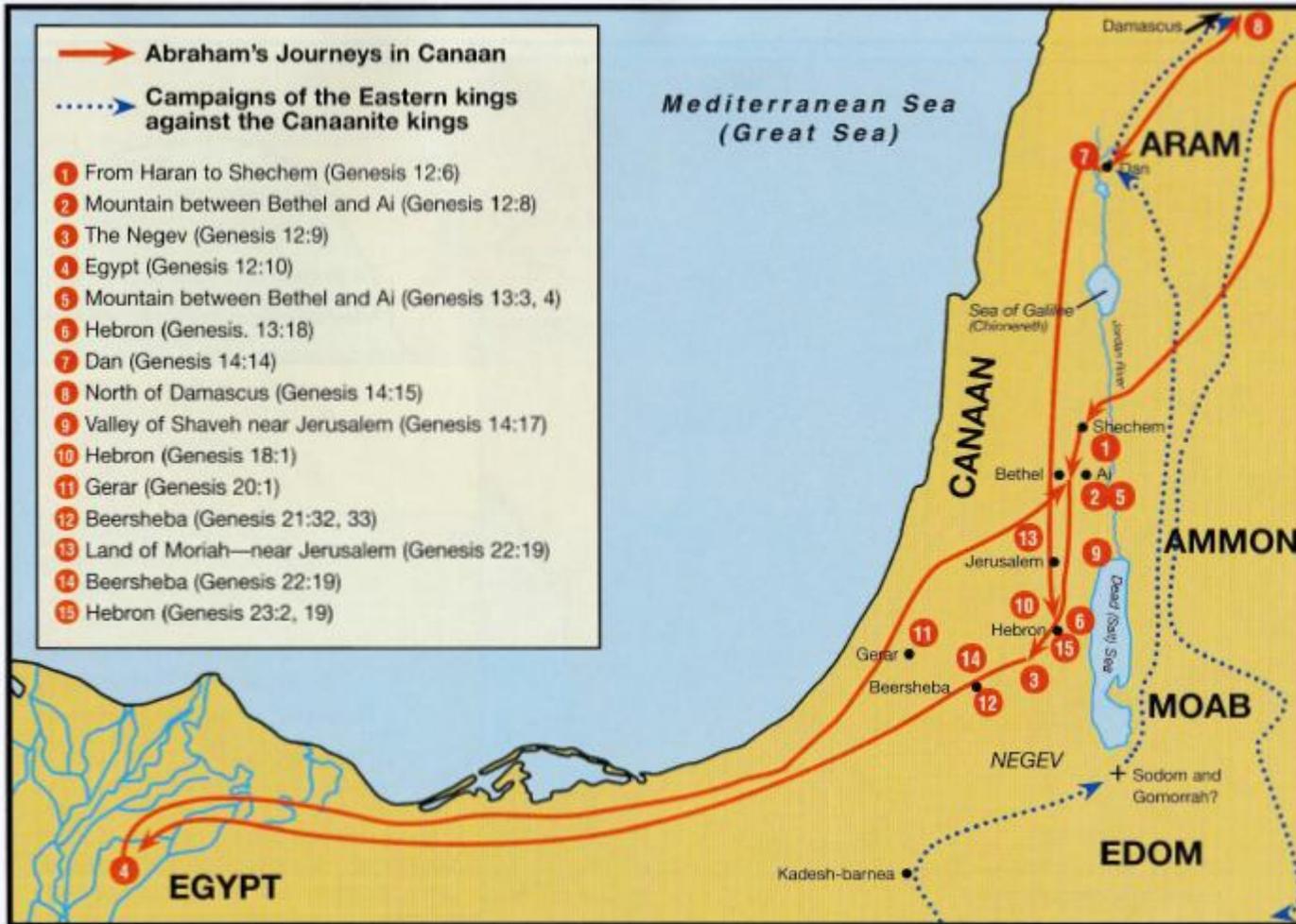
Middle East: Then (BC)



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Boiling Down the Story

- 5 Kings of Canaan (3 from the Dead Sea) Decide to Stop Paying Tribute to Kedorlaomer After 12 Years
- Kedorlaomer and 3 Allied Kings (from Mesopotamia) Go to War; 4 Distinct Battles
- Lot Is Captured
- Abram, His 318 Men, and His 2 Hittite Allies Go to War
- Lot Is Rescued and the Eastern Army Is Routed



Abraham's Journeys (2200 bc - 2000 bc) • 8

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The Kings of Salem and Sodom

- They Greet Abram and Lot on Their Return from the North of Canaan
- Melchizedek, King of Salem and Priest of God Most High (El Elyon)
 - Brings Out Bread and Wine, an Offer of Hospitality and Friendship
 - He May Have Wished to Make Peace with Abram
 - “God Most High” Likely the Canaanite God El
 - Some Reform Theological Scholars are Firm That This Was Yahweh and That His Appearance Was a Theophany

Abram and Melchizedek



Abram and Melchizedek; Juan Antonio de Frias y Escalante; 1668

The Kings of Salem and Sodom

- Melchizedek
 - Tells Abram that He Is Blessed by God Most High
 - God Most High Is to Be Blessed for Delivering Abram's Enemies into His Hand
 - Abram Gives Melchizedek 1/10 of the Spoils of War (Acknowledgement/Gift?)
- The King of Sodom Just Wants His Captured People

Abram's Response

- He Has Made an Oath to *the Lord, God Most High* to Keep None of the Spoils for Himself
- Abram Only Plans to Keep the Share Belonging to His Allies
- “the Lord, God Most High, Creator of Heaven and Earth” = Yahweh and Not the Canaanite god El
- Had Abram Accepted Anything, a Canaanite King Could Claim Right of Kingship Over Him

God Speaks to Abram in a Vision

- Genesis 15:1 Is the Exact Language Used Elsewhere in the Old Testament to Introduce a Prophet; Genesis 20:7
- God Will Be Abram's Shield and Very Great Reward
- God's Words are Martial; Great Reward = a Mercenary's Pay
- Coming so Close to Abram's Victory, the Words Are Appropriate
- For the 1st Time, Abram Questions God's Promise

Abram's Heir

- Eliezer of Damascus
- Why Not Lot?
- Scripture Is Silent, But We Can Tease Out a Few Pertinent Reasons from It
 - Shouldn't Lot Have Given Abram 1st Choice of Land for His Flocks?
 - Lot's Lifestyle Choices Are Not the Best: Living in a Sinful City; Willingness to Let His Daughters Be Raped; Drunk and Sexual Relations with His Daughters
 - Has Abram Already Seen in Lot a Man Who Does Not Have a Heart for God?
- God Reaffirms Abram Will Have a Son and Offspring Too Numerous to Count

Abram's Offspring



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Genesis 15:6

- This Is Not the Technical, Imputed Righteousness Associated with Justification
- God Credits Abram with Righteousness Because He Took God at His Word
- It Is the Rightness of Abram's Faith Rather than the Rightness of Abram's Actions

The Land

- Abram Questions God in Genesis 15:8
- Not an Unreasonable Question Given the Recent War with Multiple Kings, Both Local and Afar
- Will Abram and His Descendants Have to Fight War after War to Gain Possession of the Land?
- “How Can I Know” Is a Call to God to Affirm His Promise in a Tangible Way

The Ritual

- Animals Cut in Half and Birds
- God Confirms His Covenant by Passing Through the Cut Pieces in the Forms of a Smoking Firepot and a Blazing Torch
- In Ancient Times, Parties Solemnized a Covenant by Walking Down an Aisle Flanked by Pieces of Slaughtered Animals
- “May I Be Cut in Half if I Don’t Keep My Oath and Pledge”
- God Is Not Human and Cannot Be Cut in Half
- God Is Ratifying a Serious Covenant in the Terms of a Sacrificial Practice that Abram Would Understand

God's Promise of the Land

- From the River of Egypt to the River Euphrates
 - Some Hyperbole Here
 - The Promised Land of Canaan Had More Restricted Boundaries (Numbers 34:2-12)
 - Only During Solomon's Reign Did the Boundaries of Israel Approach the Geography of Genesis 15:18 (But Did Not Approach the Nile)
- The Land Would Only Be Theirs After Abram's Descendants Were Enslaved for 400 Years
- Abram Would Live to a Ripe Old Age and Die in Peace, Not Enduring the Hardships of His Descendants

God's Promise of the Land

- In 4 Generations, Abram's Descendants Would Return to Canaan
- A Generation = the Age of a Man When His First Son Was Born
- Abram Will Be 100 When Isaac Is Born; 4 Generations = 400 Years
- 400 Years Before the Sin of the Amorites (aka Canaanites) Reach the Point of No Return and God Exercise Full Judgment Against Them
- And 400 Years for God to Protect His People in Egypt and Weaken the Canaanites