

Genesis 14

As we continue our look at the life of Abram, we see many “firsts” in this chapter. It is the first record of warfare. It is Abram’s first appearance on the “international stage.” Abram is first called a “Hebrew.” All those who are descended from Eber (11:14) are Hebrews. Those descended from Jacob are Israelites. Those descended from Judah, after the exile, are Jews. So, technically, it is anachronistic to refer to Abram as a “Jew.” He lived before that distinction came to use. Abram has his first contact with a non-Israelite priest (the first priest in the Scriptures) who also believes in the one, true God. We also have the first oath in Scripture. This chapter has its own unique nature among the events in Genesis, relative to history, geography, and ethnicity. Without counting names, 4.5% of the vocabulary is unique in the Bible to this chapter; 6.5% of its vocabulary is rare in the Bible.¹

Even if we cannot identify the kings from secular history or all the peoples mentioned here, there is an air of authenticity to the account. That is, all that can be identified, so far, reflects that geography and that time period. For example, the kings’ names fit the geography. Several times, place names are brought up-to-date (verses 2, 3, 7, 8), which suggests a lapse of time between the real events and the reading of their record by the next generation.

It is important to remember, when it comes to archaeology, that the absence of evidence does not mean the evidence of absence. In other words, just because archaeologists cannot locate a village in the dirt of Palestine or a person’s name in records does not mean they never existed. They just haven’t been found, yet.

TRANSLATION - 14:1-6:

1 It happened in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Arioch, king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goiim, **2** they made war against Bera, king of Sodom, and against Birsha, king of Gomorrah, Shinab, king of Admah, and Shemeber, king of Zeboiim, and king of Belah, that [is] Zoar. **3** All these allied at the valley of Siddim, this [is] the Salt Sea. **4** Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer and the thirteenth year they rebelled **5** and in the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer came and the kings which [were] with him and they defeated Rephaim in Ashteroth-Karnaim and the Zuzim in Ham and the Emim in Shaveh Chiriataim, **6** and the Horites in mount Seir as far as El Paran which [is] toward the desert.

WORDS:

“Allied” (verse 3; 28 times) carries the idea of a joint effort, here a military effort. “Salt” is used 23 times, nine times in the phrase “Salt Sea.” The verb “to serve” (verse 4) is used 289 times; the related noun “servant” is found 803 times while the abstract noun “service” is found an additional 145 times. “Rebelled” (verse 4; 25 times) is found in Joshua most frequently, albeit only five times.

ARCHEOLOGY:

Shinar (verse 1) was met in 10:10; 11:2. It will also be found in Joshua 7:21; Isaiah 11:11; Zechariah 5:11; Daniel 1:2. It is the region of Babylon. Ellasar is found only here in Genesis 14. We do not know where it was located. Elam was seen in 10:22, but after 14:1, 9, it will not be seen again until Isaiah (11:11; 21:2; 22:6; Jer. 25:25; 49:34-39; Ezek. 32:24; Dan. 8:2; Ezra 10:26; 1 Chro. 1:17). At one time, Elam stretched from the Caspian Sea east to the Persian Gulf. Its capital was Susa (cf. Esther 1:2). It was a powerful state in the early second millennium B. C. “Goiim” (567 times), literally means “peoples.” Perhaps, here it means a specific people but we are not sure who it was. It could mean this king was over a coalition of much smaller people groups.

Sodom (39 times), Gomorrah (19 times), Admah (5 times: 10:19; 14:2, 8; Deut. 29:23; Hosea 11:8), Zeboiim (in the same verses as Admah), Belah (14:2, 8; 36:32-33) and Zoar

¹ Sarna, *Genesis*, 102.

(13:10; 14:2, 8; 19:22-23, 30; Deut. 34:3; Isa. 15:5; Jer. 48:34) are located in the southern area of the Dead Sea as we saw in the previous chapter. Valley of Siddim (verse 3) is not found elsewhere and is difficult to identify, other than being in the region of the Dead Sea, the “Salt Sea.” It is possible the valley and these cities were later submerged below the Dead Sea.

Rephaim was a people group, found nineteen times in the OT. They seem to have lived between the Nile and the Euphrates. Ashteroth-Karnaim is found only here; it is the same city as Ashtaroth in Bashan, found a dozen times. In Moses’ and Joshua’s day, Og will be the king of Bashan (Joshua 12:4). Zuzim are found only here and we do not know about them. The Emim are also found in Deut. 2:10-11, but we also do not know about them.

Shaveh Kiriathaim (verse 5) is not located elsewhere, but “Shaveh” must have been a village close to “Kiriathaim” (Num. 32:37; Joshua 13:19; 1 Chro. 6:76; Jer. 48:1, 23; Ezek. 25:9). Horites (7 times: 14:6; 36:20-21, 29-30; Deut. 2:12, 22) lived in the area of Mount Seir (40 times) which is where Esau’s descendants also settled. El Paran (verse 6) is identified with Elath, on the Gulf of Aqabah, at the southernmost point of Edom (Seir), on the edge of the wilderness of Paran, which is found frequently in the OT.

The path these kings took, from a generally north to south direction, came to be known as the “King’s Highway” (Num. 20:17; 21:22), which traveled east of the Jordan River, from the Dead Sea in the south to Syria in the north.

COMMENTS:

These kings have not been identified from non-biblical sources. One king, Chedorlaomer, subjugated these peoples for a dozen years, but freedom stirs deep in the heart of man. Once the kings rebelled, Chedorlaomer assembled an alliance and fought against the kings in order to resubjugate them.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in Moses’ day - The focus of Moses’ audience will be God’s treatment and protection of Abram, as well as the enigmatic person of Melchizedek, which we’ll discuss below.

Later Hebrew writers - While it is not likely that Amraphel, of Shinar, was king of a large nation like neo-Babylon, later Israelite generations ought to have found comfort in the defeat of Amraphel at the hands of “Father” Abram with a small army of 318 men, not counting the armies of his allies. Walk with God and blessings will follow.

NT writers - The role of Melchizedek in this text carries weight, by way of Psalm 110, with NT writers. We’ll comment more below.

TRANSLATION - 14:7-12:

7 Then they settled and they came to En-Mishpat, this [is] Kadesh, and they conquered all the field of the Amalekites and even the Amorites were settling in Hazazon-Tamar. **8** Then the king of Sodom went out and the king of Gomorrah and the king of Adamah and the king of Zeboim and the king of Belah, that [is] Zoar and they joined with them in battle in the valley of Siddim. **9** Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goiim, and Amraphel, king of Shinar and Arioch, king of Ellasar, four kings against the five. **10** And the valley of Siddim, [with] pits [and] pits of bitumen and they fled, the king of Sodom and of Gomorrah, and they fell there and the rest fled toward the mountain.

11 So they took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food and they went away. **12** They took Lot and his possession, the son of the brother of Abram, and they went away, and he was dwelling in Sodom.

WORDS:

“Joined” (verse 8; 75 times) carries the idea here of arranging in battle formation. “Battle” (verse 8) is a frequent word in the OT, used 319 times with the verb “to fight a battle” used another 171 times. The word “pits” (40 times) are found repeated in this verse, suggesting

many pits. “Bitumen” (verse 10) was first seen in Gen. 11:3 and the only other text will be Exodus 2:3. Bitumen holds asphalt together and asphalt is found in liquid form in the southern area of the Dead Sea. Petroleum oozes to the surface in some areas. “Fled” is found 155 times, often in contexts of battle.

ARCHEOLOGY:

“En-Mishpat” is not located elsewhere. “Kadesh” is found nineteen times, especially in Numbers (13:26; 20:1, 14, 16, 22; 27:14; 33:36-37). “Amalekites” are found a dozen times, especially in the account of King Saul (1 Sam. 15:6, 15; 27:8; 30:1, 13) and “Amorites” are found 87 times. It is this people which God will specifically tell Abram that their sins are “stacking up” and will require punishment from God (Gen. 15:19-21). Hazazon-Tamar (verse 7) is found also in 2 Chro. 20:2, on the western shore of the Dead Sea.

COMMENTS:

This paragraph is a second round of battles which draws in the inhabitants of Sodom more closely. The key concern for the reading audience is the relative of Abram, Lot. Lot is again identified as Abram’s nephew here, in order to explain why Abram does what he does. If Lot was living on the outskirts of Sodom, he is now living in Sodom and is kidnapped along with his possessions and family.

The kings “fell” into bitumen pits, but the king of Sodom is later seen in the account (14:17). In which case, “fell” suggests they jumped into the pits to hide, without any further harm coming to them or perhaps the armies, in general, fell into the pits, but the king himself did not.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - The men of Sodom were evil and extreme sinners (13:13). If Lot had had stronger moral sensibilities, perhaps he would have moved further away and would not have been kidnapped with the others. Evil surroundings bring suffering to the righteous sometimes.

Contemporaries in Moses’ day - God will frequently require Israel to avoid evil companionship. Their relative, Lot, should have been an example to them.

TRANSLATION - 14:13-16:

13 Then the fugitive came and announced to Abram, the Hebrew, and he was dwelling among the great trees of Mamre, the Amorite the brother of Eshchol and brother of Aner and these [were] possessors of a covenant with Abram. **14** And Abram heard that his brother was captured and he led out the trained men born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and they pursued as far as Dan. **15** Then he divided against them at night, he and his servants, and he defeated them and he pursued them as far as Hobah which [is] northward, to Damascus. **16** And he brought back every possession and also Lot his brother and his possession he brought back and also the women and the people.

WORDS:

“Hebrew” (39:14; 41:12) was an ethnic term. As we mentioned in the introduction, Eber’s descendants (10:21, 25; 11:14-17; 1 Chro. 1:18-19) were known as Hebrews. Jacob’s descendants were known as Israelites. Judah’s descendants, after the exile, were known as Jews. “Possessors of a covenant” (verse 13) is not found anywhere else and it gives us the understanding of “covenant” as an agreement, if not a treaty in a legal sense. The verb “heard” (vers. 14; 1,165 times) is one of the most used, about the eighth most used, verb in the OT and can be translated “to hear, listen to, understand, and obey.” “Captured” (47 times) means to “take captive” or “deport.” “Trained men” is an Egyptian term, appropriate for Moses, the author who was trained in the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22). “Pursued” (verse 14, 15; 144 times) can be translated “to pursue” or to “persecute.” It is not found in other Semitic

languages. “Defeated” (verse 15; 501 times) is also used frequently, as one would expect with “to fight a battle” also being used frequently. It can mean “to strike, destroy, injure, be beaten, or even kill.”

ARCHEOLOGY:

“Dan” was located at the northernmost point of the Promised Land. It was not called Dan until the days of the judges (cf. Judg. 18:29). We have an example, apparently, of an update by a later inspired editor, unless there was another village named “Dan” in the days of Abram. Hobah and Damascus (verse 15) relate to the northern border of Canaan which extended beyond Damascus, so the route of these kings suggests Abram drove them out of the Promised Land. Damascus is a very old city and was an important center of trade in the near east.

COMMENTS:

A fugitive escaped and informed Abram. It is likely that Abram would not have responded if it weren’t for his nephew, Lot, being kidnapped as well. Lot is called the “brother” of Abram in verses 14, 16 in a broad, generic term as “relative.” Abram was living near allies, “possessors of a covenant,” with Abram: Mamre, Eschol, and Aner. Perhaps this “covenant” carried with it some legal obligations such that the men joined in battle with Abram. But, he and his 318 men are the focus of the text. Since Abram had 318 trained servants, he likely had a very large household, perhaps over 1,000. The precise number is difficult to miss but it lends historicity to the whole account.

There is no actual battle described. Abram and his men were quite successful even pushing the invaders out of the Promised Land, if “Dan” is the same Dan of later fame, north of the boundaries of Israel. The battle was quick and Abram freed Lot and all the “possessions.” That word has been emphasized in the text because it plays an important role at the end of the chapter in Abram’s dealings with both Melchizedek and the king of Sodom.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Abram had faith in God and fought against these kings and conquered them decisively. We do not know how many men were on the opposing forces so we do not know if Abram was in a position of strength or not. We do know that those who cursed Abram’s family were cursed in return (cf. Gen. 12:1-3).

Contemporaries in Moses’ day - Many of these nations are found again in the days of Moses. Abram was successful in battle against them with only 318 men. When Moses’ contemporaries invade the Promised Land under Joshua, with a considerably larger army, they would also be successful, if they were to fight with the faith Abram had.

TRANSLATION - 14:17-20:

17 Then the king of Sodom went out to meet him after he returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings which [were] with him to the valley of Shaveh; this [is] the valley of the king. **18** Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought bread and wine and he [was] priest of God Most High. **19** And he blessed him and said, “Blessed [is] Abram before God Most High, owner of the heavens and the earth. **20** And blessed [is] God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand;” and he gave him a tenth from all.

WORDS:

“To meet” (verse 17) is also the verb being translated “to call.” “God Most High” (verse 18) is found in this context (14:18-20, 22) and Psalm 78:35. More on God’s “new” name will be given below. Melchizedek is the first “priest” (750 times) mentioned in the OT and the priesthood will serve an important role under the law of Moses. “Owner” (verse 19) is a related word with the name “Cain” (see comments at 4:1). The verb “to own” is used 85 times; the related noun “livestock” is used 76 times. The abstract noun “purchase” is used 15 times while

the concrete noun “property” or “possession” is used 10 times. The noun could also be interpreted as “Creator” (cf. Psa. 139:13). “Deliver” (verse 20) is only used in two other passages (Hosea 11:8; Prov. 4:9), but it is a related verb for the noun “shield” (60 times; cf. 15:1). “Tenth” (verse 20) is found 32 times in the OT. The verb is used ten times.

ARCHEOLOGY:

“Valley of Shaveh” is identified also as the “King’s Valley” which is mentioned in 2 Sam. 18:18. That valley seems to be the Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem.

Salem is set parallel to Zion in Psalm 76:2, perhaps suggesting Jerusalem as a “city of peace” (cf. Isa. 2:1-5; Micah 4:1-4). If Salem is not Jerusalem, and it is unclear, then we do not know where Salem was.

COMMENTS:

It appears that the king of Salem and the king of Sodom both meet Abram at the same time. Melchizedek presents Abram with bread and wine, to which he would have ready access as both a priest and king. Melchizedek blesses Abram, in fulfillment of God’s promise in Gen. 12:1-3. Melchizedek’s name means “king of righteousness” and “Salem” is related to the word “peace.” Both designations are appropriate for his heir, the Son of David.

It was common in the ANE to combine both royal and priestly offices. In fact, it was a distinguishing trait of Israelite religion for the two to be separated. The priests came from the tribe of Levi; the royalty, as we will see, from the tribe of Judah. The Hebrew writer will argue (7:14) that since Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, He could not serve as a priest *unless* the Law of Moses were to be fulfilled and taken out of the way, which is what Jesus did on the cross (cf. Col. 2:13-14).

This is the first time God, or Jehovah, has been given another name or designation: “God Most High.” “El” is a shortened form of the previously widely-used word for God (*Elohim*). The origin of the word is unknown, but it can mean “god” in a generic sense. “Most High” comes from the word “to ascend.” All monotheism, outside of Abram, is not dead. Melchizedek is a monotheistic priest of the Most High God and blesses Abram for his work in freeing the captives. The Most High God is the “Owner” of Heaven and Earth. The word could also be translated “Creator.” To bless God is to recognize the blessings that come from God.

Tithing was ancient and widespread in the ANE.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Once again, out of gratitude for a safe delivery of himself, his 318 citizen-soldiers, and Lot and his possessions and family, Abram gives 10% of his war plunder to Melchizedek. The whole scene shows that Melchizedek is of a higher position than Abram (Heb. 7:4-6). This will set the stage for the Hebrew writer to argue that the priesthood of Levi, of the nation of Israel (descendants of Abram) are inferior to the priesthood of Melchizedek.

Contemporaries in Moses’ day - Jacob gives a tithe (28:22) and God will require the Israelites to give a tithe in the Law of Moses (Num. 18; Lev. 27:30-33; Deut. 14:22-29).

Later Hebrew writers - Psalm 110, the only other OT text which mentions Melchizedek, is based on Genesis 14. This significant text ties the descendant of David, the “son of David,” to the priestly order of Melchizedek. The rabbis will debate that connection until Jesus of Nazareth solves the conundrum. Zechariah (6:11-13) would picture the Messiah as a priest reigning on a throne. Psalm 78:35 is the only other passage with the name “God Most High,” while “Most High” is found alone (Num. 24:16; Deut. 32:8; Isa. 14:14; Lam. 3:35, 38; Dan. 7:18, 22, 25, 27 and 21 times in Psalms).

NT writers - While Melchizedek is only found in Hebrews 5:6-10 & 6:20-7:28, Psalm 110 is the most quoted (cf. Matt. 22:41-45) and most frequently alluded psalm in the NT. When Melchizedek blessed Abram, we see the first of a series of non-Israelites who see God working in Abram’s descendants (21:22), Rahab (Joshua 2:10-14), Ruth (1:16), and Naaman (2 Kings

5:15). These set the stage for non-Jews to come to Jesus (Matt. 2:1-12; 8:5-13; Acts 10; Mark 7:26-30), which culminates in the gospel being offered to everyone, both Jew and gentile (Rom. 1:16). The word “tenth” is only used in the NT nine times: Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:12; Heb. 7:2, 4-6, 8-9 and always refers to the Jewish practice. Christians are never commanded by Christ or His apostles to give 10%. Stephen will refer to God as “Most High” in Acts 7:48.

TRANSLATION - 14:21-24:

21 Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give to me the soul and the possession, take for yourself.” **22** Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I raise my hand to Jehovah God Most High, owner of heavens and earth. **23** Not a thread, or even the thong of a sandal I will not take from all which [belongs] to you, so you will not say, ‘I enriched Abram,’ **24** except only what the young men ate and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshchol, and Mamre, these will take their share.”

WORDS:

“I raise my hand” is a way of saying, “I swear.” “Enriched” (verse 23) is used seventeen times. “Share” (verse 24) is used 66 times and can be translated “share, property, or plunder.” It is a related word with “divide” used in the previous paragraph.

COMMENTS:

Abram is the conqueror and he has the right to keep the spoils of battle for himself. He has given 10% to Melchizedek. He then, graciously, gives the rest to the king of Sodom. The king of Sodom comes across more blunt, if not rude, than Melchizedek. He wants people but not possessions. When it comes to the king of Sodom, Abram is not the least bit interested in keeping anything, neither a thread nor the sandal thong. His citizen-soldiers can keep what they have used, including his allies, Aner, Eshchol, and Mamre, but the rest will remain with the king of Sodom. Abram’s trust is in God. Incidentally, Abram acknowledges here that the “God Most High” of Melchizedek’s faith is one and the same as “Jehovah God” of Hebrew faith.

We do not know how confident Abram was in his own future after this battle, but God appears in the next chapter to strengthen his faith (15:1).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Abram is not after accumulating wealth as it appears the king of Sodom is. This is an indication of the type of people who live in Sodom, who will be punished by God in Genesis 19 where Abram will have to come to Lot’s rescue once again.

Contemporaries in Moses’ day - God will later give Israel permission to use plunder from battle for their own purposes, even women and children, although He will require Israelite men to treat female captives with gentleness and respect (Deut. 20:14; 21:10-14).