



## Genesis - Chapter Fourteen

### **II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)**

#### **II.a Genesis 11:27-25:18 - Abraham (continues)**

##### **Summary of Chapter Fourteen**

After separating from Abram and settling in Sodom, Lot is taken captive by an alliance of four kings who invade the Jordan Valley and defeat a local confederation of five kings. When Abram learns of his nephew's abduction from Sodom, he marshals a small force and, after pursuing the invaders northward, successfully recovers Lot and a large quantity of plunder. Abram's subsequent encounter with the kings of Sodom and Salem provides an interesting insight into his future aspirations in light of God's promises. Although Abram can compete militarily against powerful kings, he rejects the use of power to achieve God's purpose.

Thus he does not use force to take control of the land of Canaan. This section falls into three parts: vv.1-12 record the events leading up to Lot's abduction; vv.13-16 record Lot's rescue by Abram; and vv.17-24, record Abram's meeting with the kings of Sodom and Salem.

#### **II.a.v Genesis 14:1-16 - Lot's Captivity and Rescue**

A great battle of kings takes place in the Valley of Siddim and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were sacked. In addition, Lot and his family were taken captive. When word of this reached Abram, he took his own men and pursued those taking his relatives into captivity. Abram prevailed, restored the freedom of Lot and returned with the looted possessions that had been taken.

Alternative names are given in this passage for a number of locations. This suggests that an older account has been reworded for inclusion here in Genesis.

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

### Genesis 14:1-3

This brief summary introduces the rival alliances of kings. Such alliances were a common and recurring aspect of politics in the ancient Near East. The kings mentioned here have not yet been identified in sources outside the Bible, but their names correspond with known names or name types appropriate to the regions from which they may have come.

Shinar is Babylonia (10:10). The location of Ellasar is uncertain, although the king's name, Arioch, is found in texts from the ancient cities of Mari and Nuzi; this might suggest that Ellasar is in northern Mesopotamia.

Elam was an ancient state lying to the east of southern Babylonia and was the prominent power in the region at the time. Its king Chedorlaomer is the subject of much debate among scholars but he is accepted as an historic figure. Tidal is possibly a Hittite name. Goiim in Hebrew means nations.

Zoar probably lay at the southern edge of the Valley of Siddim or Jericho, which included the more infamous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the city to which Lot would flee when God had the other cities destroyed for their wickedness (19:22-23).

<sup>4</sup> For twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

### Genesis 14:4

After twelve years of subjugation, the kings of the Jordan Valley seek to gain their independence in a co-ordinated rebellion against Chedorlaomer. They maintained their independence for just one year.

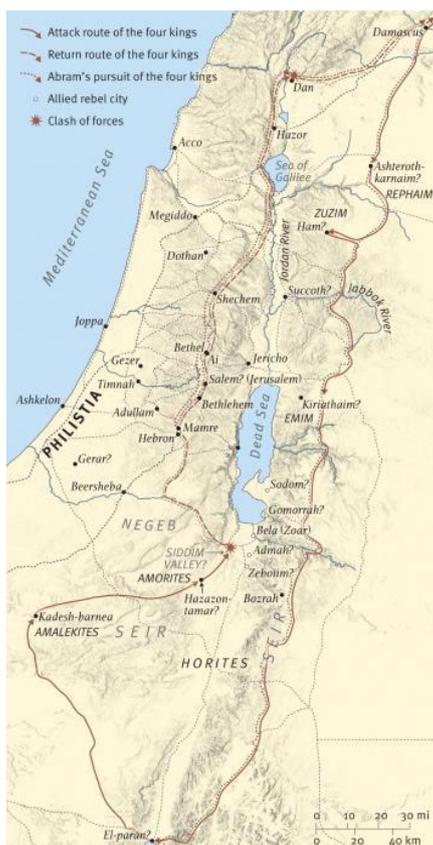
<sup>5</sup> In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and subdued the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, <sup>6</sup> and the Horites in the hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the edge of the wilderness; <sup>7</sup> then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and subdued all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who lived in Hazazon-tamar.

## Genesis 14:5-7

Under the leadership of **Chedorlaomer**, the invading kings display their military strength by defeating a number of different tribal groups. The six locations reveal that the invaders moved southward along the King's Highway in Transjordan as far as the Gulf of Aqaba before turning northward, eventually arriving at **Hazazon-tamar**, also known as Engedi (2 Chronicles 20:2). When this episode was edited for inclusion in Genesis, **En-mishpat** was known as **Kadesh**.

<sup>8</sup> 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 <sup>9</sup> with King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar, four kings against five. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way; <sup>12</sup> they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who lived in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

## Genesis 14:8-12



## The Battle at the Valley of Siddim (circa 2085/1920BC)

When five Canaanite cities rebelled against their four Mesopotamian overlords, the four kings led a campaign to reassert their control over the region.

The campaign culminated in a battle in the Siddim Valley, and Abram's nephew Lot, who was living in Sodom, was captured and carried off.

When Abram was informed of Lot's capture, he and his men pursued the four kings to Dan, where they recaptured Lot and chased the fleeing forces as far as Hobah, north of Damascus.

Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits. The Hebrew here is a good example of how the language uses repetition to show emphasis. The Hebrew way of saying full of bitumen pits is: pits, pits of bitumen. Repetition expresses abundance, plenitude, etc.

The five kings of the Jordan Valley fail to repel the alliance of eastern kings. Consequently, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are plundered.

Paralleling the general report of v.11, v.12 records the abduction of Lot and his possessions from Sodom.

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> When Abram heard that his nephew had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. <sup>15</sup> He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup> Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his nephew Lot with his goods, and the women and the people.

#### Genesis 14:13-16

Abram the Hebrew. This is the first occurrence of the term ‘Hebrew’ in the Bible and is probably used here to denote the ethnicity of Abram. The word Hebrew comes from a root that means passed over. The Septuagint translates it as ‘the passenger.’ Refer also to the comment made on 10:21-32.

The town of Laish in northern Canaan was renamed Dan in the period of the Judges (Judges 18:29). The use of the name Dan here indicates that this account was edited sometime later.

**Dan is to be identified with Tel Dan, a site extensively excavated since the 1960s. A large and significant settlement has been uncovered here from the Middle Bronze Age, circa 2000-1500BC. A monumental mud-brick arched gateway was found from this time; it is the earliest of its kind ever found.**

The Hebrew word for trained men is found only here in the OT. The context implies that they may have had some military training. A night-time assault enables Abram’s forces to overcome their opponents, who flee northward. Any man who could assemble three hundred and eighteen servants capable of fighting must have been very wealthy and influential in his community.

He divided his forces against them by night. Abram had military wisdom. Using the clever tactic of a night attack with his army split into two groups, he

succeeded in rescuing Lot and recovering all the plunder, i.e. all the goods, seized by the partnership of the five kings.

Brought back his nephew Lot with his goods. Unfortunately, Lot moved right back to where he was before in Sodom. He refused this warning from God, and would eventually lose everything when Sodom and Gomorrah were judged.

#### II.a.vi Genesis 14:17-24 - Abram Blessed by Melchizedek

By contrasting Abram's reactions to the kings of Sodom and Salem, this passage underlines his reliance on God rather than on military might in order to gain possession of Canaan. Although God has promised the land to Abram, the patriarch will not adopt violent strategies in order to obtain it.

<sup>17</sup> After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

#### Genesis 14:17

The king of Sodom is the first to go out to greet Abram on his triumphant return.

The Valley of Shaveh, also known as the King's Valley: <<*Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself a pillar that is in the King's Valley, for he said, 'I have no son to keep my name in remembrance'; he called the pillar by his own name. It is called Absalom's Monument to this day*>> (2 Samuel 18:18), lay to the east of Jerusalem.

<sup>18</sup> And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High.

#### Genesis 14:18

Melchizedek, which means 'king of righteousness,' refer to Hebrews 7:2, generously provides a meal for the returning victors. The fact that he brought out bread and wine is intriguing. Perhaps he even served them in a manner looking forward to the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ, symbolised by the participation in the Lord's Supper.

Salem is either an earlier name for or a shortened version of Jerusalem, refer to Psalm 76:2, and is related to *shalom*, the Hebrew word for 'peace.'

He was priest of God Most High. Although very little is known about Melchizedek, he provides an interesting example of a priest-king linked to Jerusalem. There appears to have been an expectation that later kings of Jerusalem should resemble him: <<*The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek'*>> (Psalm 110:4). The book of

Hebrews presents Jesus Christ, from the royal line of David, as belonging to the 'order of Melchizedek' and therefore superior to the Levitical priests (Hebrews 5:5-10 and 6:20-7:17).

There is much speculation as to who Melchizedek was. There are those who simply believe he was a man who showed the characteristics of the Messiah that was yet to come, while others believe he may represent a theophany of Christ, an appearance of the Messiah in human form before his incarnation. Others have pointed out that, if the genealogies are indeed complete and linear, then many of Abraham's predecessors were still alive at this time, including Shem.

**God Most High** in Hebrew is 'El 'Elyon. 'El is the common Semitic term for God. To this is added the attribute 'Elyon, meaning Most High. Elsewhere in Genesis other attributes are added to 'El, e.g. in 16:13 'God of seeing' translates 'El Ro'i; in 17:1 'God Almighty' translates 'El Shadday; in 21:33 'Everlasting God' translates 'El 'Olam. These different names highlight different aspects of God's nature.

<sup>19</sup> He blessed him and said,

'Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
maker of heaven and earth;

<sup>20</sup> and blessed be God Most High,

who has delivered your enemies into your hand!

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.

#### Genesis 14:19-20

**Maker of heaven and earth.** Although God has created the whole earth to be his temple, Genesis reveals that God's ownership of the earth is rejected by those who do not obey him. In light of this, Melchizedek's acknowledgment of God's authority over the earth is noteworthy.

Melchizedek's blessing attributes Abram's victory to the power of God. By giving Melchizedek **one-tenth of everything**, i.e. a tithe, Abram affirms the truthfulness of Melchizedek's words.

When Moses later received the law, God stated that it would be the Levitical priesthood only that would receive the tithes of the people. Because Melchizedek preceded the Levites and was not one of them the precedent was set that a king from outside of the priestly line was considered worthy of both kingship and priesthood. This is therefore seen as another pointer to the status of Jesus as the Christ being the one worthy to receive honour and praise.

<sup>21</sup> Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give me the people, but take the goods for yourself.’

#### Genesis 14:21

In marked contrast to Melchizedek’s blessing, the king of Sodom’s remarks are surly and small-minded: he expresses no gratitude. He dishonours Abram, and this is ominous in the light of 12:3, i.e. <<*I will curse*>>. In addition, by offering Abram the right to take the goods alone, he was failing to honour his partnership with the other kings.

<sup>22</sup> But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have sworn to the LORD, God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup> that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you might not say, “I have made Abram rich.” <sup>24</sup> I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me – Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them take their share.’

#### Genesis 14:22-24

The LORD, God Most High. By prefixing the divine name ‘Yahweh,’ translated *LORD*, to ‘El ‘Elyon, God Most High, Abram indicates that Yahweh and ‘El ‘Elyon are one and the same deity.

I will take nothing. Abram’s rejection of the offer made by the king of Sodom powerfully affirms that he is depending on God and not on human kings or their gifts in order to become a great nation and acquire a great name (12:2). However, Abram does acknowledge the gift of food given by Melchizedek, what the young men have eaten, and is also aware that his partners should be rewarded for their loyalty in following him by accepting the share of the men who went with him. He does not impose his principles on his Amorite allies (v.13). They were entitled to as much of the spoil as is appropriate under the customs of the time.