

Abraham and the Life of Faith

“War of the Worlds”

*“I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that
I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread
or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to
say, ‘I made Abram rich.’”*

Genesis 14:22-23

Sunday, May 24
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Charles Swindoll tells the story of his mentor, Ray Stedman, preaching one Sunday and recounting a temptation he had faced while attending an out-of-town conference.¹ He was staying in a small hotel and became infatuated with the pewter table set-salt and pepper shakers with napkin holder-that adorned his table each morning at breakfast. The thought entered his head that it would be easy just to slip the set into his possession, justifying the crime with the additional thought that the owner likely had a good supply and wouldn't miss just one. Stedman finished by remarking how glad he was that he didn't have to stand before his congregation and now apologize and ask forgiveness for stealing.

That week a small package arrived at the church office, and upon opening it, Stedman found an anonymous note that explaining how the person had wanted to bless Stedman for his honesty and had reached out to the hotel and purchased for him the enclosed little pewter table. The next Sunday Stedman thanked the anonymous gift-giver, and added, that what he had really wanted to tell the previous week had been how much he had coveted the large 36" television in his room.

We live in a society that drips with possessions. I cleaned out my closet and dresser just a few weeks ago, and I still have barely enough room for the shirts, T-shirts, sweatshirts and 'comfort' pants that I couldn't part with. Last year we made a trip to Saskatchewan for a wedding and while there rented a car—a really cool little Ford Edge. Brand new. It was burnt orange with power roof and everything else. Blue tooth. Everything. Needless to say, when I returned home my late model Caravan that was just fine before I left was now "meh." A whole industry has arisen whose sole aim is to convince people who already have far more than they will ever need, that they are still missing something. Everything is new and improved; or a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, or is available in low monthly payments with no interest. Our society has an insatiable appetite for what it doesn't have, an appetite that often plays out in international relations. Our history is littered by tension, conflict, and war, over what you have and what I want.

You may wonder what this has to do with our story this morning. Well, there is within this story of Abram and the only military campaign with which he is credited an important theme that runs all the way through the Bible, being finally resolved only near the end of time on this side of glory. The story begins sometime after Abram and his nephew Lot have parted company. And the lesson I want us to take from Genesis 14 is that the life of faith receives from God, rather than takes from others. The lesson begins in Genesis 14.

A War is Waged

14 *At the time when Amraphel was king of Shinar,¹ Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goyim, ² these kings went to war against 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.

⁵ In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Asheroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim ⁶ and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert. ⁷ Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazezon Tamar.

⁸ 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. ¹² They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. The first two chapters describe how the world was created and the vocation given to man by God – and everything was very good. One chapter later, in only the third chapter, everything goes horribly wrong as mankind grasps to take the one thing forbidden – not forbidden in the sense of denying him something, or holding out on him, but forbidden in the sense that a parent places annoying child proof locks on kitchen cupboards, or places plastic guards on wall outlets. Forbidden in the sense of protecting man. We pry the door open despite the warning. In the fourth chapter man commits his first murder, and here in Genesis 14 – barely into the book, we have the first recorded war. We could get bogged down on all the actors here and where they were from, however I'm sure we all get the picture as this is all too familiar. In fact, reading through the Bible you may not be surprised or think it worth pondering because war is something we've become so used to. We even joke about it, "War, what is it good for?" But we really don't stop to ponder the question, do we?

The events unfolding have been common in every age, on every continent, among every people, since the dawn of time. The powerful oppressing the powerless. The strong taking advantage of the weak. The mighty oppressing the vulnerable. Years before Abram had entered the land a confederacy of kings from what is modern day Turkey and Iran, had conquered and subjugated the kingdoms of the Transjordan, and had exacted an annual ransom for protection—protection from kings like themselves who preyed on others. They were ancient thugs—Middle East mafia. This had continued for twelve years until in the thirteen year the southern kings—likely just the chiefs of city states, decided to throw off the burden imposed upon themselves, and refused to pay

'tribute' to a confederacy lead by Kederlaomer. He was apparently was none to pleased. In the fourteenth year he marched with three allies—who joined him, not because he was a likeable guy, but because it is better to be on the same side as the schoolyard bully than one of his victims. And besides, there was spoil to be taken. They could get stuff.

We could easily replace the names here with more familiar names: Attila, Alexander, Xerxes, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin. I'm sure you can think of many other names to add to the list, which is long and it is brutal. But this is the way of a fallen world—where if you want what your neighbor has, you take it. If another person stands in your way, you step on him. It is a world of looking out for number one—yourself; a world that makes being number one at all costs a prize to be cherished and admired. It is not our second nature – it *is* our nature. 2 Samuel 11 opens with the casual statement, "*In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war...*" Not spring training. Not time for getting the garden ready, or pulling out the clubs—but, the time to go off to war. Either to get or to stop being got. And this first world war would likely have passed without mention if not for someone caught up in this conflict—Lot.

After this long description of how the massed kings had traveled through the Transjordan region razing towns and killing inhabitants, exacting punishment on those who were more weak and less powerful, we are informed—"*They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.*" What in the world is Lot doing there? When he left Abram, he was in possession of a great amount of flocks and herds and tents, so much so that the land could not support both he and Abram. Here was a man enriched by his time in Egypt, who was blessed because of his relationship with Abram, a man who was a pilgrim, a wandering Aramean like his uncle—but now he is living, not nearby, or among the cities of the plain as planned, but living right in Sodom.

You see, when we choose to dwell too close to the fire—we end up get burned. If choosing to build a house on a flood plain—it will get wet. When you choose to dwell in the world you will caught up in the way the world works. Paul had to warn: "*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.*" (Romans 12:2 Phillips) Years later this story would be told and retold several times when revivals swept through Judah and the period after the exile and it would be a reminder to the Jewish people that they were to separate themselves from the world. Their failure to do so had been repeated in a never-ending cycle throughout Judges and into the kingdom period, until God gave them over to the desires of their hearts, and the nation went into exile.

Among many heartbreaking of passages, we read in the Hebrew Scriptures is Judges 2:10-13, after the death of Joshua and his generation:

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.”

Judges 2:10-13

There is always this tension between being in the world and being of the world. Of the world squeezing us into it's values, practices and perspectives. Jesus prayed for His disciples—those present and those future when He pleaded:

I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours...I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world...Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one...for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it...As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”

John 17:9-18 (selected verses)

Have you felt that tension? We must walk and work and worship and witness in the world—but we are not to be the world. Our values, our priorities, our desires and hopes and aspirations are not to be like those of the world. We are commanded to be holy—and one of the ways we do so is to be separate, distinct. But if we allow ourselves to drift closer and closer to the world, and we do it because we are drawn to what the world offers—“Lot looked up and saw the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt...” like Lot we can be seduced into thinking all our needs and wants can be met by the world. Lot was wrong—and his getting swept up into the ways of the world should not surprise us, for each of us faces the same lure everyday. Perhaps we know more than a few Lots, who slipped closer and closer to the world, and finally winded up being of the world. Fortunately for Lot, he had an advocate. I pray your Lots do also.

A Warrior Weighs In

¹³ A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother^(b) of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. 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).

Perhaps the man who escaped had been one of those who at one time had been in the shared camp of Abram and Lot – and so he had an idea that Abram would be just the guy who would come to the aid of his nephew. Perhaps this man's family had also been taken. He knew where to find Abram, and the man who had turned his back on Sodom reacted just as he hoped. It has been pointed out that the Hebrew term translated 'called out' means 'to unsheath'. What a colorful phrase to describe Abram gathering his men—"It portrays Abrams servants as a blade that had been forged, sharpened, and polished into a gleaming, razor-sharp instrument of death."² It also indicates for us that Abram was not blind to how the world worked. He knew that one had to be prepared to defend oneself and one's people.

Jesus would send his disciples out with the warning: *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."* (Matthew 10:16) While we are not to think or act as the world around us does, we should not be unaware, nor unprepared for how the world works. Abram was prepared for a lot of problems—and he was unhesitant in springing into action to save his captured nephew.

Abram does not sit back, wag his finger and shake his head muttering, "Serves him right." There was no, "Well, he made his bed..." Though he knew how Lot had chosen to take advantage of the offer to go in the opposite direction from his nephew, and how Lot had demonstrated an uncaring attitude to the welfare of his benefactor and uncle, Abram, without thought of his own safety, jumped in the fray. There is likely no Sunday School in the world that has not taught the story of Gideon and his army of three hundred men crushing the Midianite army. Yet, Abram took his small band of warriors on a march of over one hundred and twenty-five miles, to fall upon a sleeping or drunk army that had conquered the major cities of the region, and routed them. Clearly, Abrams victory over a far superior force was aided in some way by a power far beyond the abilities of the old Bedouin. This is not the same Abram who in fear had asked his wife to identify herself as his sister. This was a man of faith.

Not only did he defeat the tribute seeking kings, he drove them north of Damascus. In essence, he kicked them out of the land that God had promised him earlier. Abram did here what Israel was supposed to have done when God would bring them into the Promised land many years in the future. If only the children of Abraham had been as faith-filled as the father of their nation. If only we could be as faith-filled in chasing away all those things of the world that would seize our children, our spouses, our

churches and our communities. While we don't wage war as the world does, we have weapons of far greater power to unsheathe. Paul reminds us:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. "

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Don't get me wrong here. I eagerly sing a lot of the modern songs of worship we have been given and am blessed by many of them. However, the heritage of our Army is one of war, celebrated in our songs:

We're an Army saved,
By Blood and Fire made strong;
And with righteousness
We mean to conquer wrong;
This shall be our universal battle song:
There's salvation for the world (940, 2017 Songbook)

COME, join our Army, to battle we go,
Jesus will help us to conquer the foe;
Fighting for right and opposing the wrong,
The Salvation Army is marching along. (949, 2017 Songbook)

WE'RE a band that shall conquer the foe,
If we fight in the strength of the king;
With the sword of the Spirit, we know,
We sinners to Jesus shall bring. (990, 2017 Songbook)

We are encouraged in song to storm the forts of darkness! Do you know anybody worth fighting for? Anyone worth advocating for? Meyers notes: "Faith makes us independent; but not indifferent."³ He is still the God who trains our hands for war, our fingers for battle. (Psalm 144:1) There are people, families, and lives who have been overpowered by the forces of this world and are crying out for rescue—for salvation. Perhaps its time we unsheathe our weapons and enter into the fray and take back that which the world has stolen, as did Abram and his band of warriors who rescued the perishing – becoming, in a way, a salvation army! Though exhausted, I'm sure that was

one happy throng that made the trek back to the Jordan valley, watched over by Abram, a man of a great and a growing faith.

Coming out to meet them was the king of Sodom, who is not even named here (though his name, possibly a pejorative one, is given in verse 2—Bera). One would think he would come in humility and thankfulness, graciously bringing gifts and succor to the throng of his fellow Sodomites. However, that is not the case, and just before he can speak, another king intercepts Abram and in the process demonstrates a totally different attitude and reaction.

A Warrior is Welcomed

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying,

*"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."*

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

²¹ The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."

²² 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."

The appearance of Melchizedek is both as sudden and mysterious as his disappearance. He will be mentioned only here, in Psalm 110 and in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews. In the Psalm and NT he is clearly pictured as a 'type' or foreshadow of the Messiah. He is the first priest mentioned in all the Bible, and the office he holds is that of priest *and* king—surprising as in later Israel there would be a distinct separation of those roles. When king Uzziah foolishly attempted to overstep the division, entering the temple to perform the function of a priest, he was confronted by the priests and warned his act would not be honored by the Lord. It is recorded that, *"Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD'S temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead."* (2 Chron 26:19) In the understated humor of the Bible we are told, *"...they hurried him out. Indeed, **he himself was eager to leave...**"* (v20)

Whereas Melchizedek brought 'bread and wine' (the ingredients not going unnoticed by many earlier commentators as the offer of a eucharist meal). The king of Sodom brought nothing. Likely the bread and wine are meant to be seen as an offer of refreshment and nourishment from the ordeal the returning army and refugees had endured. The king of Salem came with a gift—something by which to bless Abram; the king of Sodom came with a demand, expressed in only six words in the original language: give me people; take property yourself. His priority is evident: give me people – his first thought is what he wants to take.

However, the convention and culture of the day was that everything Abram had rescued was by right now his. The king of Sodom had no claim to anything; could issue no demands; was now a king without a city. His reaction here is churlish and unwelcoming. Offering no appreciation or thanksgiving for the return of the captives, he instead exhibits disdain for Abram. He was apparently unaware that the God who aided Abram had promised: *"I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."*

What I really want to focus on here though is the reaction of Abram to the two men. First, Melchizedek provides Abram with a new name for God—El-Elyon, "Most High God", Creator of Heaven and earth. The king of Salem recognizes the blessing of God rests upon Abram, and that his victory was to be attributed to the god of Abram. And as the promise stated, the one who blessed Abram was now blessed, as Abram presented him, and not the king of Sodom, with a tithe. Abram blessed the king of Salem!

Then Abram turned to the king of Sodom and declared, using the very title he had just heard from the King of Salem, and learned from his northern campaign, *"I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of Heaven and earth, that I will not accept from you even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will be able to say, "I made Abram rich."* Here is one of those cultural elements that speaks to the age of this text, for both Akkadian and Aramaic customs detail a legal practice where a business partnership or even a marriage is breaking apart, and as part of the legal documents is the phrase: 'be it a blade of straw or a splinter of wood' In essence, the practice declares that the one party has nothing that is wanted nor desired by the other; it signifies that all attachments between the two are completely and utterly dissolved.

Pretty well Abram tells the ungrateful Sodomite, you have nothing that I want; nothing that will make me happy; nothing that will in any way enrich me. Abram, in exercising his faith has learned a new name for God, and now his faith has grown even more and

he can let go of the booty, the spoils of war, that the kings of the world hunger and thirst and war over. A.W. Tozer, in *The Pursuit of God*, writes:

The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One. Many ordinary treasures may be denied him, or if he is allowed to have them, the enjoyment of them will be so tempered that they will never be necessary to his happiness. Or if he must see them go, one after one, he will scarcely feel a sense of loss, for having the Source of all things he has in One all satisfaction, all pleasure, all delight. Whatever he may lose he has actually lost nothing, for he now has it all in One, and he has it purely, legitimately and forever.⁴

Oh, that we would so readily realize what Abram had both learned and demonstrated. If we could only adopt the words of Tozer as our own. Abram would find his life and everything to do with his life, in God. Though he would live in the world, he would not be of the world—be like the world. Others might claw and scratch and wage war and seek to oppress and trample under those who stood in their way, but not Abram. There he dwelled on the heights of Hebron, living the pilgrim life of a tent dweller. Mann notes: "If Abram lost his integrity at the end of chapter 12, he has regained it by the end of chapter 14."⁵

A Tale of Two Cities

The choice that Abram makes is a choice that is more relevant than we may realize. Just as chapter thirteen featured a choice of reliance upon God or upon the world, here in this chapter we see another two choices being illustrated. On the one hand we have a choice between two ways of life. Taking or receiving, conquest or faith. Am I going to derive my happiness, my future, my comfort from the world—or am I going to leave it in the hands of God, trusting that He will provide. This chapter opens by listing all the kings that are part of Kederlaomer's confederation, but he is not the first king mentioned. That honor goes to one of the lesser kings, Amraphel, who happens to be the king in the region of Shinar, home to the city of Babylon. The conflict that is displayed for us here doesn't end with the rout of Kederlaomer, for Babylon becomes a symbol in the Bible for the greed, avarice, decadence and godlessness of the world. The conflict here is one that has continued from the moment man stepped out of the ark, and will continue until it is announced in the last book of the Bible:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her

excessive luxuries." Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered a her crimes."

Revelation 18:1-5

Come out of her my people. Be separate from her. Be holy. Here is the real tale of two cities: Jerusalem and Babylon. One a city of peace, the other a city of everything sinful and wrong with our world. Abram chooses to be a citizen of Jerusalem, to walk in faith. To vow that Babylon has not a blade of straw or splinter of wood that he wants, is to declare he has found his all in all, in the Lord, God Most High, Creator of Heaven and earth. We are indeed involved in a war of worlds, one which looks up and receives a gift; the other that looks around and grabs, and takes, and oppresses, and takes advantage over those who would deny its lusts and desires. F.B. Meyer offers:

"Why should we soil our fingers with ill-gotten gains, even though they seem needful for our existence, when our Father is owner of all that flies in the air, treads on the land, swims in the water, or lies embedded in the rocks?"⁶

Juan Fernando Ortega wrote a simple gospel song that makes an incredibly bold and faith-based statement:

Give me Jesus,
Give me Jesus
You can have all this world
Just give me Jesus⁷

I pray that you too can have the faith of Abram and recognize the salvation offered as a gift from the hand of a loving God, through the death and resurrection of His only Son, Jesus. That you can or have come to the place of having a faith that can turn its back on the wares and ways of this fallen world, and lift your hands in praise to Heaven, and vow to walk with God. That your happiness and life will not be dependant upon what you can get; or what you can take; or what the world tells you is your right; but will be based on the gift of God, offered to those with the faith to receive it.

Study Notes

- Kings, nations, peoples, come and go. If they build something that endures longer than themselves they might be remembered, otherwise the vast majority will simply fade into time and memory
 - *"As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more."* (Psalm 103:14)
- Typical picture of the world were the powerful subject the powerless; the strong the weak; the advantaged the disadvantaged. This is just the way the world has, is and always will, work.
- Kederlaomer running what amounts to a protection racket – other kings would pay him money not to attack them or unseat them
- After twelve years(!) the kings of the Transjordan rebel, likely thinking that they are now able to defend themselves against external incursions
- Kederlaomer joined by several confederates, not because he was such a nice guy, but because there was something in it for them – booty and the spoils of war (plus it is somewhat to ones advantage to be on the side of the school bully)

New Interpreters Dictionary

- Amraphel; from the region of Shinar, so likely Babylon (Gen 10:10) was his home. Otherwise exact location unknown. (vol 1., 122)
- Arioch; recent opinion favors a location between Carchemish and Haran; though has been placed as distant as Cappodocia, located along the south coast of the Black Sea. Arioch could be of Hurrian origin. (vol 1., 219)
- Bera and Birsha are unknowns (see Wenham, below)
- Kederlaomer; the king of Elam, located in the southern part of modern Iran. Little known about Elam as much was destroyed by the Assyrians. Name could mean 'servant of Lagamar' – the name of a pagan diety. (vol 1., 555)
- Tidal; some association with the Hittite kings, otherwise unknown. (vol 4., 641)
- Shinab; name may mean 'Sin' (a pagan diety) is may father', an Akkadian name.

Josephus⁸

- Writes that the Assyrians had dominion over Asia and subjugated the flourishing city of Sodom and vicinity after an earlier invasion. It was during the invasion to punish the region for rebellion that Lot was taken captive. (1.9.1)
- Abram went out of concern for the pight of his nephew and his neighbors (1.10.1)
- Fell upon the invaders at night, when both unsuspecting and drunk from the spoils of war

- Melchizedek means 'righteous' king (1.10.2). Resupplied and refreshed Abram as a gracious host

Alexander⁹

- Central lesson is on the two ways by which Abram could wrest control Canaan
 - The human way: by conquest. Defeat his enemies and take it through might
 - Receive it as a gift, the tithe therefore being a symbolic demonstration of the truthfulness of Melchizedek's words—Abram is blessed by God Most High

Meyer¹⁰

- Years before Abram and Lot had arrived in the region it had been made into vassal states of the more powerful eastern and northern kingdoms
- Paying tribute up until the time of Lot [one wonders if he was forced into paying tribute as he moved near the cities of the plain]
- Encouraged by the pitchy nature of the soil, in which horseman and chariots would move with difficulty, the townsfolk risked an engagement in the open." (55)
- "Faith makes us independent; but not indifferent." (52)
- Notable that Abram readily adopted the name for God introduced by Melchizedek
- "Why should we soil our fingers with ill-gotten gains, even though they seem needful for our existence, when our Father is owner of all that flies in the air, treads on the land, swims in the water, or lies embedded in the rocks?" (55)

Moore¹¹

- See John 8:56, was Abram aware that there was something more to this 'priest-king', that he was the foreshadow of God blessing the world ("Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.")
- The gift of the bread and the wine
- Melchizedek = king of righteousness; Salem means 'peace'
- At Sinai the two roles of king and priest had been clearly demarcated
- Here is a Gentile man, Melchizedek, who brings together the two offices
- What might the early Israelites thought as they heard this story and were introduced to this king? A reminder that there is a deeper mystery; that they (and we) do not know the whole story
- They too would need to decide how to possess the land, learning that it was not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit

- Notes that Amraphel is listed first, though not the leader of the confederacy of invading kings
- A tale of two cities – Jerusalem and Babylon. One a place of peace, the other of conquest.

Swindoll¹²

- Enough time has passed for Abram to amass a force of over three hundred trained fighting men
- “born in his household” does not necessarily mean they grew up in Abrams tribe, but that they were voluntary servants, the expression meaning “not purchased” (42)
- Abram had grown strong through influence; others would seek to align themselves with him (Gen 21:22-23)
- Were other men grew strong through power and manipulation, Abram grew strong through the blessing of God
- Vv5-11 demonstrate the power and might of the invading force; but also serves as a travelogue of the land promised to Abram
- Abram doesn’t sit back and ignore what has taken place, feeling a little smug over what had befallen his ungrateful nephew. There is no “You made your bed...” or “I told you so.”
- “The expression translated mustered [“called out”] is much more picturesque in Hebrew; it has the connotation of unsheathing his trained men. It portrays Abrams servants as a blade that had been forged, sharpened, and polished into a gleaming, razor-sharp instrument of death.” (45)
- “trained” = dedicated, set apart, equipped
- Marched his men more than 100 miles to the north to engage the foe
- Engaged them along a major trade route between Tyre and Damascus
- That there is no record of this in external sources should not be surprising. What kings would want it known that they had been thoroughly spanked by a much smaller force of men, and forced to flee
- King of Sodom not in anyplace to bargain or barter
- Picture a long caravan of exhausted people and their possessions coming home from being forcefully removed only weeks before
- Cites the example of character shown by his mentor, Ray Stedman (48-49)
- Abram did not foist his values upon his allies; nor accept anything from Sodom
- Four characteristic of greatness
 - Genuine unselfishness: don’t hold on to things so tightly as to squeeze the life out of them
 - Self-sacrifice: set aside their own safety, comfort, needs, for the better of others

- Absence of greed: motivation is not in gain, it is in God
- Gentleness: does not 'lord it over' either his allies, his nephew, nor Sodom. He doesn't "pull rank." (50)

Wenham¹³

- Story does not seem to come from any of JEPD, but from some other source (as Alexander)
- Not to be missed is that Lot was living in Sodom
- Possible that Ellasar is in the region of Cappadocia (308). There is some association with the word for 'hazelnuts', for which the region of Pontus was famous.
- Kederlaomer (Chedarlaomer) is of Akkadian origin. 'Kudur' being *son*, and 'La-Gamal' meaning *the unsparing*.
- Older commentators suggest Bera and Birsha are pejorative names (309)
- Both Sodom and Gomorrah are compound names with words for 'evil' and 'wicked' as elements
- V4 implies that the southern kings had been previously defeated
- V13 and its 'Abram the hebrew' may lend support to a non-Israelite origin for this story as Israel did not refer to itself as such (313)
- Suggests that 'born in his household' identifies "slaves who have grown up in Abram's clans rather than those more recently acquired, and are therefore the more reliable ones." (314, *contra* Swindoll)
- Group of this size employed by Gideon (Judges 7:7)
- Melchizedek brings forth bread and wine, the king of Sodom nothing (but disdain)
- Narration implies an almost simultaneous meeting of Abram and the two kings (316)
- The identity of Melchizedek can be understood in three ways, the first two presupposing that 'Melek' or 'Sedek' are the names of a god (316), or in the traditional way, ie. king of righteousness
- Joshua 10:1 has an ADonizedek as king of Jerusalem, and David's high priest was Zadok (see also Psalm 110)
- Already in non-biblical second millennium texts, Jerusalem is called 'Rushalimum/Urusalim." (316)
- First priest names in Scripture
- El Elyon is one of the titles of the God worshiped by the Patriarchs (316)
- "Tithing was an old and widespread custom in the ancient orient...given to both sanctuaries and kings." (317)
- Whereas Melchizedek blesses Abram, the kin of Sodom "makes a short, almost rude demand in just six words: Give me people; take property yourself." (318)

Notable that the order is first 'give', therefore emphasizing his first priority is to take.

- Abrams disavowing even the slightest of material from the king corresponds with an early Akkadian phrase that meant 'be it a blade of straw or a splinter of wood', which was used in a legal sense to renounce property rights (318)
- Internal evidence in the text, ie. names, places, customs, routes of travel—all indicate coherence with non-biblical texts. Quite possible that this chapter is based on one of the oldest literary sources in Genesis (319)
- Very little is known about the time period to make definite claims for or against historicity. Abram in other places does seem to be more than just a lone Bedouin. His life being spared by Pharaoh is perhaps surprising unless he was a sizable force; the land being unable to support himself and his nephew; the treaty with Abimelech – all argue for a man of some means
- "the evidence is open to various interpretations in which presuppositions play a large part." (319)
- Elam part of modern Iran
- The disdain of the Sodomite king in contrast to the generosity of the Salemite king foreshadow events to come and serve to partially fulfill the earlier promise regarding blessing and curse as it relates to how one treats Abram
- Melchizedek is representative of the many in the Bible (Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, centurions and others outside of Israel) who recognise the hand of God and who, as a result, receive a blessing

Hamilton¹⁴

- That the invading kings had ransacked so many different peoples perhaps indicates a widespread rebellion
- Being called 'the Hebrew' indicates Abram was an outsider, or of a different ethnicity from his neighbors (405)
- "He is a descendant of Eber of the line of Shem." (405)
- Sees Abrams troops as those who have "membership in a group by a means other than birth." (406)
- Abrams vow is found in an Akkadian expression found in liquidating a partnership, and in an Aramaic formula describing the division of marriage property upon dissolution of the marriage (414)

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 48-49.

² Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 45.

³ F.B. Meyer, *Abraham: The Obedience of Faith* (Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1960), 52.

⁴ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (AmazonClassics Edition) (p. 13). Amazon Classics. Kindle Edition.

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- ⁵ Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of Torah* (Atlanta: John Know Press, 1988), 34.
- ⁶ F.B. Meyer, *Abraham: The Obedience of Faith* (Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1960), 55.
- ⁷ "Give Me Jesus," Fernando Ortega, © Words: Public Domain (Music: 1996 Metro One (Admin. by Metro One, Inc.)
- ⁸ Whiston, William, trans. Josephus, foreword by William Sanford LaSor. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960.
- ⁹ Alexander, T.D. From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.
- ¹⁰ Meyer, F.B. Abraham: The Obedience of Faith. Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1960.
- ¹¹ Moore, Phil. Straight to the Heart of Genesis. Oxford: Monarch Books, 2010
- ¹² Swindoll, Charles R. Abraham. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014.
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- ¹⁴ Hamilton, Victor P. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990.