

THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES CALLED GENESIS.

GENESIS, CHAPTER 14.

VERSES TAKEN FROM "THE TANAKH. THE JEWISH BIBLE." TRADITIONAL HEBREW TEXT.

14:1...Now, when King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Golim,

14:2...made war on King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiin, and the King of Bela, which is Zoar,

14:3...all the latter joined forces at the Valley of Siddim, now the Dead Sea.

14:4...Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

14:5...In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim at Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim at Ham, the Emim at Shaveh-kiriathaim,

14:6...and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness.

14:7...On their way back they came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and subdued all the territory of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazazon-tamar.

14:8...The King of Sodom, the King of Gomorrah, the King of Admah, the King of Zeboiim, and the King of Beia, which is Zoar, went forth and engaged them in battle in the Valley of Siddim:

14:9...King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Todai of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar—four kings against those five.

14:10...Now the Valley of Siddim was dotted with bitumen pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, in their flight, threw themselves into them, while the rest escaped to the hill country.

14:11...(The Invaders) seized all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions, and went their way.

14:12...The also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, and his possessions, and departed; for he had settled in Sodom.

“Lot has greedily picked the best of the country but, now his choice turns out to have been disastrous.”

THE TERM “HEBREW.”

14:13...A fugitive brought the news to Abram the Hebrew, who was dwelling at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, kinsman of Eshkol and Aner, these being Abram's allies.

The term “Hebrew” (*ivri*) is used here for the first time in the Torah. No one knows exactly what it means. But there is certainly no lack of attempts to explain it.

Some scholars link it to “Habiru,” the name of a nomadic people living in biblical times.

Others link *ivri* to the Hebrew verb *avar*, “pass,” or, more loosely, “wander,” since Abram (from the moment God chose him) and his descendants, the Jews, have been wanderers through so much of their history. The writer, Chaim Potok titled his history of the Jews, “Wanderings.”

Jon Levinson, professor of Jewish studies at the Harvard Divinity School, notes that the most that can be said with confidence is that it “seems to refer to an ethnic group” consisting of those descended from Abraham. (see Genesis 39:14, Exodus 1:19, and Jonah 1:9)

Rabbi Yehuda Sarna, Chief Rabbi of the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue of The Abrahamic Family House and Executive Director of the Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life at New York University cites three possibilities offered in the Midrash. (The Midrash contains Biblical interpretations through storytelling, parables, as well as critical explanation and interpretation of a text. Especially of scripture by examining its original language, historical content, and literary features to discover the author's intended meaning. These interpretations date back

to ancient Rabbi's from the 2nd Century and beyond.) "One connects it with Eber, grandson of Noah, who is mentioned in 10:24 and 11:14. Another derives from Hebrew *ever*, "beyond," that is, "the one from beyond. [the river Euphrates] The third is homiletical (The process of building and delivering a sermon) and alludes to Abram's religious nonconformism: "All the world was on one side (*ever*) and he was on the other side."

A MAN WHO LOVES PEACE GOES TO WAR

14:14...When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

Though he pursued peace, Abram knew how and when to wage war. As the Bible later put it: "God will grant his people strength, God will bless His people with peace." (Psalms 29:11)

The moral of that verse is understood to be: To live in peace, a nation first has to be strong. That explains the 318 "retainers" (long time servants and their offspring) in Abram's entourage.

One of history's enduring lessons is that weakness provokes aggression. One of the lessons Jews learned from the Holocaust is to never again be so weak that their very weakness invites aggression. (Note...1 of every 3 Jews in the world died in the Holocaust)

Good people must be stronger than bad people, and good nations must be stronger than bad nations—or they will be attacked by the bad. To put it in terms of peace, peace is maintained only as long as the decent are stronger than the indecent.

Abram pursued peace but, he was prepared for war and went to war. His behavior and the verse in Psalms are examples of Biblical wisdom that runs contrary to much modern thought. In today's non-Bible-based age, many people believe in pacifism and many free nations do not believe in keeping a strong military. Biblically based people do not share these naïve views about how to confront evil and preserve peace. Indeed, the Bible is an antidote to naivete.'

14:15...At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them: and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

14:16...He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his kinsman Lot and his possessions, and the women and the rest of the people.

Though Abram seems to have mixed feelings towards his nephew Lot, he is, nonetheless, a devoted uncle, willing to travel a considerable distance to fight Lot's enemies in order to liberate him and his people from captivity.

14:17...When he returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings with him, the King of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh, which is the Valley of the King.

14:8...And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High.

King Melchizedek of Salem was a non-Hebrew but, he was a monotheist, "one of the few select non-Israelite individuals who, in the scriptural view, preserved the original monotheism of the human race in the face of otherwise universal degeneration into paganism." (Rabbi Sarna) Abram, therefore, was not the only monotheist of his day but, he was the one entrusted by God with the mission of bringing the world to ethical monotheism.

14:19...He blessed him, saying, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

14:20...And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your foes into your hand." And [Abram] gave him a tenth of everything.

14:21...Then the King of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the possessions for yourself."

14:22...But Abram said to the King of Sodom, "I swear to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

14:23...I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, "It is I who made Abram rich."

Abram refused everything he was offered, demonstrating once again, he was not preoccupied with wealth. He also does not want to be beholden to Sodom and have its king take credit for making him wealthy.

Abram's willingness to join forces with the King of Sodom, a city which the Bible already described as evil, (Genesis 13:13) is another example of Biblical moral wisdom. In waging war against evil, we cannot always choose whom we would most like as our allies. Sometimes we are morally bound to fight alongside bad people in order to defeat worse people. There are those who reject this assertion, arguing that "the lesser of two evils is still evil." But no one denies that the lesser evil is evil.

The Biblical and moral argument is that between a greater and a lesser evil, good is achieved by first defeating the greater evil for the obvious reason that less evil is always better than more evil. After Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, Winston Churchill, one of the staunchest anti-Communists, joined forces with the Communist Soviet Union and its murderous dictator, Josef Stalin, in order to defeat Hitler and Nazism. As Churchill put it to the British Parliament: "If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a favorable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons."

14:24...For me, nothing but what my servants have used up; as for the share of the men who went with me—Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre—let them take their share."