

Introduction

A. There will always be forces at work to disrupt God's plans (READ 14:1-12)

1. As we learned back in chapters 12-13, God's plan was to make Abram into a great nation and give the land of Canaan to his descendants
2. What we learn in this passage, however, is that was a group of four powerful Mesopotamian kings from the east who wanted to control the land:
 - a. Mesopotamia was to the east of Canaan and it these four kings were collecting tribute from at least five kings in Canaan (essentially forced financial payments to keep from being invaded)
 - b. For 12 years the Canaanite kings paid the tribute, but in the 13th year they finally had enough and stopped paying
 - c. As a result, in the 14th year, King Chedorlaomer and the other three kings invaded Canaan:
 - 1) They first traveled down the eastern edge of Canaan (east of the Sea of Galilee, Jordan River, and Dead Sea), down to the south and then back up to just south of the Dead Sea
 - 2) Along the way, they attacked the major cities of the Rephaim, Zuzim, Emim, Horites, Amalekites and Amorites
 - 3) From there they traveled to the Siddim Valley just south of the Dead Sea and defeated the five Canaanite kings mentioned in v. 2 (READ)
 - 4) Before returning home to Mesopotamia, went back to the east side of the Dead Sea and ransacked Sodom and Gomorrah, took all the food and possessions, women and children, and Lot, his family, and all his possessions
3. What we see here are two competing and incompatible plans:
 - a. One the one hand, we have God's plan for Abram and his descendants to inherit the land and become a great nation
 - b. On the other hand, we have four human kings who invade, pillage, and wish to continue subjugating the land for themselves in opposition to God's plan
4. Takeaway: If we look at this from a theological perspective, we see that there will always be forces working against God's plans and we see this today:
 - a. Just as God promised to build Abram into a great nation and bless the world through him, in Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised His disciples that He would build His Church from every nation, tongue and tribe and through it preach the Gospel of salvation to redeem mankind
 - b. And, just as dark earthly forces tried to invade, pillage, and subjugate the land of Canaan and circumvent God's plan for Abram, dark spiritual forces have been at work for over 2000 years trying to prevent Jesus' plan for His Church and the Gospel
 - c. But, there's good news...

B. God grants His people victory over the forces who seek to circumvent His plans (READ 14:13-16)

1. Abram was living in Canaan near the Oaks of Mamre the Amorite; this is in Central Canaan due west of the Dead Sea about 10 miles south of Bethlehem:

- a. Notice that Abram is referred to as **“the Hebrew”**
 - b. This is the first time the word is used in the OT and not much is known about its origins:
 - 1) Some believe it’s a derivative of Eber, the great grandson of Shem and father of Peleg
 - 2) Others believe it comes from the root word *ivrie* which means to cross over and it was used to describe Abram and ultimately his descendants because they had crossed over the Euphrates River into the land of Canaan (as in “Abram, the one who crossed over”)
2. When he learns of Lot’s capture from a fugitive who escaped from the Mesopotamian kings, he heads out on a rescue mission:
- a. He puts together a force of 318 of his own men:
 - 1) They are referred to as **“trained men”** which could mean trained militarily or simply tried and trustworthy men
 - 2) They were also **“born in his house”** which is a term that generally referred to those who were born to servants in one’s household (Abram hadn’t yet had any of his own children)
 - 3) This may or may not have been all the men in Abram’s household, but it gives an idea of how big his household likely was at this time; considering wives, women, and children it likely would have been well over 1000, maybe more
 - b. Three other men join forces with Abram, all brothers: Mamre, Eschol, and Aner:
 - 1) V. 13 says these men were allies, or more specifically, in covenants with Abram
 - 2) Much like Abram, they were likely lords or patriarchs over very large families (they are not referred to as kings)
 - 3) We know they joined Abram in his pursuit to rescue Lot because 14:24 said they did, but no mention is made of them supplying soldiers or any additional men to fight alongside Abram’s men
 - c. Abram and his small army pursue the four Mesopotamian kings to Dan (north about 100 miles) where they attack them at night, and then chase them all the way back east, north of Damascus (at least another 120 miles or so; 14:16):
 - 1) This is a remarkable feat because it was a true underdog victory
 - 2) The four Mesopotamian armies were a powerful force:
 - a) Remember, they oppressed the kings of Canaan for 13 years, forcing them to pay tribute year after year
 - b) On their way into the land, these kings defeated six sizeable people groups in Canaan, three of whom are described elsewhere in the Bible as giants
 - c) They also defeated five Canaanite kings and their armies, and then ransacked the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and made off with all their possessions, women and children
 - 3) Yet, Abram with his three allies and his 318 men were able to overpower these five Mesopotamian kings, get all the people and possessions back, including Lot, and chase them all the way back to their homes in Mesopotamia
 - 4) We don’t have to wonder how it happened, because later in 14:20 we learn that it was the Lord who delivered the armies into Abram’s hands—this is a scenario that is repeated often in the Scriptures:
 - a) Judges 7: Gideon and his 300 soldiers surrounded the Midianites camp with trumpets and lamps in empty water jars, then broke them and started shouting to confuse their enemy, who then started killing one another and running away

- b) Exodus 17: after the Amalekites attacked Israel at Rephidim, Joshua defeated the more populous and powerful Amalekites while Moses held his arms up in the air
 - c) Joshua 6: when Israel defeated the city of Jericho after marking around it for seven days
 - d) Joshua 10: when the 5 southern Canaanite kings attacked the Gibeonites whom Israel made a vow to protect, God reigned down large hailstones from heaven to help Joshua and Israel defeat the Canaanite kings
 - e) Judges 15-16: when Sampson killed 1000 Philistines in a single battle with only the jawbone of a donkey, or at the end of his life when he was blinded, chained to pillars and yet brought down the entire building and killed more Philistines in that instant than all the other Philistines he had killed in his life
 - f) 1 Samuel 17: How about David who killed the giant Goliath with a sling and a single stone?
3. Takeaway: We see over and over in the Bible that God grants His people victory over the wicked forces that try to circumvent His plans (notice I said HIS plans, not necessarily OUR plans):
- a. God had plans for Abram and the land of Canaan and when the kings of Mesopotamia tried to circumvent those plans, God gave Abram victory over them...even though they were larger and appeared more powerful than Abram
 - b. This is true of every believer in Christ (READ Romans 8:26-38)
 - c. This is also true of the Church:
 - 1) Jesus declared He would build His Church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it (READ Matthew 16:18-19)
 - 2) He made us part of this mission and promised to be with us in the task until it's complete (READ Matthew 28:16-20)
 - 3) We saw throughout our study of Acts that no matter what evil forces came against the Church, it continued to grow by leaps and bounds
 - 4) And, it's continued to grow ever since with millions of people coming to faith in Christ every year all over the world, even in the most ungodly and hostile places on the planet

<p>C. In victory, we should seek God's blessings not worldly spoils (READ 14:17-24)</p>

- 1. After his victory over the Mesopotamian kings, two kings from within the land of Canaan come out to meet Abram and I want to highlight three specific contrasts:
 - a. The first contrast is the difference between the character of the two kings:
 - 1) On the one hand, we have King Bera of Sodom (one of the kings who fled from the five Mesopotamian kings):
 - a) The first clue we get into this king's character is his name which many commentators believe is related to the Hebrew word, ra-ah, which means evil; a literal translation of his name would be "**in evil**"; coincidentally, the king of Gomorrah's name, Birsha, is related to the Hebrew word for wickedness and mean "**in wickedness**"
 - b) King Bera ruled over Sodom and twice in chapter 13 we were given a glimpse into the kind of city that was (READ 13:10 and 13:13)
 - c) In Genesis 18-19 we have the story of Sodom's and Gomorrah's destruction by God because their sin was "**exceedingly grave**" and not even 10 righteous people combined could be found between the two cities
 - d) The sin of these two cities was so great that throughout the rest of the Bible Sodom and Gomorrah were used as bywords for the embodiment of evil and wickedness

- 2) On the other hand, we have King Melchizedek of Salem (thought to be Jerusalem):
 - a) There is some debate as to the meaning behind Melchizedek's name but it's generally accepted as "**king of righteousness**" or "**my king is just**"
 - b) He is also referred to here as "**a priest of God Most High**" which means that he served and worshipped Yahweh
 - c) We know from Psalm 110 and Hebrews chapters 5-7 that he serves as a type or example of Christ, who is both King and High Priest
 - 3) These two kings could not have been more different in who they were: one represented righteousness and one wickedness
- b. The second contrast is the difference in what each king offered Abram:
- 1) King Melchizedek offered Abram a heavenly blessing (REREAD 14:19-20a):
 - a) The wine and bread were regular staples in the ANE and were likely King Melchizedek's way of expressing his gratitude to Abram and his men by meeting their physical needs (though it's hard to miss the foreshadowing of the bread and wine shared by Christ at the last supper)
 - b) More importantly, King Melchizedek pronounced the Lord's blessing on Abram, as well as blessing God for delivering Abram's enemies into his hands
 - c) This was essentially a confirmation and reminder of the Lord's kindness, favor, and promises towards Abram
 - 2) In contrast, King Sodom simply offered Abram an earthly blessing—the spoils of war (REREAD 14:21):
 - a) According to the rules of war, Abram had a right to everything he and his men captured from the four Mesopotamian kings
 - b) However, the King of Sodom tried to broker a deal: "**Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself**"
- c. This is where we now see the third contrast and it's in how Abram responded to each king:
- 1) Abram's response to King Melchizedek was to give him a 10th of the spoils (14:20b): "**He gave him a tenth of all**":
 - a) Hebrews 7:4 tells us that Abram gave a tenth a 10th of the spoils to Melchizedek because of Melchizedek's greatness as a priest of God (READ)
 - b) This means that Abram's gift was an act of recognition of the position Melchizedek held as God's priest, but also an act of worship in response to what God had done for him
 - 2) Abram's response to the king of Sodom was very different (REREAD 14:22-23):
 - a) Rather than accept the king's offer to keep all the goods for himself, Abram refused everything except what his men had eaten and what his allies King Aner, Kind Eshcol and King Mamre deserved
 - b) He had sworn to the Lord not to take anything from the king of Sodom for fear that he would claim that he had made Abram rich
2. Takeaway: Like Abram, our goal as individual Christians and the Church should always be to seek God's blessings over worldly spoils:

- a. Abram had no interest in being enriched by the spoils of a wicked king
- b. Rather, he was content with receiving God's blessing and waiting on God's promises to be fulfilled (most of which wouldn't be fulfilled until long after Abram's death)
- c. So, my question to us this morning is are we more interested in receiving God's blessings and promises or worldly spoils?
 - 1) Research suggests that many (most?) American Christians are more interested in living the American dream, gathering material possessions, enjoying what the world has to offer, than perusing Christ through faithfulness, obedience, and waiting on the eternal blessings and promises He made to us
 - 2) Many American pastors and churches have also fallen into the trap of thinking that higher attendance, bigger buildings, multi-campus ministries, large social media followings, etc. are signs that they are doing the Lord's work, but are they?
 - 3) Again, research suggests they are not and that these things are really nothing more than worldly spoils (Willow Creek)