

Coastal Study Notes: Genesis 14:1-24 (August 17, 2025)

Title: Abram's War & the Mysterious King

1. The Lineup: War of the Kings

In those days **King Amraphel of Shinar**,

King Arioch of Ellasar,

King Chedorlaomer (Kedor-la-omer) of Elam,

and **King Tidal of Goiim** (= nations)

2 **waged war** against **King Bera** (= in evil) **of Sodom**,

King Birsha (= in wickedness) **of Gomorrah**,

King Shinab (= father hater) **of Admah**,

and **King Shemeber** (name of destruction) **of Zeboiim**,

as well as the **king of Bela** (= devour) {that is, Zoar}.

3 All of these came as **allies** to the **Siddim Valley** (that is, the Dead Sea).

a. The Kings of the East

- **Amraphel of Shinar.** Shinar is a plain in Babylonia, which is where the Tower of Babel was to be located. Shinar represents modern Iraq.
- **Arioch of Ellasar:** Not much is known besides this forming of a coalition of smaller City States.
- **Kedorlaomer of Elam.** Elam is known as the Persian City State. So, in this frame you have the Babylonians and the Persians, two groups that dislike Israel historically. Shinar represents modern day, Iraq. Kedorlaomer was the ringleader of these city states.
- **Tidal of Goiim.** We know his name means “nations.” This could imply that Tidal ruled over a confederation of tribes or a region composed of diverse ethnic groups, rather than a single unified kingdom.

b. The Kings of the Valley

- **Bera of Sodom.** The king's name means “in evil.” We know what happens to them later in chapter 19, they will meet their end for their wickedness.
- **Birsha of Gomorrah:** Birsha means “in wickedness,” We know what happens to them.
- **Shinab of Admah:** Shinab means, “father hater”
- **Shemeber of Zeboliim** Shemeber means “name of destruction,” forecasting what will happen in Genesis 19. These first four cities will get destroyed in Genesis 19. We tend to forget, there was more than Sodom and Gomorrah that gets destroyed because of evil and wickedness.
- **King of Bela:** It's worth noting his name is not mentioned. Like the previous four cities, this one was also set in line to be destroyed. Why was it spared? Bela, also known as Zoar was NOT destroyed because Lot begged to be sent there when he and his family fled from Sodom. He did not think he could make it to the mountains in time. Yet, it was a wicked city.

- c. **The Arena: The Siddim Valley, today** known as the Dead Sea, or the Salt Sea. However, at this stage in history, the Dead Sea was not filled with salt. Instead, it was an area that was fertile and well-watered Jordan Valley, like Eden, the area that Lot coveted.

2. The Defending Champion: The East Kings

- 4 They were subject to **Chedorlaomer** for **twelve years**, but in **the thirteenth year** they rebelled.
- 5 In the **fourteenth year Chedorlaomer** and the kings who were with him came and **defeated** the **Rephaim** in Ashteroth-karnaim, the **Zuzim** in Ham, the **Emim** in Shaveh-kiriathaim,
- 6 and the **Horites** in the mountains of Seir, as far as El-paran by the wilderness.
- 7 Then they came back to invade En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and **they defeated** the whole territory of **the Amalekites**, as well as **the Amorites** who lived in Hazazon-tamar.

- a. **The kings of the east had conquered these Canaanite cities over a decade earlier**, subjecting them to taxation for twelve years until the Canaanites rebelled the thirteenth year.
- **It's worth noting that in the fourteenth year**, the kings of the east were busy fighting the Rephaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emin and the Horites, otherwise known as the giants in the land.
 - **Deuteronomy 2:10-11: 10** (The Emim formerly lived there, a people great and many, and **tall as the Anakim**. 11 Like the Anakim they are also counted as **Rephaim**, but the Moabites call them Emim.
- b. **From there they came back to invade the territory of Kadesh and defeated the Amalekites and the Amorites.** We know later during the exodus, Moses encountered an Amorite King named Og, who was also a giant. In fact, we know how big his bed was according to the Bible.
- **Deuteronomy 3:11:** *(For only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bedstead was an iron bedstead; it is in Rabbah of the sons of Ammon. Its length was nine cubits and its width four cubits by ordinary cubit.)*
 - **Why are we told this background info for a couple reasons.** First, these were not ordinary kings, they were warrior kings. They were some bad dudes, even able to destroy a lot of giants who came in their path. Secondly, by defeating these giants and tribes beforehand, these five city states would not have to worry about these giants joining forces with the Canaanite kings. Now it would essentially be five eastern kings against four Canaanite kings. It should be an easy victory.
- c. **Unfair Advantage: Four against Five. Why is this the case? One of the Canaanite Kings forfeited. He doesn't want to get involved in this fight.** We will learn about this king later in the story.

3. A Major Fail: Tar Traps

8 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 lined up for battle in the Siddim Valley
9 against **King Chedorlaomer of Elam**,
King Tidal of Goiim,
King Amraphel of Shinar,
and **King Arioch of Ellasar**—four kings against five.

10 Now **the Siddim Valley** contained many **asphalt pits** (tar pits), and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, but the rest fled to the mountains.

- a. **As expected, this was NOT much of a fight.** Give the Canaanite kings credit for showing up at the Siddim Valley to fight, but the battle is like a comedy skit. Instead of being man-handled by the war-tested five warrior kings of the east, they were defeated by their own tar pits.
- b. **If you recall, we first encountered tarpits on the plain of Shinar** where the people started to build the Tower of Babel, by using synthetic bricks as opposed to stone. They also used tar to hold them in place. This was a modern-day achievement back then. They do not have to find stone and carve them; instead, they can make symmetrically sized bricks and use tar to hold them together, a much more efficient way.
- c. **Well, the area by the Siddim Valley, known later as the dead sea, also had tarpits**, some you can still see today. These tarpits became their downfall as many of the men of the king of Sodom and Gomorrah fell into these pits. How embarrassing. Once the rest of the people saw this, they said, “I’m out,” and just fled to the mountains.

4. The Reward: The East Kings take the Plunder

11 **The four kings**
took all the **goods** (possessions) of Sodom and Gomorrah
and all their **food**
and went on.

12 They also took Abram’s nephew **Lot**
and his **possessions**,
for he was living in Sodom, and they went on.

- a. **Now that many of Sodom and Gomorrah’s soldiers were stuck in the tarpits, while the rest fled to the mountains**, this allowed the five kings of the east to have easy access to these two cities, taking whatever their hearts desired.
 - They took all the possessions, and all their food.
 - They also took Abram’s nephew Lot, and all his possessions.
- b. **This is just another example how Lot becomes a Snare** to God’s Promise. The intriguing part of this story is that had Lot not been abducted along with all of his possessions, Abram most likely would never have entered this battle.
- c. **Previously, we were told that when Lot chose the Jordan Valley**, he pitched his tent near Sodom; now we discover that he is a resident there. Sodom is his home. There is a lesson there for us. Compromise can not affect us, but also our family. Be careful where you pitch your tent!

5. A New Contract: Protect and Defend.

13 One of the **survivors** came and told **Abram the Hebrew**, **who lived near the oaks belonging to Mamre** the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and the brother of Aner. They were bound by a **treaty** (covenant) with **Abram**.

- a. **Notice how Abram is described.** Abram the Hebrew. He was just chilling near the Oaks of Mamre, where he had made a new altar to Yahweh. We are told he knew the owner of those oaks, Mamre himself, who was an Amorite. He also had two brothers, Eshcol and Aner.
- b. **One of the remnant survivors of the battle, most likely an Amorite, found Abram and his people and told him about the battle and status of his nephew.** Then we are told they were bound with a treaty with Abram. The treaty bound Abram and the Amorites to protect and defend each other. This alliance also indicates Abram's respected position within the cultural and social dynamics of the region. He was becoming known not only as Abram, but also a worshiper of Yahweh.

6. Abram's Squad: A Ragtag Army

14 When **Abram** heard that his relative had been taken captive, **he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen,** and **went in pursuit** as far as Dan.

15 **He divided his forces against them by night,** he and his servants, and **defeated** them, and **pursued them** as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

16 He brought back all the **goods**, and also brought back his relative **Lot** with his **possessions**, and also **the women, and the people**.

- a. **Abram's Army only consisted of 318 trained men, born in his household.** No doubt when Abram moved to Canaan, he anticipated the need to have trained fighting men in case there was a need to fight or defend his house. Still, the thought of three hundred eighteen trained men defeating a warrior, five-king coalition was preposterous. After all, the warrior kings defeated a handful of nations with giants. The five-king nation was a well-oiled fighting machine. Yet Abram was the aggressor, pursuing these kings as far as Dan.
- b. **Side Note: Abraham's Gate at Tell Dan:** In Israel, there is a Bronze age mud-brick gate that is believed to be connected to this story involving Abram's nephew Lot. It may have been the main entrance to the city, made of mud bricks on top of megalithic basalt standing stones, and estimated to have been built around 1750 BCE. It is dated as being 4,000 years old, which corresponds to the time of Abram.
- c. **Abram's War Strategy:** Divide his forces by night and attack. The night was the only chance really to confuse the five-king coalition. They probably had thought that had eradicated any possible threat when they defeated the giants, the Amalekites and the Amorites. They probably never expected to be attacked by another army. As a result, they pursued them as far as Hobah, which is in Damascus. The result? He brought back all the goods, his nephew Lot, his possessions, and also the women and the people. It was a complete victory, dominating and decisive.

7. The Missing King (Melchizedek)

17 After **Abram** returned
from **defeating Chedorlaomer** and the kings who were with him,
the king of Sodom went out to meet him
in the **Shaveh Valley** (that is, the King's Valley).

18 **Melchizedek, king of Salem,**
brought out bread and wine;
he was a priest to God Most High.

19 He blessed him and said:

Abram is blessed by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth,

20 **and blessed be God Most High**
who has handed over your enemies to you.

And Abram gave him a **tenth** of everything.

- a. **As I mentioned, the Canaanite Kings in battle were outnumbered five kings and nations to four.** However, there was one more king who could have evened up the people, had he fought in battle, but he did not. Why? That's where the story ends with a twist no one would have expected. Who was that fifth king missing in action? It was Melchizedek, the King of Salem. Before, the king of Sodom could meet with Abram, Melchizedek had a memorable encounter with the patriarch.
- b. **Melchizedek greets Abram with bread and wine,** maybe an entire feast. Then what he does next is a complete surprise. He blesses Abram, recognizing Abram was blessed by the God most high. Melchizedek also has an awareness that Abram did not win because of his own doing; he won because Yahweh handed Abram's enemies to Him. In other words, God gets the credit. In short, the victory over those five warrior kings was a miracle.
- c. **Abram's Response:** He gives a tenth of the goods he collected in the battle to Melchizedek. Why a tenth? I suspect two reasons. First, there were ten kings, and Abram wanted to fairly divide the booty. Secondly, this story would be so impactful that it would set a precedent later in the law of Moses for tithing ten percent for the temple priests. You see what we learn about Melchizedek was that he was a priest and a king. This is the first instance in the Hebrew Bible where a priest is identified. A thousand years later, there is another reference to this mysterious king.
 - **Psalm 110:4:**
The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,
"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."
- d. **What are we to make of Melchizedek?**
 - First, as mentioned he was a king and a priest, the first to have that dual distinction.
 - Second, Melchizedek means righteousness. He was a king of righteousness.
 - Third, Melchizedek was the king of Salem, a reference to the future city, JeruSalem.
 - Fourth, in the book of Hebrews, we are told he had no known lineage.
 - Fifth, he knew the God-most high. He gave Him all the credit for Abram's victory.

Many have wondered about the identity of Melchizedek. One rabbinic theory states he was Noah's son, Shem. At the time, Shem was still alive. Others think he was an angel, even a pre-carmate Christ. In reality, Melchizedek was a Canaanite king who just happened to be righteous and filled with peace, which is the most likely explanation of why he did not go to war.

8. Abram's Growing Faith (VS. 21-24)

21 Then the **king of Sodom** said to **Abram**,
“Give me the people,
but **take** the **possessions** for yourself.”

22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom,
“I have raised my hand in an oath to **the LORD, God Most High,**
Creator of heaven and earth,

23 that I will not **take** a thread or sandal strap
or **anything** that belongs to you,
so you can never say, ‘
I made Abram **rich.**’

24 I will take nothing except what **the servants** have eaten.
But as for **the share** of the men who came with me
—**Aner, Eshcol, and Mamr**
e—they can **take** their **share.**”

- a. **The king of Sodom approaches Abram.** All he wanted was the people, not the possessions that were taken. He said Abram could take the plunder for himself.
Perhaps he was trying to outdo Melchizedek who came with bread and wine, making himself seem more generous than the King of Salam. Abram would have none of it.
- b. **Abram's Oath to Yahweh.** I love this powerful witness. Perhaps, he made this oath after he returned from that nasty fiasco in Egypt where he almost lost his wife, Sarai forever to Pharaoh, who innocently paid Abram for the rights for Sai to be his wife.
Regardless of the why, Abram refuses to keep all the goods for himself and tells the king of Sodom the oath he had made to the Lord. He rejects the wicked kings offer in a very visual way. “I will not take a thread or a Sandle strap or anything that belongs to you, so you can never say, I made Abram rich.” Wow, that is a power response, which serves to illustrate how much Abram has changed. He just wants to focus on God's promise to him.
- c. **Trusting in God's Provision.** Genesis 14: Abram refuses the offer of the King of Sodom to keep the recovered goods, choosing instead to trust God as his provider and refusing to be enriched by a source that could compromise his walk with God.
 - **Modern Challenge:** How do we face financial anxieties, work challenges, or the constant temptation to accumulate more possessions and wealth? Do you rely on human efforts and worldly solutions rather than trusting God for provision.
 - **Abram's decision models a commitment to prioritizing God's honor over personal gain.** How can we cultivate that in God's life financially or relationally? Like Abram we must refuse to compromise our integrity or rely on questionable sources for support, even in difficult financial times.
- d. **Abram commits to his covenant he made with Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre,** the Amorites, who kept their end of the bargain in their treaty and fought with Abram. He wanted to make sure they would get their share.