

GENESIS 14:1-16 (ABRAM THE HEBREW)

Introduction: One of the things that I've noticed that really affects people – to the point that they never accept Jesus, or that unevenly affects their walk with Him to the point where they are always questioning His goodness and His love, are things like war, death, famine, suffering, etc.

These are also used by people who hate God, like self-proclaimed atheists, as an unwise basis for rejecting Him. I cannot tell you how many discussions or posts on the internet I've been in where people use these things to attack the very God that allows them to make their attacks against Him.

Think about it... I mean think it through. It is so stupid and so childish to blame God for the world's troubles and then expect you have every right to speak badly of Him, call Him names, or claim He must not exist. It is, really, the height of hypocrisy.

Anyway, I'm saying this now because today we're going to see the first war recorded in the Bible. And of course, along with war comes suffering, death, plague, pain, sorrow, etc.

The people who want to dismiss the God of the Bible will use these things in order to show how cruel He is or how incompetent He is because He allows these things to happen.

But then they turn around and exercise their free will by sleeping with someone's wife – something that will cause its own little war. Or they will do one of a million other things that will cause anger and division in another person or people without ever considering that God simply allowed them to work out their own life.

And if God did stop them, they'd say He was being unfair. Just keep thinking it through this week and you'll see that how things make much more sense when you're dealing with people who have free will. If not, then there would be no possibility of loving God either. Any love would be forced, which is no love at all.

Keep these things in mind and don't get sidetracked by people who are atheists or God haters who think they have a good argument against the God they claim they don't believe in. They don't.

Text Verse: He shall judge between many peoples,
And rebuke strong nations afar off;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore. Micah 4:3

We look forward to the day when Christ reigns on earth and war is ended forever, but until that day we should accept that God is in control and that war – past, present, and future – happens, not because God desires it, but because He allows it. And so... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name every be praised.

I. The Warring of the Nations

¹ And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations,

² that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).

³ All these joined together in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea).

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

There are times when you're reading the Bible and you may wonder to yourself "Why is all this recorded here? A good example of this is the account of the sailing journey of Paul which included a storm and a shipwreck in Acts 27 and 28.

It's a nice story, but why would God include it in there, especially when it takes up such a large portion of the book? These are the times we need to dig into the accounts and ask, verse by verse, "What are you trying to tell me Lord?"

The account today is like that. There are minute details of a battle. The details include the names of people, the countries they come from, and who they are fighting against, but when you're done, other than saying, "Ok," you may not have really come to any big conclusions about why the story is even given.

There have been billions of skirmishes and wars in history. Why did God tell us about this one? We note here that this is the first war recorded in the Bible, but not the first war in history.

I say this because these verses tell us that the rebelling nations served Chedorlaomer for twelve years before they rebelled. The logical assumption is that he waged war with them in the past and then subjected them to paying tribute. This battle is recorded because it affects God's people who have now entered the picture.

Any other wars happen as wars have happened throughout history. People want, people take, people die. God has allowed us to destroy each other and to exercise our free will. When we do and we are the victors, then we boast about our strength and how great our achievements are, but when we lose, we blame God... "How could he allow this to happen?"

Nobody ever questions why God allowed them to win the battle, nor do they question why He allowed their poor enemies to die. It's only when things go wrong that we question God. I'm bringing this up now so that you know it is the weaker in faith who question God's ways when things go bad.

He is sovereign over His creation. We are man and are a part of His creation. In the end, we have no right to hold our fist in God's face and tell Him how things should be done.

I'm not saying we don't all do it, but the stronger the faith, the less the complaining when tragedy strikes – just read the book of Job. Keep this in mind as things go well and as things get tough. Give God the credit for the victories and give God praise when you lose. If you do, you will be living the life of a faithful Christian.

We all have free will, just as the nations which war against each other. When things go bad, it's normally because of a bad decision – let's do our best to not blame God at these times, but to see His hand in the lesson we learn.

Another thing we see these verses is the beginning of a particular type of conflict which continues even to this day. These nations aligned with each other even though they were nations which were scattered during the time of the Tower of Babel.

In the conduct of nations, alliances are made and people who may not really like each other still work together for a commonly shared goal. As the world's superpower, America has alliances with many nations. We had a treaty with Kuwait in the 1990s.

When Iraq attacked them, it was a test of our faithfulness to our treaty. Was it worth the paper it was printed on? If not, then all the other nations we'd signed treaties with would know they couldn't trust us either. We may or may not have agreed with the president, but he did the right thing by standing up for Kuwait.

This is the way of the world we live in and often people who are innocent will get caught in the crossfire. One of them in today's story is named Lot.

There are four overall points to be seen in this chapter. We won't finish it today, but we can break it down in anticipation of what's ahead. First, there is a war involving the king of Sodom and four other kings who rebel against their oppressors.

The second is that Lot, Abram's nephew is taken captive during the battle. The third is that Abram will rescue him from his captivity during a battle he wages over the conquering forces.

And the fourth item to note is Abram's return and his encounters with the king of Salem and the king of Sodom. This chapter will be the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abram that He would make his name great.

This battle is waged in the area of *Siddim* which is now where the Dead Sea is located. *Siddim* means “fields” or “ploughed lands” and to stand there today and look at the area, ploughed lands are the very last thing you could imagine.

The land is a barren waste and it drops down to the lowest spot on the face of the earth, 1388 feet below sea level. There are some plantations by the Dead Sea now, but they are either desert crops like date palms or things that are watered by modern irrigation.

But the Bible records that at the time of Abram, the land was a fertile valley and it was known for its ploughed fields. It’s almost impossible to think that there was ever anything there the way the Bible describes. That only 4000 years ago, but this is what the Bible says and when it was written, people didn’t dispute it.

⁵ In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that *were* with him came and attacked the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim,

⁶ and the Horites in their mountain of Seir, as far as El Paran, which *is* by the wilderness.

⁷ Then they turned back and came to En Mishpat (that *is*, Kadesh), and attacked all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazezon Tamar.

So, these people had paid tribute for 12 years and finally got sick of it and rebelled in the thirteenth year. When they realized they weren’t getting any benefit from them in the 13th year, the four kings from the east gathered together in the fourteenth year and headed to Canaan to reestablish their authority over the people.

This scenario is played out time and again in the Bible. A nation will conquer another nation and tribute will be paid for a while until either the conquering nation gets soft or until the conquered nation grows strong enough to revolt or it makes an alliance with another nation so that together they can conquer the conquerors.

And this has been happening ever since biblical times as well. The Roman Empire overthrew nations as far north as England, but eventually it simply faded away under its own weight and because of the constant revolts which occurred and weakened the empire.

The same thing happened with England. At one time the saying was true, "The sun never sets on the British empire." Eventually because of mismanagement, a lack of discipline, and over-extension, they too faded off the scene as a world empire.

America is heading in the same direction and the world is being lined up for the end times where Israel will again be the head of the nations. Isaiah looked forward to this glorious time 2700 years ago and His words march ever closer to their fulfillment –

²Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD's house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it.

³Many people shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore. Isaiah 2:2-4

As faithful believers in Jesus Christ, we're waiting for that wondrous day when He returns and sits on the throne of David, ruling in righteousness and judging among the nations.

Going back to our verses, it said that on the way to deal with the rebels in the land of Canaan they attacked the Rephaim, the Zuzim, the Emim, and the Horites. After this, they turned back and attacked all the country of the Amalekites and also the Amorites.

These kings didn't just come after the rebels. They attacked other nations as well. They probably did this for a few reasons. First, they were showing their strength to the surrounding nations as a warning not to make alliances with the nations they'd conquered.

They also probably wanted to increase the number of nations that would pay them tribute and keep them so busy so that they wouldn't even think of making other alliances. And a third reason is to plunder the people enough to keep their war campaign going.

This is a lot like what Hitler did in Germany. Sometimes he did it with false alliances like the agreement he made with hugely naïve Neville Chamberlain. Sometimes he did it with blitzkrieg raids like in Poland. And sometimes he did it with longer battles like his attacks against Russia. As he conquered nations, he used their resources for feeding his own military.

And believe it or not, this type of thing occurs in politics as well. The left has been waging all out war on the right. Anyone who disagrees with them or their policies is fair game in their attacks.

What they can't win through the vote, they win through their troops lined up in the media, the unions, and the courts by litigation. War never affects just the people directly under attack. It affects those who stand idly and blindly by and naively hope that things will turn out for the best.

By the time these kings had gotten to their main targets of attack, many other people groups had been affected by their cunning. May we in America be more willing to stand and defend our rights now, before they are gone.

**⁸ And 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 joined together in battle in the Valley of Siddim
⁹ against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of nations, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five.**

The Bible returns to the account of the main forces lined up for battle which was mentioned in verses 1 and 2. But this time, the rebels are mentioned first and the attackers are mentioned last.

In other words, when you read both accounts, it is first from the vantage point of the four kings of the east – “we will attack.” Then the second time they’re mentioned, it is from the vantage point of the five kings of Canaan – “we will defend.”

The four kings from the east say –

We will subdue you as we did 14 years ago
You will be beaten and to us tribute you will pay
When we are finished then you will surely know
You shouldn’t have revolted; this is what you’ll say

And the five kings of Canaan replied –

We will stand and defend our land
This is the thing that we will do
Many of you will die by our hand
And we will be the victors over you

Who will win the battle and what will be the result?

¹⁰ Now the Valley of Siddim *was full of asphalt pits*;

If you want to learn the Indonesian or Malaysian language, both of which are very similar, one of the things you’ll notice right away is that instead of using a plural marker on a word the way we do when we add an “s” – such

as in **star** in the singular or **stars** in the plural, they will often simply say the word twice to make a plural.

So to say “I see a star” you would say “Aku melihat bintang.”

To say “I see stars” you would say “Aku melihat bintang-bintang”

The verse we just read does this in the Hebrew – v’emek ha’sideem b’erot b’erot emar

Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits. Or “And the valley of the fields was pits pits tar.

So why am I bringing this up... so what, right? This verse, which is talking about tar pits, along with several other verses found in the Old Testament, have pointed to the great possibility of there being immense reserves of oil in the land of Israel.

One key indicator that oil is normally present is when asphalt is seen bubbling up from the ground. Another possible indication of this is the fact that the Dead Sea is there now, but there once was a fertile valley with ploughed fields as Genesis tells us.

What could cause trillions of tons of rock to be moved in order to make such a large rift in the earth?

Some people believe that an underground cavern of gas or oil exploded when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. This is as reasonable as any other explanation and very well may be what happened. And this verse is the first indication of the oil there.

If you want to track the oil and gas finds in Israel, there are a few sites which keep up to date on these things and some of the testing and drilling has been in the Dead Sea area.

There are also indications of large amounts of oil and gas in other areas of Israel leading some to believe that Israel could at some point become a major source of both oil and natural gas.

If this wouldn't get Israel's enemies up in arms, I can't think of what else would. This very well could be the impetus for the great battle of Gog and Magog which is recorded in Ezekiel 38 and which may soon be leading to another great Mideast war near you.

¹⁰ (con't) and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; *some* fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains.

Any place full of asphalt pits wasn't the smartest choice for the five kings to line up for battle. They probably went there thinking that if things went bad, they could flee to the mountains, which is exactly what happened as the battle turned against them.

Unfortunately for them, some of the people fell into the tar pits as they fled. Kind of a goopy way to die...

¹¹ Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way.

¹² They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

Exactly what the people of Sodom had hoped to avoid by going away from the city to fight is what ended up happening. As the men of the armies fled, the people who remained in the city, and all of their goods, were taken captive. Unfortunately for the conquerors, they took Lot, Abram's nephew too. This would cost them in the end.

II. Abram the Hebrew

¹³ Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they *were* allies with Abram.

This verse marks the first time the term Hebrew is mentioned in the Bible. It is tying Abram in with Lot and is showing a designation of what Abram is, just like the designation of Mamre when he is called an Amorite.

The term “Hebrew” is tied directly to Abram’s great-great-great-great grandfather Eber in both Genesis 10 and 11. Eber means “he who crossed over” and it is signifying that he and his family are the ones who crossed over the Euphrates and away from Babel.

The term is used here for the first time to make the distinction between Abram and the attacking armies who came from the other side of the Euphrates and also from the people whom he was allied with – the Amorites.

He is of the chosen people and he is the center of focus in the Bible at this time. He is the one who will lead to the Messiah. The refugee from the battle knew that Abram was related to Lot and so he came to tell him about what had happened, probably hoping to get Abram to go after him, not only to rescue Lot, but to get back his own things which had been taken by the raiders.

¹⁴ Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained *servants* who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

Abram took no time in responding. As soon as he heard what had happened, it says that he armed his 318 trained servants who were born in his house and took off in pursuit. This shows how large of a company he must have had.

He had 318 men who were ready for battle, but he would have had many others who would stay behind to keep the camp from attack. And these are only the trained men. He would have also had women and children and young and old.

His company probably reached into the thousands. But the number 318 is very specific and the rule of the Bible is that every name, every number, and in fact every word is important. The question is, why is this curious number used? The answer probably comes from the name of a person who will be introduced in chapter 15.

He is the chief servant of Abram named Eliezer, whose name means “God is help.” Because Abram has no children, the next in line to inherit all he has is this servant Eliezer. If his name is turned into numbers, a science known as gematria, they equal 318.

As the chief of the servants and the heir apparent of the household, 318 fighting men are chosen from the same group within Abram’s home based on Eliezer’s name. It is a way of saying, “In this battle, God is my help. He is my right hand.”

And so off they go – Abram and only 318 men against many thousands of people who had just destroyed numerous kingdoms as they stormed through the land. The chances seem slim, but with many or few, the battle belongs to the Lord.

David knew and understood this when he went out as a young shepherd boy to fight the mighty Philistine named Goliath –

Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. ⁴⁷ Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle *is* the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hands.”

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

When America engages in a war, it is almost always begun in the darkest moments of the night, just before dawn. It is the time when the enemy is least ready to counterattack and the majority of them are asleep. Abram knew this 4000 years ago when he divided up the forces under him and attacked the armies at night.

This is something you will see happen again in the Bible on several occasions. Night attacks allow insignificant numbers to overwhelm opposing forces of great size. Gideon, the Judge of Israel, took 300 men into battle against 135,000 Midianites and with the Lord's help, he prevailed.

After attacking the armies, Abram didn't just stop and revel in his win, but he continued to chase the enemies and destroy them even farther north than Damascus in Syria. This was the wise thing to do because it depleted their numbers and gave them notice that they'd get more of the same if they tried to come back in the future.

Despite being criticized for pummeling the withdrawing Iraqis as they left from Kuwait, President Bush saved many American lives in future battles by continuing to crush them on the highway of death which lead from Kuwait all the way north deep into Iraq.

Countries or political parties which aren't willing to fight until the battle is won only show weakness to the enemy and cause more harm and damage to themselves. We need to remember this and not listen to doves in our government harp about the wars we fight.

In the end, they only set themselves up for much worse. By following the Bible in all matters, even the conduct of war, we will keep ourselves from many harms and troubles.

¹⁶ So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people.

Victorious, Abram returns home. Just imagine the clan applauding and rejoicing over the return of him and his men. And in a note of the true completion of the task before him, Lot is mentioned by name. Abram had been faithful to his nephew and thus to his family name.

In the New Testament, Paul explains the importance of taking care of one's family – But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:8

We are to take care of those who are in trouble, unable to help themselves, sick, afflicted, or simply less well off than we are.

In Sodom, Lot certainly had many friends, but he found out the importance of family when he was carried away. As the Proverb says – “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

Each of us probably has many friends as well, but they tend to fade out of the scene as our life unfolds. Even brothers and sisters can get on our nerves. And despite the idea of marriage being a life-long commitment, that doesn't always work out.

But the Bible says there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. That someone is Jesus and I'd like to take a few minutes and tell you about Him and His love for you...

Abram the Hebrew

In the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar
He along with three other kings went out to war

It was in the Valley of Siddim which is now the Salt Sea
That four kings faced off against another five
The five had rebelled and the four couldn't let that be
And so to the Land of Canaan they made their warlike drive

But before these forces met in this great battle
The four kings of the east fought against many other clans
And defeating each they gained stocks of war chattel
Everything was going well, according to their plans

After all their victories, before the rebels they stood
And looked across the plowed fields, yes life was pretty good

It was the five kings who faced off against the attacking four
But only one side could claim the victory, such is the way of war

Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits
And the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah took off and they fled
Some fell into the tar and probably died in terrible fits
While others headed to the mountains, as the dying bled

The conquerors took from Sodom all the spoils they could find
Also they took along Lot, Abram's nephew too
He was relaxing in Sodom, he wasn't the warring kind
And so off to captivity he went wishing he knew kung fu

And one of the fugitives came and told Abram the Hebrew
He was certain that this great man would know just what to do

Abram was allied with the Amorites at that time
And when he heard about Lot and that he was taken captive
He got together 318 of his men and they took off on a dime
Abram was a man who was really quite adaptive

He went with his servants having counted every man
And they went off in pursuit even as far as Dan

He divided his forces against them by night
They attacked them hip and thigh, probably a bloody sight
Abram pursued them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus
And he brought back all the goods along with his nephew Lot
And all of Lot's stuff was safe even his little abacus
All the women and the people Abram back home brought

Are you also willing to step up for the fight
When lost souls are being carried off to hell
With you is the Lord infinite in power and might
And of His great works others you need to tell

Stand up and proclaim the good news to those who come your way
Please don't forget Jesus is coming soon, maybe even today

Without Him in their lives there remains no hope

Because all the world lies within the devil's scope

Be brave Christian warrior and proclaim the work of Jesus
Tell those you meet each and every day
Jesus came to purge our sins and from the devil rescue us
So please tell the world, He is the only way

Hallelujah and Amen...