

**Exegetical Notes – Genesis 14:1-24**  
**“A Great Nation”**

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(In Genesis 12:2, God promised to make Abram a “great nation.” This chapter shows that God faithfully fulfilled that promise.)

**Verses 1-13**

*At the time when Amraphel was king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goyim,<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup> All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea Valley).<sup>4</sup> For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.*

*<sup>5</sup>In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emities in Shaveh Kiriathaim<sup>6</sup> and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert.<sup>7</sup> 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.*

*<sup>8</sup>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<sup>9</sup> against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away.<sup>12</sup> They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.*

*<sup>13</sup>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 of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram.*

- These verses tell of a great war that raged in the area in which Abram had settled. Nation or tribe revolted against nation or tribe. Kings allied themselves against each other. While the names of various kings and the description of various alliances are given in these verses, they are not significant to us. However, to place the story in a historical setting which can be traced establishes the historicity of these events. This war actually happened.
- Lot, Abram's nephew, had settled in the city of Sodom one of the cities which lost in the war. Lot was carried off by the winning kings as a slave along with his family and possessions.
- News of Lot's captivity reached Abram.

#### **Verses 14-16**

***<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup> He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.***

- Abram went in pursuit of the army which had taken Lot captive.
- Abram had a household army which consisted of 318 men. These men were from his own household and were trained soldiers. This is a sizeable force. Its existence shows that Abram had a large household and was wealthy. He was able to pay 318 soldiers.
- Abram's army engaged the army of the king which had taken Lot captive. They defeated that army in battle and set Lot free with his household.

#### **Verses 17-20**

***<sup>17</sup> 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).***

***<sup>18</sup> Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, <sup>19</sup> and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.***

***<sup>20</sup> And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."***

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

- Abram defeated the kings who had captured the city of Sodom. The defeated king of Sodom came to meet Abram to pay homage to him.
- Another King, Melchizedek, was present at the meeting. Melchizedek is called “king of Salem” and “priest of God Most High.” Salem is a shortened form of the name Jerusalem. He was king of the city of Jerusalem. In ancient times “kings” often performed both political and religious functions. This is true of Melchizedek. He is king and priest.
- The title used in the passage, “priest of God Most High” and “creator of heaven and earth,” were common in ancient times. Every culture assumed that their chief god was the most important god in the entire world and that their god made heaven and earth. However, in this passage Abram, a servant of YHWH recognizes Melchizedek’s right to these titles. This means that Melchizedek is a priest of YHWH, but of him we have no knowledge until this passage.
- In Hebrews 7, Melchizedek is mentioned in connection with Jesus Christ. There, it says that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. The king who appears at this meeting as King of Salem, “King of peace,” for “salem” means peace, is a picture of Jesus. His presence shows that God is active in these events and is blessing Abram.
- Abram gives a tenth of the spoils of the battle to Melchizedek. This is a king’s share of the bounty in victory. In giving this amount to him, Abram recognizes Melchizedek’s position and authority.
- Melchizedek offers the other kings at this meeting a common meal of bread and wine. No reference to the Lord’s Supper should be seen here. However, the sharing of the meal is an act of peace. He acts as the bringer of peace.

**Verses 21-24**

***<sup>21</sup> The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”***

***<sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> 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.’ <sup>24</sup> 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.”***

- Abram’s respect for Melchizedek is not extended to the king of Sodom.

- The King of Sodom, who had lost any claim to anything when he was defeated in battle, seeks a deal with Abram, now the rightful owner of everything that had belonged to the King of Sodom. Sodom offers to let Abram have all the “goods” taken in the battle provided that Abram lets him have all the residents of the city.
- Abram rudely refuses the deal. He tells Sodom to take it all back because he will not be indebted to the King of Sodom in any way. He will not allow the King of Sodom to say that he owes him anything. Abram asks that those who allied themselves with him in battle be paid by the King of Sodom. But he will accept nothing for himself. Abram refuses any alliance with the King of Sodom.
- However, Abram is now recognized as one of the “nations.” He is recognized as a “king” in his own right. The promise made to him by YHWH in Genesis 12:2 is fulfilled.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon based on Genesis 14:1-24. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)