

# Abram Goes To War

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's turn back now to Genesis chapter 14, looking at these 16 verses that we read from the beginning of the chapter. You know how it is with some jigsaws, that very often you have a piece in a jigsaw that doesn't really look like any of the other pieces.

It has a rather weird shape, and you wonder, looking at all the pieces, how that piece is going to fit in. To all the rest, because it looks so different to all the rest.

Well, there are some chapters in the Bible that are a bit like that as you come to study the Bible, and this is one of them. And you have to ask as you come to this chapter, where does it fit into the account that you have of Abraham's life?

Where does it fit in as far as taking a spiritual meaning from it is concerned? Where does it fit in with the wider picture of Abraham in covenant with God?

Abraham and the promises that we've seen already that God gave to him with regard to this land that would be his inheritance? And how that took him to think of a spiritual inheritance that is beyond this world.

[ 1 : 13 ] Where does this chapter really fit into all of that? Well, it does fit into it very snugly, actually, because if you bear in mind as we go through this chapter, this part of it today, God's promise to Abraham about the land, God's promise that he would give him, and had given him this as an inheritance.

Think of how God is so committed to Abraham, and to doing for Abraham what he has promised. And that will help you to understand where this chapter fits in, and why we have this account that seems rather strange to begin with, said as it is there, in between these other chapters, of Abraham having to go and engage in battle, really, to get back his nephew Lot, and the possessions that were taken by these kings.

Two things, then, we're going to look at. First of all, what we call the trouble with Lot. Lot, and, well, that means more than just the trouble he got into. Lot is always in a bit of trouble, as you read through these chapters in Genesis, and we'll see here that the trouble he's involved in has actually led to his being taken captive by these kings.

Then we'll look at Abraham's rescue mission, where most of the study will look at the rescue mission that Abraham engaged in, and how he recovered Lot and reclaimed all the possessions, both of Lot and the others that had been taken captive by these kings.

Now, the background to it, as you look at the trouble with Lot, the background to it, in the first verses, really down as far as verse 12, the background is really these various kings in these areas that had come to war against each other.

[ 3 : 09 ] We're told there that this particular Kedar Leomer, the king of Elam, that he was really the dominant king for 12 years. All the other kings mentioned there that went out to fight against him were actually under his dominance.

They were 12 years these kings had served Kedar Leomer, but in the 13th year they rebelled. That's how it is. And not only that part of the world to this day, that's how it is always in all parts of the world.

You find regimes coming and going. You find people who have come to be very powerful, and others are under them for a time, and give servitude to them, and become their vassals.

And then the person in charge grows somewhat weak, and these people rebel and regain their freedom. Well, that's what happened here. And for a whole year they had that freedom during the 13th year.

Then in the 14th year, Kedar Leomer decided to do something about it. He wasn't that happy that he had lost control of these kings and the areas that belonged to them.

[ 4 : 19 ] So he came back in against them to put down the rebellion, to reclaim their territory, to bring them back to be his servants, his vassals.

And in doing so, he actually came against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and these other cities that were around them in that plain, and took Lot and his people and his servants and his possessions as captain.

Lot became a trophy of war. He became one of the spoils that Kedar Leomer and his allies took away from Sodom and these other towns, back to his own place, just to show this is what I do to people who actually have the nerve to rebel against me.

So Lot is caught up in that. But remember, that Lot has brought a lot of this upon himself, everything indeed upon himself, because we saw when he divided from Abram, and Abram gave him the choice of what part of the land to choose for himself, he chose the area near Sodom.

It was good to look at, but it had this corruption at the heart of it. It had this place, it had these people, it had these sinful practices, even though it looked good on the outside, it was filled with such danger, and drew Lot into it.

[ 5 : 47 ] Because you read here, that when these kings took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, in verse 12, he was dwelling in Sodom. You see, he had begun by pitching his tent in the vicinity of Sodom.

That's what you read in verse 12 of chapter 13. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley, and moved his tent as far as to Sodom.

So that there's a spiritual message built into these verses, into these chapters, as far as Lot is concerned, you find that he is choosing what appears to be such a pleasant place, but it's filled with sin, and it's filled with danger, and he's getting sucked into the lifestyle, into the kind of ways of life that the people of these areas practiced.

And now he's living in Sodom. He's become more immersed in its daily life. And he can't claim exemption just because he's a nephew of Abraham.

When this king, Teroleomer, and his allies come against Sodom, Lot can't stand up and say, look, I don't really belong to Sodom. I'm actually the nephew of this Abraham, and he's such an important man.

[ 7 : 09 ] I've had nothing to do with these rebellions. I've had nothing to do with this, so please spare me. Don't take me. He can't use that argument. He belongs to Sodom as far as Teroleomer is concerned.

There's no distinction. There's no difference. And the spiritual message in that is very important for ourselves. Because the more we deliberately side with that which is against God, the more likely it is that we're going to increasingly get sucked into the ways of the world.

Even if we're Christians, and professing Christians, and have acknowledged the Lord as our Savior, Lot was a believer. And yet he got sucked into the ways of Sodom.

And he got sucked into what happened to the Sodomites, to the people of Sodom. He got sucked into this captivity that they were caught up in under Teroleomer's advances.

It's so important for you and for me. Whatever our situation in life is, we cannot get out of the world. We cannot actually live without some contact with the world.

[ 8 : 23 ] We can't actually live daily life without being aware of a contrary lifestyle around us and touching us and coming to have interaction with us as we interact with the world.

But the point you take from Lot here is that he was sucked into the ways of the world. He settled in Sodom. There was hardly anything to distinguish him from the people of Sodom itself by this stage.

And that's what we have to be aware of. It doesn't matter what stage of our spiritual journey we're on. And it's particularly important for the less experienced of us, for those who are newly into the Christian faith or for those who are not long on their journey, that we do two things.

That we avoid getting sucked into the ways of the world. And to do that it's important that you keep close to God and that you keep close to God's people. That you actually keep company with the best Christians, with the best people in the world.

That you actually seek to follow their example and their lifestyle. That you take their advice. That you're often in their company. That you're with the Abrams because you see Lot had separated himself from Abraham.

[ 9 : 44 ] He'd gone a distance from Abraham. He'd actually come to live much nearer to Sodom than he lived to his uncle Abraham, this man of God. So whatever interaction we have with the world, however much we need that in our daily lives, however much we can't avoid doing that in a measure, don't get sucked into its lifestyle, into its ways of thinking, into its practices.

Stay close to the people of God. Stay close to God. Keep up your relationship with God especially. Because the more, as I was reading this morning in one of the statements of William Gurnall who wrote that great book about the Christian in complete armor.

The moment you, he says, God is light but you immediately turn to the darkness when you let pride make you turn your back upon him.

Even for a moment. If you let pride, and that's ultimately what takes us away from God anyway, ourselves. If we let that happen, we are immediately going towards the darkness.

darkness. That's what happened to Lot and God is telling us. Here's the safety announcement. Here's God saying, this is such an important message.

[ 11 : 19 ] Take stock of what happened to this believer and what it led to in his experience. The trouble with Lot.

But there's secondly, Abraham's rescue mission. because here is Abraham when he was told by one who had escaped from those who were taken captive, he came and he told Abraham what had happened.

When Abraham heard this, he led forth his trained men born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as to Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah.

Now you have to stand back a bit, like we said in the beginning, and look at this chapter and where it fits into the message spiritually about Abraham and about Abraham's life. What gave Abraham the right to do this?

Why would Abraham go to war against these kings with such a small army compared to the forces that he actually faced? Well, remember the promise that God gave to Abraham about the land.

[ 12 : 30 ] Whose land is this? Does it belong to Kedder Leomer? Does it belong to the king of Sodom or the king of Gomorrah, the king of Adma, the king of Zeboam, the king of Bela?

Does it belong to any of these kings? Here's a whole list of kings, nine kings all together, five fighting against four. Whose land is it?

It's God's. But he's given it to Abraham. He's given it to his servant Abraham. And he said to Abraham, lift up your eyes and see for all the land that you see.

I will give to you and to your offspring forever and I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth. In other words, Abraham is acting as the land owner. That's the spiritual message that's coming across.

He's actually fulfilling God's promise. God has actually put it on his heart that he has to go and rescue his nephew Lot and reclaim his possessions because they actually belong to God and to the people of God.

[ 13 : 37 ] This whole land belongs to them. God has gifted it to them. It's the promise that he has given to Abraham and he's going to fulfill it. It's God's covenant promise that gives Abraham the right to do this.

To actually go and reclaim these possessions. and take his nephew Lot back to where his home is. But there's something else that's interesting here as well that fits in with that.

In order in verse 13 one who had escaped and came and told Abraham the Hebrew. Why does it say that? It's an interesting reference.

It kind of stands out at you when you read it. Abraham the Hebrew. Well it goes back to the descendants of shame.

If you take cast your mind back to or look back to chapter 11 and verse 16 when Eber which is where the name Ebru or Hebrew comes from when Eber had lived 34 years he fathered Peleg and Eber lived after he fathered Peleg 430 years.

[ 14 : 57 ] Now that's the genealogy of Terah Abraham's father or the genealogy of Abraham himself. But it begins in verse 10 these are the generations of Shem.

After the Tower of Babel incident the whole earth was then populated by the people who scattered from the descendants of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth.

And out of the three the descendants of Shem are the line of faith. God is zooming in as it were at that point in Genesis 11 to the line of faith where you see that the line of Shem is where he begins the genealogy of Abraham.

And in that genealogy of Abraham is the name Eber. And that's why you find here Abraham called Abraham the Hebrew.

Abraham the man of faith Abraham the one who has descended from Shem the one who fits into God's line of faith it is to him that this land has been given.

[ 16 : 06 ] It is he who goes in the name of God and for God to conquer these kings to reclaim the territory that God had said this is yours and I'm giving it to you and to your family afterwards.

Now there are some things that you need to actually take from that by way of applying it to ourselves spiritually. Because first of all it reminds us of a principle it contains a principle that you see again and again mentioned in the scriptures but particularly so with regard to Christ himself and indeed to the people of God and it's the principle of going out to reclaim what had become lost because what Abraham did here is precisely an image of what Jesus did when he came into the world to die on the cross to recover his people and bring them back to himself.

It's the principle of coming to act on behalf of God to rescue the undeserving. Lot didn't deserve this. Abraham didn't do it because Lot really merited it.

Abraham didn't do this because he was able to say Lot is such a good guy I have to go and actually take him back from the captivity that has come upon them. He is deserving of all that I can do for him.

Abraham couldn't say that. Lot wasn't deserving of Abraham's kindness. Lot wasn't deserving that he would be actually recovered from the captivity that he had brought about himself from his carelessness in living in Sodom.

[ 17 : 49 ] But Abraham didn't act because Lot was worthy of being rescued. He acted because it was the right thing to do. Because God had laid it on his heart to do it.

Jesus didn't come to die on the cross because he thought you and I were worthy of it. He didn't come to lay down his life. out of our meriting it.

It wasn't because we deserved it that he came to die that death. It was because God said in my eyes it's the right thing to do.

I'm fulfilling my plan. I'm carrying out my purposes. I have promised my people that I will be their God.

That I will actually make them my people. I have promised them an inheritance and whatever it takes to make that inheritance secure I will do it. I am committed to doing it even though it is going to involve the death of my only beloved son.

[ 19 : 01 ] That's what God did. You see the principle of that worked out and acted out by Abraham as he goes to rescue Lot. But it also gives us an image of the mandate that God has given his church.

Here are kings that have stolen the possessions that really belong to Abraham or to Abraham's family. And you can look upon the world in which we live as rightly belonging to God.

You can think of the territory spiritually and morally that people occupy and that is not actually given to God in honouring God and living obediently to God.

The kind of lifestyles that we see, the kind of ways of life that people follow, it's not honouring to God, it's not giving to God the glory that is due to his name, but it's the church's business through the gospel to seek to recover that territory for God, to seek to stand up for the truth, to seek to actually live out the truth and to support those like the Christian Institute who are standing against what is destructive of these values, what is contrary to these values, what is in fact ungodliness and what God himself says is an invasion of his territory.

Well you have to stand against the invader and you have to stand for the God whose territory this is and you and I have been given that privilege because we belong to the church of God, we belong to those who have the gospel and in having the gospel we are charged by God, go out and fight my battles, go out and actually engage with the enemy, go out and seek to recover what has been lost.

[ 20 : 59 ] we have the mandate, that's what God has given us, some people will say to us very forcibly today you've got no right whatsoever to tell me how to live my life, you've got no right whatsoever to say what lifestyle I should have to choose for myself, I have the right to choose for myself.

Well, people have the liberty to choose for themselves, but they don't have the right to choose what God says is his right.

And in fact, when Jesus said to his church to the disciples, go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit, that is our mandate to evangelize, that is the mandate the church follows to this day, to go out in the name of Christ, to recover territory for him.

Don't let anyone persuade you, you don't have the right, you have a right that God has given you as Christians, to live for him, to stand for his truth, to insist upon his values, to challenge the ways of the world.

Christ, you must do it wisely, you must do it tactfully, you must do it lovingly, you must do it patiently, you must do it with understanding, but nevertheless you have the right to do it.

[ 22 : 41 ] It's a God given right, it's an abdication of our responsibilities and our privileges, if we give in to the idea that's so powerful in the world, you don't have the right.

God has given us the right to do so. So Abraham's mission for rescuing Lot is actually an exercise of his rights.

He has the right because the land has been given to him by God. And God has given rights to his people by which they are mandated to go out with the gospel.

But the second thing you find with Abraham is not just his right but also his might. Because when you come to read about the men that were trained, men trained for fighting, they're not very many, there's three hundred and eighteen were given the precise number there in verse fourteen.

And when you think of all that he's going to fight against, these kings that have already been successful against the other kings with their trained armies and all of that would involve, you might say, looking at Abraham here, well, you haven't much of a chance, Abraham.

[ 23 : 53 ] How are you possibly going to conquer and recover what's been taken by these kings with three hundred and eighteen men, even if they're well trained, you're actually going out against such a huge, such a huge number and such trained, mighty, powerful armies?

enemies? Well, it's another strand, isn't it, in the Bible's teaching that you come across very frequently. The strand of teaching that says even a few with God on their side are more powerful than many enemies.

It's the same thing you find Israel in Egypt. The Egyptians who have made slaves of them years after this are doing everything they can think of to try and stop these Israelites from multiplying, from becoming powerful, but they can't do it.

Why can't they do it? It's not because they're not ingenious enough. It's not because they don't have ability intellectually. There were a few generations that had as much intellectual ability as these Egyptians in those days when the Pharaohs were powerful.

Why couldn't they do it? Why couldn't they actually wipe out these Israelite people? Why couldn't they stop their multiplying? Why couldn't they, by all the oppression they laid upon them, why couldn't they actually keep them in subjection?

[ 25 : 21 ] Because God was with them. Because God was in Egypt with these people who were slaves. The same in Gideon.

Why did God say to Gideon to whittle down the number of his men to a small number before he went out against the Midianites? Same with the New Testament church.

They're all inside one room in the days of the apostles. Yet it's to that church that God said go out and make disciples of all nations. These were the people who had to go forth not just to Jerusalem but into the Gentile world that had never ever had the gospel preached.

Yet look at the effects look at the results. Why is it that so few could actually achieve that?

Because God was with them because God had promised them certain things and sent them on a mission that he himself had equipped them for. That's why Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians there in 2nd Corinthians we have this treasure this spiritual treasure we have it in earthen vessels.

[ 26 : 38 ] Doesn't it seem a bit strange if not well if not to some people even foolish that God would actually use earthen vessels for carrying out his purposes?

That's how Paul describes himself as an earthen vessel. A vessel that's liable to cracking liable to drying up liable to being shattered at times. Why didn't God choose steel vessels?

Why didn't he describe Christians as made of steel? Wouldn't that be more effective? No it wouldn't. Why not? Because what Paul is saying is we have this treasure in earthen vessels so that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of us.

So that God's power will come into its own. How does God's power come into its own? Through our weakness. Through our smallness. Through our inabilities.

That's why you have to cast away all sense of being sufficient in yourself. All sense of what pride will actually suggest to you that you can make it on your own. That you can do this in your own strength.

[ 27 : 48 ] That you can meet this without really relying upon God. What God is saying is that in all your weakness and everything that makes you weak. Everything that makes you an earthen vessels.

my power is made perfect. My strength is made perfect. Our sufficiencies of God. You see what Abraham says in the passage that follows on from here.

Where the king of Sodom offered Abraham so much in return for what he had done for him. But Abraham said, I have lifted my hand to the Lord God most high possessor of heaven and earth that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is used.

Lest you should say I have made Abraham rich. Now, Abraham has not been disrespectful to the king of Sodom. He is not saying about the king of Sodom it is very good of you to offer this.

What he is really saying is I have everything I need already because I have God. I have lifted up my hands empty hands to the Lord to God the possessor of heaven and earth and when I am looked after by the one who possesses the heaven and the earth why should I fear?

[ 29 : 11 ] Why should I look to have my needs supplied by anyone else? When he is my refuge and my strength that is the chorus that the children sing at the ABC club and bring home to teach their parents my God is so big so strong and so mighty there is nothing that he cannot do and the verses go on from that well that is what it is for Abraham my God is so big so strong and so mighty there is nothing that I cannot do and when we have that God are we acting accordingly is the way we live our lives does it fit in with that conviction with that confession with that assertion with that belief that our God is that big so big do we make use of that the way we should think about our prayers are our prayers as they should be is our attentiveness to prayer whether it's prayer meetings or private prayer is it as zealous as it should be is it as foolish it should be if we think that this God is so big then we'll be often pleading with this God praying to this God in our relationship with God we'll be making use the maximum use of that bigness of that greatness that's what

God is actually assuring us of that's what Abraham is saying that's what he needed in his strategy do we make the use of this bigness of God that we ought not just in prayer what about our mission what about our hopes and evangelism what about our outreach what about our thoughts of gospel blessing what about our personal holiness are we actually in that as attentive as we should be on the basis that God can achieve so much in our lives to make us holy well you see that's what Abraham in this instance is like he goes out in the strength of God he only has 318 but he doesn't need any more because God is with him and because God is with him and because God has laid this on his heart and because he can say I have lifted up my hand to God the most high the possessor of heaven and earth these kings don't stand a chance there's no way that

Abraham is going to come back defeated there's no way Abraham is going to return with his head down and saying I just wish I could have managed to bring Lot back and his possessions but I just couldn't do it you cannot actually imagine Abraham going out and then reading that he comes back without Lot he doesn't because his success and his sufficiency is in God now that doesn't mean that a Christian whatever life they live whatever career they choose is going to be the best in the world at doing that it doesn't mean that the best Christian in the world the best doctor the best surgeon is a Christian it doesn't mean that the best at any way any career is bound to be a Christian some people who are not Christians may have a lot more skill and application than those who are but it should never be the case that anyone is more committed than a

Christian that anyone is more zealous than a Christian that anyone is more faithful than a Christian that anyone gives more than a Christian gives to the way they live that's what it means to have God the possessor of heaven and earth as our refuge we do our utmost utmost as Osgin has called his book our utmost for his highest the most high is the one we serve and the least we can do is our mostest well this is what Abraham did and his success of course is evident he came back after dividing his forces you see he used strategy as well he didn't just go out and say well God is with me I don't have to think much about what I'm doing he thought about it deeply he thought about how to divide his forces so as to get this success and he came back with Lot and with his possessions and brought back all of these and the women and the people now just a point in conclusion there would have been many people in Sodom and in these neighbouring cities who benefited from

Abraham's expedition and victory and yet perished when Sodom was destroyed and that too is a very solemn point that many people benefit from the likes of Abraham from the Christian gospel from the things that God gives to his people in his church that many people actually benefit from that along the way through life and still perish and still are not saved and still enter a lost eternity think of the advantage that the people of Sodom had in seeing Abraham's victory here is the king of Sodom later on in the chapter saying this to Abraham he had benefited obviously and his people from this but yet they all perished in the catastrophe that came upon Sodom and that's true for us too we all benefit from the gospel we all benefit from being part of that gospel church that we are but what is our end going to be what effect has that had on our lives have we taken stock of the goodness of God and the same is true nationally as a nation we have many reasons to be thankful to God and yet we're turning away from him step by step when the statue of liberty was being renovated in 1984 it took a couple of years through to 1986 but it was being renovated during those years and what they discovered the outside of the statue of liberty is made of copper the inside was made of many strands or bars of iron and although measures had been taken to stop the iron reacting with the copper over the years much of that iron framework had deteriorated and rusted to the extent that the statue in another twenty years was said if it had been left would have collapsed in other words liberty and all that liberty stands for an emblem of liberty and freedom and hope to so many would have collapsed because the internal structures would have rotted away that's how it is with any society as well if we don't have the internal structure renewed if the rust and the corrosion and the decay keeps going eventually liberty is going to collapse gospel freedoms will collapse personal freedoms will collapse personal morality is collapsing already it's so important that as a nation we come to stop the corrosion that we renew the inner framework to human life that we rebuild what has been lost that we come to the gospel that we let God be God

[ 38 : 07 ] Abraham's rescue mission is right and his might they belong to us as well in our responsibilities and when we face what we're facing in the days we live in you and I have the privilege of living like Abraham of acting like Abraham of speaking like Abraham of fighting spiritually like Abraham of being true to God to whom we lift up our hand as the possessor of heaven and earth let's pray gracious God we thank you that you are our provider the one who possesses heaven and earth at all times we thank you that our sufficiency is in you that you teach us sometimes oh Lord through our own foolishness that you teach us that our sufficiency is in you but we know that it is certified by your word we pray today for that grace that will help us to carry out our privileges and our responsibilities for you and for your gospel and for your kingdom so bless to us the message of your word today we pray and in all of these things apply it to our hearts and to our condition in our relationship with you here as we pray for Jesus sake Amen Amen Thank you.