

# GENESIS

Lesson 27 w/ Answers

Abram Rescues Lot

*"<sup>1</sup> 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."* Genesis 14:1-4 [NIV]

Lot probably did not realize the hot bed of political activity that he would be drawn into as he moved closer to Sodom and then eventually moved into the city. As a wealthy owner of large herds of cattle in particular, he would have been welcomed even though he was a foreigner. (Genesis 19:9) The text tells us that for twelve years, King Bera's city state—made up of himself in Sodom, and the other kings of his city state who ruled over Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboyim and Zoar—had been paying tribute to King Kedorlaomer (Chedorlaomer in some versions). However, they had had enough of those kings from Elam and the surrounding territory (modern-day Iran), so they withheld their tribute in the thirteenth year. Not happy with this act of disrespect and the loss of the tribute, Kedorlaomer and his allied kings decided to punish them.

*"<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 Hazazon Tamar."* Genesis 14:5-7 [NIV]

Kedorlaomer's army came down the eastern side of the Jordan, following a well-known trade route called the King's Highway, defeating one group after the other. Then crossing over below the southern end of the Dead Sea, they continued the war turning north at the southern end of Canaan by defeating Hazazon Tamar, located on the western side of the Dead Sea at the southern end. From here they then set their sights to the northeast and the wealthy kingdom of King Bera at Sodom, the cities of the plain, and his four kings.

I have traveled the highway out of Jericho on the western side of the Dead Sea all the way down to the ruins of Masada. Traveling that route, you can clearly see how flat and open the terrain is along the Dead Sea, but it's also very treacherous. While the ground looks solid, it's actually a type of quicksand caused by the lengthy cycles of rise and fall in Dead Sea water levels. This unstable flat shoreline of the Dead Sea, referred to as tar pits in the biblical text, will play a major role in the coming battle.

*"<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."* Genesis 15:8-12 [NIV]

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**Based on the information in the above passage, respond to the following:**

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1. Where does it say that Lot was living, and how does this location compare to where Genesis 13:12-13 indicates that he was living earlier?
  - a. ANSWER: We see in this comparison that Lot continues to make bad choices. When he and his uncle Abram stood between Bethel and Ai, Lot chose the lush valley and Jordan Plain below them, and he specifically focused on the city of Sodom. Now, we see that he is no longer pitching his tent toward Sodom; he has actually moved out of his tent and into the city. He has firmly planted himself inside the city, even though "the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord." (Genesis 13:13) Imagine Lot's surprise when he and all of his possessions are carried off by the Elamite kings.
2. Why would King Bera and his allied kings have left the cities unprotected and fought the Elamite kings out in the open by the Dead Sea?
  - a. ANSWER: To better understand this story, we should begin with a brief lesson on siege warfare in the Middle Bronze Age. Most cities at that time were fortified with thick, high walls and narrow reinforced gates. The common tactic an enemy would take was to surround the city and prepare to lay siege to it over a long period of time rather than try to penetrate the walled fortification. The strategy in laying siege to a city was to offer two possible outcomes to the inhabitants: (1) surrender and be taken captive as slaves, or (2) resist and have the city laid under siege until everyone either starved to death and/or became too weak to defend the city. To counter this form of warfare, several defensive strategies were developed: (1) the design of the walls and fortifications that would ensure access to a water supply even during times of siege, and (2) amassing and storing sufficient supplies of grain and other food to last through the duration of any siege.

On the offensive side, the king could decide to take the battle to the enemy outside the city walls and meet them in familiar ground, defeating them before they had the chance to lay siege to the city. King Bera decided to take this option and led his five-king army over to the western shoreline of the Dead Sea, probably hoping to entrap Kedorlaomer and his allied army in the muck and mire along the shore of the Dead Sea. However, this approach backfired, as the scripture text reveals. As a result, the cities on the plain were without an army to defend them, and they were easily plundered. In the aftermath, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, along with all of their possessions, were carried off as prisoners, likely to become slaves of the Elamites.

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## The Call for Help

*"<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. <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."* Genesis 14:13-16 [NIV]

## The Rescue

So Abram, without hesitation, pulls together 318 trained men "born in his household" and traveled 140 miles north to Dan, probably traveling along the western side of the Jordan river.

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**Respond to the following:**

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3. Who else went with Abram and his trained men to help rescue Lot and the others from Sodom and Gomorrah? (See Genesis 14:13.)
  - a. ANSWER: The scripture text tells us that Abram had three allies: Mamre, Eshkal and Aner. They were all Amorites, and brothers, and they accompanied Abram and his trained fighting men. (See also Genesis 14:24.)
4. Why would Abram have a trained army of 318 men, and how could they have been "born in his household" when Abram didn't have any children at that time?
  - a. ANSWER 1: The fact that Abram had a trained group of fighting men speaks to his wealth and the size of his flocks and herds. These men—and likely more who remained behind to act as guards—were trained to fight both man and animal in protecting Abram, his family, and his flocks and his herds. They would have been trained to fight all manner of wild animals along with being trained to fight roaming groups of thieves and rustlers.
  - b. ANSWER 2: The expression "born in his household" refers to servants of Abram whose parents were also Abram's servants. Since they all belonged to Abram, they would have been "born in his household."

5. How could Abram and his army have caught up to Lot's captors, and so quickly, before Kedorlaomer and his allies could make it back to Elam?
- ANSWER 1: Kedorlaomer and his allies were four kings who were now loaded down with bounty from all their battles, including thousands of people whom they had taken captive as slaves, plus all the livestock. And traveling through hilly, rough terrain as they headed north toward Damascus with this entourage would have slowed them down even more. In contrast, Abram's army was small, needed very little, knew the geography well, and could travel much further distances before having to make camp.
  - ANSWER 2: Note also that Abram's army didn't stop after their first encounter with the enemy at Dan. Rather, after the initial battle at Dan, they pursued them an additional 100 miles north of Dan to Hobah—a total of 240 miles of pursuit, all on foot. It would have represented a sound defeat for Kedorlaomer and allies.
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## The Reunion

*"<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." Genesis 14:17-20 [NIV]*

After Abram returns victoriously from battle, having rescued Lot and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah along with all of their possessions, King Bera for Sodom runs out to greet Abram. We are then introduced to Melchizedek, the "king of Salem," who brings out "bread and wine." The Biblical text tells us that Melchizedek is the "priest of God Most High," and he blesses Abram. (Note: Salem is the early, small, village that will later become Jerusalem, and is located on the side of Mount Moriah. More about this location and Melchizedek in later lessons.)

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### **Now respond to the following:**

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6. Contrast the behavior of King Melchizedek with that of the King of Sodom. (See 14:17-21.)
- ANSWER 1: Note that Melchizedek brings bread and wine and blesses Abram. This king is very hospitable and blesses Abram for being so faithful in rescuing his nephew and the citizens of both cities. On the other hand, Bera, King of Sodom, is only happy about one thing: getting his people back so that he may once again rule over them. Note that he even tells Abram to "keep the goods for yourself." Since, as king, Bera owns everything—even his people's possessions—he nevertheless gladly gives all that away as long as he still rules the people.
  - ANSWER 2: Melchizedek recognizes that the victory is all God's doing. Bera of Sodom could care less; he thinks the battle was won simply because one army beat the other, and now he can have his people back. Melchizedek recognized that it was all about God. Again, for Bera, it's all about him, the King of Sodom
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*"<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.'" Genesis 14:21-24 [NIV]*

Once again, we see that Abram only wanted to do God's will, and he did not want to be rewarded for something that God had accomplished. His intentions were pure; all he wanted to do was follow God's leading and rescue Lot and the others.

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*Last question for the lesson:*

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7. The narrative above also shows us something about God. If Abram was doing God's will, then what specifically was God's will? Think about it and respond.
- a. ANSWER 1: Despite Lot's continued poor choices and his desire to live among wicked people, God wanted Lot rescued. God saw something in Lot that was worth saving, and He sent Abram and his army to rescue him. God could have easily used the Elamite kings' capture of the city's population to punish Lot and allow Lot to become a slave of the Elamites for the rest of his life.
  - b. ANSWER 2: Additionally, this shows us that no matter how hopeless our situation may seem, God knows each of us and the situation that we are in, and He can also send rescue—even when we believe that there's no hope of rescue.

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In the next lesson, we will see God formalize His covenant with Abram in a very Middle Bronze Age way. Abram would clearly understand the meaning and significance of this covenant, as it was the custom of the day. For believers today, it points the way toward Jesus coming as God's sacrifice. It will be a very interesting lesson for all of us, I'm sure.

Have a blessing-filled week!

In Christ,

**Wes**