

Genesis Lesson 8: Kings and Covenants

Read Genesis 14:1-16

Last time we ended with Abram settling near the oaks of Mamre in Hebron. Chapter 14 opens with a war between some surrounding kings, one of which will be the king of Sodom and will therefore affect Abram's nephew Lot. There are four kings that decide to attack five other kings. The first king listed of the four kings is Amraphel. Many scholars believe that this quite possibly could have been Hammurabi. If you are unfamiliar with Hammurabi, he was the sixth king of what is known as the First Babylonian Dynasty and is probably most remembered for his law code. This code, appropriately named the Code of Hammurabi, is among the earliest known recorded laws by mankind. In fact, its discovery helps refute the Documentary Hypothesis, which claims that Moses could not have been the author of the Pentateuch. Part of the reasoning was that Mosaic law was too advanced of a law code for his era. Yet again, we think way too much of ourselves and give far too little credit for earlier mankind's ability. When the Code of Hammurabi was discovered, it more that proved that assumption to be invalid.

Whether Amraphel was Hammurabi or not, he was king of Shinar, which is the area of Babylonia and he was part of these four kings along with Arioch, Chedorlaomer, and Tidal. The five kings on the other side were Bera, Birsha, Shinab, Shemember, and the king of Zoar. Bera is the king of Sodom and his name means "son of evil". Birsha is the king of Gomorrah and his name means "with iniquity or with wickedness".

Wow! They certainly will live up to those meanings.

The reason for the war is given in Genesis 14:4. They no longer wanted to serve Chedorlaomer after twelve years of servitude. They decide to rebel so, in the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer gathers up three of his king friends and they go on a great campaign. They not only attack these five kings, but before they reach them, they defeat several other people including the Rephaim, who are giants, and the Horites, who are cave dwellers. On their return trip they conquer others like the Amalekites and the Amorites. At this point, the five kings come out to meet them in the valley of Siddim, which is near the Salt Sea, also known as the Dead Sea.

Genesis 14:10 tells us that the "valley of Siddim was full of tar pits" and "the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them". Your version may have the word bitumen instead of tar, but they mean the same thing. There are only a few places around the world who currently have these "tar pits", but they are known for collecting thousands of fossils as animals get stuck in them and eventually die of starvation, exhaustion, or sun exposure. They are quite dangerous and could have meant death for these people if no one was there to help them out of it. As a result, the four kings plunder all of Sodom and Gomorrah, including Lot and his possessions.

One man escapes and takes word to Abram, who has a covenant with Mamre and his brothers Eshcol and Aner. As a side note, the word

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“Hebrew”, IBRIY, is first used in Scripture here in Genesis 14:13 and means “one from beyond” as Abram was not originally from this area. As the story goes on, we see in verse 14 that Abram must have been quite wealthy as he had “trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen”. He goes in pursuit of the four kings, defeats them with his small army, and brings everything and everyone back. This is a remarkable victory which could not have been won without the Lord.

Think About It:

Go online and read about or watch a video about tar pits.

Look on a Bible map and see how far Abram pursued the four kings before overtaking them.

What lesson, if any, can we learn from Lot in this story as he was “living in Sodom”?

What do you think Abram’s chances of winning this battle were without the Lord?

What can we learn spiritually from Abram, if anything, about what we should do for our brethren who are taken captive?

Read Genesis 14:17-24

In the last section of chapter 14, we meet a very interesting man by the name of Melchizedek. He is the king of Salem, which is later known as Jerusalem, and he is “a priest of God Most High”. This is the first time the word “priest” is used in Scripture and, as you know, this is well before the Law of Moses and the Levitical priesthood. It seems quite obvious that the Lord was working among people other than the Hebrews at this time. This should not surprise us, but encourage us. Remember that the Bible is only focusing in on the line of Christ. We are not privy to the encounters that God had with other people before the coming of the Messiah. What we do know is that there were others who served Him like Melchizedek.

We cannot embark on a lengthy study of Melchizedek, but we will discuss a few key points. The Hebrew word for “Most High” is ELYOWN and means “elevation, lofty, supreme”. Abram will connect “God Most High” to his name for God, “Lord” or YEHOVAH, in Genesis 14:22. Melchizedek’s name means “king of righteousness”. Also, he is king of Salem, which means “peace”, so he is “king of peace”. This is confirmed by the Hebrew writer in Hebrews 7:1-2 and these are both titles that he will correlate to Jesus.

The Hebrew writer will also correlate Melchizedek to Jesus in that they both are

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“without father, without mother, without genealogy...” (Hebrews 7:3). He is not saying they do not have parents, but rather that their titles have nothing to do with their genealogies. Melchizedek was not a king because he came from a line of kings and Jesus is not a priest because He came from the line of Levi (He came from Judah). They did not receive their titles based on the physical, but rather were endowed with it by “God Most High”. The meaning of this terminology is corroborated by the Tell el-Amarna tablets, discovered in Egypt in 1887, which are ancient clay tablets containing correspondence between Egyptian leaders and representatives in Canaan and other areas.

In Genesis 14:20 Abram honors Melchizedek by giving him a “tenth of all”, which the Hebrew writer tells us in Hebrews 7:7 is a confirmation that Abram is lesser than Melchizedek. It also lets us know again that Jesus indeed could be a priest even though He was not from the tribe of Levi. That can be further explained in Hebrews 7:11-19.

There are so many parallels drawn out between Jesus and Melchizedek. They are both called kings of righteousness, they are both called kings of peace, they are both kings and priests, they are both greater than father Abraham, and they were both given their positions by God rather than by heritage. This is a clear example of what we call a type and an antetype (ante meaning before). These terms simply refer to something that happens in the Old Testament, yet also represents something that happens later in the New Testament. Despite the mystery surrounding Melchizedek, he was just a man, but represented our Lord. What an honor for him!

Think About It:

What do you think it was like for Abram to meet Melchizedek?

Why did Abram refuse the goods that the king of Sodom offered him? (Genesis 15:22-23)

How difficult do you think it was for the Jews to comprehend Melchizedek and his superiority over Abram?

Read Genesis 15

In chapter 15, God adds to His promise to Abram. He says in Genesis 15:1 that He will be his shield. God says He is going to protect Abram and He again promises to make his descendants so great that they will be uncountable in verse 5. Abram questions God because he is still childless and knows that his inheritance will fall to someone other than his own offspring, but God assures him that the promise will be through his very own son. Verse 6 says that Abram “believed in the Lord” and God “reckoned it to him as righteousness”. Even though Abram was advanced in age and without his own child, he believed God was faithful and able to do what He promised.

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Genesis 15:7-16 seems to be an official covenant that God is making with Abram. He promises the land again and, when Abram questions, God has him bring five different sacrifices. When the sun started to set, God caused a “deep sleep” to come over Abram. The Hebrew word for “deep sleep” is TARDEMAH, which means “lethargy, trance, or deep sleep”. In this “deep sleep”, or trance, Abram is granted a knowledge about his descendants and their time in Egypt. He is even given a time frame for their departure from Egypt and comfort about his own passing from this life.

In Genesis 15:17 we read about the smoking oven and the flaming torch that pass between the sacrifices. Perhaps this is symbolic of the Lord passing through and establishing His covenant with Abram, as the very next verse lets us know that it was on that day that God makes a covenant with Abram concerning the land promise. Blood seems to be required when covenants are established. We have come to better understand the faith of Abram, but his story is far from over. I hope you will join me as we continue to learn more about God, His faithful servants, and His incredible plan.

Think About It:

Do you think that God will consider it righteous if we believe His promises to us, just as He did when Abram believed Him?

Do you think there is any symbolism in Abram scaring the birds of prey away in Genesis 15:11 and, if so, what?

Why do you think God caused “terror and great darkness” to fall upon Abram in Genesis 15:12?

Why is God going to wait to deliver His promise to Abram’s descendants according to Genesis 15:16?

Is there a reason God is waiting to deliver His promise to us?
