

### A MOST UNUSUAL TURN OF EVENTS | GENESIS 14:1-7

The last time we saw Abram, he and Lot had separated, and Abram had moved to Hebron. As we move into chapter 14, the story takes an odd turn, giving a very detailed account of a battle that doesn't include Abram, nor Hebron, nor any of the locations Abram has been.

The account begins with the words, **it came to pass in the days...** This somewhat innocent sounding phrase turns out to be an "alarm" of sorts in the pages of Scripture. This is the first time it is used, but four other times the Bible uses the exact same phrase. And it turns out that each time indicates a terrible turn of events (see Ruth 1:1, Est. 1:1, Isa. 7:1, Acts 11:28).

It turns out that four kings, named with their locations in verse 1, gather against five kings, named with their locations in verse 2. The four kings are from the east, the area of Babel. The five kings are from the area called **the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea**. This *valley of Siddim* is somewhat unknown, but the word comes from the same root as *Sodom*, and is likely in the same region, Sodom being the chief city. Genesis 13:5 described this land **as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar**. From what we know of the ancient world at that time, the three major centers of civilization were Mesopotamia (from which the four kings of v. 1 came), Canaan, and Egypt. Furthermore, it looks like this *valley of Siddim* was the "breadbasket" of Canaan. This puts Canaan in the middle of the two superpowers of the day.

The battle is introduced in verse 3 but explained in verses 4-7. For 12 years the peoples of Siddim had paid tribute to the Kings of the Mesopotamia. But in the 13<sup>th</sup> year they rebelled. What happens next is predictable. Almost. We expect the eastern Kings to come squash the rebellion. But what happens is that the eastern coalition goes through several smaller empires along the way, taking a most unusual and indirect route *around* Siddim. First, they are to the west (modern day Jordan), then in the south (modern Sinai Peninsula), then to the east (Kadesh, modern day Israel).

Why are the eastern kings not taking a direct route? Perhaps it is intimidation. Perhaps they do not want a battle with the kings of the valley of Siddim, they just want the tribute money, and they are strategically thinking that the kings will submit when they see the power of the four kings.

An interesting glance into the future arises here. The children of Israel, after 40 years in the wilderness, will leave Kadesh to enter the Promised Land, but will not take a direct route. In fact, they will take almost the same route, albeit in reverse, that the four kings are taking. Furthermore, they will defeat armies along the way and the result, as stated by Rahab in Jericho, is that **terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you** (Josh. 2:9).

### A MOST SURPRISING DEFEAT | GENESIS 14:8-17

War ensued, **four kings with five** (v. 9), and the five did not fare well. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, falling into the oily pits that still are found in the region. Those that could, fled. The kings of the east took the spoils.

Not until verse 12 do we see why this story is included in the Torah. Abram's nephew Lot shows up once again, this time in trouble. An unidentified messenger rushed to Abram to tell him the news, and Abram comes to the rescue. And in the rescue two things are especially interesting. First is that this is first and only time Abram is called **the Hebrew** (v. 13). This is a descendent of Eber (Gen 10:21, etc.). The word means *one who crossed over*, presumably speaking of the Euphrates (see Josh. 24:2). And an interesting bit of etymology is the the Greek *hyper* and the equivalent English *hyper* come from this word, with the idea of *going above*.

Second, the victory is won with 318 men (v. 14). How can 318 men defeat four kings who already defeated five, and more? A couple of things in the text indicate that this was skilled war strategy rather than supernatural victory. First, the number 318 itself is a factor of six, and six is the Biblical number which emphasizes *man*. Second, the description of the battle, beginning with the fact that Abram **armed his trained servants** (v. 14), then divided his men and attacked by night. This shows Abram as a man of shrewd military skill. The skill paid off, and Abram rescued Lot, as well as the bounty lost by the five kings of Siddim. The battle was a **slaughter** (v. 17) of the four eastern kings.

### A MOST UNUSUAL PARENTHESIS | GENESIS 14:18-20

With no explanation, comes **Melchizedek king of Salem** (v. 18), who is introduced as **a priest of the most high God** (v. 18). This Melchizedek is so incidental to the story that one wonders why it is here, and so mysterious one wonders who he is. This is the first introduction of one called *El Elyon*, or **the most high God**. Not only is Melchizedek a priest of this God, but Abram shows his allegiance to this same God in verse 22. The only conclusion one can make is that Melchizedek *is a priest unto the God of Abram*.

The Jewish teaching is that this king is Shem, son of Noah. This could be true, but he is also certainly a *type* of Christ, if not the preincarnate Christ altogether. Why is this important figure revealed here? *Perhaps it is because Abram defeated the king of Shinar*, the home of the tower of Babel, and God wanted to reward Abram's work.

### A MOST DEFINITIVE STATEMENT | GENESIS 14:21-24

Abram made a very strong statement to the King of Sodom, who offered all the stolen goods to him. Since he was faithful to **the possessor of heaven and earth** (v. 21), Abram would **not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet** (v. 22) from Sodom. What strength and faith to be able to say, "I neither want nor need what you have." This kind of testimony can come only from one who is in total reliance upon **the possessor of heaven and earth** (v. 21).