

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 14

We have four things in the story of this chapter.

I. A war with the king of Sodom and his allies, #Ge 14:1-11.

II. The captivity of Lot in that war, #Ge 14:12.

III. Abram's rescue of Lot from that captivity, with the victory he obtained over the conquerors, #Ge 14:13-16.

IV. Abram's return from the expedition (#Ge 14:17), with an account of what passed,

1. Between him and the king of Salem, #Ge 14:18-20.

2. Between him and the king of Sodom, #Ge 14:21-24. So that here we have that promise to Abram in part fulfilled, that God would make his name great.

Ver. 1.

We have here an account of the first war that ever we read of in scripture, which (though the wars of the nations make the greatest figure in history) we should not have had the history of if Abram and Lot had not been concerned in it. Now, concerning this war, we may observe,

I. The parties engaged in it. The invaders were four kings, two of them no less than kings of Shinar and Elam (that is, Chaldea and Persia), yet probably not the sovereign princes of those great kingdoms in their own persons, but either officers under them, or rather the heads and leaders of some colonies which came out of those great nations, and settled themselves near Sodom, but retained the names of the countries from which they had their origin. The invaded were the kings of five cities that lay near together in the plain of Jordan, namely, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. Four of them are named, but not the fifth, the king of Zoar or Bela, either because he was much more mean and inconsiderable or because he was much more wicked and inglorious than the rest, and worthy to be forgotten.

II. The occasion of this war was the revolt of the five kings from under the government of Chedorlaomer. Twelve years they served him. Small joy they had of their fruitful land, while thus they were tributaries to a foreign power, and could not call what they had their own. Rich countries are a desirable prey, and idle luxurious countries are an easy prey, to growing greatness. The Sodomites were the posterity of Canaan whom Noah had pronounced a servant to Shem, from whom Elam descended; thus soon did that prophecy begin to be fulfilled. In the thirteenth year, beginning to be weary of their subjection, they rebelled, denied their tribute, and attempted to shake off the yoke and retrieve their ancient liberties. In the fourteenth year, after some pause and preparation, Chedorlaomer, in conjunction with his allies, set himself to chastise and reduce the rebels, and, since he could not have it otherwise, to fetch his tribute from them on the point of his sword. Note, Pride, covetousness, and ambition, are the lusts from which wars and fightings come. To these insatiable idols the blood of thousands has been sacrificed.

III. The progress and success of the war. The four kings laid the neighbouring countries waste and enriched themselves with the spoil of them (#Ge 14:5-7), upon the alarm of which it had been the wisdom of the king of Sodom to submit, and desire conditions of peace; for how could he grapple with an enemy thus flushed with victory? But he would

rather venture the utmost extremity than yield, and it sped accordingly. *Quos Deus destruet eos dementat--Those whom God means to destroy he delivers up to infatuation.*

1. The forces of the king of Sodom and his allies were routed; and, it should seem, many of them perished in the slime-pits who had escaped the sword, **#Ge 14:10**. In all places we are surrounded with deaths of various kinds, especially in the field of battle.
2. The cities were plundered, **#Ge 14:11**. All the goods of Sodom, and particularly their stores and provisions of victuals, were carried off by the conquerors. Note, When men abuse the gifts of a bountiful providence to gluttony and excess, it is just with God, and his usual way, by some judgment or other to strip them of that which they have so abused, **#Ho 2:8,9**.
3. Lot was carried captive, **#Ge 14:12**. They took Lot among the rest, and his goods. Now Lot may here be considered,

(1.) As sharing with his neighbours in this common calamity. Though he was himself a righteous man, and (which is here expressly noticed) Abram's brother's son, yet he was involved with the rest in all this trouble. Note, *All things come alike to all*, **#Ec 9:2**. The best of men cannot promise themselves an exemption from the greatest troubles in this life; neither from our own piety nor our relation to those that are the favourites of heaven will be our security, when God's judgments are abroad. Note, further, Many an honest man fares the worse for his wicked neighbours. It is therefore our wisdom to separate ourselves, or at least to distinguish ourselves, from them (**#2Co 6:17**), and so deliver ourselves, **#Re 18:4**.

(2.) As smarting for the foolish choice he made of a settlement here. This is plainly intimated when it is said, *They took Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom*. So near a relation of Abram should have been a companion and disciple of Abram, and should have abode by his tents; but, if he choose to dwell in Sodom, he must thank himself if he share in Sodom's calamities. Note, When we go out of the way of our duty we put ourselves from under God's protection, and cannot expect that the choices which are made by our lusts should issue to our comfort. Particular mention is made of their taking Lot's goods, those goods which had occasioned his contest with Abram and his separation from him. Note, It is just with God to deprive us of those enjoyments by which we have suffered ourselves to be deprived of our enjoyment of him.

Ver. 13.

We have here an account of the only military action we ever find Abram engaged in, and this he was prompted to, not by his avarice or ambition, but purely by a principle of charity; it was not to enrich himself, but to help his friend. Never was any military expedition undertaken, prosecuted, and finished, more honourably than this of Abram's. Here we have,

I. The tidings brought him of his kinsman's distress. Providence so ordered it that he now sojourned not far off, that he might be a very present help.

1. He is here called *Abram the Hebrew*, that is, the son and follower of Heber, in whose family the profession of the true religion was kept up in that degenerate age. Abram herein acted like a Hebrew--in a manner not unworthy of the name and character of a religious professor.

2. The tidings were brought by one that had escaped with his life for a prey. Probably he was a Sodomite, and as bad as the worst of them; yet knowing Abram's relation to Lot, and concern for him, he implores his help, and hopes to speed for Lot's sake. Note, The worst of men, in the day of their trouble, will be glad to claim acquaintance with those that are wise and good, and so get an interest in them. The rich man in hell called Abram *Father*; and the foolish virgins made court to the wise for a share of their oil.

II. The preparations he made for this expedition. The cause was plainly good, his call to engage in it was clear, and therefore, with all speed, he *armed his trained servants, born in his house*, to the number of *three hundred and eighteen*--a great family, but a small army, about as many as Gideon's that routed the Midianites, #Jud 7:7. He drew out his *trained servants*, or his *catechised servants*, not only instructed in the art of war, which was then far short of the perfection which later and worse ages have improved it to, but instructed in the principles of religion; for Abram commanded his household to keep the way of the Lord. This shows that Abram was,

1. A great man, who had so many servants depending upon him, and employed by him, which was not only his strength and honour, but gave him a great opportunity of doing good, which is all that is truly valuable and desirable in great places and great estates.
2. A good man, who not only served God himself, but instructed all about him in the service of God. Note, Those that have great families have not only many bodies, but many souls besides their own, to take care of and provide for. Those that would be found the followers of Abram must see that their servants be catechised servants.
3. A wise man: for, though he was a man of peace, yet he disciplined his servants for war, not knowing what occasion he might have, some time or other, so to employ them. Note, Though our holy religion teaches us to be for peace, yet it does not forbid us to provide for war.

III. His allies and confederates in this expedition. He prevailed with his neighbours, *Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre* (with whom he kept up a fair correspondence) to go along with him. It was his prudence thus to strengthen his own troops with their auxiliary forces; and probably they saw themselves concerned, in interest, to act, as they could, against this formidable power, lest their own turn should be next. Note,

1. It is our wisdom and duty to behave ourselves so respectfully and obligingly towards all men as that, whenever there is occasion, they may be willing and ready to do us a kindness.
2. Those who depend on God's help, yet, in times of distress, ought to make use of men's help, as Providence offers it; else they tempt God.

IV. His courage and conduct were very remarkable.

1. There was a great deal of bravery in the enterprise itself, considering the disadvantages he lay under. What could one family of husbandmen and shepherds do against the armies of four princes, who now came fresh from blood and victory? It was not a vanquished, but a victorious army, that he was to pursue; nor was he constrained by necessity to this daring attempt, but moved to it by generosity; so that, all things considered, it was, for aught I know, as great an instance of true courage as ever Alexander or Caesar was celebrated for. Note, Religion tends to make

men, not cowardly, but truly valiant. The righteous is bold as a lion. The true Christian is the true hero.

2. There was a great deal of policy in the management of it. Abram was no stranger to the stratagems of war: He *divided himself*, as Gideon did his little army #Jud 7:16, that he might come upon the enemy from several quarters at once, and so make his few seem a great many; he made his attack by night, that he might surprise them. Note, Honest policy is a good friend both to our safety and to our usefulness. The serpent's head (provided it be nothing akin to the old serpent) may well become a good Christian's body, especially if it have a dove's eye in it, #Mt 10:16.

V. His success was very considerable, #Ge 14:15,16. He defeated his enemies, and rescued his friends; and we do not find that he sustained any loss. Note, Those that venture in a good cause, with a good heart, are under the special protection of a good God, and have reason to hope for a good issue. Again, It is all one with the Lord *to save by many or by few*, #1Sa 14:6. Observe,

1. He rescued his kinsman; twice here he is called his *brother Lot*. The remembrance of the relation that was between them, both by nature and grace, made him forget the little quarrel that had been between them, in which Lot had by no means acted well towards Abram. Justly might Abram have upbraided Lot with his folly in quarrelling with him and removing from him, and have told him that he was well enough served, he might have known when he was well off; but, in the charitable breast of pious Abram, it is all forgiven and forgotten, and he takes this opportunity to give a real proof of the sincerity of his reconciliation. Note,

(1.) We ought to be ready, whenever it is in the power of our hands, to succour and relieve those that are in distress, especially our relations and friends. *A brother is born for adversity*, #Pr 17:17. A friend in need is a friend indeed.

(2.) Though others have been wanting in their duty to us, yet we must not therefore deny our duty to them. Some have said that they can more easily forgive their enemies than their friends; but we shall see ourselves obliged to forgive both if we consider, not only that our God, when we were enemies, reconciled us, but also that he *passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage*, #Mic 7:18.

2. He rescued the rest of the captives, for Lot's sake, though they were strangers to him and such as he was under no obligation to at all; nay, though they were Sodomites, sinners before the Lord exceedingly, and though, probably, he might have recovered Lot alone by ransom, yet he brought back all the women, and the people, and their goods, #Ge 14:16. Note, As we have opportunity we must do good to all men. Our charity must be extensive, as opportunity offers itself. Wherever God gives life, we must not grudge the help we can give to support it. God does good to the just and unjust, and so must we, #Mt 5:45. This victory which Abram obtained over the kings the prophet seems to refer to, #Isa 41:2, *Who raised up the righteous man from the east, and made him rule over kings? And some suggest that, as before he had a title to this land by grant, so now by conquest.*

Ver. 17.

This paragraph begins with the mention of the respect which the king of Sodom paid to Abram at his return from the slaughter of the kings; but, before a particular account is given of this, the story of Melchizedek is briefly related, concerning whom observe,

I. Who he was. He was *king of Salem* and *priest of the most high God*; and other glorious things are said of him, **#Heb 7:1**, &c.

1. The rabbin, and most of our rabbinical writers, conclude that Melchizedek was Shem the son of Noah, who was king and priest to those that descended from him, according to the patriarchal model. But this is not at all probable; for why should his name be changed? And how came he to settle in Canaan?
2. Many Christian writers have thought that this was an appearance of the Son of God himself, our Lord Jesus, known to Abram, at this time, by this name, as afterwards, Hagar called him by another name, **#Ge 16:13**. He appeared to him as a righteous king, owning a righteous cause, and giving peace. It is difficult to imagine that any mere man should be said to be *without father, without mother, and without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life*, **#Heb 7:3**. It is witnessed of Melchizedek that he liveth, and that he abideth a priest continually (**#Ge 14:3,8**); nay (**#Ge 14:13,14**), the apostle makes him of whom these things are spoken to be our Lord who sprang out of Judah. It is likewise difficult to think that any mere man should, at this time, be greater than Abram in the things of God, that Christ should be a priest after the order of any mere man, and that any human priesthood should so far excel that of Aaron as it is certain that Melchizedek's did.
3. The most commonly received opinion is that Melchizedek was a Canaanitish prince, that reigned in Salem, and kept up the true religion there; but, if so, why his name should occur here only in all the story of Abram, and why Abram should have altars of his own and not attend the altars of his neighbour Melchizedek who was greater than he, seem unaccountable. Mr. Gregory of Oxford tells us that the *Arabic Catena*, which he builds much upon the authority of, gives this account of Melchizedek, That he was the son of Heraclim, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, and that his mother's name was Salathiel, the daughter of Gomer, the son of Japheth, the son of Noah.

II. What he did.

1. He *brought forth bread and wine*, for the refreshment of Abram and his soldiers, and in congratulation of their victory. This he did as a king, teaching us to do good and to communicate, and to be given to hospitality, according to our ability; and representing the spiritual provisions of strength and comfort which Christ has laid up for us in the covenant of grace for our refreshment, when we are wearied with our spiritual conflicts.
2. As priest of the most high God, he blessed Abram, which we may suppose a greater refreshment to Abram than his bread and wine were. Thus God, having raised up his Son Jesus, has sent him to bless us, as one having authority; and those whom he blesses are blessed indeed. Christ went to heaven when he was blessing his disciples (**#Lu 24:51**); for this is what he ever lives to do.

III. What he said, #Ge 14:19,20. Two things were said by him:--

1. He blessed Abram from God: *Blessed be Abram, blessed of the most high God*, **#Ge 14:19**. Observe the titles he here gives to God, which are very glorious.

(1.) *The most high God*, which bespeaks his absolute perfections in himself and his sovereign dominion over all the creatures; he is King of kings. Note, It will greatly help both our faith and our reverence in prayer to eye God as the most high God, and to call him so.

(2.) *Possessor of heaven and earth*, that is, rightful owner, and sovereign Lord, of all the creatures, because he made them. This bespeaks him a great God, and greatly to be praised (#Ps 24:1), and those a happy people who have an interest in his favour and love.

2. He blessed God for Abram (#Ge 14:20): and *blessed be the most high God*. Note,

(1.) In all our prayers, we must praise God, and join hallelujahs with all our hosannas. These are the spiritual sacrifices we must offer up daily, and upon particular occasions.

(2.) God, as the most high God, must have the glory of all our victories, #Ex 17:15; 1Sa 7:10,12; Jud 5:1,2; 2Ch 20:21. In them he shows himself higher than our enemies (#Ex 18:11), and higher than we; for without him we could do nothing.

(3.) We ought to give thanks for others' mercies as for our own, triumphing with those that triumph.

(4.) Jesus Christ, our great high priest, is the Mediator both of our prayers and praises, and not only offers up ours, but his own for us. See #Lu 10:21.

IV. What was done to him: *Abram gave him tithes of all*, that is, of the spoils, #Heb 7:4. This may be looked upon,

1. As a gratuity presented to Melchizedek, by way of return for his tokens of respect. Note, Those that receive kindness should show kindness. Gratitude is one of nature's laws.

2. As an offering vowed and dedicated to the most high God, and therefore put into the hands of Melchizedek his priest. Note,

(1.) When we have received some signal mercy from God, it is very fit that we should express our thankfulness by some special act of pious charity. God must always have his dues out of our substance, especially when, by any particular providence, he has either preserved or increased it to us.

(2.) That the tenth of our increase is a very fit proportion to be set apart for the honour of God and the service of his sanctuary.

(3.) That Jesus Christ, our great Melchizedek, is to have homage done him, and to be humbly acknowledged by every one of us as our king and priest; and not only the tithe of all, but all we have, must be surrendered and given up to him.

Ver. 21.

We have here an account of what passed between Abram and the king of Sodom, who succeeded him that fell in the battle (#Ge 14:10), and thought himself obliged to do this honour to Abram, in return for the good services he had done him. Here is,

I. The king of Sodom's grateful offer to Abram (#Ge 14:21): *Give me the soul, and take thou the substance*; so the Hebrew reads it. Here he fairly begs the persons, but as freely bestows the goods on Abram. Note,

1. Where a right is dubious and divided, it is wisdom to compound the matter by mutual concessions rather than to contend. The king of Sodom had an original right both to

the persons and to the goods, and it would bear a debate whether Abram's acquired right by rescue would supersede his title and extinguish it; but, to prevent all quarrels, the king of Sodom makes this fair proposal.

2. Gratitude teaches us to recompense to the utmost of our power those that have undergone fatigues, run hazards, and been at expense for our service and benefit. *Who goes a warfare at his own charges? #1Co 9:7.* Soldiers purchase their pay dearer than any labourers, and are well worthy of it, because they expose their lives.

II. Abram's generous refusal of this offer. He not only resigned the persons to him, who, being delivered out of the hand of their enemies, ought to have served Abram, but he restored all the goods too. He would not take *from a thread to a shoe-latchet*, not the least thing that had ever belonged to the king of Sodom or any of his. Note, A lively faith enables a man to look upon the wealth of this world with a holy contempt, #1Jo 5:4. What are all the ornaments and delights of sense to one that has God and heaven ever in his eye? He resolves even to a thread and a shoe latchet; for a tender conscience fears offending in a small matter. Now,

1. Abram ratifies this resolution with a solemn oath: *I have lifted up my hand to the Lord that I will not take any thing, #Ge 14:22.* Here observe,

(1.) The titles he gives to God, *The most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth*, the same that Melchizedek had just now used, #Ge 14:19. Note, It is good to learn of others how to order our speech concerning God, and to imitate those who speak well in divine things. This improvement we are to make of the conversation of devout good men, we must learn to speak after them.

(2.) The ceremony used in this oath: *I have lifted up my hand.* In religious swearing we appeal to God's knowledge of our truth and sincerity and imprecate his wrath if we swear falsely, and the *lifting up of the hand* is very significant and expressive of both.

(3.) The matter of the oath, namely, that he would not take any reward from the king of Sodom, was lawful, but what he was not antecedently obliged to.

[1.] Probably Abram vowed, before he went to the battle, that, if God would give him success, he would, for the glory of God and the credit of his profession, so far deny himself and his own right as to take nothing of the spoils to himself. Note, the vows we have made when we are in pursuit of a mercy must be carefully and conscientiously kept when we have obtained the mercy, though they were made against our interest. A citizen of Zion, if he has sworn, whether it be to God or man, though it prove to *his own hurt*, yet *he changeth not*, #Ps 15:4. Or,

[2.] Perhaps Abram, now when he saw cause to refuse the offer made him, at the same time confirmed his refusal with this oath, to prevent further importunity. Note, *First*, There may be good reason sometimes why we should debar ourselves of that which is our undoubted right, as Paul, #1Co 8:13; 9:12. *Secondly*, That strong resolutions are of good use to put by the force of temptations.

2. He backs his refusal with a good reason: *Lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich*, which would reflect reproach,

(1.) Upon the promise and covenant of God, as if they would not have enriched Abram without the spoils of Sodom. And,

(2.) Upon the piety and charity of Abram, as if all he had in his eye, when he undertook that hazardous expedition, was to enrich himself. Note,

[1.] We must be very careful that we give no occasion to others to say things which they ought not.

[2.] The people of God must, for their credit's sake, take heed of doing any thing that looks mean or mercenary, or that savours of covetousness and self-seeking. Probably Abram knew the king of Sodom to be a proud and scornful man, and one that would be apt to turn such a thing as this to his reproach afterwards, though most unreasonably. When we have to do with such men, we have need to act with particular caution.

3. He limits his refusal with a double proviso, **#Ge 14:24**. In making vows, we ought carefully to insert the necessary exceptions, that we may not afterwards say before the angel, *It was an error*, **#Ec 5:6**. Abram here excepts,

(1.) The food of his soldiers; they were worthy of their meat while they trod out the corn. This would give no colour to the king of Sodom to say that he had enriched Abram.

(2.) The shares of his allies and confederates: *Let them take their portion*. Note, Those who are strict in restraining their own liberty yet ought not to impose those restraints upon the liberties of others, nor to judge of them accordingly. We must not make ourselves the standard to measure others by. A good man will deny himself that liberty which he will not deny another, contrary to the practice of the Pharisees, **#Mt 23:4**. There was not the same reason why Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, should quit their right, that there was why Abram should. They did not make the profession that he made, nor were they, as he was, under the obligation of a vow. They had not the hopes that Abram had of a portion in the other world, and therefore, by all means, *let them take their portion of this*.