

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 14

ABRAM AND LOT HAVE SEPERATED. LOT HEADS TOWARDS GREEN PASTURE NEAR SODOM AND ABRAM WALKS WITH GOD TOWARDS CANAAN. IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, GOD EXPANDS HIS INITIAL PROMISE TO ABRAM AND SHOWS HIM THAT THE LAND OF CANAAN IS THE LAND GOD IS GIVING TO HIM.

THOUGH THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF OUR CURRENT CHAPTERS IN GENESIS IS ON ABRAM AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD, LETS NOT FORGET THAT HE IS PART OF A LARGER COMMUNITY THAT IS NOT BUILDING ALTARS AND HEARING MESSAGES FROM GOD. WE SAW IN GENESIS 12 HOW THE WORLD AROUND ABRAM WAS ACTING, WHEN IT ALMOST SEEMED LIKE A GIVEN THAT THE MEN OF EGYPT WERE GOING TO KILL ABRAM TO GET MARITAL ACCESS TO SARAI. RIGHT FROM THE JUMP OF GENESIS 14, WE WILL AGAIN DISCOVER THE LARGER WORLD THAT IS *LITERALLY* AT WAR WITH EACH OTHER.

IN A FEW MOMENTS WE'RE GOING TO READ A LIST OF NAMES AND PLACES MOST OF US HAVE NEVER HEARD. WE'LL MEET WARRING KINGS OF KINGDOMS LONG FORGOTTEN. AS WE READ THE CHAPTER IT ALMOST FEELS LIKE IT IS AN INTERRUPTION TO THE BEAUTIFUL ABRAHAMIC STORY. IT FEELS THAT WAY BECAUSE THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT IT IS! WE'LL HOPEFULLY GLEAN OUR LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM THIS VERY UNFAMILIAR STORY WITH AN ALL TOO FAMILIAR FEEL.

GENESIS 14:1-12

A LARGE REGIONAL CONFLICT ENSUES BETWEEN THE KINGS OF THE REGIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST. THE TEXT MENTIONS 5 CITIES IN THE LAND OF CANAAN THAT REBEL AGAINST 4 KINGS FROM MESOPOTAMIA WHO HAD BEEN RULING OVER THEM. THE CLASH OF THESE KINGS HAPPENS FIRST IN THE "VALLEY OF SIDDIM" (V. 8). WHILE THE FIGHTING HAPPENS, THE GROUP OF 5 KINGS WHO HAD REBELLED RETREAT AND GET STUCK IN SOME TAR PITS MAKING THEIR ESCAPE A MUCH STICKIER SITUATION. SO THE MESOPOTAMIAN KINGS (THE GROUP OF 4) BEGINS TO PLUNDER SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

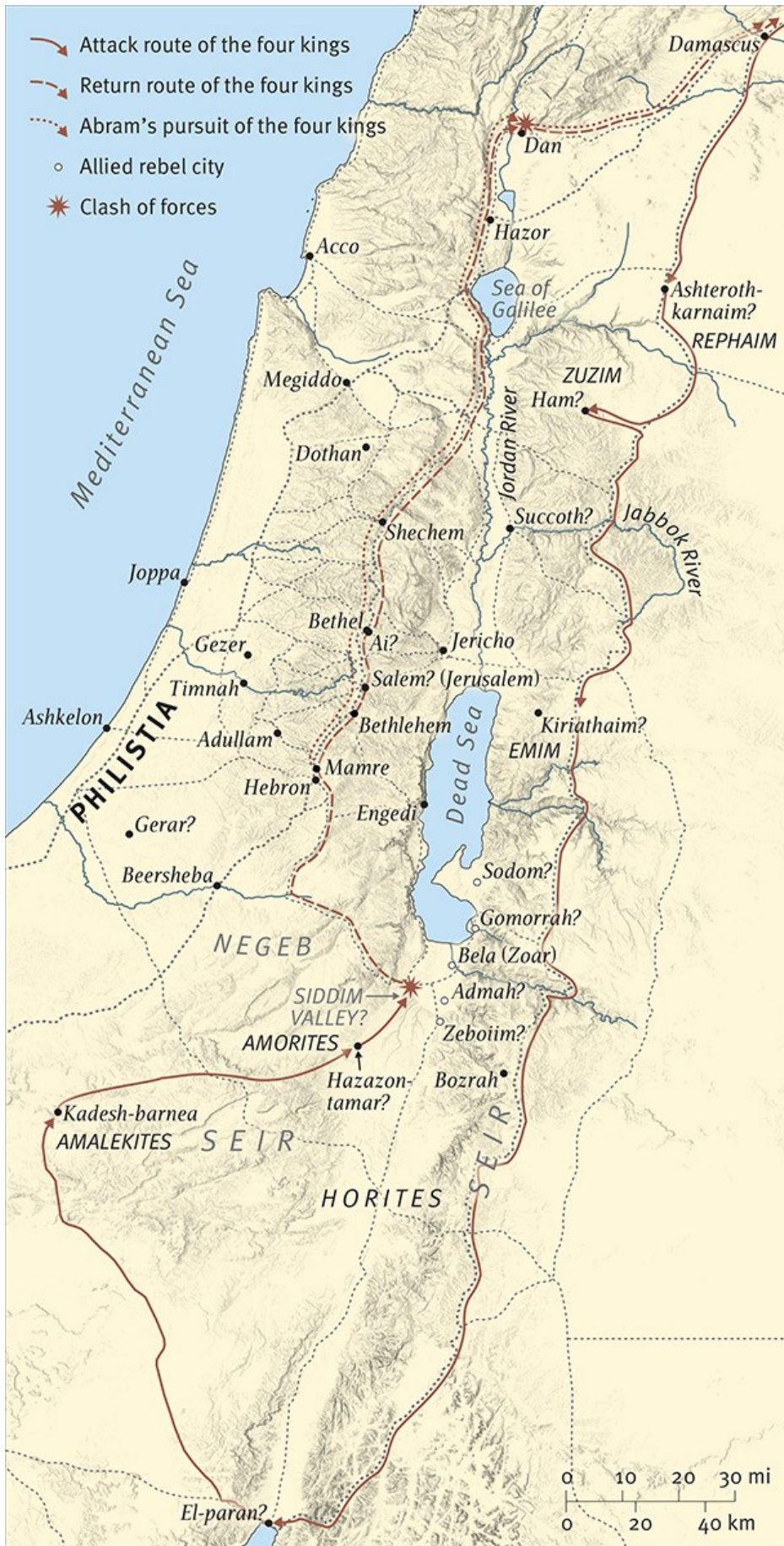
AS THEY TAKE GOOD AND SUPPLIES, THEY ALSO TAKE PEOPLE, PRESUMABLY TO BE SLAVES. ONE OF THE RESIDENTS OF SODOM THEY CAPTURE IS LOT! AND IT IS IN THAT MOMENT THAT THIS VERY CONFUSING AND DISCONNECTED STORY BECOMES RELEVANT TO US.

HERE'S HOW THE NLT TELLS IT:

GENESIS 14:10-12 (NLT) - AS IT HAPPENED, THE VALLEY OF THE DEAD SEA WAS FILLED WITH TAR PITS. AND AS THE ARMY OF THE KINGS OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH FLED, SOME FELL INTO THE TAR PITS, WHILE THE REST ESCAPED INTO THE MOUNTAINS. 11 THE VICTORIOUS INVADERS THEN PLUNDERED SODOM AND GOMORRAH AND HEADED FOR HOME, TAKING WITH THEM ALL THE SPOILS OF WAR AND THE FOOD SUPPLIES. 12 THEY ALSO CAPTURED LOT-- ABRAM'S NEPHEW WHO LIVED IN SODOM-- AND CARRIED OFF EVERYTHING HE OWNED.

GENESIS 14:13-16 - ABRAM RESCUES LOT

ABRAM HEARS ABOUT LOT'S CAPTURE FROM ONE OF LOT'S MEN THAT WAS ABLE TO ESCAPE. ABRAM PUTS TOGETHER A DEFENSE FORCE FROM AMONGST HIS MEN AND PURSUES THE ARMIES THAT CAPTURED LOT. NOT ONLY DOES ABRAM MANAGE TO GET LOT BACK, BUT HE DEFEATED THE OPPOSITION, CHASES THEM OUT OF CANAAN AND GETS ALL OF THE STUFF BACK!



GENESIS 14:16 (NLT) - ABRAM RECOVERED ALL THE GOODS THAT HAD BEEN TAKEN, AND HE BROUGHT BACK HIS NEPHEW LOT WITH HIS POSSESSIONS AND ALL THE WOMEN AND OTHER CAPTIVES.

THOUGH THE TEXT DOESN'T SPECIFICALLY CITE THIS, THE TRUTH IS CLEAR: GOD IS CERTAINLY WITH ABRAM! 5 KINGS OF CANAAN CAN'T STOP THE 4 KINGS OF MESOPOTAMIA YET ABRAM AND HIS CREW CAN! GOD'S FAVOR IS ON ABRAM AND THE PROMISE THAT GOD WOULD BLESS AND CURSE THOSE WHO BLESSED OR CURSED ABRAM IS BEING SEEN IN ACTION THROUGH THIS RECORD.

GENESIS 14:17-20 - ABRAM HONORS GOD

FOLLOWING THE VICTORY, ABRAM RETURNS THE GOODS TO THE KINGS OF CANAAN. ONE OF THE KINGS OF THIS REGION IS NOT PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED IN THE RECORDS UNTIL NOW - MELCHIZEDEK, THE KING OF SALEM. GENESIS 14:18 TELLS US THAT MELCHIZEDEK, ALONG WITH BEING A KING WAS A "PRIEST OF GOD MOST HIGH (HEBREW: *EL ELYON*)". SALEM IS A CITY IN CANAAN WHICH WILL LATER BE A JEBUSITE CITY CALLED "JERUSALEM".

MELCHIZEDEK IS A UNIQUE CHARACTER IN THIS STORY BECAUSE HE IS A KING AND A PRIEST, AN UNUSUAL COMBINATION NOT ONLY FOR THIS TIME IN BIBLICAL HISTORY BUT ANY TIME IN BIBLICAL HISTORY. IT IS ALSO INTERESTING THAT MELCHIZEDEK IS NOT A PAGAN PRIEST BUT A PRIEST OF "GOD MOST HIGH", IDENTIFIED AS THE "POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH" (14:19) AND THE GOD OF ABRAM (14:19).

THERE ARE OTHER SYMBOLS HERE THAT HAVE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE TO

BELIEVERS LATER IN SCRIPTURE, SPECIFICALLY THE PRESENCE OF BREAD AND WINE (14:18) AND ABRAM PRACTICE OF GIVING A "TENTH" OF ALL (THE FIRST INSTANCE OF A "TITHE"). WHY THE BREAD AND WINE? WHY DID ABRAM DO THIS? WHERE DOES MELCHIZEDEK COME FROM? WHERE DOES HE GO? HOW DOES HE KNOW ABOUT GOD MOST HIGH? SPECULATION ABOUNDS AND SOME CLARITY COMES FROM NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS (SEE HEBREWS 5-7) BUT FOR OUR PURPOSES IN GENESIS, WE DON'T KNOW ANY MORE THAN WHAT WE HAVE IN THE TEXT. HERE IS SOME OF WHAT THE ESV STUDY BIBLE SAYS:

"MELCHIZEDEK (WHICH MEANS "KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS") GENEROUSLY PROVIDES A MEAL FOR THE RETURNING VICTORS. SALEM IS POSSIBLY A SHORTENED VERSION OF "JERUSALEM" (SEE PS. 76:2) AND IS RELATED TO SHALOM, THE HEBREW WORD FOR "PEACE" (SEE HEB. 7:2). HE WAS PRIEST OF GOD MOST HIGH. ALTHOUGH VERY LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT MELCHIZEDEK, HE PROVIDES AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF A PRIEST-KING LINKED TO JERUSALEM. THERE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN AN EXPECTATION THAT LATER KINGS OF JERUSALEM SHOULD RESEMBLE HIM (SEE PS. 110:4)."

ONE ADDITIONAL POINT ABOUT ABRAM'S ACTIONS - HE RESPONDS TO MELCHIZEDEK'S KINDNESS AND BLESSING WITH GENEROSITY AND A SACRIFICIAL GIFT (A TENTH OF ALL THE GOODS HE RECEIVED) TO HONOR GOD.

GENESIS 14:21-24 - ABRAM IS GOD'S MAN

THE KING OF SODOM MEETS WITH ABRAM (WHO JUST GOT ALL OF THE KING'S STUFF BACK!) AND SHOWS NO GRATITUDE OR THANKS BUT JUST DEMANDS "GIVE THE PEOPLE TO ME AND YOU AND KEEP THE GOODS". YET ABRAM GIVES BOTH BACK TO HIM BECAUSE HE SEEMS TO WANT NO CONNECTION TO THE KING OF SODOM, BECAUSE OF HIS ALLEGIANCE TO GOD.

IN A MOMENT WHERE ABRAM COULD HAVE DEFINITELY "MADE A NAME FOR HIMSELF" HE CONTINUES TO SHOW HUMILITY AND GRACE AND RELIANCE ON THE GOD WHO SAID TO ABRAM "I WILL MAKE YOUR NAME GREAT" (GENESIS 12:2). ABRAM IS LIVING IN THE LAND THAT GOD HAS PROMISED TO GIVE TO HIM AS HIS OWN POSSESSION YET HE ACTING LIKE A PILGRIM IN THAT LAND. HE IS RELYING ON GOD TO PROVIDE FOR HIM AND HIS FAMILY AND IS INTENTIONAL TO NOT ALIGN HIMSELF WITH THE KINGS, RULERS AND NATIONS OF THE LAND IN WHICH HE LIVES.

AS WE TIDY UP THIS CHAPTER, LET'S PAUSE TO REFLECT ON SOME OF THE LESSONS OF GENESIS 14. GENESIS 14 IS A BIT CONFUSING, HARD TO FOLLOW AND FILLED WITH INTERESTING (AND WEIRD) ENCOUNTERS. WHAT CAN WE GLEAN FROM SUCH A CHAPTER? LET'S GIVE IT A SHOT BY TYING IT TOGETHER BACK WITH WHAT WE LOOKED AT AS WE BEGAN.

THE BIBLE IS A SACRED AND DIVINELY INSPIRED TEXT. YET, THAT DOES NOT MEAN IT IS JUST A TRITE RELIGIOUS DOCUMENT FILLED WITH "HOLIER THAN THOU" STORIES AND LITTLE PITHS OF WISE MORAL SAYINGS. THE BIBLE IS THE REAL DEAL. GENESIS 14 IS A MESS OF A CHAPTER. THE PATRIARCH OF FAITH, ABRAM HAS TO GO TO WAR AGAINST AND WITH PAGAN KINGS TO SAVE HIS NEPHEW. THIS WHOLE REGIONAL CONFLICT FOR OUR PURPOSES COMES OUT OF NOWHERE, BUT IN REAL TIME HAD BEEN BREWING FOR SOME TIME (V. 4 - "IN THE 13TH YEAR THEY REBELLED...").

AT THE START OF OUR LOOK AT THIS CHAPTER, I MENTIONED THAT THE STORY FEELS LIKE AN "INTERRUPTION" TO OUR STORY WITH ABRAM BECAUSE //7//S AN INTERRUPTION TO OUR STORY WITH ABRAM. THE INCLUSION OF THIS ACCOUNT IN THE TEXT GIVES US REASON TO LOVE GOD AND THE BIBLE EVEN MORE - HERE'S WHY:

OUR LIVES OF FAITH ARE NOT ONE MOMENT OF DIVINE ENCOUNTER FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER DIVINE ENCOUNTER FOLLOWED BY DIVINE ENCOUNTER. OUR LIVES ARE FILLED WITH "INTERRUPTIONS" TO THOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD. WE DRAW CLOSE TO GOD, HAVE CLARITY TO BIG QUESTIONS

OR PROBLEMS AS WE READ THE BIBLE, RECEIVE WISDOM FOR OUR DAYS THROUGH THE SPIRIT, ENTER SWEET HOURS OF PRAYER AND PRAISE, AND THEN WE HAVE TO DRIVE THE KIDS TO SCHOOL, TALK TO THE OTHER GUYS IN THE SHIPYARD, SHOVEL THE SNOW, NAVIGATE A BARRAGE OF QUESTIONABLE ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS ON THE TV, AND SOMEHOW PAY THE MORTGAGE THIS MONTH.

WE DO NOT LIVE IN FAITH-BUBBLES, WORLD'S WHERE THE ONLY PEOPLE AROUND US ARE KIND, ENCOURAGING, HELPFUL AND COMPATIBLE. HAVE YOU NOTICED?

OUR LIVES ARE MUCH MORE LIKE GENESIS 13-14. GREAT MOMENTS OF COMMUNION WITH GOD AND THEN WORLD WARS BREAK OUT AND YOU HAVE TO GO BAIL OUT YOUR (PROBABLY FOOLISH) NEPHEW. MANY WRONGLY LOOK AT THE MEN AND WOMEN OF SCRIPTURE AND THINK THEY HAD SOME ADVANTAGE OVER US. GOD SPOKE TO THEM, ANGELS VISITED THEM AND THEY LIVED IN BETTER AND MUCH SIMPLER WORLDS - OF COURSE THEY WERE ABLE TO BE WHO THEY WERE - IF ONLY IT WAS LIKE THAT FOR US.

WELL 21ST CENTURY SAINT, DON'T BE SO QUICK TO BE SO SIMPLE MINDED. WE LIVE IN JUST AS COMPLICATED AND EVIL OF A WORLD AS THEY DID YET GOD SPEAKS TO US DAILY THROUGH HIS WORD AND WE HAVE BEEN VISITED BY THE RISEN JESUS. THEY DIDN'T LIVE IN FAITH-BUBBLES. ABRAHAM MEETS WITH GOD IN GENESIS 13 AND IS SURROUNDED BY MILITARY MESS IN GENESIS 14. AND YET HE REMAINS FAITHFUL, KEEPS HIS INTEGRITY, PROTECTS HIS LOVED ONES AND HONORS GOD IN HEART AND ACTION.

THIS IS THE PICTURE OF A LIFE OF FAITH THAT THE SCRIPTURE ACTUALLY PAINTS. THIS SIDE OF GLORY, WE LIVE IN THE MESSY WORLD THAT INTERRUPTS OUR DESIRED CIRCUMSTANCES DAY BY DAY. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A FAITH-BUBBLE. WE CAN AND SHOULD SURROUND OURSELVES WITH GOOD AND GODLY INFLUENCES AND PEOPLE AND PRACTICES - BUT SOMEHOW THE WORLD STILL POPS IN AND FORCES US TO RESPOND, JUST AS THESE WARRING KINGS POPPED ABRAHAM'S LITTLE BUBBLE - FORCING HIM TO DEAL WITH THEIR MESS.

SO, OUR LIVES IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, ARE NOT ABOUT AVOIDING AS MANY MESSY SITUATIONS AS WE CAN (THOUGH WE SHOULD AVOID THEM WHERE WE CAN) - IT IS MORE ABOUT LIVING BY FAITH *IN AND THROUGH* THOSE MESSY INTERRUPTIONS IN OUR LIVES. TOO MANY CHRISTIANS FOLD AND GET FRUSTRATED OR FLUSTERED WHEN INTERRUPTIONS ARISE IN THEIR DAYS AND LIVES. WHY? WHOSE STORY ARE WE READING?

ACTS 14:22 (NLT) - (PAUL AND BARNABAS) ENCOURAGED THEM TO CONTINUE IN THE FAITH, REMINDING THEM THAT WE MUST SUFFER MANY HARDSHIPS TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

2 TIMOTHY 3:12 - INDEED, ALL WHO DESIRE TO LIVE GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS WILL BE PERSECUTED.

1 PETER 4:12 (CSB) - DEAR FRIENDS, DON'T BE SURPRISED WHEN THE FIERY ORDEAL COMES AMONG YOU TO TEST YOU AS IF SOMETHING UNUSUAL WERE HAPPENING TO YOU.

1 JOHN 3:13 - DO NOT BE SURPRISED, BRETHREN, IF THE WORLD HATES YOU.

THE TERM "INTERRUPTION" IMPLIES THAT LIFE IS SUPPOSED TO GO A CERTAIN WAY AND THEN IT DOESN'T BECAUSE OF THESE "INTERRUPTIONS". LET US RECOGNIZE THAT "INTERRUPTIONS" THE MANY AND VARIED ONES WE ENCOUNTER EVERY DAY ARE PROBABLY HAVE A BETTER TERM THAT THEY SHOULD BE IDENTIFIED BY. BIBLICALLY SPEAKING, RATHER THAN CALLING THESE INTERRUPTIONS "INTERRUPTIONS" WE SHOULD CALL THIS VERY COMMON EXPERIENCE - "LIVING LIFE". AND AS WE "LIVE LIFE" AND ENCOUNTER THESE INTERRUPTIONS WE, LIKE ABRAHAM, WILL STAY FAITHFUL, OBEDIENT AND DEPENDANT ON GOD MOST HIGH.