

Genesis 14:1-16, The Beginning of Hope in the Promises of God: A Life of Abraham, Preached by Michael Gunn @ Harambee Church on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008

*"For us as Christians, Abraham is our father, not because he's a good guy, but because he is a reminder that our relationship with the Almighty is a relationship defined by Grace. What really matters is not whether Abraham is good or bad or cowardly or heroic, but that God pursues His design for the welfare of the human family with people like that; in other words, people like us!"*

**Lewis Smedes**

## **Intro**

As we saw last week, humanity has its sublime side and its evil side, and that truth exists in the hearts of every man and woman in the world. To not think that creates self-righteousness, that at best displays a snobby person and at worse hacks to death thousands of Tutsi's because you are superior to them. And we wonder why God has the right to enact His perfect justice on people? The key to this dichotomy in every human is repentance and then moving toward God, which allows us to see ourselves for who we are, and who our sustenance comes from, and then act according to His will in the lives of others. We saw Abram doing this in last week's passage.

This week we have a rather strange passage. Many commentators want to write it off as irrelevant and Jewish folklore. They see it as a later addition to enhance the "Myth" of Abraham. This seems weird to me. The author has already show his dark side, why in the world would this be the case? The story of Abraham doesn't seem to be a fabrication. Fabrications don't usually include the weaknesses that the author includes.

The question bigger question is how does Abraham, a herder, drive out 4 kings. The other major problem in the text is none of these kings have been identified in antiquity. As we have learned many times over though, the absence of evidence in antiquity doesn't necessarily mean the absence of historical accuracy. Ancient history is hard to document, and many civilizations in the bible (Such as the Hittites) had no physical proof until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What we do have here is another instance of God working in the life of His people. In the next few weeks, we will begin to unearth the providence of God in our faith walk, and in the fulfillment of His promises.

## **From the Head...**

As we saw last week, it is possible that Abram sinned against God and Sarai to preserve his life, since God promised him that the blessing would come through him. Later on we will see Abram have sex with Hagar, because he once again wanted that promise to happen through his own doing. This is just a way that we justify our actions, but in reality, in all our striving, God continues to work His plans in spite of our actions and non-actions. What is interesting though, our actions matter. If Ishmael wasn't brought in to this world through an illicit sexual union, we may not have many of the turbulent issues that occurred in the Old Testament, and continue to this day.

Our text today sounds like the gulf war (1991 version), with many nations participating, but these kings are more or less kings of cities, rather than countries (Which is why I think that many of these names and cities haven't been located). This is why "Kings" (Feudal Lords) would bind together to fight, because it would strengthen their armies against the surrounding Kings. Therefore Abraham's armies of 318 would have been formidable, especially as it combined forces with the remaining armies of the defeated kings.

These were "Marauders" looking to pillage and rape, which is what verses 11 and 12 tell us. In chapter thirteen we see Lot "Choosing" his land, leaving Abram with the rest, which is a picture of the reality of God's sovereign will in action. It appears as Lot's choice, but God is providentially involved. God promised Abram that land, and Lot is an obstacle, but in chapter 13 God deals with that obstacle in the choice of Lot. Now we see a further obstacle in the kings of the land who take over all of the land from the east to the west. Abram does not set out to conquer anyone or anybody. He simply sets out to free his nephew Lot, and the fact that this occurred and he had to act gave him dominion over that land as the one who conquered it. When Abram took Lot with him, and when Lot made his choice, no one knew that his presence would lead to God giving Abram dominion over the land.

Now we know that this dominion is short lived, and that Israel would not rule in the land for 400 years, but God is shaping Abram, and bringing him forth as a player in God's redemptive history.

The term "Hebrew" in verse thirteen is an interesting one. First Israelite's didn't refer to themselves as Hebrews, and second the Israelite's hadn't come along for another 400 years. The term is an ancient one found often in the ancient near east for those that are "Outsiders" or "Marauders." I think this fits here. Abram, and his people were outsiders in the land of Canaan. God has called him out and placed him as a "Resident Alien" in a strange land.

This isn't a story of great faith, or great warring; it's a story of a great God who is sovereign in our lives, and who is providentially connected to His design and plan in the world.

**...to the Heart**

So often ignorant people look into the pages of the Old Testament and see a mean, capricious God. This is because they can only view the text horizontally from their own human, 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective. This is a form of dishonesty, and text raping that is rampant in our culture, but unfair to the truth of the text. Unfortunately, Christians have a habit of doing the same thing, trying to get the "Nugget's" of God's truth without understanding the context grammatically, historically and socially. What we see when the exegetical smoke clears is a just, fair, Holy and loving God of grace that is absolutely worthy to be worshipped, which is what Abram does, and we will explore more next week!

**Books for further study:** *Genesis*, Walter Brueggemann, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*, Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, Bruce Waltke, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis*, Gordon J. Wenham, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, John H. Walton, *Creation and Blessing*, Allen P. Ross

**Next Weeks Verses:** Genesis 14:17-24

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