

Genesis 14: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[6 : 0 8] Genesis chapter 14. Genesis chapter 14. is that the land later associated with Amalek is conquered and it is or it's liberated by Abram and this is a sign of the possibility of Abram's descendants doing the same thing.

Genesis 14 then is a conquest narrative. It is a narrative of Abram going throughout the whole land conquering a significant tract of territory. He pursues Chedilema and his forces up to the north of Damascus. It's a significant territory that he's marked out by his victory and as we've seen Abram has been building altars throughout the land then walking throughout the land and then having a certain area of the land being declared as his possession in the future mapped out as the territory that God will give to him and here we see taking possession of the land and guarding the people within it. He's progressively developing a deeper relationship with the land and its people as we go through these chapters. So we begin in chapter 12 of having an exodus experience in the land of Egypt going down into Egypt because of a famine being protected there being delivered with plagues and then going into the land wandering throughout the land spying out the land as it were and now winning a victory within the land. He's going through the history of his descendants in important ways. He's already been in significant places like Shechem and Ai where they failed to take possession of the land and he's built altars in these places. He's playing out the history of Israel in advance and so as Israel looked back at stories like this they would see that their destiny has been foreshadowed that there's nothing that they will face that Abram has not faced before them. The kings of the nations, Chedilema and his forces drive the forces of the land, the Canaanites, down to the asphalt pits but yet Abram can defeat them and if Abram can do it then they may be able to do it too with the forces that dominate the land in their day. Lot's part in this story is important. He's the one it would seem at this point that Abram's descendants would be named in but yet in the previous chapter we saw that

Lot went his own way. In many respects he seems like a bad penny. He's gone his own way but maybe he can be won back. You can imagine Abram having great hope here as he goes out to rescue Lot. Maybe Lot will have learned his lesson. Maybe Lot will come back to him. One of the questions within this chapter is how Lot and Abram will relate by the end of it, this episode. Are they going to relate to each other as brothers or is Lot going to return to the status of a son-like character, his brother's son who is adopted into his family and who will bear his destiny? These are important questions and as the chapter moves on we'll see that there is a fateful decision that arises. Abram gathers together his forces. He has influence within the land and it suggests as we read this chapter that he has real weight to him. He's someone who's acting very much like a king at this point. Not just a priest building altars but a judge figure, a figure with military might, someone with allies, someone who can muster military forces. He himself has forces of over 300 men, 318 men and that number is significant. Why that number in particular? Well it's the gematria of the name of Eliezer who we meet in the following chapter. It's the number of his house-born servant.

These are people who are born within his house and they're representing Eliezer, his chief servant. Now the fact that he can muster this many men suggests that he probably has about two or three thousand people in his sheikdom. There's a significant number of people surrounding him and all of these are people who can fight for him, who he can call upon to his aid. They're not just regular mercenaries, these are people who belong to his own house. So he's already acting as a sort of king on some scale and Abram now is going to move to a grander scale of operation. He's acting with the peoples of the land, with allies around him and he's combating some early empires. Chedilema and the Japhethite kings come against him and he's someone who can stand for the land he's within and make a conquest within it.

He does not take absolute possession of it, that's something that awaits later developments, but he's able to drive out the opponents and he divides up his forces, attacks by night and pursues the opponents north of Damascus. After he wins the victory he meets with the king of Sodom and Melchizedek the king of Salem in the king's valley. Melchizedek the king of Salem brings out bread and wine.

[11 : 03] He is described as the priest of God most high and he brings out bread and wine. We're seeing here themes of priesthood and kingdom. Abraham as he has already gone throughout the land has built altars, sites of worship etc and he's developed allies Mamre, Hannah, Eshcol, other figures like that who have surrounded Abraham and allied themselves with him. And he is met here by Melchizedek the king of Salem. This meeting is an interesting one. It occurs at a very significant point within the story that invites reflection. Abraham has been playing out the history of the future history of his nation.

He's gone through the story of the exodus, he's gone through the story of spying out the land, the conquest of the land, and now he meets this mysterious figure from Salem. And he treats this figure in a remarkable way. This figure blesses him but he gives him a tithe of everything he possesses.

And it would seem that this Melchizedek character is of more significance than he might originally appear to be. The fact that he appears at this juncture suggests that there's something more to him. If he is playing out the destiny of Israel, what or who does Melchizedek represent?

That site will later be the site of Jerusalem and he's met by the king of righteousness as Melchizedek's name suggests. So it's a very significant meeting. At the site of Jerusalem meeting with this mysterious character, it might seem to be an anticipation of a sort of Davidic kingdom. But a Davidic kingship that also has priestly authority. And so it's not surprising that the book of Hebrews and other parts of later scripture would reflect upon this event and see within this event something that maybe augurs something greater in the future, some anticipation of what some figure might arise later on in Israel's history. And it's not surprising then that Christ is presented as the greater Melchizedek, the one who after his victory over the principalities of powers comes as the Davidic king from the new Jerusalem to his people with gifts of bread and wine, setting a table for them in the presence of their enemies, defeated enemies, feeding them at his feast. We are the true sons of Abraham.

We're fed by the great Melchizedek. And so this pattern as it plays out anticipates later history and the destiny of the people of God. The king of Sodom says something quite fateful at this point.

[13 : 39] He says, Abraham, you can keep the goods, but I want to keep the people for myself. And what does that mean? It means that the king of Sodom wants to keep Lot. He wants Lot and his family. And so all the people are returned to the king of Sodom. Abraham might have hoped that he would have Lot restored to him, but that is not to happen. He's been liberated from captivity to King Chedileoma, but he's now back within the land and has a part to play within the society of Sodom. He's pitched his tent near Sodom in the past, but later on we'll see him enter within their gates, being one of their rulers. He's one of the people who has influence within that society now. And so this story is one that is a pivotal point, a point where the destiny of Lot and Abraham separates more decisively. And whereas in the previous chapter it might have been just for a period of time, now it seems more definitive.

One question. As we're reading the story of Abraham, it's important to keep in mind that there are a lot of moving pieces. There's Abraham's relationship with the land. There's Abraham's relationship with the people of the land. There's Abraham's relationship with his wife Sarai. There's Abraham's relationship with the promises of God. At this point it would be good to step back and reflect upon how all these different aspects of the story stand at this particular juncture, to take stock of how things stand before the significant events of the chapter that follows.