

## **“DEFEATING THE ENEMIES OF FAITH”** **(Genesis 14:1-24)**

How many of you remember the children’s song “I’m in the Lord’s Army?” “I may never march in the infantry, ride in the cavalry, shoot the artillery... I may never fly o’er the enemy, but I’m in the Lord’s army. Yes, sir!” Anybody remember that song? It’s probably not politically correct anymore to associate being a Christian with being in God’s army, but the New Testament is filled with military images such as “fighting the good fight,” and the “weapons of our warfare,” “putting on the full armor of God,” and “being a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” These phrases remind us that the Christian life is a battle, and every day we face an enemy who wants to take us out. Our success in living the Christian life depends on being aware of the battle we face, rising up in confidence to fight the enemy, and using the right weapons to defeat him.

This is illustrated in the story we come to today in Genesis 14. We’re studying the life of Abraham, and in chapter 12 God calls Abraham to leave his country and go to a land He would show him. He promises Abraham three things: a land, many descendants, and great blessings. In faith Abraham journeys east until he comes to the Promised Land – the land of Canaan – and God prospers him with great material abundance – he has herds and flocks, silver and gold, as well as a number of people who want to work for him and come under his blessing.

In the Bible the Promised Land symbolizes abundant life – the quality-of-life God created us to enjoy. The full enjoyment of this life was lost at the fall, but Jesus came to restore that life, and when we trust in Christ, we inherit all the privileges and blessings that come by being children of God – such blessings as forgiveness, joy, peace, hope, satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, purpose, and meaning – we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Our enemy wants to plunder our blessings and rob us of abundant life. This is pictured in all the Old Testament stories of wars and conflicts where real-life, flesh-and-blood enemies are continually invading the Promised Land and trying to take it. Every Old Testament physical battle pictures what the New Testament refers to as a spiritual battle. Today we do not fight against flesh-and-blood, visible enemies, like Israel did – we fight against unseen demonic powers of evil and darkness. Satan has two simple goals. One is to keep you from trusting in Christ and being saved, and if you do, his goal then becomes trying to rob you of your spiritual blessings and to keep you from living a productive Christian life.

All this brings us to our passage today in Genesis 14, where a real flesh-and blood war is fought – the first war recorded in the Bible – and from it we draw inspiration and instruction for fighting our own battles. The main thought we want to learn today is this: To defeat the enemy we must be bold in battle and wise in victory. We must boldly fight to keep the enemy from stealing our blessings, and we must be wise to not look to the enemy for our blessings. The chapter can be divided into two sections – verses 1-16 describes the battle, and verses 17-24 describes what happens after winning the battle.

Rather than read the first nine verses of chapter 14, which are full of names and places that you don’t want to hear me pronounce, I’m going to summarize them. What you basically have is a war between two groups – **(SLIDE)** you have an alliance of four kings from the east (in the Fertile Crescent area of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is Iraq today – the same area Abraham moved from), and an alliance of five kings from the land of Canaan who lived in the region around the Dead Sea.

Last week we saw how Abraham and his nephew Lot parted ways – Lot went east towards the Dead Sea area and settled in the city of Sodom, and Abraham went to the south to live near the city of Hebron. Geographically, Abraham and Lot live about 30 miles from each other.

When we think of a king, we usually think of a monarch ruling over a large kingdom, but in Abraham’s day kings ruled over cities – some of them very small cities – and they were more like mayors. Verse 4 says that the five kings of Canaan had been forced to pay taxes to the main king from the east, named Kedorlaomer. For twelve years the Canaanite kings had been under his thumb, but in the thirteenth year they rebel... “We’ve had enough of your tyranny – we want our independence.”

In the fourteenth year Kedorlaomer allies with three other kings from the east and they embark on a military campaign to expand their territory in the west, and they sweep through the southern region of Canaan and make their way north to the region of the Dead Sea to deal with the five rebellious kings. In anticipation, the Canaanite kings, led by the king of Sodom, set up battle lines near a place called Siddim. But they’re no match for the powerful kings of the east.

We pick up the story in verse 10... “Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom” (10-12).

The five kings from the east plunder the Promised Land and take all the possessions and food of the people of Sodom, and they also take Abraham’s nephew Lot captive. The last phrase of verse 12 says, “Since he was living in Sodom.” By choosing to move to the wicked, depraved city of Sodom, Lot placed himself in danger, and this is the first of many consequences he will face for this decision. Like the prodigal son he was enticed by the world, but ended up in bondage.

Verses 13-14 say, “A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.”

We discover that Abraham has become a force to be reckoned with in the land. Someone is able to escape tells Abraham that Lot has been taken captive. He refers to Abraham as “the Hebrew,” which means an immigrant or foreigner. People in the area viewed Abraham as being different from them – he was the new guy in the area and stood out in the way he lived and conducted himself.

Although Abraham is new to the land, God has blessed him greatly, and it’s surprising to find out that he has an army of 318 men “born into his household.” In ancient times people would voluntarily align themselves with a powerful leader out of economic necessity and for safety and protection. It seems like Abraham has established his own small kingdom, and has the manpower to do something about his nephew Lot. We also read that these 318 men were “trained,” which means that Abraham was prepared for enemy attacks – knowing that the blessings of the land were in constant danger of being plundered.

Likewise, we need to be ready and prepared for spiritual attack. 1 Peter 5:8-9a says... “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...”

Be aware, Peter says, that you're in a battle, and that the devil is trying to devour you and plunder your blessings. Like Abraham, we need to be ready and trained to withstand his attacks. We keep from being taken off guard by staying spiritually tuned-in – by staying vigilant in prayer, trained in the knowledge of God's Word, and united in fellowship with fellow believers in the household of faith.

It would be easy for Abraham to say, "I warned Lot about going to Sodom, but he was determined to go there. He's made his bed, now he has to lie in it." But there's no hesitation on Abraham's part – he rallies his 318 trained men and takes off to rescue Lot. He's motivated not just by his love for Lot, but his belief in all that God has promised him. These five kings have invaded God's turf – the Promised Land – and Abraham is going to rise up and fight the enemy.

Verses 15 and 16 say, "During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people."

**(SLIDE).** Abraham and his army pursue the enemy all the way to city of Dan, about 100 miles or so to the north. Abraham and his 318 men are vastly outnumbered by Kedorlaomer and his army, and it reminds us of Gideon's army of 300 going up against the Midianite army of 135,000, or of David going up against Goliath. These stories hammer home the point that when God is on your side, no enemy can stand against you – greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Abraham even displays some military tactics: He attacks at night when the enemy is not expecting it, and he divides his men so that they can hit the enemy from sides. Kedorlamoer's army turns and runs, and Abraham's army chases them another 50 miles north until they rescue Lot and take back all that the enemy has plundered.

Everything in the Old Testament is points us forward to Jesus, and what Abraham does for Lot is a powerful picture of the gospel, and what Jesus – Abraham's descendant – did for us. The Bible says that the entire human race is held captive to sin. In John 8:34 Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." Titus 3:3 says, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures."

The captivity of some people is obvious – they're enslaved to alcohol or substances or food or sexual sin. But sometimes the captivity of people is less obvious – they're enslaved to sins that can't so easily be seen like greed or lust or pride or bitterness. We're all held captive to sin, and unless we have a rescuer, we all will die in sin and be eternally cut off from life in God.

In Jesus' first public sermon He said, "I have come to proclaim liberty to the captives." Jesus came to set us free, and paid the price of our liberation by dying in our place on the cross. Not only did He liberate us, but took back what Satan had plundered. In Matthew 12 Jesus had just healed a demon-possessed man who could not talk or see, and the Pharisees claimed that Jesus received His power from Satan. In response, Jesus uses a parable to illustrate His power over Satan. He says, "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house" (12:29).

Jesus says, "Satan is very strong and powerful and holds many in captivity to sin, and the only way they can be rescued is for someone stronger than Satan to overpower him." By delivering this man from demon-possession, Jesus overpowers Satan and plunders his house. He's rescues a lost soul and sets him free.

Once we've been set free from sin, God enlists us to be part of his rescue team to help liberate those still held in captivity – to pray for people, to show them God's love, and to proclaim the good news that there is freedom and hope in Jesus. It starts by noticing the captivity of others around you – in your neighborhood, or where you work, or who are in your network of relationships. God wants to use you in your unique sphere of influence to notice their captivity and to pursue every opportunity to share the message of salvation to bring them out of captivity.

The enemy doesn't want us to do that and tries to intimidate us with fear. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." We can't help people if we're fearful or timid. We draw courage – not by our own power – but by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit – greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Abraham rose up in boldness, and I take comfort in the fact that Abraham was not always bold. When he went down to Egypt he was filled with fear, but now he rises up in faith. Peter was a coward when he denied the Lord three times, but he became an unstoppable force once he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The longer we walk with the Lord, the bolder we become.

To enjoy abundant life and keep the blessings we've been given requires that we not only be bold in battle, but wise in victory. Abraham's wisdom is seen in verses 17-24, where he faces another enemy – a more subtle enemy – not invading the Promised Land, but in the Promised Land – that will test his allegiance and trust in the Lord.

As Abraham and his army return home, he is approached by two kings. We read about the first king in verse 17... "After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley)." The king of Sodom was one of the defeated kings, and he's anxious to get back his people who were taken captive. He goes to meet Abraham in the King's Valley, which is the Kidron Valley, just to the east of Jerusalem, the same valley Jesus would cross over on His way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Just as the king of Sodom was coming out to meet Abraham, in verse 18 another king comes out to Abraham... "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything" (18-20).

Melchizedek is one of the most mysterious persons in the Bible, and part of his mystery is that we don't know much about him, other than his brief appearance here, one verse in the book of Psalms, and later in the book of Hebrews – which we'll talk about in a minute. What we know here in Genesis 14 is that he's both a king and a priest – a ruler over people and a representative of God to people. He's the king of Salem, which would later be known as Jerusalem – the holy city of God and the epicenter of God's plan of redemption.

He's also a priest of the God Most High – the one true living God, who created heaven and earth. Even though he is a Canaanite, he worships the same God as Abraham, which is surprising. You'd think that Abraham was the only follower of God in the land, but here's a priest who also believes. Jerusalem, or Salem, is only 20 miles from where Abraham lived, so it's likely that Abraham already knows him and is friends with him. It may also be likely that Abraham sees Melchizedek as his king – his superior – which is why Abraham gives him a tenth of what was taken in the battle.

Melchizedek brings out bread and wine for Abraham and his men – he gives them a royal banquet to celebrate their victory. He says, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Here is a man, in the midst of a pagan land, who knows God and ascribes glory to God for Abraham’s victory. Even though Abraham boldly led a successful rescue mission, the power behind his success was God.

All the battles we read about in the Old Testament – whether it is Gideon or David and Goliath or the battle of Jericho – all carry the same theme of God’s people going forth in faith – often against great odds – and God giving them victory. They all learned what was said by the prophet Zechariah, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6). God delights in taking ordinary people like you and me – who lack skill and confidence – and infusing us with His supernatural power, so that we are left to say, “This could only be done by the power of God, and all glory goes to Him.”

Although Melchizedek quickly appears and disappears in this story, he is mentioned a thousand years later by David in Psalm 110:4, where David speaks prophetically of the future Messiah and says, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” In what way is the future Messiah like Melchizedek? We’d be in the dark if it were not for the book of Hebrews. The New Testament book of Hebrews was written to show Jewish believers in the early church that Jesus was superior to any Old Testament person, law, ritual, or sacrifice. All of those things had their place, but they all pointed forward to Jesus.

One of the things Jewish believers were hung up on is that Jesus could be their High Priest. In the Old Testament a priest was the spiritual mediator between sinful people and a holy God, and the High Priest was the head priest. Every Jew knew that priests came from the tribe of Levi – if you weren’t a Levite, you couldn’t be a priest. When the author of Hebrews declares that Jesus is our High Priest, they said, “Jesus can’t be a priest – He’s not a Levite.”

The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 110:4 three separate times in chapters 5-7, declaring that “Jesus is a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” Melchizedek was a name highly revered by every Jew, and they knew that Abraham treated him as his superior and honored him with a tithe. Melchizedek was a priest long before the Levitical priesthood, and is thus superior not only to Abraham, but to Levi.

Melchizedek served as a unique, one-of-a-kind priest, and Jesus is from that order – a unique priest in two ways. First, like Melchizedek, Jesus is both priest and king – offices that were separated and distinct in the Old Testament. Jesus is not just the mediator between God and man – a priest, but is the sovereign ruler over man – a king.

Second, like Melchizedek, Jesus’ priesthood is eternal. Old Testament priests eventually died and faded from the scene, but Jesus remains our eternal High Priest, as well as our king. As our High Priest, He brought sinful man back into relationship with a holy God by His death on the cross. As our king, He sits on the right hand of God, and one day He will return to establish His kingdom in the same city of Jerusalem that Melchizedek ruled over.

All this to say that Melchizedek foreshadowed of the ministry of Jesus, and now that an even greater priest and king is here in Christ, put all your trust in Him – come to the Father through Him and worship Him as king by giving Him tithes in acknowledgment of His superiority.

There's another king who comes to Abraham. Verse 21... The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." The king of Sodom is a much different king – not a king of peace and righteousness like Melchizedek, but the king of a wicked and depraved city. He's bad news. He represents the world that entices you to find blessing through pleasure and possessions and power. And now he offers those worldly blessings to Abraham and says, "Give me the people of Sodom back who you rescued, and I'll let you keep all the possessions that the enemy plundered."

If I'm Abraham I'm thinking, "You bet I'm going to keep all the loot – I risked my life to bring it back and I deserve every penny of it." But in verse 22 he says, "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share."

Abraham says, "Go pound sand. I don't want even the smallest item from you. I swear my allegiance to God Most High, and I will wait to find my blessings in Him, not in what the king of Sodom offers me." This is very similar to the temptation Jesus faced in the wilderness when the devil offered to give Him all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for bypassing the cross. Jesus said, "Go pound sand – get out of my sight – I only worship and serve God." That's Abraham's attitude... "I want nothing from the world – take the world, but give me Jesus."

This took great faith because at this point Abraham is still waiting for God to give him an heir and a land. The easy way would be to keep the plunder and be satisfied with the immediate riches of the world, but Abraham chooses to be content with what he has and wait for God's blessings.

The story in Genesis 14 is designed to inspire us and embolden us to fight the enemies of our faith – to be aware that Satan seeks to plunder the abundant life God gives us, and to rise up and not let that happen – to put on the full armor of God and fight to protect our blessings – and to help liberate others from bondage to the enemy – and to find abundance, to find satisfaction, find contentment, purpose and meaning in God, and not the world. We're in the Lord's army, and with His power we can defeat the enemies of our faith.