

“...possessor of heaven & earth”

In modern times it is easy as Christians to forget who we are. We gain our riches, great jobs, lovely homes, maybe university degrees, plaudits from our peers, even fame. Some are even fortunate enough to earn sufficiently to give them good pensions, giving them good after-retirement living. Then, in our folly, we think our successes are all our own. We got them by our hard work and ability, after all.

Wait! None of it is ours! It all belongs to God! It is He Who made us. It is He Who distributes intelligence, wealth, ability and successes to His people. But, He does not give these things for our own gain – He gives them for His own purposes. They do not belong to us. When we get them we must hand them back, recognising our own feebleness.

Jesus Christ, as God, owns the cattle on a thousand hills, as He owns everything ever made, yet He takes nothing for His own gain, choosing instead nothing at all. Why should He need anything when he already owns it all? It is futile to gather riches (in their general sense) into our barns when we already own everything alongside God, as His children! There is no place in the Christian language for “This is mine!”

And why should we be afraid of what others can do to us, when God is possessor of heaven and earth? He is the King of kings. No problem is too great and no enemy is more powerful. It stands to reason that if we live in the palm of His mighty hand, nothing can harm us. So why fear the enemy? He might even kill our body – but the only one we should fear is the one who can damage our souls, Satan. In reality this fear is only theoretical if we obey God. It is true that Satan can do us immense harm, but only if we live apart from God’s commands and holiness (or, as we see in the life of Job, God allows it for our final good and Satan’s rebuke).

We are the servants of God, as well as His children in Christ. Our lives must be handed over, so that we do not retain even a cotton thread or a shoe-latchet for ourselves. It is a marvel of God’s economy, that when we hand everything over to Him, He gives us everything-plus in return! Sadly, many people who call themselves ‘charismatics’ think that they can choose to hand everything over to God *in order* to get more. A twisted kind of ‘holy investment’ looking for gain.

This is a perversion of the truth, and God will not honour such a low view of His benefits. It is

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only when we hand everything over to Him as an act of obedience and love, with no expectation of getting anything back, that He gives us everything in return. The best thing we can have back is sheer joy, the joy of knowing His peace in our lives, and His presence. Yet, He gives us even more.

Thus, whatever state we are in and whatever is our portion in life, we must love the Lord, no matter what. Can you do this? Do not envy the rich and famous. Be thankful for the very breath in your body – you will receive immeasurable riches in heaven!

Verses 1-4

1.

“And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations;

2.

That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.

3.

All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea.

4.

Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.”

Today, we are dismayed by this or that war, but in the days of Abram war was a very commonplace activity. Unlike modern times when war is undertaken by whole large nations, the wars were enacted by tribal groups, some of whom had only one city as their base. Here we see such tribal kings banding together as confederates, to obliterate their neighbours.

The problem with tribal confederacies, of course, is that individual tribes can change allegiance,

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joining whichever other tribes can give them a personal advantage. Thus, in tribal wars there are no real friendships, only perceived current benefits.

In this chapter the warring factions are Amraphel, Arioch, Chedorlaomer, Tidal, Bera, Birsha, Shinab, Shemeber and Zoar. They all met on the plain of Siddim to battle out their differences.

In verse 4 we find that the kings of Canaan had been subject to king Chedorlaomer for 12 years, and they now had enough of paying him tribute and having his foot on their necks. Chedorlaomer was kind to Elam. In the 13th year the kings led an army against him and he, in turn, raised an army of three eastern kings in his own defence.

The name of Chedorlaomer, in Elamite language, translates as 'servant of the god Lagamar'. At that time Elam was a powerful state, and, as was common in those days, the surrounding kings allied with the most powerful ruler, for obvious reasons! By invading Syria and Canaan, this king was competing to procure the lucrative trade routes of the area.

Amraphel (queried to be Hammurabi) was king of Shinar ('country of two rivers'), which later became known as Babylon or Chaldea. Arioch was king of Ellasar (a town in Babylonia, about 28 miles east of Ur) and was a chief executioner for Nebuchadnezzar.

Chedorlaomer of Elam ('eternity'; east of Shinar and northeast of the Tigris river) was the target of war. The Biblical translation of his name is 'handful of sheaves', though his local name meant something else, as Hebrew scholars teach. Tidal ('great son') was the 'king of nations', which is another way of referring to his being chief of a variety of nomadic tribes. These were all allies of the king of Elam.

Their enemies included Bera ('son of evil'), king of Sodom ('burning'), sited near the Dead Sea and the Jordan; Birsha ('with iniquity'), king of Gomorrah ('submersion'); Shinab ('splendour of the father'), king of Admah ('red earth'), a city in the Siddim valley; Shemeber ('lofty flight'), king of Zeboiim ('gazelles'), a city on the same plain as was occupied by Sodom; and the king of Bela ('destruction'), later known as Zoar ('insignificance').

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They all clashed on the plain of Siddim ('field' or 'plain'), where the Dead Sea is located, as the text says (salt sea).

Verses 5-9

1.

“And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim,

2.

And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto El-paran, which is by the wilderness.

3.

And they returned, and came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites that dwelt in Hazezon-tamar.

4.

And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim;

5.

With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five.”

It takes time to muster an army. And this is why Chedorlaomer took until the 'fourteenth year' to attack his former subjects. He had to gather around him those who were friends. They travelled to the main battle site, slaughtering as they went.

The first to be attacked were the Rephaims or *rapha*. These were an ancient race of giants

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(literally), who lived at Ashteroth Karnaim, ('Ashteroth of the two horns/peaks'), a city east of Jordan, in Bashan. Though giants they stood no chance against the fury of a combined army.

Next came the Zuzims in Ham ('hot' or 'sunburnt'), again east of the Jordan but actual site unknown. Then came the Emims ('terrors') of Moab, here recorded as Shaveh Kiriathaim ('plain of the double/two city').

The fury continued to mount Seir ('hairy'), which was a mountain in Edom, south of the Dead Sea. There the inhabitants, the Horites ('cave dweller'), were dealt a devastating blow. It is likely that the meaning of their name described their actual dwelling places, caves. The slaughter extended from there right to the harbour town of Elparan ('palm of Paran') in the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea. In those days, slaughter meant slaughter!

The marauding army, drunk on blood and spoils, doubled back again and went on to wreak havoc on Kadesh ('holy'), the southernmost part of what was to become Judah, to kill the Amalekites, (descended from Amalek, grandson of Esau. The writer is referring to people not yet born, so that readers could 'fix' places and people at the time the book of Genesis was read). The next victims of the victorious kings were the Amorites in eastern Canaan, in Hazezontamar ('dividing the date palm'), which was possibly in the desert of Engedi, Judah.

It was in this desert region that the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar/Bela decided to meet their adversaries head-on, in the vale of Siddim...."four kings with five." By this time the armies of Chedorlaomer were battle-hardened and eager for more victories – which they readily obtained.

Verses 10-13

1.

"And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.

2.

And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way.

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3.

And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

4.

And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eschol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.”

The five kings did not have a hope of wining against their formidable and already victorious foes, who had by this time won numerous battles along the way. The armies of Sodom and Gomorrah were vanquished. Those who remained fled into the slime-pits (bitumen pits) to die in the mires. Others fled to the mountains. The king of Sodom escaped.

Elated by such an easy defeat, the invading army took the spoils of war – food, gold, silver, jewels, cattle, women, and began to return home. As they went, they picked up men and women who would be their slaves. Unfortunately for them, they also took Lot and all that he had.

An escapee from this slaughter found his way to Abram (for the first time called ‘Abram the Hebrew’; ‘Hebrew’ meaning ‘one from beyond’, but later used as a designation for the Israelites). He recounted how Sodom and surrounding area fell, and that Lot was one of those captured. It is most likely that Abram already knew of the wars, which came very close to his own abode. But, he had no reason to get involved. Now, however, it was different.

At the time Abram was living on land owned by an Amorite, Mamre (‘strength’ or ‘fatness’, a description of the man’s power and wealth). He was the brother of Eschol (‘cluster’) who lived in Hebron, and Aner (‘boy’) a tribal chief. This family were ‘confederate with Abram’. That is, they were close friends and allies.

Verses 14-20

1.

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“And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

2.

And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.

3.

And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

4.

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

5.

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

6.

And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

7.

And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.”

Lot is called Abram's 'brother', *ach* – here meaning a relative of the same tribe. He gathered ('armed' – or 'emptied out') his 'trained' servants – those who were most experienced and loyal

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– and just 318 of them chased after the joyous victors as they returned home.

Reaching the army at night, Abram divided up his men, probably in a pincer movement, and swooped upon the soldiers, killing many. The roused army scattered and tried to escape, to Hobah ('hiding place') which was north of Damascus, a trading city and capital of Syria, 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem, but were picked off one by one.

This time it was Abram who took the booty, so the invaders were left with nothing but death for all their long months of warfare. We see here how God is greater than numbers. With God on our side there can be no other victors. Lot was thus returned to his family, along with all that he had. The other captured peoples were released.

When Abram returned to his own place, the king of Sodom rode out to meet him in the king's dale, Shaveh valley ('plain'). He was joined by the king of Salem ('peace', the city which was to become Jerusalem), Melchizedek ('my king is Sedek'). He belonged to an order of priests (re 'the order of Melchizedek') and was also God's High Priest at the time, to whom Abram gave a tithe after the great battle.

Melchizedek joyously brought Abram food and wine as a thank you, and blessed him, attributing Abram's success to the 'most high God, possessor of heaven and earth.' It is a timely reminder that any successes we achieve in this life are attributable to God, and not to our own powers. It is God Who owns every creature and gives them what is good. This is exactly what Melchizedek told Abram. In recognition of this fact, Abram gave tithes, a tenth of everything harvested as booty. The actual amount was not relevant; what was important was the principle of attributing the victory to God Almighty.

Today, many Christians work hard, they obtain qualifications, they get to know the 'right people' and they use their natural abilities. Then, sadly, they begin to think that their own hard work and abilities are the source of their success. In reality, they have their ability, intelligence and success solely from God!

The invading armies probably had all these things, but they did not attribute it to God. They fought out of lust and greed. Thus, they fell, at the hands of a much smaller force, led by a man who loved God. Nothing is too great for God! Christians need not fear the future, for their God is

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true to them and will reward holiness and obedience.

Verses 21-24

1.

“And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

2.

And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,

3.

That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:

4.

Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.”

Whereas Melchizedeck had noble thoughts and desires, the king of Sodom only saw the riches brought back by Abram. Instead of showing gratitude, he urged Abram to split the booty, even though he had himself lost all to the invaders and ran away in fear! He asked Abram to hand over the people he had released and for Abram to keep the goods.

But, Abram was on a totally different level of understanding. My actions, he said, were in the name of the most High God, not my own name. Therefore, I will take nothing from this venture, not even a sewing thread or a shoe latchet. He continued, that is why I will take nothing that belongs to you, just in case you tell others that you made me rich by allowing me to keep your goods or people!

It is a wise Christian who does not allow himself to be tied to unbelievers, or be ‘owned’ by them

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in any way. Beware of going into business with unbelievers! Do not form close relationships with them for reason of gain! Give all to God and He will give all back in return, but moreso. Our allegiance is to Him, not to this world.

The only thing Abram asked for was the food eaten on the return journey and anything his young allies took as booty. For himself he asked nothing. In this way the most victorious person gave away what he had gained, but by doing so he retained his integrity and won the truest victory of all, over sin and the desire for power.

In the end, it was this handing over of everything that made him powerful, led by God and rewarded for his obedience. The king of Sodom, who demanded a share of what was already taken from him, eventually died of his lustful ways. So, who really won? The king or Abram?

God owns heaven and earth. He is our true King, so why follow after lesser goals and men? If God owns everything there is nothing we can offer Him except for our souls and bodies, our desires and successes. For the same reason, we should fear no enemy.

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