

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 15

Chapter 14

Four Shemite Kings and Five Canaanite Kings

Genesis 14:1 **And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, ²that they 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 (that is, Zoar). ³All these came as allies to the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea).**

Approximately 320 years had transpired since the scattering of the families across the land after the tower of Babel. It is evident from Scripture and secular history that the original family members who were separated at the tower of Babel had become hostile and domineering toward each other. Chapter 14 introduces the reader to four Semite kings from the original land held by the descendants of Shem after the tower event and five Canaanite kings living in the area inhabited by Ham's son, Canaan.

The Semite kings were Amraphel, Arioch, Chedorlaomer and Tidal. In this story we discover that Chedorlaomer was lording his authority over the Canaanite kings and, in reality, all the kings of all the people of all the towns from Elam to Egypt. It just so happened that five of the Canaanite kings rebelled against his authority. Chedorlaomer sought the help of his superior Amraphel and the three other co-kings in the Babylonian Dynasty at the time. These five Semite kings are mentioned together on a clay tablet currently housed in the British Museum (Figure 26). Who were these kings?

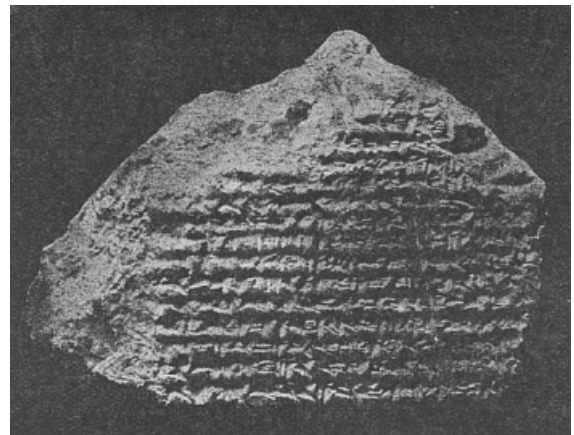


Figure 26: Unbaked Clay Tablet In British Museum which mentions Amraphel, Chedorlaomer, Arioch and Tidal

Amraphel king of Shinar

Amraphel was also known as the Hammurabi or Hammuraphi of Babylon/Shinar. The Hammurabis were a family of kings who controlled the Babylon area from before the time of Abram. Amraphel was the sixth king in the line of kings of the Babylonian Dynasty. *Am* means god; *raphe* means great. This Babylon/Shinar refers to the old Babylonian kingdom,



Map 18: Location of Arpachshad (Babylon - Amraphel), Elam (Chedorlaomer), Aram (Tidal), Asshur (Arioch)

not the Babylonian Empire of Nabonidus and Nebuchadnezzar who conquered the Assyrian Empire. The original Shinar area was populated by Shem's son Arpachshad after the scattering from the tower of Babel. This area is known today as Iraq. Abram was a descendant of Arpachshad. This Hammurabi was responsible for the great laws of the land that influenced many of the laws incorporated and copied by other nations. This Hammurabi was the controlling king among these five with the other four kings reporting to him.

Chedorlaomer king of Elam

This king was also known as Khudur-lagamar. Elam was west of Babel, known today as Iran. At that time in history, the king of Shinar directed the work of the king of Elam. Chedorlaomer was Amraphel/Hammurabi's official in charge of the five kings of Canaan mentioned in this passage, but most likely, over all the city kings of the Canaanite tribal areas.

Arioch king of Ellasar

Arioch was the king of Ellasar or Assyria located on the land controlled by Asshur after the incident at the tower of Babel. Arioch was also an officer of Amraphel/Hammurabi who was in charge of the land of Asshur.

Tidal king of Goiim

The area of Goiim is difficult to identify; however, Tidal's name is mentioned with the other kings on the clay Babylonian tablet now in the British Museum. Joshua 12:23 mentions a king of Goiim whom Joshua defeated in the taking of the Promised Land. Most likely, Goiim was associated with the descendants of Aram who settled north of Canaan Land after the tower event.

All four kings were cousins from the line of Shem. These kings were rulers over nations in contrast to the Canaanite kings who were rulers over villages.

Today, we would call these local village rulers mayors instead of kings. Notice that Bera was the king of Sodom, Birsha the king of Gomorrah, Shinab the king of Admah, Shemeber the king of Zeboiim. Notice that the name of the king of Bela/Zoar is not mentioned.

The five Canaanite kings ruled five towns located on the Jordan River in the Valley of Siddim. These villages are listed in order from north to south in the Scripture. Only the location of Bela/Zoar is known today. The angels destroyed the first four when the Dead Sea was formed in the year of Isaac's birth, 2091 years after the creation of Adam. As we will see later in Genesis, the fifth village, Zoar, was not destroyed at the time of the other four because of Lot's request to allow it to be his place of safety during the destruction. These five villages sat within the boundaries of today's Dead Sea, which is 31 miles long and 9 miles at its widest point.

Why did the four kings of the huge Babylonian kingdom attack the five kings of small villages?

Rebellion of Five Hamite Kings Addressed

Genesis 14:4 Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but the thirteenth year they rebelled.

As already mentioned, Chedorlaomer had controlled the kings of Canaan for 12 years when the Canaanites decided to rebel against his authority in year 13. We do not know where this fits into the timeline of Abram's entrance into the land of Canaan after the death of his father, Terah. This 13 year span of time was longer than 11 years between Abram's entering Canaan and the birth of Ishmael; therefore, the Semite control of the Canaanite kings had begun prior to Abram's departure from Haran.

Defeat of Rephaim, Zuzim, Emim, Horites

Genesis 14:5 And in the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim and the Zuzim in Ham and the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, ⁶ and the Horites in their Mount Seir, as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness.

The four kings did not travel to Canaan in the 14th year on the same roads that Abram traversed from Haran to Shechum. Rather, they moved through Canaan on the east side of the Jordan River all the way to the wilderness of El-paran in Edom and defeated four other groups of people on the way.

Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim

Notice the kings defeated the Rephaim first. *Rephaim* means "giants." These Rephaim were Canaanites, descendants of Ham, and they were extremely large people and descendants of Repha/Rapha. As the united army of the Semite kings left the Aram/Syria area of Damascus, they marched 28 miles south to Ashteroth-karnaim east of the Sea of Galilee and defeated the giants in that village. It was a massacre of people.

Zuzim in Ham

Continuing to travel 60 miles south, the four kings defeated the Zuzim giants in Rabbath-ammon, cousins of the Rephaim of Ashteroth-karnaim. The English should render their name Ham-zuzims rather than Zuzims of Ham. It, too, was a massacre of people. With their destruction, more than 500 years later, the Ammonite tribe took over their land. Ammon was the second son of Lot conceived after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.³⁹

Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim

Traveling 50 miles further south, the four kings defeated the Emim giants, other cousins of the *Rephaim* and were also giants living in the village of Kiriathaim. It was another massacre. After their defeat, as with Ammon, the tribe of Moab, the first son of Lot conceived after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah inhabited Emim's land more than 500 years later.

³⁹ Genesis 19:31

Horites in their Mount Seir, as far as El-paran

Just south of Kiriathaim is the area of Edom where the Horites dwelt in the caves of Mount Seir and the mountain range of Paran. Here, too, the four kings slaughtered many people. The area was not called Edom at the time. It was named Edom after Esau and his family moved there about 150 years after this event when Jacob returned to Canaan with his family from his 21 year self-exile in Haran, away from his brother, Esau. Likewise, Seir was a son of Esau; therefore, the names given in this passage are given to identify specific locations with known sites.

Defeat of Amalekites, Amorites

Genesis 14:7 Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and conquered all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, who lived in Hazazon-tamar.

Hidden in the English of this passage is the direction of travel of the four kings when it says, “they turned back.” North, south, east and west did not exist in the Hebrew of Abram’s day. Forward meant east, backward meant west, left meant north and right meant south. Although the four kings turned to the right on their journey to head toward Kadesh, they actually turned west/backward according to the way directions were given in that day.

From Mount Seir and the mountain range of Paran, it was about 70 miles to En-mishpat/Kadesh where they conquered the Amalekites, the descendant tribe of Amalek, a son of Canaan. From Kadesh they traveled at least 80 miles north to Hazazon-tamar, village on the west side of the Jordan River, near the Valley of Siddim where they conquered the Amorites. Amor was a son of Canaan and his descendants were the tribe identified as Amorites.

We must notice that the four kings “defeated” the giants but “conquered” the Amalekites and Amorites. In English we do not make a distinction between the words defeat and conquer; however, the Hebrew does. What is the difference? The Rephaim, Zunims, Emims and Horites were small groups of people who lived in certain villages. Even though they might have fought with all their might, the four kings destroyed these family units of giants, including the Horite cavemen. With the Amalekites and the Amorites, things were different. The Amalekites and Amorites were large tribes that lived in multiple villages across the land they controlled. In this case, the four kings conquered only the Amalekites and Amorites in two villages. Not all of the Amalekites and Amorites were defeated.



Map 19: Route of the Five Semite Kings south on the east of the Jordan River then north on the east side of the Jordan River

Kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, Zoar against Semite Kings

Genesis 14:8 And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah and the king of Admah and the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim,⁹ against Chedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim and Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar-- four kings against five.

As the four kings with their armies arrived at the valley of Siddim, the five kings of the five villages met them “arrayed for battle.” The five Canaanite kings thought they were ready for the Semite kings. They had already heard that the Semite kings were in the area because they had defeated or conquered all the tribes on the east side of Jordan and now they had arrived on the west side. “Arrayed for battle” means that the five kings had designed a strategy; they strategically placed their men on the battlefield and readied them for the fight. One interesting detail could almost be lost in this passage. The five Canaanite villages must have been located on the west side of the Jordan River in the valley of Siddim. Had they been on the east side, the four kings would have attacked them with the other villages of giants they had already defeated on the east side.

Tar Pits Valley of Siddim

Genesis 14:10 Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country.

The armies of the five Canaanite kings were no match for the armies of the four Semite kings. In that day, only males twenty years of age and older engaged in battles; therefore, the women and children remained in the villages. Overpowered, the men of the five Canaanite kings “fled to the hill country.” Where was the hill country? We must not forget that the location was called the Valley of Siddim because all valleys are surrounded by hills; in this passage, the men simply fled to the hills around the valley in all directions; some may have crossed to the other side of the Jordan River to seek refuge in the hills to the east. As indicated, in the rush to retreat to the hills for safety, the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah fell into the tar pit before they made it to the hills to hide. However, in the Scripture, the hill country is most often a reference to an area given to Judah after the Israelites conquered the Promised Land, the hill country of Judea.⁴⁰ If so, these Canaanites ran to the hills of their Jebusite cousins near modern day Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

⁴⁰ Joshua 21:11

Capture of Lot

Genesis 14:11 Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed. ¹² And they also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.

The four kings had accomplished their task! They had battled with the five rebellious kings and won. Evidently, the four Semite kings entered the villages of Sodom and Gomorrah and stripped them of all their food to replenish their own travel supplies. In the process, the kings took Lot and all his possession as prisoners. Did Lot fight with the men of Sodom against the four Semite kings? Probably not because he was considered an alien at that time as will be indicated in Genesis 19:9. Lot lived in Sodom at that time in his tents at the edge of the village. We must be reminded that it was Lot's choice to live in Sodom; Abram did not send him there. Had Abram sent him to the valley, Lot's trouble could have been blamed on Abram. Because it was Lot's choice, he was responsible for all that happened to him in the valley of Siddim. Was Lot the only one taken as a prisoner by the four Semite kings? No. See the next verse.

Report of a Fugitive to Abram

Genesis 14:13 Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram.

As the four Semite kings made their way north on the west side of the Jordan River, a man escaped from the caravan of prisoners and made his way to the tents of Abram by the oaks owned by Mamre the Amorite. This fugitive's mission could not have been accidental. Abram and Lot's families were the only Semites in the land of Canaan and the fugitive was most likely a Canaanite. Why did the fugitive go to Abram instead of another Canaanite tribe for help? Surely Lot had made an impression on the fugitive and sent him to Abram. Notice that Mamre had two brothers, Eschol and Aner who were also close friends of Abram.

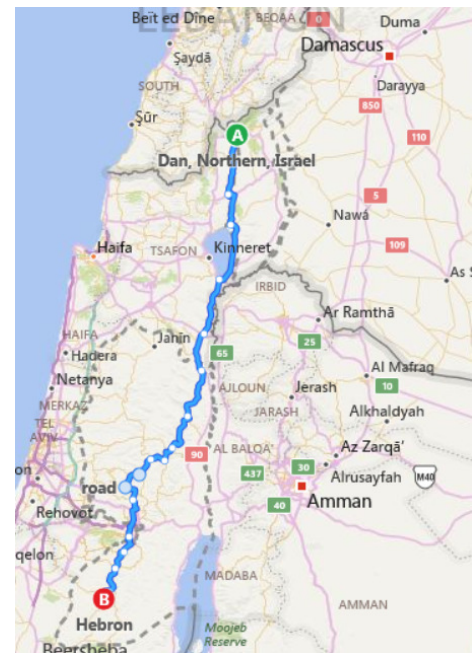
Abram's Trained Men Act

Genesis 14:14 And when Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

In this passage, the Scripture gives a glimpse of the magnitude of the following that accompanied Abram from Haran. Abram's trained men were at least 20 years old and they were all born in his house. This does not mean that they were his sons. Abram did not have a son until he turned 86.

These men were the sons of the souls who had followed Abram out of Haran down to Egypt and back to Bethel/Ai. Because fewer than 10 years had passed since Abram left Haran, the men, 20 years old or older were all born while Abram was still in Haran. He had the 318 trained fighting men born to his house under his control before leaving Haran. This group did not include the male servants he acquired from Pharaoh while he was in Egypt. In Genesis 1 – 13, it is evident that women who were able to have children would bear several sons and daughters in their lifetimes. Most likely, among these 318 men, many were brothers. Accounting for the number of other people in Abram's house, the fathers, mothers and underage siblings of these soldiers is impossible; however, with the trained men numbering 318, it is safe to say that the clan which followed Abram out of Haran consisted of more than 600 people. Adding the servants acquired in Egypt magnifies that number.

Today, the village of Dan is located in the Golan Heights area of Israel, about 196 miles from Hebron. The name of the area was not Dan in Abram's day; it was called Laish. Dan was one of the 12 sons of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abram. After the capture of the Promised Land under Joshua, the name of the city of Laish changed to Dan. Our Bibles have made the change in order to know indicate where Abram caught up with the four Semite kings. Near the area of Dan, Abram divided his men in order to conquer the armies of the four kings. Abram attacked at night, an unusual tactic. Little by little, for 45 miles, from Dan to Hobah, a village north of Damascus, Abram pursued and defeated the four Semite kings. Regardless of the size of the king's army, their full attention could not be placed on defending themselves against Abram; many of their men had to guard the prisoners and the supplies.



Map 20: Hebron to Dan and on through Damascus

Spoils Rescued

Genesis 14:16 And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people.

With Abram's defeat of the four Semite kings, the extent of their booty was exposed. The four Semite kings had cleared the four rebellious Canaanite villages of their food, supplies, men, women and children. It must have been their intent to take the prisoners into exile back to Shinar. Lot had been the catalyst that spurred Abram into action to rescue all the people taken captive from Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar.

King of Sodom, Valley of Shaveh

Genesis 14:17 **Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).**

Bera, the king of Sodom had survived the battle in the valley of Siddim, even though he had fallen into a tar pit. As Abram returned from the 482 mile round trip adventure, the king of Sodom must have heard that Abram was on the way and Bera went to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (or the Valley of the Kings which is also called the Kidron Valley today). This verse indicates the location of the meeting. The valley still separates the old village of Salem from the Mount of Olives. Salem means “peace.” At the time of the meeting, the descendants of Jebu controlled Salem. They eventually built a great citadel there. Long after the days of Abram, King David conquered the Jebusite Citadel, made it his own capital city and called it Jerusalem. Just east of Jerusalem and across the Kidron Valley is the Mount of Olives where Jesus spent His last night before His crucifixion. It was in this valley that the king of Sodom traveled to meet Abram.

Blessing of Melchizedek

Genesis 14: 18 **And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tenth of all.**

Before the king of Sodom arrived, Melchizedek, the king of Salem, met Abram, his men and all the people that Abram had rescued with bread and wine in the valley east of Salem. Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” As the king of Salem, he was by default the religious leader of the city. As such, he was both priest and king. But Melchizedek was more than that; he was a “priest of God Most High,” the LORD. His God was Abram’s God.

In his blessing of Abram, Melchizedek says, **"Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth."** Just to be clear, Abram was not the Possessor of heaven and earth, God Most High is! Furthermore, it was God Most High Who helped Abram defeat the four Semite kings.

Abram must have recognized Melchizedek as the authentic Priest of Salem because he gave him a tithe of all he had rescued. It was a time of worship for Abram and his followers before he had to deal with the king of Sodom whose name in Hebrew means the king of “burning.”

People Not Goods

Genesis 14:21 **And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself."**

The evil king of Sodom approached Abram to make a deal. Evidently, he had no army and no people; all he had was an empty village. All he wanted was the return of his people.

Abram's Promise to the LORD

Genesis 14:22 **And Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, ²³ that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'**

Abram swore that he would not take **"a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours."** The Hebrew actually says, "a thread even unto a shoe-latchet." Within the customs of the Hebrews, this phrase has a male and female meaning. The thread was used by the women to tie their hair on the back of their heads; the shoe-latchet was used to tie the men's shoes; women's shoes were attached by a different process. Both the thread and the latch represented the smallest possession of the male or female. With this statement, we see that Abram did not want to benefit from anything that belonged to the Canaanite people he had rescued, either females or males.

Shares Given

Genesis 14:24 **"I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share."**

Not everything Abram had rescued was available to give back to the king of Sodom and Abram did not intend to give all that was left to him. The journey from the Hobah area required food and some of that which was rescued from the four Semite kings was used on the return trip. A tithe of the goods had been given to Melchizedek. Abram also felt that the men who had been born in his house who fought to retrieve the people and their goods should be paid as well as Mamre and his brothers Aner and Eshcol. Whether or not the king of Sodom agreed to it we do not know; however, we can assume that the king did not disagree. One thing is for sure, Abram took nothing for his time and troubles.