9-18-22

Genesis 14:1-16

We have here in chapter 14 the first war that is recorded in the Bible. Obviously, this was not the first war in history because we learn that some cities were already subject to kings of other countries. But this war is brought out in the Bible because it involved Abram and Lot. War, and the subjection of other peoples for profit, is a result of the fall in the Garden of Eden. This type of activity had become common by the time of Abram, and it remains so today.

We see a pattern here that has taken place throughout the Bible and throughout history in general: One stronger group subdues a weaker group and the weaker group is forced to pay tribute to the stronger. These kings of the East had previously subdued the five cities of the valley of the Jordon, and these five cities had to pay tribute or risk punishment.

This kind of arrangement provided long term profit for the conquering kings. If they took over a city and simply removed everything all at once, that would be the end of the income. However, by allowing the city to remain, they could receive a yearly benefit. You might think of it as an investment that continued giving a return.

The catch to this arrangement was that the subjected peoples might rebel. This is what happened here. The kings of the valley paid tribute for twelve years but then rebelled and refused to send their tribute to the kings of the East. When this type of thing happened, the stronger nation would usually try to destroy the offenders and take all the spoil. This would take care of the problem and act as a warning to others who might be thinking of rebelling.

It took a year for the kings of the East to get their coalition together and head toward the offending cities of the valley. The Bible describes how the eastern kings journeyed down the east side of the Jordon River, subjugating cities as they went. When they were south of the Dead Sea, they crossed the Jordon valley and headed back up the west side of the river, finally coming to the valley of Siddim to face the kings of the five cities.

There is an interesting spiritual point here we shouldn’t miss. It appears that king Chedorlaomer is the head of this coalition. He is mentioned first in the lists of the kings of the east each time. Each time except the first time in verse 1. In verse 1, king Amraphel is mentioned first. Notice that he is king of Shinar. This is meant to stand out to us because the land of Shinar is notable as Babylon.

It is significant that the Holy Spirit would call our attention to the involvement of Babylon. The first readers of the Pentateuch would call to mind the tower of Babel. This tower was an attempt by mankind to show their equality with God and that they didn’t need Him. It was an anti-God rebellion. For those of us who have the whole Bible, we are given a deeper understanding of the significance of Babylon.

Throughout the Bible, we learn what a problem Babylon is to the people of God, and even to the rest of the world. At one point, Babylon became the ruling world force in the physical realm. They were very destructive but at the same time, used by God for His purposes. One of those purposes was to purify His people; another was to separate out those who would remain faithful to Him.

The physical Babylon was destroyed, and may or may not revive; but the spiritual Babylon remains intact and becoming more prevalent. The book of Revelation shows us the destructive force of the spirit of Babylon. It is basically idolatry, in the form of lust for wealth, power, luxury, and sensuality. It is the world spirit in rebellion against God; a spiritual tower of Babel. It is the spirit of antichrist.

Just as physical Babylon was destroyed, spiritual Babylon will be destroyed at the return of King Jesus. Until then, it serves the purposes of God. For one thing, it will allow no middle ground; the people will either follow the world system of Babylon or they will follow Jesus Christ. For those who follow Christ, living in this world system develops us and strengthens us; it increases our faith and our reliance on God. By the help of the Holy Spirit, we realize that the evil is too strong for us and we learn to depend on Jesus. By the way, this realization of weakness is being poor in spirit, and our reward for it is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The kings of the East finally get to their destination, the five cities in the valley. They all face off against each other in the valley of Siddim, which is the valley of the Salt Sea; which is the Dead Sea. Moses lets us know that in the area where they met for battle, there were numerous tar pits. It is still this way today where bitumen and asphalt are found in the area.

It appears that the soldiers of the valley didn’t put up much of a fight. They were probably not fit for war. We get a glimpse of this from the prophet Ezekiel. In chapter 16, God is telling Israel that they have become worse than Sodom; even calling Sodom Israel’s sister. In verse 49 God tells them, “*Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy.*” When we think about Sodom and Gomorrah, we don’t usually think about these types of sins, but about the sin of homosexuality for which they were destroyed.

But the verse from Ezekiel lets us know where this sinful lifestyle started: it started in luxury. Remember why Lot chose this valley to begin with; it was like the Garden of Eden; it was like Egypt. This was a fertile valley. It was easy to grow crops; there was plenty of grazing area for their livestock. In spite of the abundance, they gave no thought to helping others. They were only concerned for themselves. They ended up with time on their hands.

It was this combination of selfishness and idleness that caused God to remove His common grace from them and hand them over to their reprobate minds. But in addition to the sin of homosexuality, their idleness caused them to be unprepared for war. When the kings of the East attacked, the people of the valley were physically unfit and could not offer much resistance.

What a word of warning this is to us, especially in this nation. We are obsessed with leisure; we are obsessed with luxury. And it is easy to see how much of this nation has been handed over to a reprobate mind. People have too much ease and time on their hands, so they put their energies into selfish pursuits and champion causes that come straight from the dark recesses of their minds. This is the spiritual picture of Babylon that is so prevalent in the book of Revelation, the spiritual force that will dominate in the last hour.

In the account of Sodom, the effects of idleness are a little hidden, but we get a clear picture of the dangers of idleness from the life of king David. We are all familiar with the story of David committing adultery with Bathsheba and then having her husband, Uriah, murdered. Why did this happen?

The account of David’s sin is found in 2 Samuel chapter 11. It starts in verse 1: *Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem.* David was king; and he was also a mighty warrior who had proved himself many times over. But this particular year he sent out his commanders and army while he hung around Jerusalem. It wasn’t long before he was lounging about on his roof that he noticed the beautiful Bathsheba. His idleness was the beginning of his downfall.

God created us to work; He created us to be occupied. I think many people have a false impression of the Garden of Eden because of all the artist’s renderings. All the pictures I have seen show Adam and Eve just standing around, maybe eating some fruit or petting a deer. But consider Genesis 2:15, “*Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.*” God created work and occupation as a good thing, and it still is. It is only because of the sin of mankind that it has become a drudgery and a frustration.

There is no sin in rest or in having good things in this life. We just have to be careful to thank God for them and to resist letting them become idols. Continuing to work in this life is spiritual training for us. If we lapse into continual luxury, we will become unfit for battle, just like the men of Sodom. Make no mistake, we are in a constant battle in this life, whether we want to be or not. Satan, the world, and the desires of our flesh constantly wage war on us and they will not stop during our lifetime.

As we continue to work, dealing with the frustrations that come from things not working out right, we are strengthened to deal with spiritual temptation and the frustration that comes with it. Additionally, when we are properly occupied, we are less likely to think long enough about temptation to fall into it. The Lord uses our work and the stumbling blocks we face to form us into His character and likeness.

The armies of the east defeated the cities of the valley and ransacked them. They took all that could be carried and the herds which they drove toward Shinar. They captured all the women and children and all the men who survived and took them to become slaves. And Lot was right in the midst of it. We see Lot’s continued descent to worldliness. Whereas Lot had first relocated to the valley and moved his tents as far as Sodom, verse 12 lets us know that Lot was now living in Sodom.

Lot has apparently gotten a taste of the good life while in Egypt and he liked that ease in Sodom. Lot compromised: even though what he saw taking place in those cities tormented his righteous soul, he put up with it for the ease of living. As we see here in this chapter, he paid the price for his compromise.

The Bible warns us against conforming to the world. James 4:4 is very clear: *You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* That is harsh, but it is important to let that reality sink in. Christians have to live here in this world, but our eyes and hearts must be in heaven. This world offers many pleasures, and some of these pleasures are good gifts from God, but the world wants us to replace God with the pleasures; and that will turn the almighty Lord of the universe against us.

Now, if we had been in Abram’s position, what would we have done? Here’s our nephew Lot, who we brought with us to benefit from God’s promise to us. In an effort to keep peace, we offer him his choice of land to live in, and he grabs the very best. Then he does his best to enjoy living with godless people and he ends up getting exactly what he deserves. What would we do? My first reaction is to let him go and good riddance. He brought this all on himself and is getting what he deserves.

But that is not what Abram did. When he found out what happened to Lot, he didn’t hesitate. He gathered all the men of his household; notice they were trained and ready, there was no idleness among them. He also enlisted the aid of some allies he had made while he lived in the land. Abram was ready.

The army Abram went after was apparently not small; they had traveled a long way and had captured many cities. But Abram went after them at great personal risk and he had no plans for personal gain; it was strictly to rescue his nephew, who deserved no such help.

Throughout the account of Abram in the Bible, we see a type of Jesus. Jesus did not hesitate, but at the proper time He came at great personal cost to save us. And we were every bit as bad as Lot in our treatment of God prior to our salvation.

In addition to the deep gratitude we owe our Saviour for what He has done, we are called to do the same. Whether it is sharing the Gospel or just helping out a fellow human-being, a Christian is to be the good Samaritan. Most of the time, helping someone else will cost us something or it will be inconvenient; usually both. But we are to do it anyway. This is the way we become living sacrifices, acceptable to God, and stay free from the lusts of the world.

Prayer

Once more, O Lord, we are amazed at Your word and how You order the events of the world to fulfill Your desire. What You have ordained from before creation will come to pass; none of Your creation, human or angel, can foil Your plan. All those who try simply bring You glory when they fail due to Your great power and wisdom.

We Your people recognize that we can bring You glory when we are used by You in the fulfilling of what You purpose to bring about. It is our desire to bring You glory by being faithful servants rather than defeated enemies. We ask for the constant help of the Holy Spirit to guide us in Your ways and according to Your will.

Give us a spirit of willingness to be occupied. Keep us from idleness and the idolatry of laziness. May our work always be committed to You, that You will be pleased to establish it. Keep us willing to be inconvenienced for the sake of others, and to remember that all we have is Yours and to be used for Your Kingdom.

Thank You Lord, in Jesus’ name

Amen