

# Meditations of the Heart - Reflections on the Scriptures

*Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

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## **Genesis 14:1-16**

**1** In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, **2** these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). **3** And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). **4** Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. **5** In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, **6** and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness. **7** Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh) and defeated all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar. **8** Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim **9** with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five. **10** Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. **11** So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. **12** They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way. **13** Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram. **14** When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, **318** of them, 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 to Hobah, north of Damascus. **16** Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

Within Genesis 14:1-16, we never see the name of God mentioned and we never see Abraham seeking God for help. Yet we do see Abraham respond to a crisis. The crisis was brought about by invading kings and their marauding armies (think Capital One Card commercial, perhaps) who attack city-states in the area of Canaan and Sodom and, amidst the all damage they inflict, they take captive Abraham's nephew Lot.

Abraham responds by taking an army of 318 trained men, all men of his normal employ – which should give us a sense of the size of Abraham’s holdings, and defeating these invading kings. On the one hand, this is a major feat. These invading kings and their armies had come from city-states stretching from the Black Sea in the northeast to the Persian Gulf in the southeast. The lengthy list of kings, peoples and places that these eastern kings had defeated speaks to the formidable nature of their military capability. And yet Abraham and his 318 men defeated these kings and their armies and rescued the Canaanite/Sodomite people who had been taken captive.

On the other hand, historians and Bible scholars believe that Abraham’s army was probably equal in size to the invading alliance they had defeated. The Scriptures do not suggest that this was anything akin to a story like Gideon’s army of 300 in Judges 7 that defeated enemies much more numerous than they. The Scriptures also do not suggest that this story is like the story of II Kings 18-19 when the Assyrian king Sennacherib brought his sizeable army against outnumbered Jerusalem. Judah’s king, Hezekiah, prayed for God’s help and an angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 men in the camp of the Assyrians, prompting the Assyrians to return home. We don’t see anything like that in Genesis 14. Abraham has a responsibility to take care of and he goes and does it. He does it on behalf of Lot, but he also knows that, the way these invaders are moving through the land, they will be threatening Abraham soon enough if he doesn’t deal with them now. This bravery (out of faith) is quite a contrast to Abraham’s experience of not trusting God and fearing for his life in Egypt. He had been given a promise that God would give him and his descendants the land of Canaan and, if these invaders are threatening the land of Canaan, Abraham has to act – and even defend his Canaanite neighbors (who have become his allies).

So, even though we see no *miraculous* military victory or intervention by an angel of the Lord, the overarching point of Genesis 14:1-16 is that Abraham IS trusting God – and his faith leads to his courageous, noble and self-less actions on behalf of his relative and his neighbors. Abraham’s life has been transformed by his faith since coming out of Egypt because he has remembered the surety of God’s promises. Therefore, Abraham is not crushed or despaired by these crises. He simply remembers God’s promises and holds on to them in the midst of what he knows he has to do.

This very morning, driving to the church, I heard a man on the radio talking about the unrest of our times and how God has many people on Sunday, but not many the rest of the week. This man emphasized how, for example, “God needs us on Thursday” (and other days of the week, as well).

This man meant well, but he had it backwards. God doesn't need us. We are the ones who need God. We need God every day, every hour. In fact, the very fabric of our being and the way we are created is that we are made to need God and depend upon God – and if we live as though we do not need God, then we are not living as we are designed - and that spells problems, as Abraham discovered in a negative way in Egypt (where he didn't trust God), and in a positive way in Canaan (where he did trust God).

I'll leave you with two quotes that speak to what is going on with Abraham in Genesis 14. They should speak to us as well:

*"Non-Christians get courage by forgetting reality; Christians get courage by remembering reality."*

— Timothy J. Keller

*"Faith is ultimately a refusal to panic."*

- D. Martyn Lloyd Jones