

With God You Are Never Outnumbered

Genesis 14:1-16

Introduction:

We all have days we'd rather forget, days where nothing goes as expected. No matter what we had planned life had other ideas. We all get in over our heads sometimes. Just in case you've had a bad day or a few this week, let me encourage you with some pictures of some other people who've had bad days.

Spiritually, we sometimes get ourselves in situations that are more than we bargained for. We set off to do something. We convince ourselves that it will be harmless and innocent. Nothing will come of it, we are sure. Whether we just closed our eyes to the dangerous possibilities or ignorantly never anticipated them, we find ourselves in over our head. This happens especially often when we live our lives with earthly vision.

Last week we saw in the lives of Abraham and in his nephew Lot two ways of looking at things. Abraham saw things with spiritual vision. He didn't consider things merely by their earthly value. He weighed choices by their spiritual impact. He valued relationships over material gain. He defined the future's potential by what was possible with God in it.

Lot, on the other hand, approached life with earthly vision. He considered only the balance in the checkbook and the money in the bank. He put material gain over people, even his own family. He chose only what was best for himself, regardless of others. He either did not see, or chose to ignore the moral and spiritual influence of the things he chose.

So when Lot saw the valley of Siddim and all its rich pasture land, abundant fresh water, and the bustling metropolis of Sodom, he jumped at the opportunity. But like us many times, Lot found himself in way over his head. This happened because in his journey of faith, he saw with earthly vision, instead of spiritual vision. As we explore Genesis 14 this morning, we need to reflect on our own spiritual journeys. Like Lot, you may find yourself in over your head. But Abraham will show us that with God, you are never outnumbered. When you walk with God you always have the advantage, no matter the odds.

Body:

Please read along with me in Genesis 14. This is one of those passages you pray you never get called upon to read in Sunday School or small group. It is bursting at the seams with hard-to-pronounce Bible names. The spellcheck in my Microsoft Word got so overheated it caused a small electrical fire. So I'll try not to stumble too much as we read through this.

14 *At the time when Amraphel was king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goyim,² these kings went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboyim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).³ All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea Valley).⁴ For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.*

⁵ *In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim⁶ and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert.⁷ Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazezon Tamar.*

⁸ *Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboyim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim⁹ against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five.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.¹¹ The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away.¹² They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.*

To this point, the story of Abraham's life has been a very personal one. But suddenly, in this chapter, our characters are swept up into the tumultuous flow of ancient geopolitics. We see kings and armies marching. We hear the clash of swords striking. We hear the shouts and cries of battle, and the anguish and the throes of death. We smell the odor of open, wounded flesh and spilt blood baking on hot desert sand.

This is the very first war recorded in Scripture. It is not included here as an interesting historical lesson, but because Abraham and Lot are caught up in the furious flow of battle. It also makes a dramatic spiritual point. It shows us the consequences of Lot's earthly vision, and demonstrates the faith of Abraham's spiritual vision.

I also want to include an interesting side note. This is one of the oldest sections of Scripture that contains historical records that mentions very specific places and names. Bible

critics long held that the history of Genesis 14 was an obvious fabrication. The names of the kings were fictional or unhistorical. There is no known historical line of march east of Canaan as the one taken by the four kings in this account.

However, archaeological discoveries in recent years have confirmed much of Genesis 14. Some of the names, places, events, and the line of march have found historical confirmations outside of the Bible. The evidence is compelling enough that a former critical scholar has admitted, “there seems to be no reason to question the factual basis of Genesis 14.”ⁱ This just underscores the reliability and authenticity of God’s Word. As more time passes, and the more research that is done, the list of supposed errors in Scripture grows smaller and smaller.

What we have here are four kings from the east, led by king Kedorlaomer. He was an Elamite king from west of Persia. This would be modern day Iran. He brought with him 3 subservient kings and their armies. Thirteen years before, Kedorlaomer had conquered all the territory between him and Egypt. Elam and Egypt were the two ancient super powers of the day. Controlling this land meant controlling the most valuable trade route. Keeping this trade route open and free flowing was essential to Elam’s economy and national security.

But the cities that lay along the route didn’t like being under Kedorlaomer's thumb. So, as our text says, in the thirteenth year they rebelled. In retaliation, Kedorlaomer set out with his armies to secure this territory, and keep his trade routes with Egypt open. The armies of the four kings crushed everything in their paths. Archaeologist Nelson Glueck describes the devastation, “I found that every village in their path had been plundered and left in ruins, and the countryside was laid waste. The population had been wiped out or led away into captivity. For hundreds of years thereafter, the entire area was like an abandoned cemetery, hideously unkempt, with all its monuments shattered and strewn in pieces on the ground.”ⁱⁱ

This brought them to the valley of Siddim. Siddim is Hebrew for Salt Sea. This took place at the southern end of what we know as the Dead Sea today. This is where the five kings of the valley, including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, joined forces and tried to stand their ground against Kedorlaomer. They chose a sandy plain lined with tar pits as a place for battle. Undoubtedly, they thought the tar pits would work in their favor, providing a line of defense.

But the tide of battle so quickly fell in favor of Kedorlaomer, that the armies of the plain found themselves trapped by the tar pits, and many fell in.

Of course, you might wonder how people could fall in. These tar pits were in the desert and the wind would blow the sand on top of the tar, so that it looked just like all of the ground around it. Soldiers fleeing for their lives were not careful and plunged headlong to their deaths.

With the armies of the plain soundly defeated, their undefended cities lay wide open for looting and pillaging. That is exactly what Kedorlaomer did. He swiped all the loot he could and captured healthy citizens to take back as slaves. Included in these spoils of war were Lot and his family. Surely, Lot had not considered this eventuality when he chose the better land.

If this were a movie, you could almost imagine the scene. The camera focuses in on the jubilant armies of Kedorlaomer as they make off with the spoils of war, leaving behind a ruined and desolate battlefield. The camera then pulls back from a distance to a hill overlooking the valley. Standing on that hill, surveying the whole scene, is a robed figure silhouetted against a smoke filled sky. Then a second camera shows us this man's face illuminated in pale orange by the distant flames. His expression is steadfast. He clutches his staff as his heart is broken by the devastation before him. He lowers his eyes in a silent prayer. His name is Abraham.

Suddenly, a bruised and weary man wearing only filthy, singed tatters stumbles into the camera frame. He falls at Abraham's feet clutching the hem of his robe. Abraham kneels down to hear the desperate man's words, "Your nephew Lot, He has been captured."

¹³ *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.* ¹⁴ *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.* ¹⁵ *During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus.* ¹⁶ *He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.*

Earlier with Lot, we saw the terrible consequences of earthly vision. But here with Abraham we see strength of spiritual vision. In these verses Abraham shows us three important things we can apply to our own lives.

I. An Incredible Faith in God

First Abraham demonstrates an incredible faith in God. These verses don't say anything overtly religious or spiritual, but we see Abraham's faith in his action. The fact that He is willing to attack these invaders and attempt a rescue shows man trusting in the strength and protection of God.

Consider what Abraham could have said, "I should count myself lucky, that I didn't get attacked. I escaped with everything. Why push my luck. Anyway, what can I do against four armies? I'm no match for them. Didn't you just see what they did down there? Haven't you heard about all those other kings they defeated? What can a guy like me do? Huh?"

Instead, Abraham went forward with a confidence he could only have by trusting in God. Abraham realized a very important fact: with God you are never outnumbered. The numbers of the enemy do not matter. You own numbers do not matter. All throughout Scripture we see this fact.

- Eight people locked up in a boat against a worldwide flood
- An enslaved and beaten people trying to escape the most powerful nation in the world.
- The children of Israel conquering the land of Canaan.
- Gideon and 300 men defeat the vastly superior Midianites.
- A young shepherd boy faces down a giant.
- Three young men in a fiery furnace
- An aging Daniel praying in a den of lions.
- One sinless savior against all sin of all time.
- 120 trusting believers against an empire.

Yet, it's at these times that we feel outnumbered that we are most likely to quit trusting in God, and try to take matters into our own hands. It doesn't have to be a military enemy either. In fact, for us it most likely won't be a military enemy, and the battles we fight will not be with swords. You may feel outnumbered financially. You cannot see a way through your economic woes, so you are tempted to depend on earthly vision and take matters into your hands. Perhaps you are tempted to cheat on your taxes, steal, neglect family or spiritual matters to work.

Perhaps you feel outnumbered emotionally. You can't handle the stress. Your life has been in upheaval. You are tempted to forget your troubles through the numbing haze of a pill or drown your sorrow in the bottom of a bottle. The enemy is dragging you away.

Perhaps you feel outnumbered relationally. You feel alone and unsupported. You've been abandoned and neglected by those who should have been there for you. You've come to that place in life you just want to build protective walls around you. You want to keep everyone and everything a safe distance from your heart. They can no longer get close enough to hurt you, but now no one can get close enough to help you either.

Perhaps you feel outnumbered spiritually. The temptations are too much. You can't say no. You can't help it. You think you will never conquer that sin. You are in the enemy's chains.

But what we learn from Abraham here is that with God we are never outnumbered. There is not an enemy you can't face with God. Abraham's faith and confidence to go for it, shows that he knows this.

II. An Incredible Love for Lot

Secondly, we see here an incredible love for Lot. Abraham could have washed his hands of Lot. I know what I would've wanted to say. "It's his own stupid fault. He made his choice and he got what he deserved. I don't owe him anything. He never did anything for me. Why should I risk my life for him?" Abraham is driven not only by an incredible faith in God, but by a sacrificial love for others. He is selfless. This reminds me of what the apostle John tells us in his first letter. Our love for God must demonstrate itself in a love for others.

III. An Incredible Wisdom in Planning

There is a third thing though we should notice. Even though Abraham was trusting in God, he did not throw his intelligence out the window. He exemplifies an incredible wisdom in planning. Notice that he called upon his skilled men. He wasn't just taking anyone into battle. He utilized strategy, cunning, and timing in his attack. Abraham was a regular Navy Seal. Not bad for a seventy-something old guy.

Trusting in God doesn't mean acting foolishly, or ignoring the earthly resources we have, because God uses them and works through them. Faith means trusting beyond our ability and resources, but it doesn't mean ignoring or abandoning them. Having God on your side doesn't mean you get to act like an idiot. There are too many people, believer and non-believer alike, who have the mistaken impression that faith and brains don't go together. Faith and reason aren't mutually exclusive. They are like two wings of a bird that empower the Christian mind to

soar. We must learn to use them both. We must steer between the extreme on one hand of rationalism which elevates human reason to the supreme answer to life's problems, and the other extreme of anti-intellectualism which rejects human reason as a divine gift and in which reckless imprudence masquerades as faith.

Abraham proves that faith and brains can act in perfect harmony with one another. We need to develop both our IQ (Intelligence Quotient) and SQ (Spiritual Quotient). I love C.S. Lewis' says in *Mere Christianity*. "God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than of any other slackers. If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all."

We should use what we have, then trust God beyond it. You've probably heard the old story about the man of great faith trapped in rising flood waters. He climbed onto the roof of his house, and prayed for God to save him. He was confident that God would save him.

First, one of his neighbors in a canoe came by and offered to take him to dry land. "No thanks, he replied. "I've prayed to God and I'm sure He will save me." As waters lapped over the edge of his roof, a police boat came to his rescue. Again, he refused confident that God would answer his prayer. Finally, a National Guard helicopter flew overhead as he straddled the peak of his roof that barely protruded above the rushing waters. They dropped a ladder and begged him to climb. "No thanks," he said. "God will save me.

A short time later, he was caught away in the flood and died. When he arrived in heaven he asked of God, "Lord, why am I here in heaven? I prayed for you to save me. I trusted you to save me from that flood."

"Yes, you did," God answered, "And I sent you a canoe, a boat, and a helicopter. But you never got it. That isn't faith. That's stupidity.

ⁱ Free, Joseph P. & Vos Howard F. (1992) *Archaeology and the Bible*. Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing. pp. 52-53

ⁱⁱ Guzik, David (2013). *Enduring Word: Genesis 14 – Abraham Rescues Lot and Meets Melchizedek*. <https://enduringword.com/commentary/genesis-14/>