

GENESIS

Lesson 14 - Chapter 14

Before we discuss this chapter, I'd like to take a few minutes to discuss something of a general, but important, nature concerning the Bible. And, it involves a rather scholarly and legal term: the word is "redacted".

Redacted is a word you're going to hear with some regularity in Torah Class; it simply means, "edited". And, I know that it bothers some Christians to be told that you are NOT reading the original scriptures in your Bibles. These writings went through many revisions over the ages. But, I also want to assure you, that these revisions.....particularly to the OT.....were very minor. We know this is the case because with the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written down by the Essenes over a period time stretching from around 50 BC to just before 70 AD, we have been able to compare the words of the Hebrew OT scriptures found among those Dead Sea documents with what we have been using for centuries, and they are virtually identical. Only some minor spelling variations were found, and perhaps a phrase here and there was added or dropped or modified.....usually by adding, deleting, or changing a person's name or a city.....and THAT because that name or city more recently went by a different name or title due to language evolution; none of these minor variations had any effect on the meaning.

Now, understand that the OLDEST OT documents written in Hebrew currently in use in our modern Bibles were copies from the late 900's A.D.....just before the time of the Crusaders. The finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in one giant leap, took us back almost 1000 years from that time, which is partly why that find was so important to us; so to see that virtually no meaningful changes had occurred over a 1000 years attests to the dedication of the hundreds and thousands of Jews who had hand-copied the Hebrew Bible for further use and distribution over that 10 century period. What we are reading in the Torah is very accurate.....at least in the original Hebrew.

Where we have a few problems is with the translations from Hebrew to other languages. And, the first translation of the OT from Hebrew to another language was in Greek..... and that was accomplished about 200 years BEFORE the Dead Sea Scrolls were written down. Called the Septuagint, the Greek language version of the OT has also proven to have been faithfully copied and handed down over the centuries, so it, too, is a most useful and accurate document. However, as we have discussed before, there are very real challenges in translating the THOUGHTS of one culture and its associated language, into another culture and ITS associated language. Hebrew thought and Greek thought were then, and remains to this day, miles apart. And, there are many words and thoughts in Hebrew that have no parallel in Greek. So, something close, or at least similar, had to be chosen.

This problem is even more troublesome with the NT; because the oldest NT documents we

possess are all written in Greek. Yet, it is obvious and unchallenged that the writers of the NT were Jews; they were Jews thoroughly immersed in Hebrew culture and Hebrew thought. We can compare the ancient Greek Septuagint against the ancient Hebrew OT and fairly easily find where the translation problems lay; but it is somewhat different for the N.T., because we have relatively few passages of N.T. writings that were written down in Hebrew at some point or another; and all of those appear to have been taken from the Greek, not the other way around. Recently, though, a group of Jewish scholars HAVE written a complete Hebrew NT, using the tremendous leaps in understanding of Hebrew culture in the days of Yeshua, that also gives us a better understanding of the 1st century Church. This Bible is written by the Bible Society of Israel, and it is a fully parallel OT **and** NT in English and Hebrew.....a very valuable tool for any serious student of the Bible.

Now, the translation problem is further multiplied when you take a Hebrew thought, try to write it in a foreign language, like Greek; and then take the Greek and further translate it into yet another language, like English. Even more, over time, words within a particular language can take on different meanings. What an English word meant when the first King James Bible was written, as compared to today, can be quite different.

Here's the thing: understand that the mere translation of a document **is by its very nature** a redaction, an editing. Simply translating the Hebrew to Greek and then the Greek to English, adds in variations. Why else do you suppose we have the absolutely endless series of what we call **Bible versions** in English that we have today? And, don't forget, the Bible has also been translated, now, into literally hundreds of other languages, and a substantial amount of those FROM the English!

Let me give you a little help tip for studying the Bible.....especially the NT.....for those of you who are serious Bible students. Something that few Christian scholars will tell you about, and even fewer actually do to any great extent: and that is to compare the writings of many NT verses with their OT counterparts. Does that sound odd? What verses of the Old might be in the New? Remember, the NT consists, at least 50%, of direct OT quotations. A good study bible will show you exactly which NT verses are but OT quotations, and even tell you which book, chapter, and verses of the OT are being brought forward into the NT section you are reading.

Don't just take mental note that that NT verse or paragraph is an OT quotation: stop, look up that OT passage, and read it. Mentally insert that OT portion, just as it reads in the OT, into the NT. Depending on your Bible version, more often than not the supposed OT words written in the NT will NOT actually be the same as those written in the same OT passage. Let that sink in for just a moment. Why, if the translator fully recognizes that what is being said is simply a direct quote from the OT, don't the words have an exact match? Often it is because the OT is being translated from Hebrew documents into English, while the NT is being translated from Greek documents into English. And, the Greek meaning often is a couple of degrees off course from the Hebrew meaning; add in FURTHER translation from Greek to English and Hebrew to English, and it complicates the issue even further.

But, frustratingly, there is more. Every Christian denomination today, of which there are nearly 3000, has a set of doctrines and a creed that each goes by; and in general, the Bible

translators, either consciously or sub-consciously, adheres to the doctrines and creed of one or another of these denominations. So, when the opportunity comes to translate a word, often when what is written in the original doesn't seem to match their preconceived doctrines, they will substitute a word or phrase that is out of context, but which keeps the meaning of the verse within the boundaries of the beliefs that they hold dear. So, translation often has some agenda buried deep within it. This is why it is so necessary to use several versions to study from, and better yet, gain an understanding of Hebrew language and culture. I recommend that everyone have a Hebrew Bible to correlate the English translation with, because even if you don't have any proficiency in Hebrew, you can rather easily tell when two words in Hebrew are similar, but might have two very distant English words used to translate that same Hebrew word. Then, one should be suspicious, and do a thorough Hebrew word study to see exactly what that word means to the Hebrew mind.

PLEASE understand this: the Bible was not written in a vacuum. All the thoughts and phrases and word meanings were within the context of the Hebrew culture of that era. Our goal, then, is to find out what those words meant to the original authors; because they should be taken to mean exactly the same thing for us. Otherwise, we turn the Bible into a living document; that is, one which is made to evolve with the times.

Now, I'm not issuing any condemnations. I'm simply pointing out that a) there is much more variation in the NT writings among the various translations than for the OT, and b) this is primarily because the NT is where the various Christians doctrines find their foundation, and where doctrinal arguments are made for defending or criticizing any particular denomination's beliefs.

Thankfully, over the last 20 years, with many Jewish scholars either coming to belief in Messiah or at least having a more open approach to studying and considering the NT, some great work is being done in adjusting the NT translations so as to be in line with the Hebrew culture and thought patterns of the 1st century A.D. Even more, with the discovery of what is usually called the Community documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we are finding that an astounding number of phrases and theology in the NT that we, up to now, thought was brand new or unique with Jesus and His disciples, in fact these theologies were already under development, and the phrases already in use, with the Essene separatists out in the wilderness of Judah.

So, as I try to connect the Torah and the NT for you at times, I'm also going to occasionally try to correlate some of the Dead Sea Documents with it as well, so as to better help us understand what certain things meant to the minds of the NT authors, and what certain words and phrases meant to the vast audiences Jesus spoke to. And, that is more possible within the last 10 – 15 years than ever before in history.

And, let me assure you, you have nothing to fear. Your faith in Christ will grow and be even further validated as we study Torah and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some of the mysterious and confusing things of the NT that we have so much difficulty understanding often become more clear and understandable and **real** with the help of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the comparison with the OT.

OK, armed with that understanding, let's get into Genesis 14.

READ Genesis 14 all

There is WAY more to this chapter than meets the eye. We are entering some really meaty parts of the Torah that sets the stage for the future.

The area where Lot had gone to live, the Jordan Valley, extending all the way to the Dead Sea, and including the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, was in essence part of a district controlled by a king named Chedorlaomer; and Chedorlaomer apparently had some type of mutual protection treaty with this small group of nations and kings mentioned in the outset of verse 1. Now, the names of these various kingdoms listed here cannot all be translated into a specific area on a modern map, but some can. The place called Ellasar is almost for sure Ashur, one of several ancient cities built by Nimrod, and which eventually was called Assyria. Amraphel, one of the kings that allied with Chedorlaomer, lived way up north, in an area called Shinar....the same place Nimrod had called home, and also where Ur.....Abraham's home town...was located.

The place called Elam, which was Chedorlaomer's kingdom.....or better, city-state.....is also known by another biblical name, Shushan (which we find in the book of Esther). Today, it is called by yet another name, Khuzistan. Remember, we're going to find many names for people and places in the Bible, that change over the centuries; both as a result of changing languages and of the changing hands of a city to a rival king or empire. Elam, Shushan, and Khuzistan are all the same place; and in modern times, this place is located in southwestern Iran just a few miles from Ur.....so Shinar and Elam likely shared a border.

King Tidal is known to be a king of the Hittites, so his territory that is called "Goyim" covered the areas of Western Turkey and Syria. Those of you who have studied a little Hebrew know that the Hebrew word goyim means "nations" and it also means "gentiles". Prior to Abraham, goyim was a very generic word-meaning nation in a very general sense.....just like we use the word "nation" today. But, once God separated Abraham, and then designated him as the first "Hebrew" which set him apart as a SPECIAL and UNIQUE nation of people set-apart for God's purpose, the word goyim took on a slightly different tone. It then meant "all the other nations and peoples of the world except for Abraham and his people". So, by about 1900 BC, goyim meant "gentile nations" or "gentile people". Here, in Genesis 14, it is very likely that whoever was the last person to redact this chapter of Genesis in antiquity, was simply showing that in the original Scriptural documents the kingdom that King Tidal reigned over was not written down and named, so he simply inserted the rather generic word "goyim", indicating that Tidal was indeed a king of some nation or another.

It is through fairly new archeological evidence that we now know with certainty that King Tidal was ruled over a people called the Hittites. And, BTW, the Hittites were an enormous, dominant, and very advanced culture of that era. I suspect that when Genesis was first written down, it was not all necessary to explain what people King Tidal ruled over; anymore than it would need to be explained today, to most any literate culture in the modern world, what nation

President Bush is president over.....it is simply common knowledge.

The common element among the territories of these allied kings who were going to come down into the Middle East and make war, is that they were ALL in what we call Mesopotamia, and the territories they held were substantial.

This district that had rebelled had its own rulers, and we are given their names: Bera, Birsha, Shinab, Shem-eber, and unnamed ruler of Zoar; we're told that they had paid tribute to K'dorla'omer for 12 years as part of a peace treaty. Every one of these minor kings ruled over relatively small armies and very limited areas as compared to those 4 Mesopotamian kings. In the 13th year since the making of the treaty these rulers rebelled..... which simply means they grew tired of paying tribute to these absentee landlords up in Mesopotamia, and refused to pay any more. So, a year later, K'dorla'omer and his allies marched south and attacked the rebelling district.

The allied armies met-up in the valley of Siddim; a valley that no longer exists because it is now part of the Dead Sea. Here is one of those places in the Bible where redaction took place. Because WHEN this event happened and was written down, the valley of Siddim DID exist. Later, when a Bible copier was copying the text, he added the words "now the Dead Sea". Otherwise, nobody would have known what or where the now inundated Siddim Valley was. Even more, the words that editor ACTUALLY wrote was not "DEAD sea", but "SALT sea". Even later yet, when the name Salt Sea fell out of use and became known as the Dead Sea, the Bible copiers naturally began using Dead Sea instead of Salt Sea. As you can understand, NONE of this represents substantive changes, nor does it change the location or meaning. All it does is clarify and bring forward facts that would otherwise have become obscure and lost. This is the most typical kind of Biblical redaction.

For you geography buffs, you might also like to know that the Dead Sea is basically two parts: the northern and the southern. The northern is what existed in Abraham's day; it was very deep....some 1300 feet. The southern part did not exist until after Abraham's time, and was the result of the northern part filling up, and then overflowing into the Valley of Siddim that was adjacent and to the South. So, the Valley of Siddim became filled up with water, and simply became a relatively shallow part of the newly expanded Dead Sea.

The route that the kings from Mesopotamia took was the already well-marked "King's Highway" extending from Damascus in the North, eventually all the way to Egypt. They attacked and defeated the Rephaim at a place called Ashteroth-Karnaim, the Zuzim at Ham (not sure just where that is), the Emim at Shaveh-Kirathaim, and finally far to the south, the Horites in the area of Seir. Then later, then they headed back north and defeated the Amelikites at Kadesh, which is also called En-Mishpat.

Now, the people called Rephaim, Zuzim, and Emim are difficult to identify. Several lessons ago, we talked about the Nephilim.....that race of giants, or powerful and tyrannical men spoken of before the Flood. They were supposedly the result of fallen angels mating with human females. It is thought by many sages that the Rephaim, Zuzim, and Emim may well be a kind of Nephilim, post Flood. They don't seem to be known anywhere as a tribe, so this appears to

be more of a description, and their names reflect the language and cultural of the region each is found in. But, this is conjecture; it is not at all clear who these 3 groups of people were. The other names mentioned....like the Horites, Amelikites, and Amorites are well attested to ancient Middle Eastern tribes.

When the rebellious kings knew they had to react to the armies that were nearing to them, they gathered together and met the armies of King Chedorlaomer in the Valley of Siddim. So, without going into detail, the various rulers of this rebellious district came out to battle against K'dorla'omer and his men, and they got creamed as one might have expected.

K'dorla'omer's allied army took all the district's food supply, their possessions of value, and even some people to use as slaves..... this was normal battle protocol in those days. Among those taken as slaves were Lot and his family, who were living in Sodom when the attack came.

Abraham hears Lot has been kidnapped, and immediately takes 318 of his men, out of his own household, and sets out to rescue Lot. At the time Abraham got the news of this, he was living among some of the Canaanite peoples, with whom he had apparently entered into a formal alliance by means of treaty. But, he elected NOT to use any of these Canaanites to help him; rather the 318 men he took with him were men loyal to Abraham, since many had been born into his clan, and they had been trained in warfare. This gives us some idea of the size of nation or people Abraham had become in a rather short period of time. BTW: this doesn't mean that Abraham was the biological father of all these men. Almost certainly these were the children of many servants and slaves. People purchased as slaves, of which Abraham owned many, were considered part of the family. Because of the familiar history of the brutal and ungodly African slave trade that supplied so many of the field workers in early America, we get a very distorted idea of what slavery among the Biblical Hebrews amounted to. Slavery among the Hebrews was not that far from modern day adoption, where someone often pays a mother for the right to adopt her child, or at least pays for all her medical expenses during pregnancy and delivery, plus a stipend. So, even though direct children of Abraham certainly had authority and rights of inheritance above these slaves and the children born to these slaves, slaves were not maltreated; they were usually valuable and beloved members of the clan, and generally given respect and love.

Abraham and his warriors pursue these kings all the way to what would eventually become known as Damascus, Syria..... a long way. Notice that verse 14 says they went as far as the region of "Dan". Here is another redaction; because Dan was named after one of the sons of Jacob....one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob was an eventual grandson of Abraham, Dan an eventual son of Jacob, and the land called Dan an eventual location of the tribe of Dan after the Exodus. So, the area called Dan, here, could not possibly been named that for at least 600 years **after** this story of Abraham rescuing Lot occurred.

After Abraham and his men pull-off a surprise attack, at night, on K'dorla'omer's exhausted army, and achieve victory, all the booty is recovered and Lot and his family are freed; and upon their return Abraham and his men are given a rousing greeting by the grateful rulers (those kings of the district) and the residents of the now restored district who got most of their stuff back.

Beginning in verse 18 we are treated to a fascinating, but brief, story and meet one of the most mysterious characters in the Bible: Melchizedek, king of Shalem. In addition to being a king, we are told that Melchizedek is also a high priest, and that he worships El'Elyon.....the God Most High. Melchizedek comes out to greet Abraham, brings bread and wine and blesses Abraham, and Abraham then presents him with a tenth of everything that was recovered. So, an interesting play is set-up here: two rulers come to greet Abraham: the king of Sodom, the ruler of an evil place; and Melchizedek the ruler of a righteous place. A truly important pattern is established in this story, and as it continues on into the first verses of Chapter 15, we'll get to its significance shortly.

Let's take a little time with this, for I have found that when we come across these odd scenes, it's best to look at them carefully..... for always something of great significance is occurring, and it's no different here.

Who, or what, is Melchizedek? Glad you asked. The first thing to understand is that Melchizedek is not a formal or personal name, it's a title; so we're not told exactly who this person is. As an example, President Bush's name is not **president**: it's George Bush. President is just the title of the office he holds. This is also true of all the so-called "names of God" that we have run into up to now in Genesis. In fact, the title used for God in this story, El Elyon.....God Most High....is also NOT a name in the way we typically think of it. But, it DOES indicate that Melchizedek is a Believer in the God of the Bible, and that he is perhaps one of the few monotheists.....those who worship only one god.....that still exist. So, none of the so-called names-of-God are actually His name: they're all titles. But, they are also something else: just like **president** is the title of the office George Bush holds, so are these various titles of God indicative of the office, the authority, that God holds. Further, we need to keep in mind that when the Bible refers to El Elyon, El Shaddai, and several more titles of god as "names".....it doesn't mean a proper NAME like Tom or Becky or Jerry. Rather, name (in Hebrew, shem) most of the time in the Bible means "reputation". So, God's name, as in reputation, are actually many; He is the God Most High, God of the Heavenly Hosts, the God Who Hides Me, the Lord Who Provides, the Lord Who Heals, and several more. It won't be until the time of Moses that God actually divulges his formal and personal name.....YHWH.....which IS like Tom or Becky or Jerry; YHWH is NOT a reputation or a title. So, as regards the TITLE Melchizedek, Melchi means "king" and "tzedeck" means "righteousness"..... so it's a title that, translated to English, means "my king is righteousness" or "the king of righteousness". And, it's a name in the sense of it being this unknown man's **reputation**.

Now, there are precious few words spoken about this intriguing fellow. But, we need to glean as much as we can from this, because he is referred to in a powerful way in the NT, which means that even 1900 years after Abraham meets Melchizedek, apparently much more was known about him and remembered than has been written down. Melchizedek is seen by the writer of Hebrews as a very special part of Israel's history and, perhaps, Israel's spiritual future.

Let's look at this key section of the NT, and make some connections between the Torah and the NT book of Hebrews.

READ HEBREWS 7:1 – 17

The ancient Hebrew sages and scholars had some interesting things to say about this mysterious fellow that St. Paul and others obviously relied on and believed as truth, or Melchizedek would not have been used to draw some important parallels with Yeshua HaMashiach. And, the first thing to understand is that Melchizedek was real..... he's not a symbol or a metaphor. Even Josephus, the Jewish Roman historian of Christ's era, verified that Melchizedek was a real person. We find, for instance, that in the passages we just read, that he was king and priest over a city called Shalem. There is some evidence that BEFORE that city was called Shalem, it was called Tzedek; and that this place either was, or adjacent to, the Jerusalem that would come later.

Some of the ancient scribes said that Melchizedek was actually Shem, the son of Noach. Now, you may ask, does that mean like a 2nd coming of Shem, or a Shem-like individual, or maybe even a descendant of Shem? No, these scribes meant that Melchizedek was the actual, real, literal Shem. And, that is entirely possible because Shem, by biblical records and chronologies, was still alive at this time! And, of course, Shem was to be the line of good that extended from Noach, and if ANYONE alive at this time were completely loyal to the One God, it would have been Shem, who rode out the Great Flood.