

98-10-25a

Let's continue our worship this morning. You'll turn with me to Psalm 76. This is a song in the hymn book of Israel that commemorates the victorious power of God.

Psalm 76. The superscription of this psalm says to the chief musician, on stringed instruments, or neganot in Hebrew, a psalm of Asaph. A psalm.

In Judah, God is known. His name is great in Israel. In Salem, also, is his tabernacle and his dwelling place in Zion.

Those two parallel phrases are something we'll return to this morning when we study Genesis and Melchizedek, the king of Salem. In Salem, also, is his tabernacle and his dwelling place in Zion. There he broke the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword of battle.

Selah. You are more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. The stout-hearted were plundered.

They have sunk into their sleep, and none of the mighty men have found the use of their hands. At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse were cast into a dead sleep. You yourself are to be feared, and who may stand in your presence when once you are angry? You cause judgment to be heard from heaven.

The earth feared and was still when God arose to judgment to deliver all the oppressed of the earth. Selah. Surely the wrath of man shall praise you.

With the remainder of wrath, you shall gird yourself. Make vows to the Lord your God and pay them. Let all who are around him bring presence to him who ought to be feared.

He shall cut off the spirit of princes. He is awesome to the kings of the earth. The thought expressed in this psalm is parallel to the story we find ourselves studying over in Genesis as we resume our study this morning in chapter 14.

As you will remember, although we've had a little bit of a break, there were four kings who came down from the north and the east. Abram is dwelling in the land. He's not far from Hebron.

He's not far from the place where he built his altar. He's not far from Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first as we find in Genesis 13.4. Called on the name of the Lord, he dwelt not far from there. And in 13.18 of Genesis, it tells us Abram moved his tent, went and dwelt by the terebinth trees or the oak trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the Lord.

So then Lot, who has departed, he's traveled eastward to the very fringe of the land of

promise. We have a digression here as far as the story goes, and we don't have Abram or Lot mentioned for several verses, beginning in chapter 14. In the days of Ammerfeld, the king of Shinar, Ariok, king of Elassar, Keterleomer, king of Elam and Tidal, king of nations, they made war with the five kings of the plain.

Bera, king of Sodom, Bersha, king of Gomorrah, Shinab, king of Adma, Shemeber, king of Zeboim, and the king of Bela, that is Zoar. These are all kings in the plain that surround the southern part of the Dead Sea. So the four kings, they're outsiders, they're from way up north of Damascus.

They come down and they join in battle in the Valley of Sidon, which is the Salt Sea. This valley, we don't know exactly where it is, but it's apparently the valley that's associated with the southern portion of the Dead Sea. And they were subdued, the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, and their three allies.

They are subdued and become vassals. They enter into a suzerain vassal treaty with this alliance of kings up north. And for twelve years, they're paying tribute.

They're sending the bulk of their gross national product up north to this coalition of kings. Twelve years they serve Keterleomer and the thirteenth year they rebel. They say, we're tired of this.

This is ridiculous. You have another generation coming up that doesn't remember the defeat, doesn't remember the humiliation. They say, why should we be sending away all of our goods? It's a rich and fertile land.

We want to keep it. So they say, those guys are far away. We're not going to send this anymore.

So they rebel. So in the fourteenth year, Keterleomer, this is verse five of chapter fourteen, and the kings who were with him. You can tell in the meantime, in this dozen or thirteen years that pass, where before it was sort of a coalition of equal kings up north, the four of them are mentioned, now Keterleomer has emerged as the dominant king in this coalition.

He's the main brain here. He's the head and the respected leader of this group. So Keterleomer and the kings with him come down and attack.

And they start, they say, we're just going to make a slash and burn campaign. This is like Sherman's march to the sea. And so they start at the upper border of the land and they come down the eastern side of the Jordan River.

Remember your geography of Palestine? You've got the Mediterranean Sea, sort of a J-shaped coastline there to the west. You come inland and after you have the plains and you get into the mountains, then you have the Jordan River, a vertical line. You've got

the Sea of Galilee at the top of that line.

You've got the Dead Sea at the bottom. And Jerusalem, as a point of reference, is basically due west some distance from the northern edge of that Dead Sea area. Well, beyond the Jordan, this is what today they call Transjordan.

Remember, they always talk about the West Bank and that sort of thing? Well, they're talking about the Jordan River. Well, on the other side, this is where this was not a part of the land of promise. These kings come slashing and burning down the eastern side and they're going to make a J-shaped route.

They're going to come all the way down the eastern side and they sack all of these emes and isms that are listed here in verse 5 and verse 6. They're making a southward journey down the eastern side of that Jordan basin. And they hack and slash and they're accumulating stuff all the way down. They're sacking and pillaging and plundering and gathering all the wealth of these little city states that they conquer.

Well, they get all the way down below where you have this divider in the land of the Jordan River and the seas on each end of it. And they come all the way down to what today you would find the Gulf of Aqaba and you have Eilat down there, which is a city that's famous now for its glassware and products. If you ever see a catalog from the Biblical Archaeology Review or the Biblical Archaeology Society, they have a little catalog of things you can get from the Holy Land, large and small.

And one of the things they have in there is glassware from Eilat. It's a very prosperous little town there, but it's at the north end of the Gulf. Well, you've got to turn when you get to that point.

And so they come down and they turn back and start heading northwest. So this is the other arm of the J now. They've come down and they're swooping back.

So they're going to come up and attack the area of the five kings from the south. Well, you can imagine that the rebels, when they started fortifying and expecting an attack, they figured it would come from the northeast. Instead, it's going to come from the southeast.

Well, they're not prepared for this. And they hear, in the meantime, of this string of victories from this coalition, and they're in mortal fear. So in verse 7, when it says they turned back, these four kings, this coalition, they turned back and came to En Mishpat, that is, Kadesh, and attacked all the country of the Amalekites and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazazon Tamar.

There's a lot you could say about this geography. You remember when the Israelites were coming out of the land of Egypt in the Exodus? What's the first group they encounter? Egypt has been laid waste by the plagues. They're helpless.

Their army has been decimated, drowned in the Red Sea, and so forth. They're wide open to attack and domination by an outside force. And as the Israelites are leaving, heading more or less north and east, they encounter the Amalekites coming the other way, because this is the land of Amalek up here to the east-northeast of Egypt.

So they see the opportunity and they come in. There's a lot of history you could say, but if you've ever heard of the Shepherd Kings in Egypt, this has been equated by a lot of students of history and of the Bible with the Amalekites coming in to Egypt and taking advantage of their weakened, decimated state right after the Exodus. But this is the land of Amalek, sort of between Palestine and Egypt.

So obviously when these kings come down and make this jay, they hit the Amalekites and defeat them. And all the country of the Amorites, who dwell in Haze on Tamar, this is another area down south there. So the king of Sodom, this is verse 8, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Adma, the king of Zeboim, and the king of Bila, which is Zoar, went out and joined together in battle in the Valley of Sidon.

Now this is *deja vu*. They did this 13, 14 years earlier when they were first subdued. But now the field is reversed apparently.

They're not expecting the battle to be waged in this direction. They got beat there the first time and now they're going to get beat there again. And they're against, in verse 9, Keter, Laomer, king of Elam, Tidal, Amraphel, Ariok, four kings against five.

Now we already know who the combatants are, don't we? Why does verse 9 reiterate this? It's a reminder to us. This is looking ahead to what we're about to study this morning. This is a big deal.

These are big coalitions, four kings, five kings. These are big armies. It's a big battle.

This is a wide valley. We're going to find out this morning it's full of pits. But it's a big deal.

You've got a coalition on each side, large armies, great clash of swords and shields and large numbers of men here. It's a really big deal. This is sort of the Gettysburg of Sodom and Gomorrah here.

And in verse 10, this valley of Sidon, and you remember that most words in Hebrew and in the Semitic languages are composed of three consonants. When you write them down, you write down the three consonants and then you fill in the vowels. Vowel points are a relatively late addition for hundreds of years.

When you wrote down Hebrew, you just put the consonants down and you had to remember what the vowels were. Well, what are the three consonants of Sidon? S-D-M. What are the three consonants of Sodom? S-D-M.

So this valley is very near Sodom. It's at the gates. Apparently this is the valley of Sodom.

It could be just as easily as Sidon. And the valley was full of asphalt pits or bitumen pits. What's the Middle East most notable for? What's their primary natural resource? What is Iraq and Iran and all the rest of these famous for? It's petroleum.

There are huge deposits of petroleum and natural gas and all the associated things. You've got the asphalt, bitumen, tars that are a result of these huge deposits. And they're so huge.

And in some cases, they approach the surface. Well, there's also a fault that runs through this area and there's some geological instability. And so you've got these pits that at that time were near the surface.

Now, these are still discernible today, both south in the southern region of the Dead Sea and also in the northern region. But there are these asphalt pits. And you can imagine, you know, sulfurous fumes and sticky, gummy regions.

And these are pits. So it was full of these. In fact, the Bible emphasizes this in the Hebrew here when it says, now the valley of Siddam, it says it was full of pits.

And then it says asphalt pits or bitumen pits. So it says they weren't just pits. They were these tarry pits, these nasty pits.

And the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled and fell there, literally fell in to these pits. Now, it's not clear. The verb here for fall can mean that they didn't want to, but they did, and were trapped and scattered in these pits, rendered immobile, or that they fell into them as a means of defense.

Either way, what's the result? These armies are, if your army winds up being in pits, plural, they're scattered, they're divided, they are immobile, they're helpless. And so the other thing that this tells us is that this coalition of five kings of the plain has been divided, because the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled and fell in the bitumen pits. What does the rest of verse 10 say? The remainder fled to the mountains.

This is Adma, Zeboim, and Zoar. These guys used to have a commercial when I was a little boy out in California for Hills Brothers Coffee. Head for the hills was the little slogan.

Well, that's what these three kings did. They headed for the hills. So you've got, they've been split.

And you get the idea that in the vale of Sodom, in the valley of Sodom here, the coalition, these are experienced, victorious armies that have come down, and they drove a wedge right between the five kings. And two of them wound up in the pits, and the

other three armies fled up into the hills. So they're scattered, they're routed, and the cities in the northern part of this valley are wide open.

Their defense is gone. The armies are disabled and decimated and scattered in these pits and up in the hills. And so the coalition of four kings from the north, in verse 11, they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions, all of their food, and went their way.

You stop and think about this. Sodom and Gomorrah, these are fairly sizable towns, as we'll see later on in Genesis when we come back to Lot living in Sodom and the eventual destruction of these cities that's already been mentioned in the earlier chapter. These are pretty big towns.

If you go in there and take all of their stuff, just figure a medium-sized town that may be nearby. Think about Richardson or Garland or sort of a medium-sized town. If you took all the stuff, all of the food, clean out all the supermarkets, you can imagine in this ancient day there are granaries, there are bins of grain, bins of corn, there are huge flocks and herds of livestock and so forth.

There's a lot of stuff in these towns. Well, these armies sacked both towns, took all the stuff that's worth taking. You think about later on, the victories in the Exodus when Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan and go over to Jericho.

There are huge numbers of goods and things that are available for plunder. Well, they take all of this stuff. And this was their goal.

This is the reason the four kings came down in the first place. These people weren't paying their tribute. So they say, Hey, you owe us.

This belongs to us. You should have been sending us tribute. Since you didn't send it, we're going to collect it with interest.

We're taking everything, all the gold, all the silver, all the flocks and herds, all the grain. So they load themselves down with all this stuff. And while they're at it, they also grab a lot of the people and say we're going to have servants.

They're going to use these people in part. They're an army. How are they going to move all of this stuff back up north? They've got a long ways to go.

The area that these kings come from is more than 200 miles north. This area is at least 200 miles. If you just measure on a map the distance from the southern part of the Dead Sea back up to Damascus, as the crow flies, it's 200 miles.

How are they going to get all this stuff back? Well, they just go in there and the British Navy to man their ships. Nobody wanted to go to sea and endure the hardships for two

or three years, so they had press gangs that would just go out and find guys that might have had a night on the town and were staggering around. They'd grab guys off the street and they would impress them into service in the British Navy.

They would grab them and say this is what you're going to do. Well, they go in and take a large part of the population, especially the male population, to herd these animals to carry this grain and gold and silver and so forth. And then they also grab the women to become servants in their households when they get back up to their areas up north.

So, the towns are just laid waste and everything is gathered up and plundered and taken. So, they take all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions and left. Look at verse 12.

They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods and left. In both verse 11 and verse 12, you have the same two verbs used. They took and they left.

The reason this is emphasized and the reason this is repeated, one of the things is this is a pattern in Hebrew narrative to give you the general picture and then to tell you something more specific. Remember way back in the creation account, it says God created man in his own image after his likeness and you have a general account of creation. Then in the next chapter you have the specifics of God making Adam from the dust to the ground and the formation of Eve from the rib.

The general and the specific. So, generally in verse 11, virtually everything in Sodom and Gomorrah is taken, then specifically our point of interest and Abram's is in verse 12. But they take and they leave.

And this leaving is mentioned twice because this event takes place and it's going to be a while before Abram finds out. In verse 13, one who had escaped, and this is literally in Hebrew the fugitive, the fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew for he dwelt by the tree of Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Eskel, and brother of Aner, and they were allies with Abram. I said Aner, it's actually Aner in Hebrew.

Well, if you have a map in the back of your Bible, and if you don't, you should. Look at the geography here for a moment. Find any map of the Holy Land, doesn't matter if it's the lands of the Bible or the New Testament or whatever.

But if you look and find a map that shows the Sea of Galilee up north and the Dead Sea or the Salt Sea down south, when you see the Dead Sea down south, you find it's larger and longer than the Sea of Galilee up north, and they're linked by the Jordan River. Well, I'm not sure which map you're looking at or what cities may be noted, but just if you look at the Dead Sea at the south, halfway up and straight west, about a third of the way to the coast, this is where Hebron is. If you have any kind of a decent map, it should probably show Hebron there.

Well, this is where Abraham is. This is where he's living. The oaks of Mamre or the terebinth trees of Mamre are just a couple of miles, like two and a half miles north of Hebron.

So, this is where Abraham is. Now, look down at the bottom of the Dead Sea there. This is where Sodom and Gomorrah and all this stuff has taken place.

So, the fugitive, after this battle and after this plundering and so forth, he's going to flee and eventually make his way up to where Abraham is and tell Abraham about this. But you notice, if you've got any sort of topography on your map, there's a bunch of mountains and valleys and creeks and things to cross. It's going to take this guy some time to get up there.

In the meantime, the coalition of four kings, they've left and they're going back up the eastern side of the divide there, the two seas and the river. They've cut off the loop of the Jay here and they're heading almost back straight north on the eastern side of the... The travel is a lot easier there. If you can see the topography at all, the mountains are much steeper and rougher on the west side than they are on the east.

So, they're traveling their known route. They've got all these subdued... They've probably left some garrisons in these defeated cities and so forth. So, they're going back and collecting up their guys and rolling back up the way they came, taking all of this stuff home.

Well, eventually, this fugitive makes his way to Abraham, but some time has passed, as we will see. And when Abraham finds out about this, back in Genesis 14, 13, he is told by the fugitive what has taken place. It's very interesting here and I'm going to digress for just a moment because it says, told Abram the Hebrew.

Not sure what all the different translations may say there, but this is the first time that anyone is called a Hebrew. And it's actually rare. The term Hebrew is rare in the Old Testament because the Israelites, the people of Abraham, never called themselves Hebrew.

They were the children of Israel or Abraham is our father or whatever, but they didn't call themselves Hebrews. This was an outsider's term to describe them. Archaeologists have found references to the Hapiru, H-A-P-I-R-U, which, if you think again about consonants, is very similar to Hebrew as far as the sound of the word.

And these, in various ancient Near Eastern texts, appear to have been people who had no fixed territory. And in a nutshell, there's a lot you can say about the Hapiru, i.e. the Hebrews, but they were always viewed by the peoples as outsiders. They didn't have their own territory necessarily.

They weren't in a fixed location. They were somewhat migratory. What's the word we

use for Arabs that live in the desert? There's a name for that lifestyle.

Nomadic is what I was trying to think of. And that's the way that the Hapiru are presented in these ancient Near Eastern texts. So it's interesting that this phrase is used here.

In fact, this whole account from the beginning of chapter 14 has been somewhat different structurally from what we've seen because Abram and Lot are not even mentioned. It's all about the kings and territory and battles and so forth. And when it says, One who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, you almost get the idea that this account has been maybe brought in from another source.

It doesn't seem to flow quite with the family details and the altars and worshipping God and so forth that we've seen before. You have references to people and places and battles and so on. I find this interesting for this reason.

We've talked before about how these records of pre-flood and early post-flood details would have come into Moses' hands as he writes the account of Genesis. And I believe that we have Joseph to thank for the preservation of these early records obviously under the supervision of God through the Holy Spirit. But in the mechanical sense of preservation, we know from our general knowledge of Genesis that Joseph is going to rise to a great level of prominence in Egypt and he's going to rule there for decades.

You remember Joseph also knows there's going to be, God reveals to him that there's going to be a period of bondage of his people in Egypt and that subsequently God is going to deliver them. As we'll see when we get to the end of Genesis, Joseph knows this and he says, don't put my bones in a pyramid. Don't bury me in Egypt.

You keep my bones and when God delivers Israel, you take me with you. I want to be buried in the land of my fathers. I want to be buried back up there with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the crypt, in the cave of Machpelah.

And Joseph does this intentionally because he knows that his bones are going to be a symbol of hope for Israel as much bondage and slavery as they're going to endure for as long as 430 years. Every time they see the bones of Joseph sitting there, they know it's a reminder to them of the promise of God. Joseph knows this.

Well, stop and think about it. Joseph's got all this time. He's up in the palace.

He's administrating and so forth and so on. He's got access to the libraries, all the great learning of Egypt is at his disposal there. His family records, in which Jacob comes down and lives with him and he sets his father up in the land of Goshen and so forth.

He has ample time as a wise man to not only think ahead about the necessity for the people of Israel to have hope and to remember the promise of God that they'll be

delivered, but everything else that is a part of their heritage. And it's no stretch of the imagination to see Joseph gathering information, the records from his father and his father's father and so forth and depositing these in a safe place in the libraries of Egypt where hundreds of years later Moses is going to find them. And one of the things that he may have found in his research in the library of Egypt are what at that time we would have called extra-biblical accounts of history.

And here you have a battle account from a few hundred years earlier. It's not all that far from Joseph back to Abraham in his day, but the Egyptians are keeping track of history and they know about accounts of battles and movements of peoples and so forth. And some historian had written this stuff down and Joseph finds this and he says, oh look, here's a reference to Granddad in the Egyptian accounts.

And so he collects this and puts it in the same deposit of material that's there when Moses studies in a library or perhaps Moses found it himself. But at any rate, this has the look and the feel, vocabulary wise and so forth, of an archival record of battle that has been gathered and included in the record. And so you have this reference of an outsider, Abraham the Hebrew.

Abram the Hebrew was told about this. And this is an extraordinary account. As we're going to see, it's quite an unusual feat that Abram is about to accomplish here and it would have been notorious in the region and would have been recorded by the surrounding nations.

So that's one observation we make out of verse 13. The second one is, remember the Hebrew, this term, the connotation of it is someone without a fixed place of residence. If you remember over in Hebrews chapter 11, it talks about the patriarchs, it talks about Abraham in particular, who did not build a city and settle down and establish a dynasty.

They waited for a city whose founder and builder is God. You would expect that someone who's living a nomadic life, a transient life, who moves from place to place, would be less strong, would have less of an establishment or less of a base from which to operate. And it makes it all the more extraordinary when we read the account that follows that Abram is a wanderer in the land.

What is the source of his victory? When it calls him Abram the Hebrew, Abram the wanderer, the outsider, it's all the more extraordinary. It sets us up for what we're about to read. I'd like to go ahead and read the account of what happens beginning in verse 14.

He's been told by the fugitive that his nephew has been taken captive. So in verse 14, when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his 318 trained servants who were born in his own house and went in pursuit as far as Dan. There are two things we want to observe here.

First of all, in the previous verse, remember it said he's dwelling by the terrabith trees of Mamre, the Amorite brother of Eschol and brother of Aner. Well, Eschol and Aner, the reason these guys are mentioned is they are allies of Abram and they are going to accompany him. It doesn't specifically say so in verse 14, but we find out at the end of the story that they go with him.

But Abram's own group here, his armed men, number 318. Remember what we saw a verse or two back? The four kings meet the five kings. Huge armies, big battle, giant strategy type thing for the history books going on here.

Abram gets 318 men. It kind of reminds you when you think forward into Judges of Gideon and his 300 men out of an initial pool of thousands, he winds up with 300 men with lamps and pitchers. Well, here you have Abram with 318 men.

The other thing that this tells us is the magnitude of the prosperity of Abram. Out of his household, he can raise sort of a mini army of 300 men, 318 men. These are young men capable of doing battle.

This doesn't count his servants who are old guys, who are past arms bearing age. It doesn't count the women's servants. It doesn't count the ones who are too young.

It doesn't count the ones that he's got to leave behind to keep his stuff while he's gone. So you think about this. 300 men.

Let's suppose that this is maybe 1 tenth, 10 percent of the servant force Abram has got. Well, that's 3,000 servants if this is 10 percent. Let's say that it's 50 percent, half of his servants, which is conservative.

He's still got 600 servants out there watching flocks and herds and operating his businesses and his commerce and looking things over. And that doesn't include women and children. He's huge.

Abram is a very large corporation. The Abram Corporation is big. And he's been prospered by God as he dwells there.

And he's also made alliances with the three clans that live in this area. You think, well, how could he expand and have so much stuff without causing conflict with the other dwellers? Well, he entered into alliance with them. And apparently these are honorable men and they're very favorably disposed.

It's mutually beneficial. But their forces are not numbered in this 318. It's very specific to tell us that these 318 are born in his own house.

These aren't even servants that he bought or was given in Egypt. These are all native-born servants. And this also speaks of their loyalty to Abram.

So, they're born in his own house and they go in pursuit as far as Dan. Now, if you found that map the first time, let's go back to it. Because we want to figure out exactly where Dan is.

It's easy to just kind of blow by these place names and think, well, they kind of went a little distance. If you look at a map, you remember, once again, Abram's starting out down there by Hebron, which is halfway down west of the Dead Sea. Dan, if you can look at the top of your map and find the Sea of Galilee, well, Dan's another 30 miles north of the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee.

So, you just span that distance there and you begin to realize that this is no small trip that Abram makes here. This is probably 150 miles as the crow flies. I just measured this with a ruler on the map and it's about 150 miles from where Abram lives up there to Dan.

And if you can see any of that topography, this is rough country. But Abram takes his 318 servants and his allies from Mamre, Eshkol and Aner and they go up the western side. They're going to literally head them off at the pass, if you will.

And so they make this rough trek and they catch the returning armies of the four kings up in the area of Dan. And if you have a map that shows enough detail, you'll see that the northern part of the river Jordan, the Jordan flows south, there's a river that flows north and then there are three tributaries that it splits into. And Dan is up in that region.

But this is a major feat. Abram and his band go over 150 miles north and go on the attack against this coalition with all of their stuff. What is the outcome of this encounter? Abram and his tiny band against this coalition that has been successful and has routed every city-state that they've encountered.

They routed a coalition of five kings of the plain. Abram goes up and cuts them off. What happens? We're going to pause and take our break and when we come back, we'll see the results of this battle.