

Principles of Spiritual Warfare

Abraham rescues Lot

Text: Gen. 14:1-16

Introduction:

1. In this chapter we have the first battle between nations that is noted and recorded in Scripture. We now see Abraham functioning as a soldier in this battle as we follow his walk of faith. Abraham was a worshipper of the Lord but he was also a warrior for the Lord. “The life of restful fellowship with God (13:18) is now to be disturbed by a new emergency issuing in new experiences. Communion with God is constantly found to be the preparation for new crises in the believer’s daily life.” (Griffith Thomas)
2. From this passage we can learn some very helpful principles that we can apply to the spiritual conflict we find ourselves in, especially as it relates to entering into spiritual warfare on behalf of others.
3. We will study this battle under five headings:
 - The Description of the Battle (Vs. 1-12)
 - The Intervention in the Battle (Vs. 13-16)
 - The Visitation after the Battle (Vs. 17-20)
 - The Temptation after the Battle (Vs. 21-24)
 - The Consolation after the Battle (Gen. 15:1)
4. In this sermon, we will cover the first two headings, dealing with the battle itself. Next message, we will consider the events that took place after the battle was over.

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE BATTLE (VS. 1-12)

A. The Coalitions in the Conflict (Vs. 1-2)

1. The Attacking Kings (Vs. 1). This was a coalition of four powerful kings from the region of Mesopotamia, the general geographical location where Abraham had originally come from, the area we know today as modern-day Iraq. There was:
 - a. The primary king – Chedorlaomer.
 - b. The participating kings – Amraphel, Arioch and Tidal.
 - c. Henry Morris notes that the confederacy consisted of the kings of Shinar (Babylonia), Ellasar (the leading tribe in southern Babylonia), Elam (the original kingdom of Persia), and Tidal king of nations (probably a tribe of northeastern Babylonia).
2. The Defending Kings (Vs. 2) This was a coalition of five kings in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. Four of these five cities would be destroyed in God’s Divine overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Zoar, perhaps the smallest of the cities, was spared for Lot’s sake (See Gen. 19:20-23; Deut. 29:23) It appears Sodom was the most influential in this coalition of the “cities of the plain” (Gen. 13:12).

B. The Catalyst for the Conflict (Vs. 3-5a)

1. The cities of the plain were under tribute to Chedorlaomer for 12 years. Evidently Chedorlaomer had conquered these lands

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previously and put them under tribute. Interestingly, Lot moved to Sodom, thinking it offered him liberty but in reality, Sodom was enslaved to a foreign power. What a picture of the world! On the surface it appears so pleasant, free and exciting but in reality it is a system in bondage to the prince of the power of the air.

2. In the 13th year of their servitude, they rebelled and this provoked Chedorlaomer and his allies to invade in the 14th year.

C. The Conquest of the Conflict (Vs. 5b-12)

1. The conquering of lands (Vs. 5b-11)
 - a. The first phase of the campaign (Vs. 5b-7). Evidently the rebellion of the five cities became a pretext to wage war on other kingdoms in the region. This also appears to have been a strategy to leave the five cities isolated and without any other potential ally to call on for help. There were at least six kingdoms that were routed in this campaign of terror, some to the North of Sodom and some to the south. They made “a wide sweep to the east and south (Seir) and then around to the southwest (to “Kadesh” as in Kadesh-Barnea); then northwest to the western side of the Dead Sea (Hazazontamar, which is better known to Bible students as Engedie, cp. 2 Chronicles 20:2), and then lastly the troops swarm down upon their final objective.” (H.C. Leupold)
 - b. The second phase of the campaign (Vs. 8-11). The four kings now come to the primary purpose of their campaign; to punish and subjugate the five cities of the plain for their revolt. Two geographical markers are noted in the text to indicate where the battle took place.
 - i. The vale of Siddim. This is mentioned three times in the text (Vs. 3, 8 & 10). The location is believed to lie at the southern end of what we now know as the Dead Sea. The area had many “slimepits” meaning the area was a rich source of Bitumen. This may have been one of the reasons for the financial success of Sodom and surrounds.
 - ii. The salt sea (Vs. 3). This was likely an earlier version of what later became known as the Dead Sea. It was likely much smaller then and increased in size after the outpouring of God’s wrath on the land. John Butler calls this conflict “the Dead Sea War” since it is all centered around the Dead Sea area.
 - iii. Sodom and her allies had the home ground advantage over the enemy and possibly greater numbers (five kings vs four) but they lacked courage and strength. The lazy, lustful lifestyle of the Sodomites meant they were no match for the invading force (See Ez. 16:49). Moral weakness in a nation often leads to military weakness.
2. The capture of Lot (Vs. 12). Lot was in a place of vulnerability in Sodom. When you compromise with the world, you compromise on spiritual safety in your life and become no match for the devil.

II. THE INTERVENTION IN THE BATTLE (VS. 13-16)

Consider Abraham's response to this battle. We learn much about the quality and maturity of our Christian lives in the way we respond to things. Consider some lessons from Abraham's response to this battle:

A. The Maturity of his Intervention (Vs. 13)

Abraham's maturity is evidenced in:

1. The timing of his response. Up until this point Abraham was not targeted by the invading kings and Abraham did not get involved. He only got involved when he heard his "brother" was in jeopardy. Knowing when and when not to involve yourself in a conflict is something that requires maturity and wisdom.
2. The spirituality of his response. Clearly Abraham did not harbor resentment and an unforgiving, bitter attitude towards his nephew. We don't find Abraham saying something like, "well, that serves him right! After all, he shouldn't have gone to Sodom in the first place." While it is not wrong to recognize the facts of a situation and that a brother or sister is reaping what they have sown out of the will of God, it should be coupled with a sincere care for the individual. There should not be a carnal gloating over a brother's demise.

B. The Motivation of his Intervention (Vs. 14a)

1. It was not self-centered. Abraham had nothing to gain from a human perspective by getting involved in this conflict. The fact that Abraham did not have a carnal motive is evidenced in the verses that follow where he refuses the king of Sodom's offer (Vs. 21-24).
2. It was others centered. Abraham was clearly motivated by nothing else but selfless love for Lot. To get involved in spiritual rescue efforts requires a selfless mindset. You put yourself at risk spiritually by entering the battle. You also put yourself at risk emotionally as sometimes the person you are trying to help does not end up turning out how you had hoped. Sadly, in Lot's case, even after the sobering experience of being a prisoner of war and being the beneficiary of Abraham's help, he still chose to go back to Sodom!
3. "Genuine separation – an unattachedness to the things of time and sense, because of an ardent devotion to the unseen and eternal – is the result of faith, which always works by love; and this love tenderly yearns for those who are entangled in the meshes of worldliness and sin. **Faith makes us independent but not indifferent.**" (F.B. Meyer)
4. Note: This is a key point to highlight as the charge often levelled against the separated Christian is that he/she is harsh and unloving. Actually, the genuinely separated Christian is full of the love of Christ and will act selflessly on the behalf of those in need.

C. The Methodology of his Intervention (Vs. 14b-16)

We learn some excellent lessons for spiritual warfare by studying Abraham's approach to this battle with the enemy. We are reminded that a separated believer is also a soldier. Abraham had:

1. The Right Soldiers for the Battle (Vs. 14b) There are five qualities we note in Abraham's servant soldiers. These qualities are essential for the Christian soldier. Abraham's soldiers were:

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- a. Separated soldiers – Abraham and his men were separated men. Holiness and personal separation from the world goes hand in hand with being an effective soldier. The model promoted by many Christians today of becoming like the world to conquer the world is a recipe for tragic defeat. Lot is a prime example of this. His compromise led to spiritual powerlessness. A Christian who puts his head in the lap of this world will be shorn of the locks of his spiritual strength (remember Samson).
 - i. John Butler notes, “Here is a great lesson for the individual Christian and the church: you do not have to be popular with the world to be of help to them and to win them to Christ. We are making a grave mistake in our age in thinking that to reach the world and rescue the world from their sin cursed condition we must become more like the world... Yes, the philosophy of much of Christendom today is move to Sodom and mingle with the Sodomites and you will be better able to help them rather than sitting up on a hill in Hebron praying to God and staying aloof from Sodom. But this sort of thinking by the worldly saint does not have one single iota of support from the Scripture. Our text will nail it to the wall. It is the separated, clean saint that can help the sinner best. Though you may be scorned and despised for your separation from evil, it will in no way deter your ability or opportunity to help in the hour of need. Rather, it will enhance your ability and opportunity to help. The one who escaped knew there was help in Abraham, not in anyone from where he had just come.”
 - ii. F. B. Meyer adds, “The men who live the life of separation and devotion towards God, are they who act with most promptness and success when the time for action comes. Lot being in Sodom, could neither elevate its morals nor save it from attack. Abraham living among the hills is alone able to cope successfully with the might of the tyrant king. Oh, do not listen to those who say you must live on the level, and in the midst of worldly men, in order to elevate and save them; and advise you to go to the theatre, the ball-room, the public-house, in order to give them a higher tone. Did Lot save Sodom? Nor will a better fate than his befall any man, who, unbidden by God, settles down in the world for his own whim and pleasure. If you would lift me, you must stand above me.”
 - iii. Let’s seek to be “**higher ground**” believers!
- b. Equipped soldiers – “**armed** his trained servants”. Abraham provided his soldiers with the weapons they would need for the battle. In like manner, we have been equipped by God for the spiritual battle we face. Ephesians 6:10-18 – “Finally brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might...”
- c. Trained soldiers – “armed his **trained** servants”. Abraham made sure that apart from their regular duties as servants, these men

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were trained for battle. Abraham's faith gave him the foresight to see the dangers and threats on the horizon and to prepare accordingly (See Prov. 22:3; 27:12 – the prudent man foresees the evil). It is not enough to have the weapons. You must know how to use them. The local church is the Lord's training center to prepare skilled Christian soldiers (See Eph. 4:11-12). To be trained you must be teachable!

- d. Dedicated soldiers – “servants”. These men were servants. Spiritual warfare is a part of our service for Christ. It requires selfless effort to be involved in the battle on behalf of others.
- e. Unified soldiers – “born in his own house”. Divided armies lose battles!
 - i. They were from one household. In like manner, we need to wage spiritual warfare with other likeminded believers from the household of faith (Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 3:15).
 - ii. They had one head. They had been born, raised and trained by godly Abraham. They were on the same page as their spiritual leader. Christ is our head and we rally under His leadership. Unity with Christ's appointed leaders in our lives (i.e., pastors/under shepherds) is also vital.
 - iii. They had one heart. They were single-minded and united in their objective to conquer the enemy.

2. The Right Strategy for the Battle (Vs. 15)

Abraham employed a battle strategy that was similar to that adopted by Gideon some centuries later (Judges 7). Israel has a long history of night warfare, down to recent history. Note the three main prongs of their godly strategy.

- a. They were against the enemy – “divided himself **against** them”. In this day of “positivism only”, determine to be biblical and be against everything God is against and for everything God is for. There was no confusion in the minds of Abraham and his men as to who the enemy was.
- b. They were arranged to face the enemy – “**divided**...he and his servants”. This was not a carnal division as this group of men were unified. It simply means that within this team of men under the godly leadership of Abraham, each man had his sphere of responsibility. God gave wisdom on how to organize the available men for the battle. The resources were wisely organized. There were teams within the team and each group was to fulfill its role and thus achieve the overall objective. In the local church, the whole team needs to be on the same page as to the main objective and in cooperation with God's appointed leaders but each member has a function to fulfill that contributes to the success of the whole. Put your whole heart into whatever sphere of ministry God has placed you in right now. The team depends on it!
 - i. Have you joined the team? Membership comes before ministry for a reason. You can't be on a ministry team

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- within the local church team unless you have first joined the team!
- ii. Have you joined a team? If you are a member, are you serving in a ministry?
 - c. They attacked the enemy – we note the word ‘pursued’ occurs twice. This is the action of faith. There is the more passive side of the walk of faith in worship by the altar but that leads to the active side of service in the battle.
 - i. They ‘pursued them unto Dan’ (Vs. 14b). Dan was in the north of Israel. Scholars tell us this was about 120 miles journey (193 km) for Abraham and his men. The enemy was journeying back to their homeland in Mesopotamia with the spoils of war.
 - ii. They ‘pursued them unto Hobah” (Vs. 15b). This location is noted as being near ‘Damascus’. This was no small feat!
 - iii. It is not enough to simply talk about the battle. You must get involved in the fight and earnestly contend for the faith.
 3. The Right Success in the Battle (Vs. 15b, 16)
 - a. The secret of the victory (Vs. 15b; 20). Abraham and his men were diligent, disciplined, trained, equipped and organized men. They gave it their very best. But in reality, even with all of that, they were no match humanly speaking for such a powerful foe. Chedorlaomer had routed the whole region, defeating multiple kings and kingdoms. The secret behind their victory was the power of God. God ‘delivered’ the enemy into their hands (Vs. 20).
 - i. It is significant that in Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul opens the section on the armour of God with the words, “Finally, my brethren, be **strong in the Lord**, and in **the power of his might**.” (Eph. 6:10). Without God’s power, you are NO match for the devil and his demonic forces.
 - ii. “Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing; were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God’s own choosing: Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He, Lord Sabaoth, His name, from age to age the same, And He must win the battle.” (Martin Luther – A mighty Fortress is our God)
 - iii. The power of God is on the side of the separated, Spirit-filled man.
 - b. The size of the victory (Vs. 16). This was not a small victory. This was a huge victory! Never underestimate the big victories God can accomplish with a small army yielded to Him. Little is much when God is in it!

Conclusion: Are you an active soldier in the spiritual battle for souls?