

# Genesis 14:1-24

## Genesis 14:1-7 – The Kings from the East

In the days of **Amraphel** king of Shinar, **Arioch** king of Ellasar, **Chedorlaomer** /kay-dor-lay-more/ king of Elam, and **Tidal** king of Goiim,

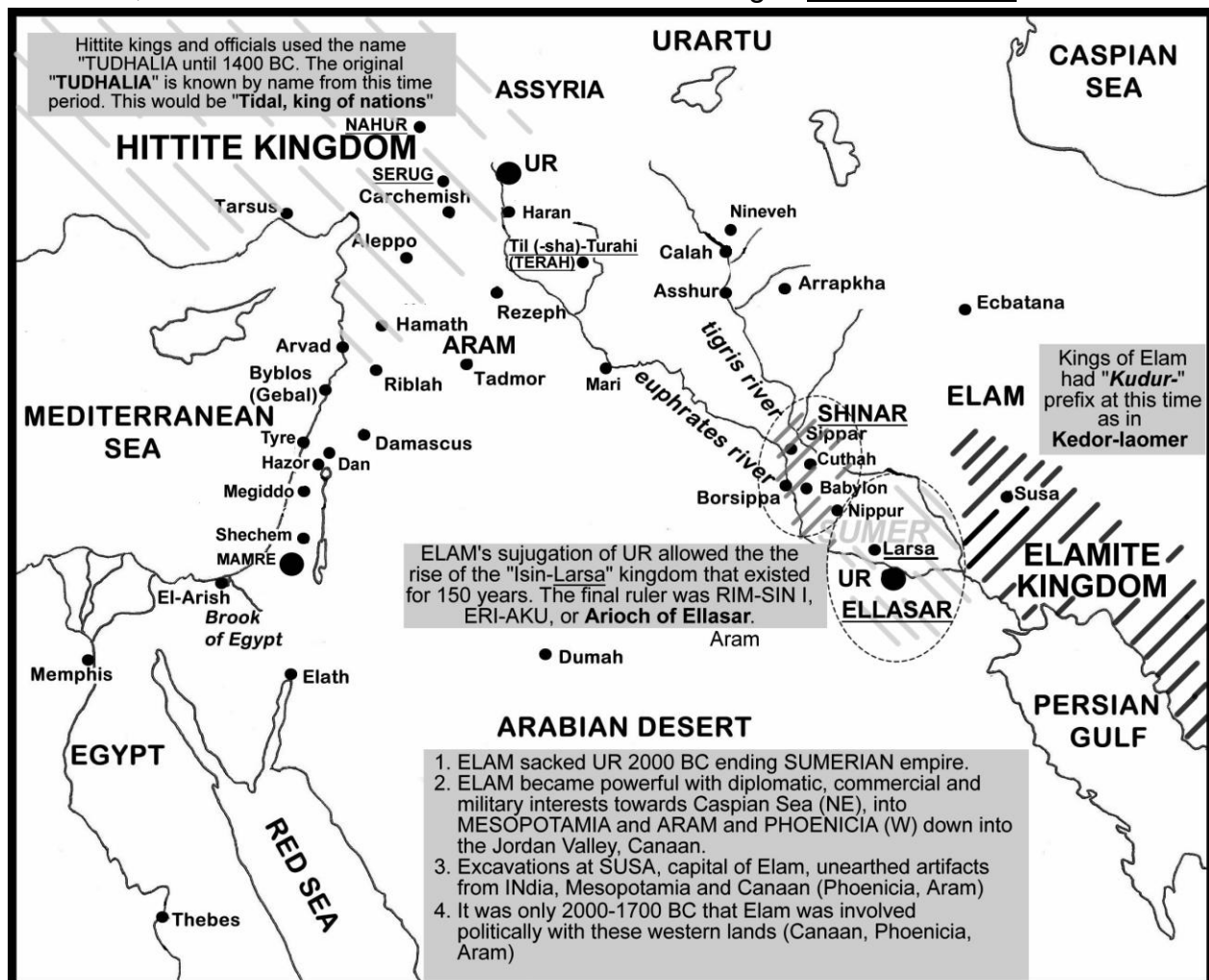
2 these kings made war with **Bera** king of Sodom, **Birsha** king of Gomorrah, **Shinab** king of Admah, **Shemeber** king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).

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.

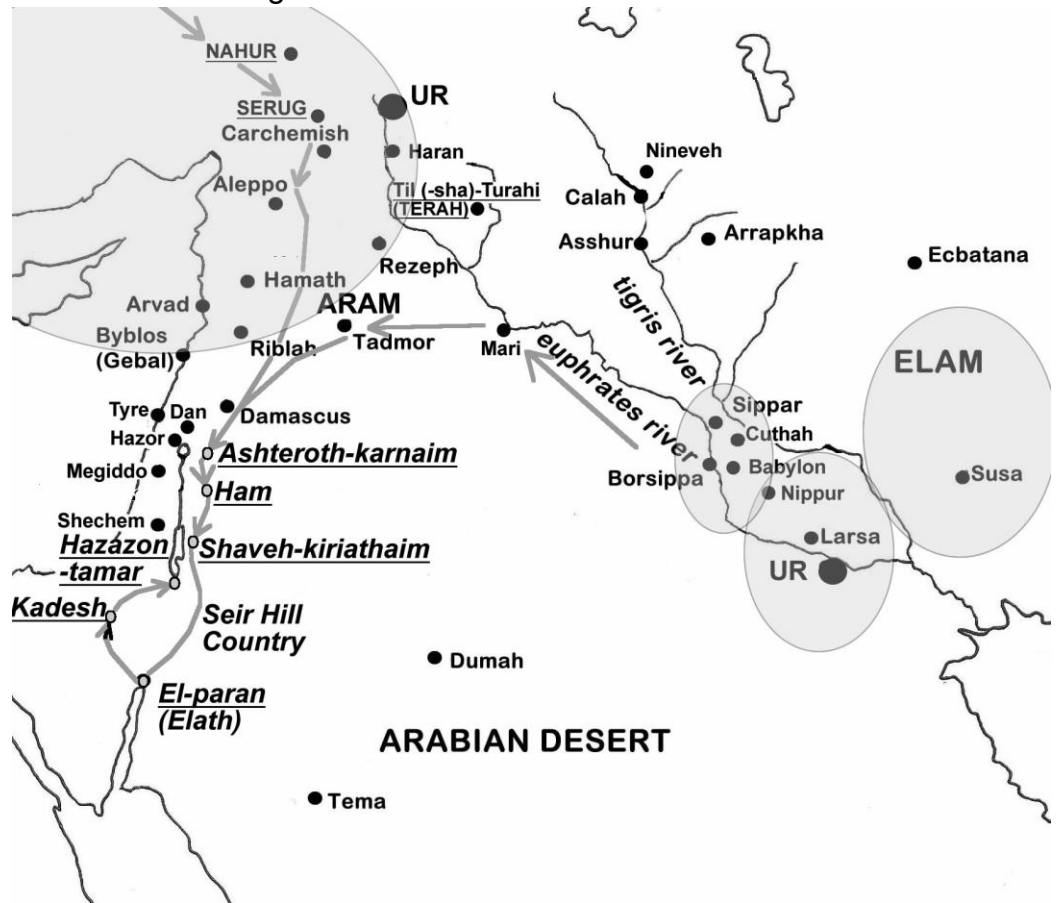
5 In the fourteenth year **Chedorlaomer** and the kings who were with him came and defeated the **Rephaim** in Ashteroth-karnaim, the **Zuzim** in Ham, the **Emim** in Shaveh-kiriathaim, 6 and the **Horites** in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness.

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.



1. Ancient Near Eastern campaign reports of this time period commonly preserve the itinerary of the movements of armies. This route is a straightforward march through the land going south on the main route through Transjordan (east of Jordan) on the KING's HIGHWAY to where it turns west at Bozrah. At this point the route runs across the top of the plateau about 10-15 miles east of the Jordan River and the rift valley. From Bozrah they leave the King's Highway which turns west and follow the south trade route branch called the Way of the Wilderness to the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea. From there they come north on the "Way of the Red Sea to Kadesh Barnea where they rejoin the King's Highway going east to Tamar. At that time they move north to the cities of the plain (kikar) NE of the Dead Sea
2. Lands invaded by the four kings from Elam:
  - a. **Ashteroth-karnaim** – REPHAIM – Ashtaroth was capital of the region east of the Sea of Galilee near the city of Karnaim
    - i. The Rephaim are heroic demigods in the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible.
    - ii. Deuteronomy 2:20-21 says the Rephaim were strong and tall like the Anakites
    - iii. Og, king of Bashan, was the last of the Rephaim according to Deuteronomy 3:11. His bed is recorded as being 13 feet long and six feet wide.
    - iv. The Septuagint uses the Greek word *gigas* (Giants) and *titanes* (Titans)
    - v. They are described as being 7-10 feet tall

- b. **Ham** – ZUZIM –
- c. **Shaveh-kiriathaim** – EMIM –
- d. **Seir hill country to El-paran (Elath)** on border of wilderness – HORITES –
- e. **Kadesh (En-mishpat)** – AMALEKITES – Kadesh Barnea is in the NW of Sinai in the land of Canaan's SW about fifty miles southwest of Beersheba
- f. **Hazazon-tamar** – AMORITES – this is forty miles southwest of the southern tip of the Dead Sea



## Genesis 14:8-12 – The Kings of the Five Cities (Sodom)

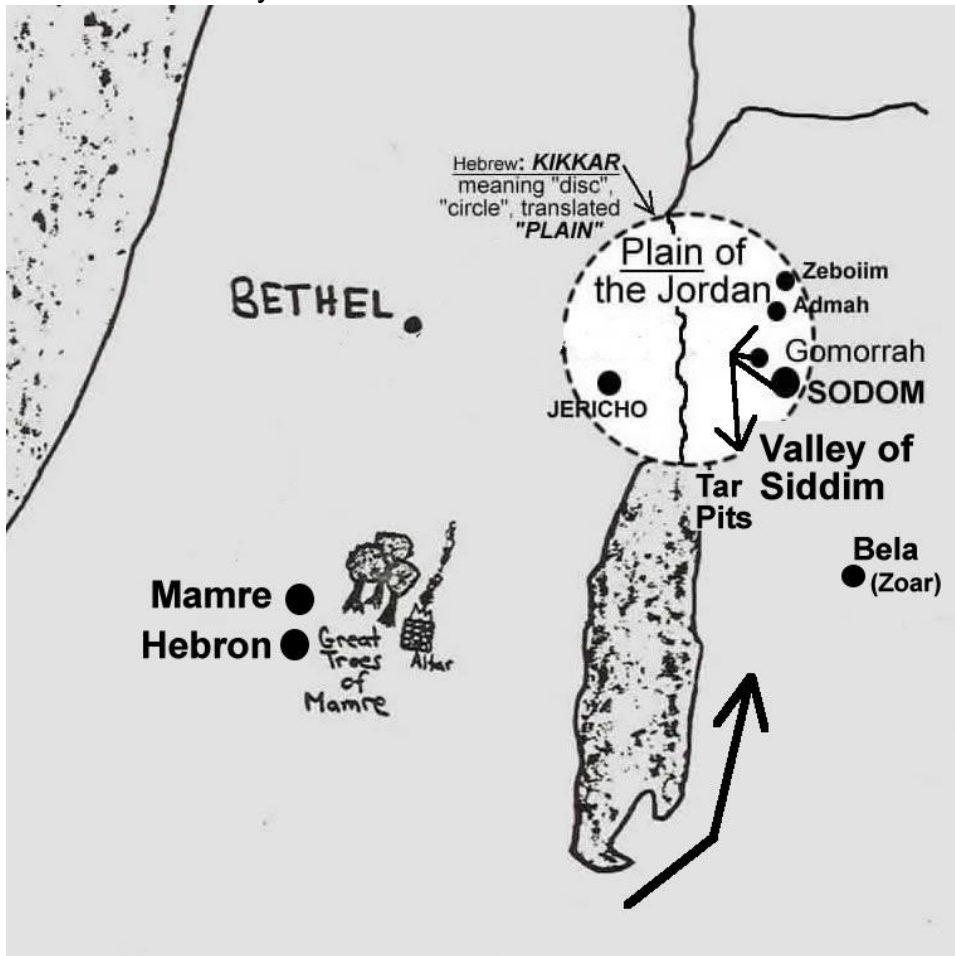
Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the **Valley of Siddim**

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.



1. **Tar Pits** – Bitumen is a thick, sticky black liquid that was used as an adhesive or for waterproofing. It was mined close to the surface of the land and in the water of the Dead Sea by digging holes like wells that led down to the bitumen. These wells were open pits that could be used by the kings of the Valley (Plain of Jordan, Kikkar) to hide from the enemy once their armies had been defeated, the people captured and their cities plundered.

## Genesis 14:13-16 – Abram’s Rescue of Lot

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.



1. “Hebrew” the word may refer to:
  - a. Social status as a foreigner as in Gen. 39:14-17; Ex. 2:11; 1 Samuel 4:6; Jonah 1:9. The foreigner could be dispossessed or disenfranchised
  - b. The word is used as Habiru or ‘apiru in ancient documents from this time period that refer to shepherds or even invaders.
  - c. This term is not limited to an ethnic group, a linguistic group. Some are Semites, Hurrians and others in ancient writings. They worship different gods and are referred to by this term from east of the Tigris to Egypt to Turkey (Anatolia)
  - d. People with this title are outsiders, mercenaries or lawless renegades.
  - e. Israelites may have been considered Habiru or Hebrews.
  - f. It is also possible this identification comes from Abram’s ancestor Eber.

2. 318 trained men refers to military retainers. These men had been hired by Abram to protect his servants, flocks and possessions. In a time like this Abram called on his personal military to retrieve Lot
  - a. This number is possible when considering the great Spartan 300 that faced down Xerxes invading Persian troops of 10,000’s with ships and war animals.

- b. A document from a king from this time laments that his army has been reduced to only 300.
- c. The Mari letters record a military force of 300 to be the perfect size of military to invade with
- d. The kings and their men that Abraham attack were likely exhausted, full of food and plunder and drunk.
- e. Abram attacked at night under the cover of darkness.

- f. Abram divided his forces into three attacking divisions that would have shocked and out maneuvered forces that were not prepared to fight.

### **Genesis 14:17-20 – Abram and Melchizedek**

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

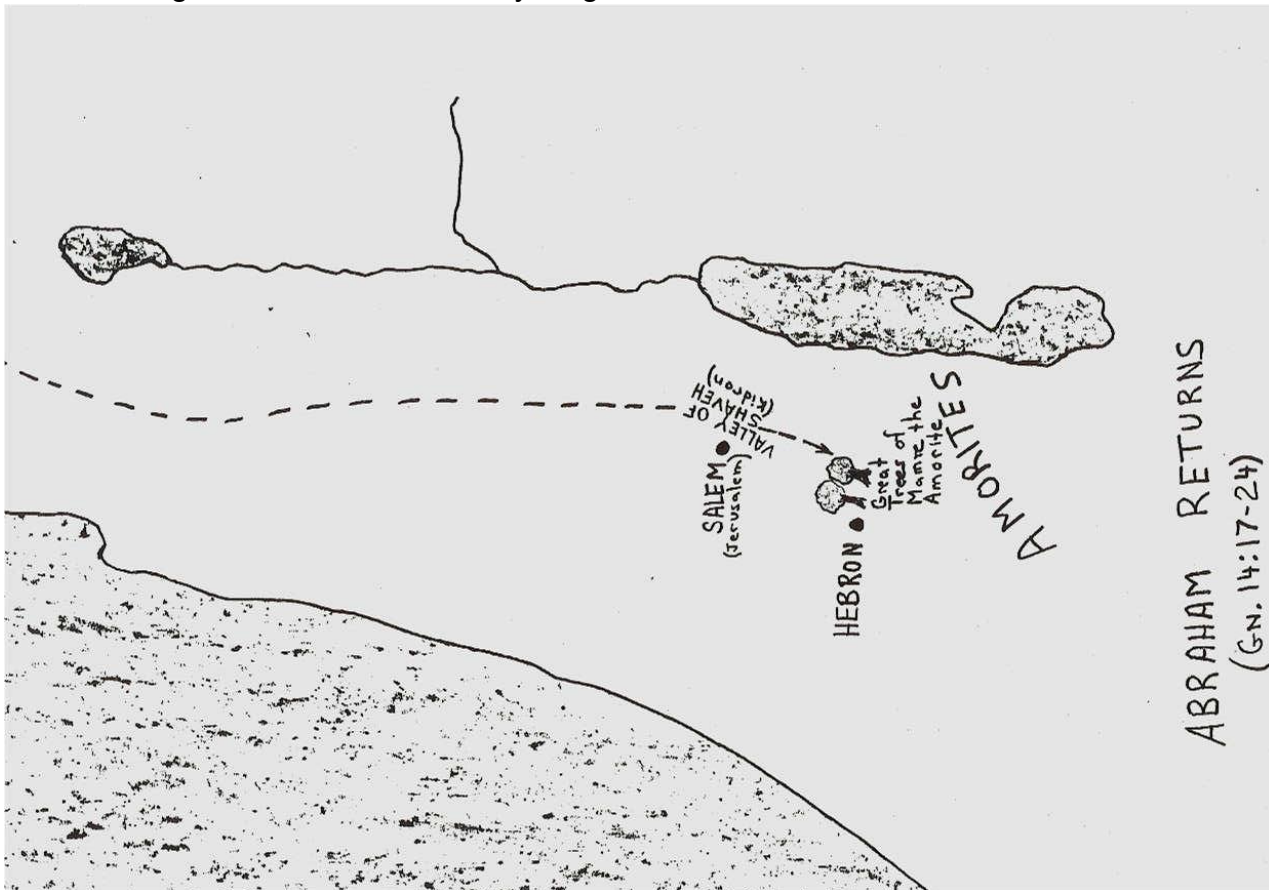
18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)

19 And he blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;

20 and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

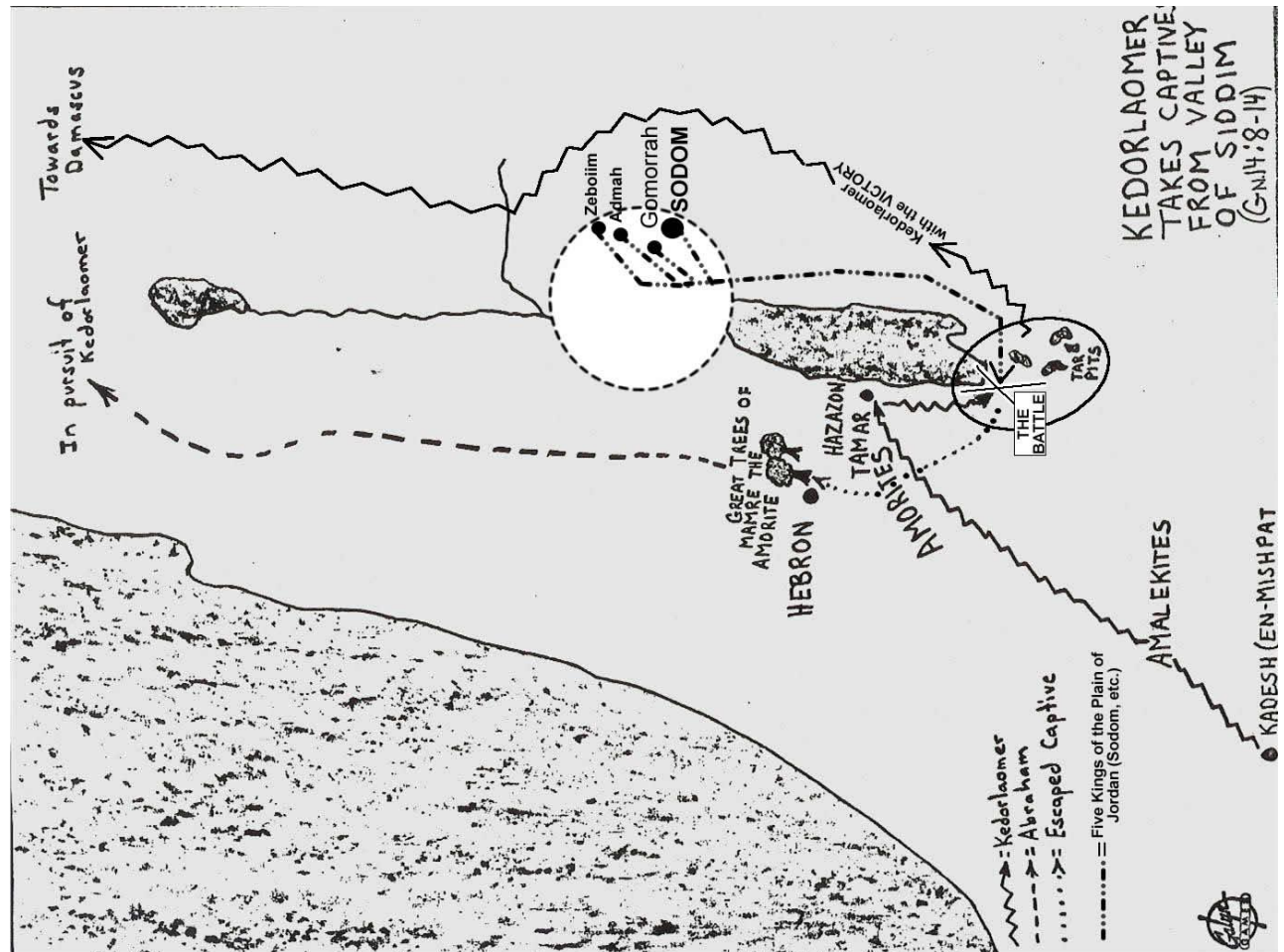
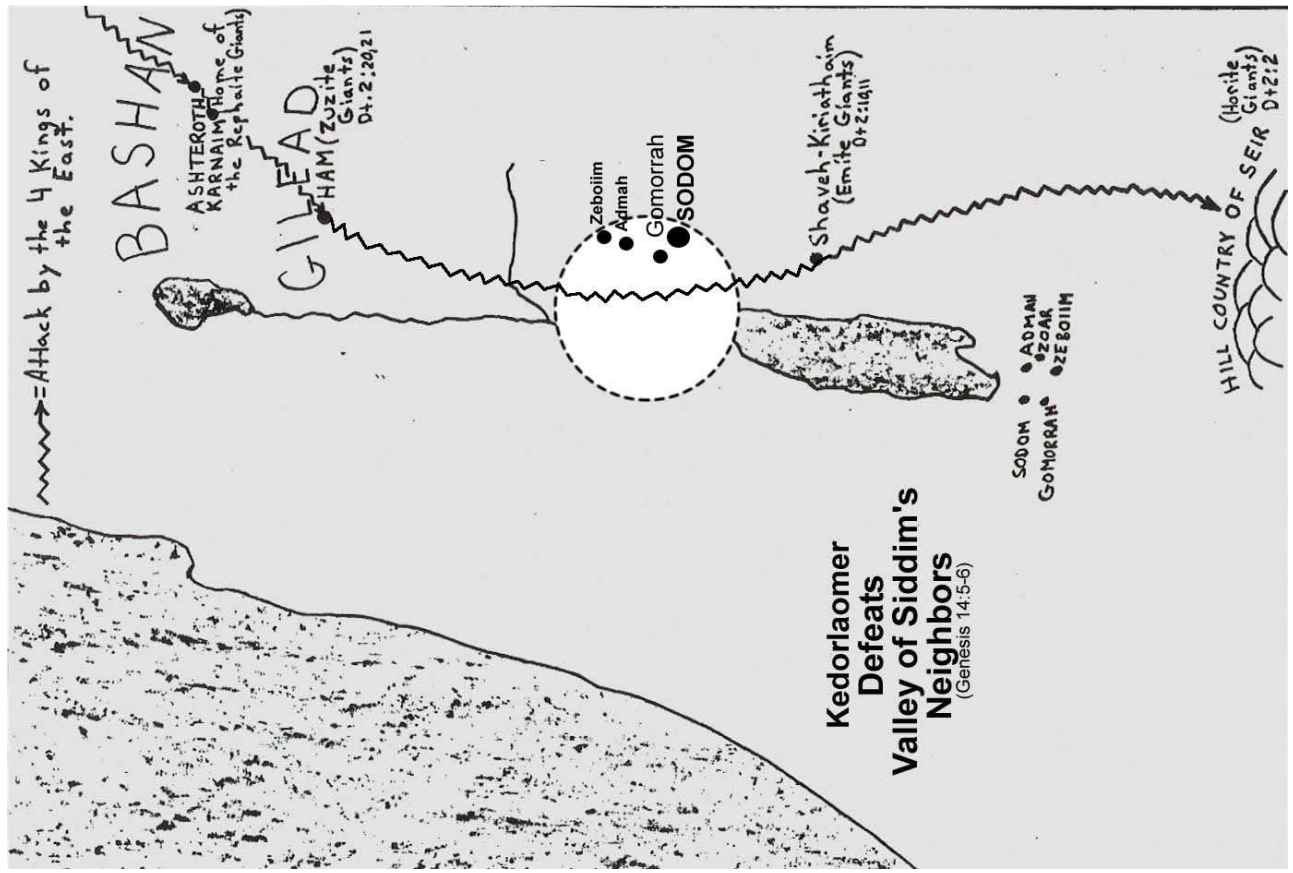


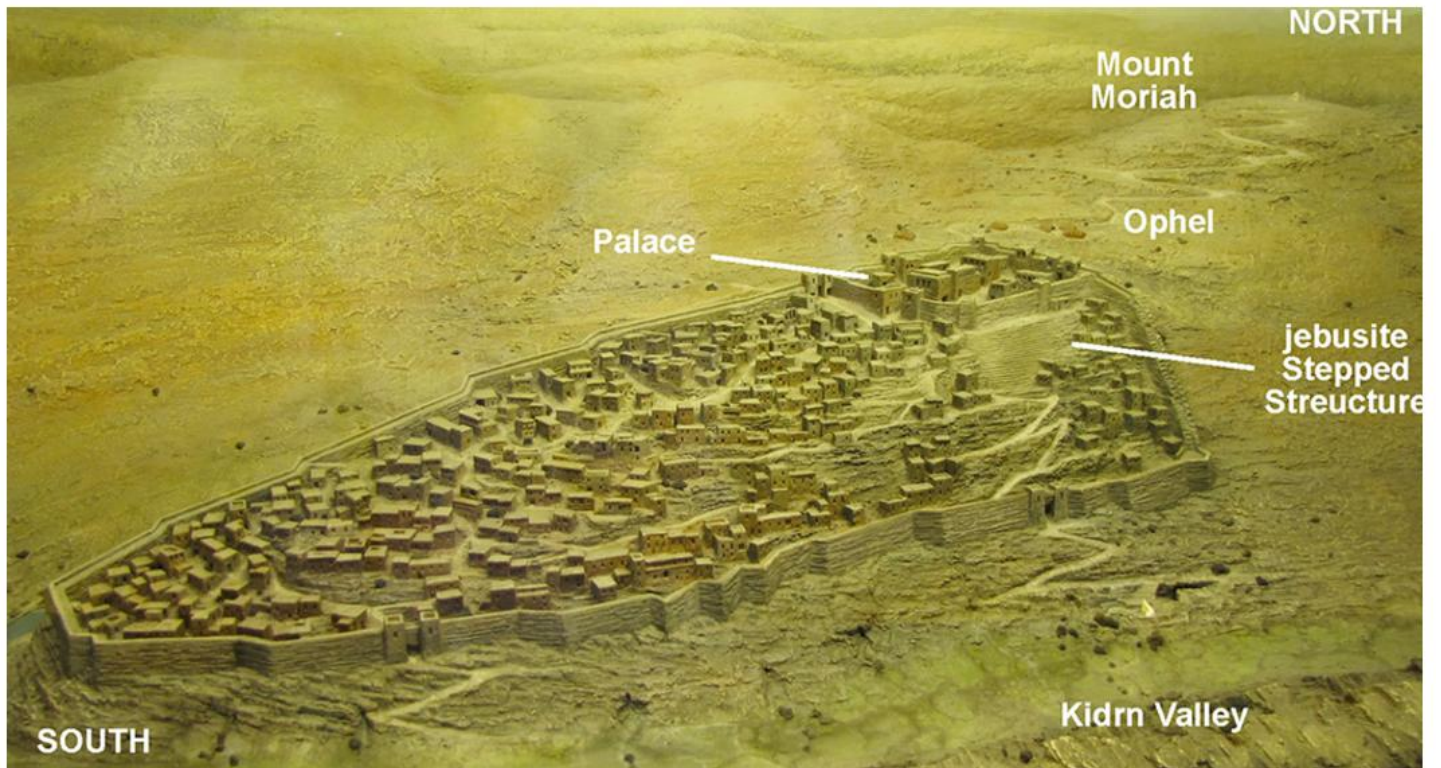
### **Genesis 14:21-24 – King of Sodom and Abram**

And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.”

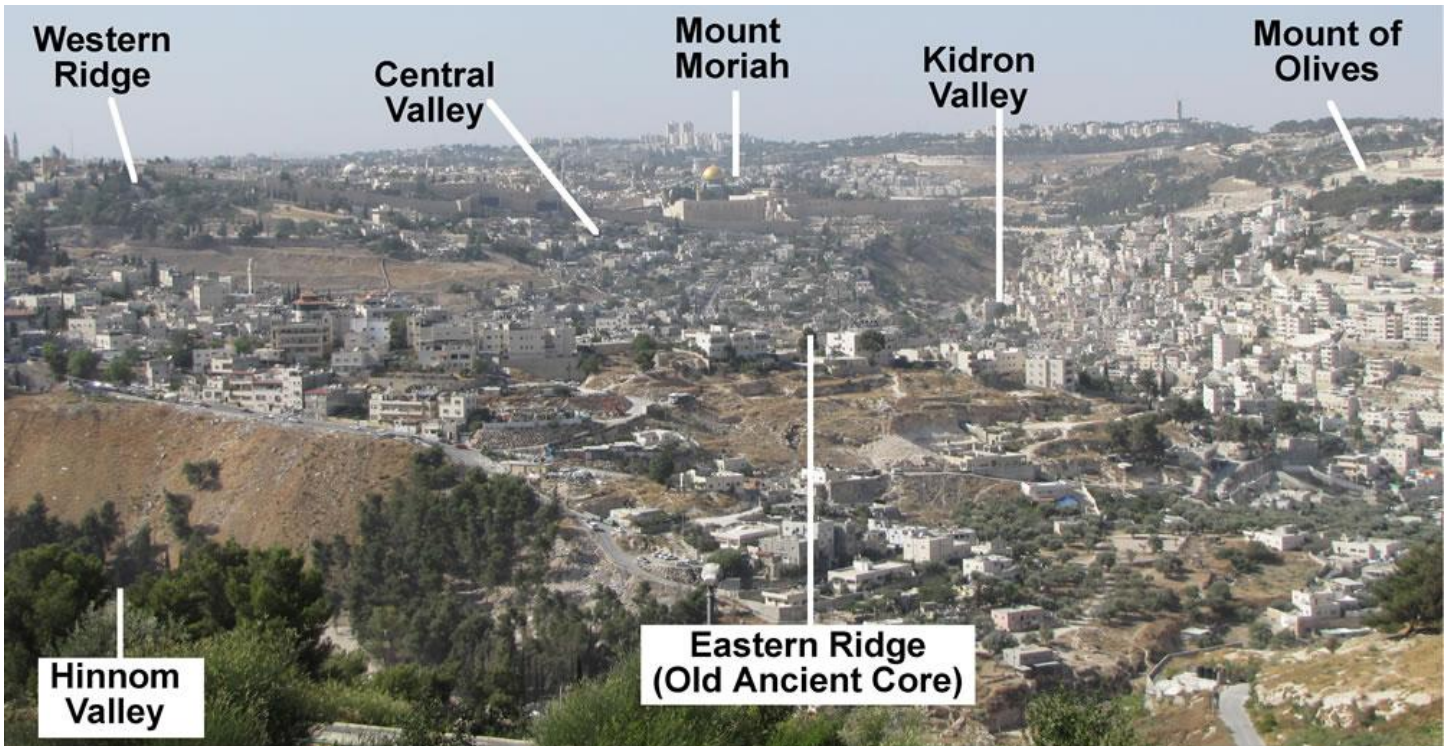
22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom,

“I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ 24 I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.”



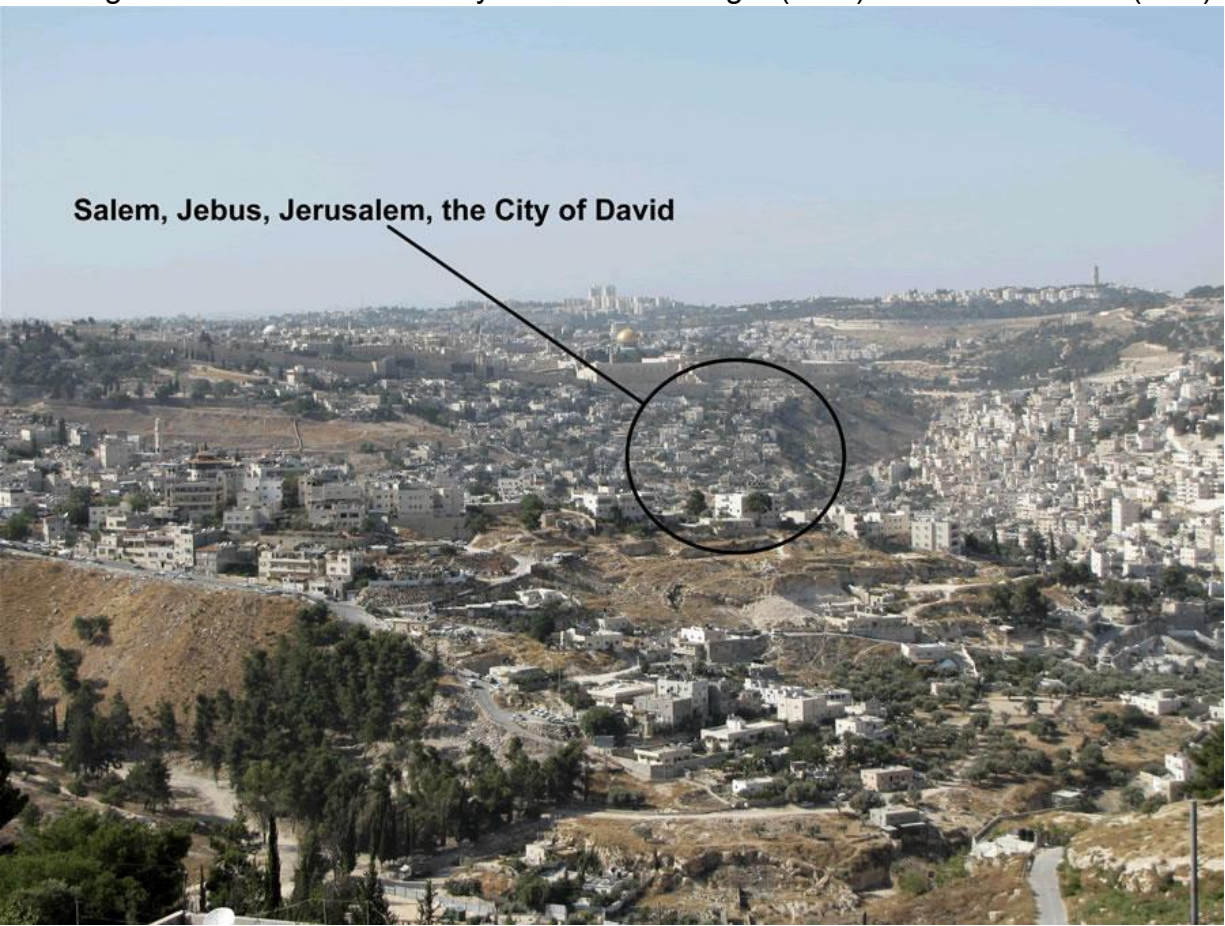


Early Jerusalem labeled and viewed from the Mount of Olives to the east. Notice the Stepped Stone Structure





Looking south in the Kidron Valley. Jerusalem on right (west). Mt. Olives on left (east)





## Source -

<https://armstronginstitute.org/299-uncovering-the-battle-that-changed-the-world>

## NOTES:

But as Genesis 14 reveals, these five Jordan Valley city-states were not the only ones to bear the brunt of invasion. Genesis 14:5-7 record that, as the four kings invaded the Levant, various tribes were assaulted en masse, including the Rephaim, Zuzim, Emim, Horites, Amalekites and western Amorites. Verse 7 indicates that King Chedorlaomer and his allies zig-zagged through the Levant, effecting maximum destruction. Various peoples were attacked in specific cities. Others were slaughtered throughout their entire country (such as the Horites and the Amalekites).

Finally, the Jordan Valley kings emerged in what must have seemed a futile defense. The battle was staged in the “vale of Siddim—the same is the Salt Sea” (verse 3). Unsurprisingly, the five valley kings were defeated, with the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fleeing and bogging down in “slime pits” that filled the valley. Others fled to the mountains. The victorious Chedorlaomer pillaged Sodom and Gomorrah and departed with an abundance of goods and captives (verses 10-11).

---

pursued as far as Dan” (verses 13-14; “Dan” here is an anachronistic term, added later by one of the Bible’s early editors; it refers to the furthest northern point of ancient Israel, the location to which the tribe of Dan later migrated).

---

At Dan, Abram divided his men into smaller squads and, under cover of darkness, attacked Chedorlaomer’s forces using guerrilla warfare tactics.

---

the captives were freed, together with the ransacked goods. A triumphant Abram returned home where he was greeted by the representatives of many grateful peoples, including the king of Sodom and, most notably, “Melchizedek king of Salem ... priest of God the Most High” (verse 18).

- 
- The events described in Genesis 14 fit squarely within what is recognized as the “Elamite Conquest” period.
  - According to conventional chronology, around 2000 b.c. Elam sacked Ur and effectively ended the dominance of the Sumerian empire.
  - Elam was catapulted to new, powerful heights.
  - In *The Routledge Handbook of the Peoples and Places of Ancient Western Asia*, historian Trevor Bryce writes:  
“Elam [now] became one of the largest and most powerful of the western Asian kingdoms with extensive diplomatic, commercial and military interests both in Mesopotamia and Syria. Its territories extended north to the Caspian Sea, south to the Persian Gulf, eastwards to the desert regions of Kavir and Lut, and westwards into Mesopotamia.”
  - Elam began its superpower status first with the Shimaki dynasty, followed by a rich Sukkalmah period. Remarkably, this eastern kingdom of Elam’s diplomatic, commercial and military interests extended as far west as Syria—the territory of the Levant!
  - Historian Joshua Mark writes:  
“Even though details of Elamite culture are vague during this period, it is clear that trade was firmly established and lucrative. Excavations at Susa [Elam’s capital] have unearthed artifacts from India and various points in Mesopotamia and the Levant.” Could some of these artifacts have come as tribute from the vassal Jordan Valley kings?

- Prof. Kenneth Kitchen writes, “[I]t is only in this particular period (2000–1700) that the eastern realm of Elam intervened extensively in the politics of Mesopotamia—with its armies—and sent its envoys far west into Syria to Qatna. Never again did Elam follow such wide-reaching policies. So, in terms of geopolitics, the eastern alliance in Genesis 14 must be treated seriously as an archaic memory preserved in the existing book of Genesis ...” (On the Reliability of the Old Testament).
- And what about the man at the center of it all, King Chedorlaomer, Kudur-La-gomer? It is notable that kings of Elam with the “Kudur-” prefix specifically reigned during this final, grand Sukkalmah period.
- At the same time, the other three kingdoms mentioned in Genesis 14 were also present. Moreover, historians recognize this was a period where geopolitical alliances were common. According to Professor Kitchen, this early second-millennium b.c.e. period was “the one and only period during which extensive power alliances were common in Mesopotamia and with its neighbors.”
- The Elamite subjugation of Ur resulted in more than just the establishment of Elam as the regional superpower. It also allowed the development of the **“Isin-Larsa” kingdom.**
  - This small kingdom began in the city of Isin, but later was overthrown and established in the city of Larsa—again, matching with the later Elamite Sukkalmah period.
  - The Larsa state only existed for 150 years, primarily during the 19th century b.c.
  - Moreover, the final ruler of the Larsa kingdom was Rim-Sin i, Eri-Aku—or “Arioch of Ellasar.”

- What about Tidal?
- Again, this name is an ideal match for the Hittite name Tudhalia.
- But history shows that Tudhalia i reigned around 1400 b.c.e.—nearly 500 years after the events recorded in Genesis 14.
- Actually, historians recognize that “Tudhaliya i” was not the first official with this title.
- There is a mysterious “proto-Tudhalia” recognized from the most fragmentary of records.
- In fact, so mysterious is this figure that he is only known in name; historians still debate his official standing.
- He is speculated as being on the scene between the 19th and 17th centuries b.c.
- This Tudhalia, then, would be a good fit with the original “Tidal, king of nations.”

History books and the archaeological record show that sometime during the 19th to 18th centuries b.c.e., the geopolitical picture in the Middle East underwent a sudden and radical change. The Elamites were overthrown. Larsa was conquered, and a fleeing Rim-Sin was captured. And the region of Anatolia was marred by internal strife. Historian Paul Kriwaczek writes of a “shock of an unprecedented social environment,” with “confrontation ... [v]endettas and blood feuds.”

What happened? As is revealed by ancient inscriptions (such as the 18th-century b.c.e. Mari Letters), these powerful kingdoms were sacked by an emerging Amorite power—one that would take over the region and become what is known as the “Amorite First Dynasty.”

I purposely left the biblical “Amraphel, king of Shinar” until last, because this king has been linked in name to the famous ancient ruler Hammurabi. There are a few ways “Hammurabi” can be transliterated, such as Amurapi, which later took on a “divine” form, Amurapi-ili—a close match to the Hebrew “Amrapil.”

Hammurabi was a regional Amorite king of the Sumerian-Shinar city of Babylon. He started out as a relatively minor regional ruler and even referred to one of the kings of Elam as “father.” He is known for his alliances with the then-powerful Elam and Larsa. But sometime during the latter part of his reign, his fortunes dramatically changed. History records that Hammurabi overthrew Elam and Larsa and united Mesopotamia under a newly dominant Amorite power administered from Babylon.

What caused this dramatic power shift in favor of Hammurabi and the Amorites? Historians generally cite a tangle of alliances with Elam and Larsa, and a deceptive and failed power grab by Elam. This alone would fit well with the biblical picture. But going further, could the rise of the Mesopotamian Amorites have anything to do with Abram’s victory against Elam in Syria—a victory for the western Amorites, within whose country Abram lived, and whose people Chedorlaomer attacked? (Genesis 14:7, 13). Could the biblical account of the defeat and humiliation of Elam have tipped the dominoes toward a complete collapse of the primary Mesopotamian power, eventually to be replaced entirely by an Amorite power?

It’s possible that Hammurabi’s emergence as Mesopotamia’s dominant force was a function of Abram’s victory over King Chedorlaomer and his allies.

There is still some dispute about the dating of Hammurabi; many historians place him around 1792 to 1750 b.c.e. (about a century too late to be a counterpart of biblical Abram). However, dating the early Mesopotamian kingdoms is notoriously difficult, and the chronological record remains contested among historians, varying up to centuries (with Hammurabi placed anywhere from the 19th century to the 17th century b.c.e.). It remains entirely possible that Hammurabi and Abram—who at the time of the battle was in his 70s or 80s (Genesis 12:4)—were counterparts.

What is certain is the eventual utter collapse of Elam and Larsa and the ensuing primacy of the Amorites. The geopolitical scene, then, fits well with the biblical account.

So where does the evidence leave us? Details remain unknown. Crucially, though, there is no evidence against the Genesis 14 “battle of nations”—only a burgeoning body of evidence for it. (It goes without saying that many find Abram’s “resistance” unbelievable—but note the sidebar at the end of this article, “319 vs. Four Armies?”.)

To revisit the quotes from the introduction:

“[L]ittle or no historical memory of pre-Israelite events or circumstances in Genesis”? Hardly—rather, the geopolitical situation is a close fit, to the nearest century.

That Genesis 14 is made up of “names and places, none of which can be verified by outside biblical sources”? As we’ve seen, that’s an outright falsehood—and from a “Bible scholar” no less.

Don't be intimidated by scholarship. Sometimes the conclusions of the "educated" critics may feel like the armies of empires bearing down. But they are no match for a strong faith among even the smallest of armies—like that led by the "father of the faithful," the patriarch Abraham.

---

## Sidebar: The Rise and Fall of Sodom

A pottery shard from Tal el-Hammam, its surface melted into glass.  
P. Silvia, Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project

The location of Sodom has long been debated, but new archaeological evidence points to **Tall el-Hammam**, which sits on the northeastern edge of the Dead Sea. This was no small city: During this Middle Bronze Age period, Tall el-Hammam was a fortress of 344 dunams (85 acres), consisting of an upper and lower city, with an additional 970-dunam (240-acre) occupational area outside the city walls.

Around the early 18th century b.c., this site (as well as several others surrounding) came to an almost inexplicable, cataclysmic end. Burned foundations were found of mud brick structures that suddenly disappeared. Skeletons lay mangled. Clay pottery fragments were discovered to have melted into glass. Zircon crystals in the pottery, upon analysis, were shown to have formed within one second—the result of superheating to temperatures perhaps as hot as the surface of the sun. A "tidal wave" of boiling hot salt swept over the land. Mineral grains had rained down, carried by scorching, high-force winds. Ash and debris, about a meter thick in some places, were left behind within the wider 500-square-kilometer (193-square-mile) area of destruction—a scene of utter carnage of biblical proportions. The estimated regional population of 40,000 to 65,000 people would have been killed instantly by this strange event.

What caused the catastrophe? Scientists don't know. One theory is that an exploding meteor may have been the cause—an "airburst" event that would have required at least a 10-megaton yield to inflict the type of damage witnessed (over 650 times the blast yield of the Hiroshima atomic bomb). Whatever happened, the region was left uncultivable and inhospitable for the next 500 years.

---

### 319 vs. Four Armies?

Genesis 14 says that Abram's army was comprised of only 319 men (including himself). Abram at this time was around 80 years old. Is it really possible that he could defeat four powerful armies?

"Statue of Leonidas," king of Sparta, in Sparta, Greece.  
leekelleher/CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

But the matter of divine intervention aside, history shows that winning such a lopsided battle is possible. Recall the famous Battle of Thermopylae (484 b.c.e.), where 300 Spartans defended the narrow pass from anywhere between 100,000 and 2.6 million Persian troops. (The Spartans were supported by 6,000 backup troops—but these played a more minor role.)

There are numerous examples of severely lopsided, yet victorious battles.

- In the Battle of Lacolle Mills in 1814, 80 British soldiers held back 4,000 American troops.
- In the Battle of Blood River in South Africa in 1838, 464 Boers were attacked by 15,000 Zulus. The defense was successful, with only three Boers wounded—compared to 3,000 dead Zulus.
- In the Capture of Belgrade during World War ii (1941), only seven German soldiers captured the entire city, which was defended by thousands of troops.
- In the Battle of Longewala in 1971, 150 Indian troops successfully defeated an advancing Pakistani force of 4,000 soldiers and 40 tanks. Only two Indians were killed.

Was Abram's rout, with only 319 men, impossible? Historical precedent resoundingly says no.

Tactically, Abram and his small, nimble force had advantages.

The large size of the enemy's armies (at least tens of thousands of soldiers) would have constituted an unwieldy force.

Logistically, it would have been difficult to navigate the unfamiliar terrain.

Further, Josephus, the first-century historian, records that King Chedorlaomer's men were drunk and gluttoned on the spoils.

Abram's men were familiar with the territory and operated under darkness. (They may also have taken advantage of a separation of Tidal's troops northward to Turkey.)

All that would be required of Abram was:

- to cause chaos and the
- targeted killing of the military leadership.

There is room for endless speculation. Whatever the answer, the Genesis 14 account is not only entirely reasonable, it is supported by archaeological and historical evidence.

**Source -**

<https://armstronginstitute.org/299-uncovering-the-battle-that-changed-the-world>