

War has come to Lot's paradise

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[0 : 00] War has come to Lot's paradise. Now, for those of you who haven't been with us, we've been journeying through the book of Genesis, a great, amazing book in the Bible, because it records the beginnings of everything.

It records the beginnings of this world and ourselves and how we as humanity came to be, what we're doing here, and why the world is like it is. All of those questions are answered in the first few chapters of the Bible in Genesis.

And we've been working through that over the last term or so, and we've learned a number of very important truths which change the way we look at the world. Firstly, we've learned that God has a good plan for this world.

And that plan, which, you know, we look around the world, we don't think that there's a good plan, we don't think that this world is going anywhere, but in Genesis we learn that there is a plan, and God hasn't diverted from it, a plan that He has for this world.

But we also learned that humans who were meant to carry out God's plan for the world and live under God's authority, they rebelled against that.

[1 : 04] They rebelled against God's authority. We as humans don't like living under rules. We don't like living under boundaries, even though those boundaries God has placed for our good, and yet we rebelled against that.

We wanted to be our own rulers, our own kings, and what that resulted from, we saw in Genesis 3, was us being cut off from goodness and eternal life, and so the entry of sin and death came into this world, and that was called the curse.

That's what's commonly known as the curse. And that was in Genesis chapter 3, and that really is the root cause of why we're in the situation we're in today.

But, thankfully, the Bible didn't stop at the end of Genesis 3, because that wasn't the end of the story. We went on to learn about God's plan to rescue people from the curse that we are under, and one day undo the curse from this world, and bring us back into His good purposes and eternal life. And the unfolding of that plan is what the rest of the Bible is all about. But then we come to the story in Genesis 14, about ancient Middle Eastern politics, which might not seem that relevant to us today in 2019 in South Africa, but it is, in fact, very relevant, because it helps us to understand how God plans to rescue people from the curse that all of us are under, because we all know we live under that curse.

[2 : 38] I'm not sure I would need to convince you of that. Maybe you just have an amazing life that everything always goes well, and you won't die. So, if that's you, then you can probably go watch the rugby, because you don't need to be here.

But for those of us who are under the curse, we all know that we're under a curse. Now, we might try to ignore it, and cover it up with things that we can buy with our money, and we might even get to the point of thinking, life is pretty good here on Earth.

But then, all of a sudden, some tragedy comes in our life and reminds us that we are still living in a cursed world. A car accident claims a loved one. You get diagnosed with cancer.

Your marriage falls apart because of sexual immorality. Your friend gets killed in a botched hijacking. We are not immune to these things. Many of you have gone through these terrible reminders that this is not the good life.

This is not the good life. No matter how much we try to pretend it is. And that lesson is a lesson that Lot learned in this story, in Genesis 14.

[3 : 52] You'll remember from last week, Genesis 13, Lot moved into a wonderful lush land, and he had a whole bunch of money, and cattle and everything, and he went into the Jordan Valley, and he

chose that land because it afforded him the chance at a good life.

That Jordan Valley, that land that he chose, we're told in Scripture, Genesis 13, that it reminded him of Eden. Even though he had never actually seen Eden, he heard about it, what the world was before, and it reminded him of that, and he wanted that.

And so he was chasing after the good life in the Jordan Valley, and everything was good in Lot's world. He had money. He was living near the cities. He had all the amenities of the cities.

He had a great land to live in. Everything was good. But then he gets a rude awakening when war comes to paradise, and he is reminded that he is still living in the middle of a cursed world, no matter how nice it looks, and he becomes a captive of the powers of the day, and he loses everything.

But this is a story about how God unexpectedly rescues Lot from the result of that curse that he is under, and it's a story of how God can do that for you too.

[5 : 05] And so let's see how it goes. I expect you to have your Bibles open in Genesis 14, and you can follow the story with me. This is the first recorded war in the Bible, one of the earliest records, historical records of war that we have available, and it's a big war.

It involves nine nations. It began when five kings rebelled from under the rule of a tyrant king, Kedaleoma, the king of Elam, which is in modern-day Iran.

And so he and his three remaining allies, they don't like people rebelling against them, so they marched their armies to bring some pain to those rebel kings who lived here. You'll see on a map behind me.

Just that little circle is where these rebel kings lived. That's also where Lot lived. That's the valley of the Jordan. And then up to the top right is where Kedaleoma and his kings and his army came from. That green line kind of traces their root in this campaign, just to show you in some context. And so where they lived, modern-day Jordan, Kedaleoma was coming down to wipe them out.

[6 : 18] But on the way, coming down, we read this. Look at verse five. They defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth-Karneim, the Zuzites in Ham, and the Emities in Shave-Kiriathem, and the Horites in the hill country of Seir as far as El-Paran near the desert.

And we're going, okay, so what? Isn't that what they do in war? But you see, these guys were mentioned for a reason. Because the Rephaites and the Zuzites and the Emities are no ordinary nations.

They were types of giants. I'm not kidding here. You know Goliath? David and Goliath, they were, back in those days, very big, very powerful people who would have won the Rugby World Cup without batting an eye.

But there were whole nations of them. There were three of these nations, the Rephaites, the Zuzites, and the Emities. The name Emities actually means terrors. Imagine having your neighbors called the Terrors.

And one of their kings who lived in history, we have a record that his bed was recorded as being 13 and a half feet long. That's a pretty big guy.

[7 : 31] And so, for Kedelioma to just march through and defeat these three nations was quite something. It shows how powerful he was. It's meant to make us really recognize the power and the authority of Kedelioma's army.

Nobody could stop him. Anyway, eventually he reaches his destination. He defeats the rebel kings in the Battle of Sedim in a convincing victory. But then, after he does that, he's not finished. He decides to do some looting while he's there. You don't go on a trip without getting some souvenirs like some slaves and gold. And so, he sacks the city south of Jordan and takes whatever he wants, including a number of slaves from the populations of those cities.

And there it was that without knowing it, Kedelioma made the biggest mistake of his career.

Because amongst the slaves he captured from the city of Sodom, being whipped and dragged in chains behind his victorious army was a man called Lot, who happened to be the nephew of another man called Abram, who was a man you do not want to mess with, which is what the rest of the story shows us.

Except Kedelioma had probably never heard of Abram. He was a cattle herder who lived in a tent up in the hills. But one day, as he's there, a lone man is seen running over the hills towards his tent and it turns out he's one of the survivors of the looting of Sodom and he breaks the bad news to Abram and he tells them that his nephew has been taken.

[9 : 12] How did he feel? How did he respond? Well, I don't know if any of you have watched the movie Taken with Liam Neeson. Yeah?

It's a story of a retired government operative whose daughter gets kidnapped by human traffickers who then eventually learn that they've messed with the wrong guy. It's got some great lines in the movie.

There's this scene where he's on the phone with the kidnapers and they don't know who he actually is. They think he's just some guy. And he says, sorry, I can't help but do the Liam Neeson voice.

If you're looking for ransom, I don't have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills. Skills that I've acquired over a very long career. skills that make me a nightmare for people like you.

This is my favorite line in the movie. Anyway, so then Liam Neeson's character goes after these human traffickers and he rescues his daughter. And it's quite a violent movie actually so I can't officially recommend it.

[10 : 15] But it is something that I think every dad wants to be. Protect their children like that. Protect their family. Well, once Abram discovers that these Iranian human traffickers have taken his nephew, he pulls a Liam Neeson and he goes after them.

And he even manages to put a special forces unit together of 318 trained men from his household and his allies and he tracks Kedileim's army for hundreds of kilometers.

That red line that's going up from kind of the Dead Sea all the way to Dan at the top. He's following this army with his 318 warriors and he eventually catches up with them in the northern region.

He engages them in a surprise attack under the cover of night and actually defeats them. This terrifying army that defeated these nations of giants routed by Abram and his 318 men.

Now this would have been a huge surprise. Kind of like when Japan beat the Springboks. Nobody expected that they would do that. And not only does Abram defeat Kedileim's army and rescue his nephew and all the loot but then he carries on chasing this defeated army until they're well and truly out of the land.

[11 : 34] And so it's no surprise when he turns around and he's on his way back and after news spreads across the land of his victory two kings from the south come out to meet him in a place called the King's Valley.

It was probably named after this famous meeting. Between Abram and these kings and it is a famous meeting because what happens there from verse 17 onwards helps us to understand what the story is actually all about and why it is in our Bible.

So let's read it from verse 17. After Abram returned from defeating Kedileim and the kings allied with him the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Sheveh that is the king's valley. Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was the priest of God most high and he blessed Abram saying blessed be Abram by God most high creator of heaven and earth and praise be to God most high who delivered your enemies into your hand.

And then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Now what's important to notice here is what is said by this mysterious character Melchizedek and what Abram's response is.

[12 : 50] So Melchizedek becomes an important figure later in the Bible. There's a few times he's mentioned Psalm 110 Hebrews 5 to 7 which you can look at at home because and the reason he's an important figure later in the Bible is because he is not only a king but he is also a priest of God.

He has this dual identity of king and priest and he also comes from a place called Salem which later becomes Jerusalem. The location of the temple where people could have contact with God where Israelites could actually come and worship God where they heard his word and where through the sacrificial system they could actually touch the divine.

They could have real contact between humans and God again like it was in Eden before the fall.

And so in other words that's what happens in Jerusalem much later in the story but Melchizedek is a man who God has made an intermediary between himself and Abram a representative and so then in his speech he reveals to Abram that it was actually God who won that battle.

It was God who delivered Abram's enemies into his hands. What's fascinating about this story is that God is not mentioned once until Melchizedek appears.

He's not in this story God. This is just you know if we start reading it from 1 to 16 this is just a story of national politics and wars between all these secular kings. It's like reading a Wikipedia article.

[14 : 21] There's nothing divine about it. But as a priest it's Melchizedek's job to help Abram and us to see that God was actually there all along.

That God was at work in this world even when it didn't look like it. I think that's a reminder that we need often when we look around and we think that God is not at work in this world when the powers of the day are ruling and doing their conquests whether that's economic conquest or military conquest or social conquest and it doesn't look like God is at work.

I think one of the things this story reminds us of is that he is he's always there and he's always working behind the scenes and Melchizedek's job was to help Abram to see that that God was working through him.

Now of course that comes as no surprise if you've been with us so far in Genesis because we remember that he was a man who God had made a covenant with. Remember back in Genesis chapter 12 that Abram was no ordinary guy I mean he was an ordinary guy until God intervened in his life and made this covenant with him.

Now for those of you who don't know what a covenant is we learned in Genesis so far that it is a special arrangement that God makes with particular humans to continue his good purposes for the world.

[15 : 40] That's basically what a covenant is. God has these good plans for the world he's going to carry it out through particular nations and people and he makes covenants with those. God actually doesn't do anything in this world outside of his covenants.

So those are very important for the rest of the story of the Bible. And so God made this covenant with Abram in Genesis 12 and he promised that through Abram and his family he was going to save people from the curse.

It's an amazing promise. Just go home read Genesis 12 1 to 3 again and just meditate chew over the fact that in that promise God is promising to undo the curse around the whole world a global undoing of the curse and a bringing back of life and goodness.

It's an amazing promise. And so then we start to get to understand why Abram was so successful in this battle against Kedileoma.

It was not because he had a very particular set of skills. It was because God had made a covenant with him. And so God was working through him and Abram recognizes that when he gives Melchizedek a tithe of all the loot the traditional tribute for priests he recognizes this is a priest of God that God is there speaking through Melchizedek and that he had been there all along.

[16 : 59] That is what Abram comes to know and get confirmed by Melchizedek. And so what this story is in the Bible to show us is just how God rescues people from the results of the curse in this world.

world. And he does it not through kings and armies and politics but through the people with whom he has made a covenant in this world.

That is how God is currently at work and has always been at work. It's interesting the word king or kings appears 28 times in this passage.

So on the surface as we read this story it's all about worldly kings and their power plays. But the one person who's not called a king that's significant that does something is Abram.

Abram never gets the title of king but he is the one person in the story what all the great kings failed to do which is to rescue the helpless and defeat the wicked.

[18 : 03] That is the job of a king to rescue his people to save them from their enemies and to defeat those enemies which these kings could not do against such a powerful army but Abram did.

The one person who wasn't the king. And that the king's job to rescue the helpless and defeat the wicked in this world and in the spiritual world that is what God has always been at work to do through his covenant people through Abram's line even if you don't notice that he's at work.

he is busy doing that right now. You know we look at our kings our presidents and our governments and we look to them to bring us into a land of blessing let's be honest that's what we hope our governments can do to rescue us from the curse of unemployment and crime but they always let us down.

All our kings cannot actually rescue us from the curse and yet God has sent someone to us a descendant of Abram who was not recognized as a king and yet his name was Jesus Christ which means God saves and king because he came to do what no human king could do for you he came to do what Abram did for Lot to rescue you from forces that are more powerful than you and he did

that in a very unexpected way by letting himself be sacrificed on a cross and the reason that needed to happen for him to rescue you from forces that are far more powerful than you is because your greatest enemy is not some king or some political power the greatest enemy this world has known is not Nazi Germany or ISIS or North Korea your greatest enemy is your sin because your sin is what takes you away from God's good purposes and places you under God's judgment and cuts you off from life and I think you know it and we are by nature slaves to that enemy as much as Lot was a slave to that king

I mean try not to sin for a week see how you do and not by your own standards of sin but by God's in the Bible come back to me next week and tell me that you haven't sinned at all but you can't because we are slaves to sin but there on the cross Jesus was doing God's work to rescue us from the power of sin over us that is why he came to it that is what the whole thing is about because by his perfect sinless sacrifice God made it possible for the sins of other people to be atoned for only one man could do that only the sinless man who was God himself could die such a death that it can pay and atone for the sins of other human beings unique in history so when Jesus died on that cross for the sins of the world he was doing a king's work rescuing the helpless and defeating their greatest enemy and you know what he wore a crown as he did that work not a crown of gold or silver but a crown of thorns that the Roman soldiers had mockingly put on him not realizing that he was in fact a king and that his death was the way he was establishing his kingdom on earth and then three days after he died he rose to life and he ascended to take his throne in heaven and then he poured out his

[21 : 59] Holy Spirit on earth to all those who enter into his covenant to break them out from the influence of sin over them and that is a promise that he seals in the act of baptism as you've seen today Carl and Elijah have now become members of that covenant too that God made with Abraham which means that they like Lot have the assurance of rescue from the power of sin in their lives not because of anything they've done but through faith in the one who has done it all for them but they also have the assurance of resurrection one day being finally rescued from the brokenness of this world and the curse of this world just like death could not hold Jesus it will not hold his people who are in his covenant be assured of that so that they can one day inhabit the new creation a world without end and a world without curse and a world without death that is the world we all long for and that is the world that God is busy working towards and that he is rescuing people each and every day as you've seen today to be part of that and that is a world that the kings and the presidents of this world can never give you but Jesus can because of what he did on the cross he can rescue you from the curse that you are under if you enter into this covenant like

Carl and Elijah did today and so if you feel that you are sitting here and you have heard from God that God is speaking to you through his word today and that you now understand that Jesus died for your sins and that he rose again and is coming back and you haven't done this yet repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins and receive the Holy Spirit and eternal life and recognize that God has carried out a great rescue mission to save you a rescue mission that's still happening today every day behind the scenes you might not think that God is at work in this world when you read the newspapers but God is at work and he is doing that work today through his covenant people as he always has done as they serve their king and proclaim his gospel in this world that's the covenant that

Carl and Elijah have entered into today and so that's the work that they are also called to be a part of and that all of us in the covenant are called to be a part of which is to not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to fight bravely under his name against sin the world and the devil and to continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants to our life's end until that day when we reach the world without end amen let's pray lord we do thank you so much for the fact that the bible didn't end at the end of genesis chapter 3 that you have always had a plan to undo the curse in our lives and in this world and that you have carried out that plan ever since day one from through your covenant we thank you lord that we can enter into that covenant and and receive the sure hope of eternal life and the forgiveness of our sins we pray lord that you would help us to be covenant people to live as covenant people to do that work that you have called us to do until we arrive to eternal life one day with you forever amen