

A summary of Genesis 14:17-24

- 1. Abraham was the first great gospel preacher in the Old Testament! Do we preach the gospel? (Genesis 14:13-14;12:5;12:16)** Who were the 318 trained men in Genesis 14:14 that Abraham led forth to fight the four kings? Where did they come from? What was their background? These are good questions to ask when reading the Bible. Genesis 12:5 is the first verse that may reveal the identity of these individuals, telling us that when Abraham left Haran, he took his wife Sarah, Lot and the people that he had acquired in Haran. These people were Gentiles. In verse 16, we read further that when he left Egypt, Pharaoh gave him male and female servants on account of Sarah. These also were Gentiles. Eventually, these people may have become the numerous herdsmen that both Abraham and Lot possessed in Genesis 13:7. Eventually, these "Gentiles" became trained men in Abraham's service team to fight the enemy. How did this occur? How did these men get trained? Abraham preached the gospel to them and raised them up. However, for that to happen, Abraham had to grow in his knowledge and understanding of God. Thus, he built an altar to God at Shechem in response to the Lord's appearing to him (12:7). He then pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai and built a second altar. Eventually, he built two more altars, signs indicating that he grew. Eventually, we learn in 14:14 that he had 318 trained men. However, these men were not trained overnight, and not through Abraham's natural ability, but rather through a process of growth that may have taken several years. It is the same with us. Do we need to preach the gospel? Absolutely. How? Through building altars to the Lord. For example, do we come to the Lord's day gathering to offer ourselves to the Lord, to praise and thank Him? Do we come early to offer our praises? We should not wait to offer praises. We need to boldly build an altar to offer ourselves to the Lord. However, this is not only an individual offering, but an offering with brothers and sisters, with our spiritual companions, with our "service team." Abraham may be described as being "people oriented," and not "meeting oriented." This is what makes him such a great gospel preacher. For many years, many readers of the Bible may have had the impression that God called an individual named Abraham, a tremendous man of faith. However, as we read Genesis 12-14, we realize something much more. God raised up Abraham to establish the church life and build up the church. In the same way, God did not just call us as individuals, but He has called us to preach the gospel to our classmates, to our friends and colleagues, our relatives, to go out to contact people we do not know, to raise up pillars or a service team that together can bear God's testimony. We are surrounded with Gentiles, wherever we are, whether at school, at work or with our friends, just as Abraham was surrounded by Gentiles (12:6;13:7). He seized these opportunities to preach the gospel. Do we grab such opportunities? For example, in 14:13, a man escaped from captivity to report to Abraham that Lot and all his possessions had been carried off. Who was this person? The Bible does not reveal his identity, but in reading more carefully, and in putting several verses together, we may reason that this man could have been one of Lot's herdsmen, very much attached to him, but also very close to Abraham since he had undoubtedly been with Abraham when the latter was still with Lot. This is proven by the fact that this "unknown soldier" went directly to Abraham, traveling at least 50 km., and knew where to find him. Another example are the three Amorite brothers: Mamre, Eshcol and Aner, who were allies or confederates of Abraham, based on a covenant that Abraham had made with them. In a sense, to preach the gospel is to make a covenant with unbelievers. The Amorites were one of the tribes that inhabited the land of Canaan and that God would later tell the children of Israel to chase out from Canaan after entering the good land. All these tribes coexisted with Abraham, yet Abraham was seemingly unafraid, preaching the gospel to them, and raising up a service team from among those very people. A very good way to overcome our fear of Satan and his tactics is to preach the gospel to people around us who are in Satan's kingdom. The people around us may actually be our strength and even our blessing.
- 2. In the church life, both Christ and Satan will inevitably come to us, but with different intentions (14:17-18).** After the battle had been fought and won, first the king of Sodom came to meet Abraham at the valley of Shaveh (14:17). Immediately afterwards, Melchizedek, king of Salem, also came to Abraham with bread and wine. The king of Sodom can be considered to be a type of Satan, with Sodom representing the evil nature of sin. Melchizedek, we know, is a type of Christ, as Hebrews 7:1-4 indicates, without genealogy (without father or mother, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God). Both the king of Sodom and Melchizedek offered Abraham something. The king of Sodom offered him the possessions, and Melchizedek offered him bread and wine. The difference is that the king of Sodom wanted something in return, namely the people. We will have these two experiences as we live the church life. Satan will come to us to tempt us with

many possessions and riches of this world: good grades, a good job, a nice family, a good house, a good car, a good retirement. Such promises are merely enticements, in order to occupy us, to capture our person. He is willing to give us possessions in order to occupy our person so we have no room or heart for God (14:21). Christ, on the other hand, comes to save us, bringing us bread and wine, to bless us (14:19). This salvation is indeed to bless us with Himself, not just by giving us possessions like Satan, but to save us from ourselves and to bring us to realize that He blesses us not because of how capable we may be or how effective our service may be. When Christ works in us, Satan will inevitably find a way to come and even imitate Christ in such a way that it may be hard for us to discern who it is that we are dealing with. That is why we need to build altar after altar in order to consecrate ourselves to the Lord, so that when Satan comes, we may be protected by spiritual companions and a service team that can be our support and our encouragement.

- 3. We have no ability to partake of the financial grace offering. We need to build an altar again and again in order to grow in the divine life so we may be able to offer to the Lord (Genesis 14:20).** Abraham realized that it was God who had delivered his enemies into his hand (14:20), and not his own natural or soldierly ability. It is not easy to offer \$5 to the Lord, let alone one tenth of our income! How could Abraham offer one tenth of the spoil? This did not happen overnight. It began with his building of the altars. Even when he was weak and went down into Egypt, he returned to the good land (Canaan) and built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord. This is the church life. We need to consecrate ourselves again and again. We have no ability to give. We cannot give. We must build altars, not just by ourselves, but with our service team. Chapter 14, which culminates with the financial grace offering, has its fundamental foundation in chapters 12 and 13, where Abraham learns to hear God's speaking and responds by building an altar. So it is with us. For example, why do we come late to the bread breaking gathering on Sunday morning? Why do not we praise the Lord out loud? We need to build an altar to offer ourselves to praise the Lord every Lord's day, or to pray with the saints every Tuesday/Thursday night, even if for a few minutes. If we cannot come to the Sunday morning gathering on time, or pray corporately with the saints during the week, how can we ever offer one tenth? Even if we wanted to offer, we would normally find an excuse not to offer. As we grow in the divine life, we may realize how much the Lord has done for us, and how little we have given to Him. Then, our heart may be in a position to pick up the burden of the financial grace offering.
- 4. The financial grace offering is a matter of our free will and according to our life level (Genesis 14:17-24).** Abraham was clear that he would not take a thread or a sandal strap of anything that belonged to the king of Sodom lest he should say that he had made Abraham rich (v.24). He gave a tenth of his possessions to Melchizedek. This was according to Abraham's life level. How did he grow in life? He built altar after altar. Eventually, he would not take a cent for himself. At the same time, he only spoke for himself, not for the young men who were his allies and with whom he had made a covenant earlier. He allowed Mamre, Eshcol and Aner, as well as his other men, to take their share. Abraham never imposed his burden or practice on the members of his service team. Yet he exercised in order to grow, and listened to the Lord's speaking to him. This may also indicate that partaking of the financial grace offering is according to our free willingness, and never by obligation or compulsion. A financial grace offering must be made in secret, not in the presence of man, unless there is a need for fellowship. We should never despise or criticize anyone who does not offer. This is a matter of life, not a matter of the law. Did the Lord speak to us? Were we touched by His speaking? If our life consists of building altars, of interacting with the Lord, then our life level will grow. This is not to criticize anyone, but to state facts. At the same time, we do need a teaching concerning the financial grace offering, in order to perfect us to know how fundamental such a grace is that we can enjoy. Simultaneously with Christ, Satan also has a teaching which will frustrate us many times. For example, if we are struggling to make both ends meet, we may not even think about the financial grace offering, or if we are confronted with it, we may excuse ourselves by saying that we will offer when we are doing better financially. The problem is that when we do have more money, we have a long list of expenses already marked out. It will seem as if we never are able to partake of this grace, even if we have all the money in the world. If we cannot exercise to offer one tenth of the small income that we have today, how will we manage to offer one tenth of our income with a comfortable salary, house, garage and vacations? It will seem that we can never offer enough in keeping with our income level. Even if we have a lot of material wealth, the financial grace offering is the most challenging of all. If we do not offer financially to the Lord, that is an indication that our life level of growth is quite low.