

Genesis 14: Battle of the 9 Kings, Battle of Siddim (2080s BC)

Introduction

Why is it important to study the details of Genesis 14? The short answer is found in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” As with any part of Scripture, you could read the same passage multiple times, and understand something different every time.

Much of the Bible is written as historical narrative. This means that the people and places described actually existed, and the events described actually occurred. The material is written from a specific point of view, and may embed a larger purpose. This style of writing was found as far back as the Ur III Dynasty (2112 BC – 2004 BC) in Mesopotamia. If the Bible is historically inaccurate, then it doesn't matter what the Bible says on any particular subject – it is just a collection of stories and myths. What if historical references described in the Bible are proven true? What then?

There is much that can be said about Genesis 14. Briefly, it was a war that Abram became a part of. Abram was born at a time when civilizations and dynasties were becoming established. It was the time of city-states, clay tablets, pharaohs, pyramids, and ziggurats. Although a significant amount of evidence exists about this time period, much more has been lost or destroyed. We must piece together cultures, kingdom successions, war plans, etc. with just a few bits of data. Needless to say, it is easy to make incorrect conclusions based on incomplete evidence. That being said, it is possible to make certain conclusions and educated guesses knowing that some of them need to be adjusted as more evidence is found.

Date of Genesis 14

Numerous articles have been written over a long period of time that try to determine the identities of the kings listed in Genesis 14. Common names discussed include: Hammurabi, Rim Sin I, Amar-Sin, Naram-Sin, and Shulgi. Although these are reasonable possibilities based upon geography and name recognition, most options become untenable once the events of Genesis 14 are assigned a date.

Dates for the life of Abraham range from the time of the Great Pyramid to the time of the Minoan civilization. This is a range of about 1000 years. The Bible provides a very specific year in which Abram was born. King Solomon died in 931 BC, and he reigned for 40 years (1 Kings 11:42). Construction began on the temple in 966 BC, and the Exodus occurred 480 years earlier in 1446 BC (1 Kings 6:1). Jacob entered Egypt 430 years prior to the Exodus at the age of 130 (Genesis 47:9, Exodus 12:40). Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born, and Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5, 25:26). Therefore, according to the Bible, Abram was born in 2166 BC.

Abram was 75 when he left Haran (Genesis 12:4), he was 86 years old when he had Ishmael (Genesis 16:16), and he was 99 years old when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed one year before the birth of Isaac (Genesis 19:24). Assuming Genesis 14 describes an actual battle, it must have taken place somewhere after the time that Abram left his family and moved to Hebron (2091 BC), and before the time that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed one year before the birth of Isaac (2067 BC). It is also reasonable to state that the events of Genesis 14 took place before the birth of Ishmael (2080 BC). Thus, based upon the Bible, the events of Genesis 14 took place in the 2080s BC.

War Campaign

According to Genesis 14, there were five kings in the Valley of Siddim: Bera of Sodom, Birsha of Gomorrah, Shinab of Admah, Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the unnamed king of Bela (Zoar). For twelve years, these five kings paid tribute to Chedorlaomer king of Elam. They then rebelled and stopped paying tribute in the thirteenth year. In the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer the king of Elam combined forces with Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, and Tidal king of Goiim to quell the rebellion.

This group of four kings defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, the Horites in Seir, the Amalekites in En-mishpat (Kadesh), and the Amorites in Hazazon-tamar. Afterwards, the five kings of the valley joined battle against the four kings under Chedorlaomer of Elam. These five kings were quickly defeated as many ran away. The victors took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah. They also took Lot and his family – the nephew of Abram.

When Abram was told of this by an Amorite ally who escaped the battle, he gathered 318 men and traveled north toward the Dan Spring near the base of Mt Hermon. He divided his forces, attacked at night, and defeated them. Abram pursued these four kings to Hobah north of Damascus, and brought back all the possessions and his family.

Historical Background and Correlations

Special Note: Some dates are estimates.

Does Genesis 14 describe the geopolitical environment of the 2080s BC. Who had the strongest militaries, and who did they have influence with? What was the cross-cultural diplomacy like in this region? Essentially, what was it like in the 2080s in Elam, Mesopotamia, and the Levant?

Sargon of Akkad was the first to dominate Mesopotamia. At its height, the Eastern Semitic speaking Akkadians controlled land from Byblos (Lebanon) in the eastern Mediterranean, north to the Taurus Mountains (Turkey), east to the Zagros Mountains (Iran), and southeast to the Persian Gulf (Kuwait). Sargon was the cup-bearer to King

Ur-Zababa of Kish, usurped the kingship from Lugal-zage-si of Uruk, and defeated Luhu-ish-an, the 8th king of the Awan Dynasty of Elam. Best estimates place his reign at 2334 BC – 2279 BC, which corresponds to the lives of Reu, Serug, Nahor, and Terah – the direct ancestors of Abraham. The Bible states that Reu lived for 339 years, Serug lived for 330 years, Nahor lived for 208 years, and Terah lived for 205 years.

Naram-Sin was the grandson of Sargon. He reigned from 2254 BC – 2218 BC, and his name means “Beloved of the Moon God Sin.” He destroyed the Semitic city of Ebla in 2240 BC. Pottery seals of Egyptian Pharaoh Pepi I were found near Royal Palace G in Ebla. This means that Pepi I's reign predated 2240 BC. Other evidence shows that Pepi I's reign was about 49 years. Also, there was a peace treaty signed between Naram-Sin and Khita – 11th king of the Awan Dynasty of Elam.

Shar-Kali-Sharri was the 5th king of the Akkadian Empire and son of Naram-Sin. He ruled for about 25 years. He had to deal with the same drought / famine that Pharaoh Pepi II of Egypt did. The famine lasted from approximately 2200 BC to 1900 BC and was associated with a thirty to fifty percent decrease in rainfall. This correlates to the time between the collapse of the Akkadian / Egyptian civilizations to the beginning of the Old Babylonian Empire / 12th Dynasty of Egypt. Pepi II died in 2184 BC, and Shar-Kali-Sharri died in 2193 BC. Shar-Kali-Sharri captured Sharlag, king of Gutium. Tirigan, 19th Gutian ruler in Sumer, was defeated by Utu-hengal of Uruk in 2119 BC. Ibbi-Sin, 5th king of Ur III Dynasty, was captured by Kindattu, 6th king of the Shimashki Dynasty of Elam in 2004 BC.

There are very few artifacts that date to the time period just after the collapse of the Akkadian and Egyptian civilizations. The Akkadian Empire disbanded in 2154 BC. The First Intermediate Period of Egypt (2181 BC – 2055 BC) spans the 7th through part of the 11th Dynasties, but very few monuments or written texts have been found.

Puzur-inshushinak

Puzur-inshushinak is the key to setting the political and military stage for Genesis 14. It is unclear of his relationship with King Khita of Elam, but it appears that Puzur-inshushinak succeeded Khita to the throne of Elam. Puzur-inshushinak was governor of Susa and military governor of Elam. Inshushinak was one of the major gods of the Elamites and protector deity of Susa. Puzur-inshushinak means “Calling Inshushinak - the god of the underworld.” Puzur-inshushinak gained control of a significant portion of central Mesopotamia and the Zagros Mountains after the collapse of the Akkadian Empire. Many surrounding city-states were vassals and paid tribute.

The Elamites during the time of Puzur-inshushinak wrote in a script called Linear Elamite. There are only 43 inscriptions of Linear Elamite found. Of those, only one has any historical reference. François Desset is a French archaeologist specializing in the Elamites and deciphering Linear Elamite. He states that the Elamite script and the Akkadian cuneiform script had a common ancestor. Because of limited reliable

evidence, it is difficult to piece together with any reliability what happened between 2200 BC and 1900 BC.

Chedorlaomer of Elam / Servant of the God of the Dead / Puzur-inshushinak

Following the discovery of documents written in the Elamite and Babylonian languages, some scholars think that Chedorlaomer is a transliteration of the Elamite term Kudur-Lagamar, which means servant of Lagamar - an Elamite god of the underworld. Based on Genesis 14, Chedorlaomer exerted a significant amount of power from Elam through the Zagros Mountains to central Mesopotamia. Could Chedorlaomer be Puzur-inshushinak?

First, “kudur” and “puzur” sound similar. One means “servant,” and the other means “calling.” Second, Inshushinak was the god of the underworld and the protector of Susa. Similarly, Lagamal or Lagamar was the god of the underworld. He was worshipped in Dilbat (near Babylon), Susa, and Terqa (near Mari in western Syria). It is possible that in Syria and the Levant, Puzur-inshushinak could be identified as Kudur-Lagamar. The geopolitical environment, culture, and historical records suggest that it is possible. There is, however, not enough information to confirm or deny this possibility. Yet, what little we know of Chedorlaomer is consistent with what little we know of Puzur-inshushinak.

Arioch of Ellasar / Servant of the Moon God / Eri-aku of Larsa

Most Biblical scholars agree that Ellasar is Larsa. It is about 16 miles southeast of Uruk. It existed prior to the time of the Akkadian Empire, but it rose to power after the collapse of the Ur III Dynasty. At times, Larsa had a significant population of Amorites. Understanding the history of the Amorites gives us clues to the identity of Arioch and the culture of Larsa.

The Amorites are mentioned in Sumerian literature, specifically “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” and “Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird.” Early Sumerian literature places the Amar.tu / Mar.tu / Amorites in the lands west of the Euphrates River, more specifically the lands in and around Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.

There is a wide range of views regarding the Amorite homeland. The most common view is that the Amorites were from central Syria identified with the mountainous region of Jebel Bishri, which was known as the “mountain of the Amurru” by the Akkadians. The Amorite language is closely related to the Northwestern Semitic languages of Aramaic, Canaanite, Edomite, Hebrew, Moabite, Phoenician, Punic, and Ugaritic. These are from the region around Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan. During the famine of 2200 BC – 1900 BC, the Amorites, along with other tribal groups, migrated into southern Mesopotamia in large numbers. They were one of the causes of the downfall of the Third Dynasty of Ur. They gradually usurped authority from the Sumerians by taking over the city-states of Isin, Larsa, Eshnunna, Kish, and Babylon.

Some have suggested that Arioch could refer to Eri-Aku. “Agu” or “Aku” refers to the god of the Moon. So, Eri-Aku could mean “Servant of the Moon God,” which is consistent with the meaning of the name “Naram-Sin” or “Rim-Sin.” It is not being suggested that Arioch is Naram-Sin or Rim-Sin I, it is being suggested that being named “Servant of the Moon God” is consistent with the cultures in the Mesopotamian region at this time. In Daniel 1:7, some theorize that the young Hebrew men were given names based on Babylonian / Amorite gods Bel, Marduk, Aku, and Nebo, but the author changed the spelling slightly to remove direct references to these gods.

Eri-Aku has been connected to Naram-Sin (4th king of the Akkadian Empire), Amar-Sin (3rd king of the Ur III Dynasty), and Rim-Sin I (14th king of Larsa). The only way for any of these to be involved in the Battle of the Nine Kings of Genesis 14 is to completely disregard both the Bible and historical evidence – which many scholars do. Because, if the Bible is historically inaccurate, then it doesn't matter what the Bible says on any particular subject. What if historical references described in the Bible are proven true? What then?

So, who was the king of Larsa in the 2080's BC? It was possibly a local Amorite leader not loyal to the King of Sumer who went by the name of Eri-aku.

Tidal of Gouim / Tudhaliya of Gutian

The Hattians were a people from central Anatolia (Turkey) and spoke an ancient language not associated with Hurrian or Hittite. The Hattian religion involved worship of elemental gods, which was very common of many cultures of that time period. The Hattic culture was absorbed into Hurrian and Hittite cultures. The Hurri or Hurrians lived in southeastern Turkey, Syria and Northern Mesopotamia during the Bronze Age. The largest and most influential Hurrian nation was the kingdom of Mitanni (1600 BC - 1260 BC). The Hittites (1650 BC – 1190 BC) spoke an Indo-European derived language and were based primarily around Hattusa in central Turkey.

Linguists, historians, and archaeologists have tracked tribal migration patterns from Turkey to northern India partially along the Zagros Mountains. The Hurro-Urartian language group of eastern Anatolia has many similarities with linguistic patterns of the Indo-Aryan language group of northern India.

The Gutu or Gutian people of the Zagros Mountains were not great builders or writers. Most of what is known is through the often biased accounts of their neighbors. Because of this, the language of the Gutian people is still a mystery. The Gutu were a conglomeration of various tribes that descended from the Zagros Mountains and battled the Akkadian Empire and the Ur III Dynasty. That being said, the Gutu language and culture had Hurrian influence. The modern Kurds of Turkey and northern Iraq are possibly descended from the Hurrians.

Ancient Mesopotamians treated the Gutti as subnormal beings for their unwillingness to conform to customs and laws of civilization. They have been described as barbarians with the intelligence of dogs and the appearance of monkeys while speaking a confusing unknown language. The Gutti proved to be poor rulers. Prosperity declined and the canal network fell into disrepair. They were removed from power in Mesopotamia by a coalition of rulers of Uruk and Ur when Utu-hengal of Uruk defeated Gutian king Tirigan in 2119 BC.

Tudhaliya was a common name among both Hurrian and Hittite rulers. Many Biblical scholars equate "Tidal" with "Tudhaliya." Goyim or Goim is a transliteration. Some versions of the Bible have translated this word as "nations" or "Gentiles." The term may reference the Gutian people of the Zagros Mountains. The name Tidal appears to have very little meaning in Hebrew and provides no clues as to its meaning. Tidal of Goim possibly represents Tudhaliya of Gutian.

Amraphel of Shinar / One That Speaks of Darkness / AMR-B-L of Syria

Who is Amraphel of Shinar? In Hebrew, Amariah means "God has said." The term "amar" means to "talk, speak, or command". "Phel" or "pel" refers to "dark" or "darkness." So possible translations of the name Amraphel are "He Commands the Dark" or "One That Speaks of Darkness."

One significant clue to the identity of Amraphel is that he was the king of Shinar in the 2080s BC. The problem is, where is Shinar? The typical answer is that Shinar is another name for "Sumer," the land controlled by the Ur III Dynasty in southern Mesopotamia. If "Shinar" is "Sumer," then Amraphel must be King Shulgi of the Ur III Dynasty of Sumer. There are problems with this. First, based on Genesis 14, Amraphel subjugated himself to the leadership of the king of Elam in order to restart the flow of tribute into Elam from the city-states around the Dead Sea. This is not consistent with the geopolitical relationship between Elam, Sumer, the Gutti of the Zagros Mountains, and the Amorites. Second, the primary power and influence of the Ur III Dynasty remained primarily in southern Mesopotamia. A significant number of scholars agree that Shinar was in southern Mesopotamia around Babylon and Sumer. However, there are some who argue that Shinar has nothing to do with Sumer.

William Moran (editor of the Amarna Letters), Geoffrey W. Bromily (editor of "The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 4"), and Gordon Wenham (leading Genesis scholar) have suggested that Shinar is related to Ša-an-ḥa-ar of the Amarna Letters, Šanḥar in Hurrian, and Sangar in Egyptian, and that all of these refer to a region in Syria.

At the time of Genesis 14, Syria was the land of Amorites and Hurrians. The Gutti probably spoke a dialect of Hurrian. Larsa was administered by Amorites, and the Elamites had at least functional relationships with the Amorites and Hurrians. The Sumerians, however, had a history of negative interactions with the Amorites,

Elamites, and Gutti. There is compelling evidence to suggest that Shinar is Syria, not Sumer. This means that Amraphel was an Amorite (or Hurrian) king of Syria, not a Sumerian king of southern Mesopotamia.

Amarna Letter 170 provides a possible clue as to the identity of Amraphel. Amarna Letter 170 was written by Aziru, leader of the region of Amurru, to the Egyptian leader (Amenhotep III or IV). It mentions the name AMR-B-L or Amur-Ba'la. The letter associates AMR-B-L with the Amorites. It has also been stated that Eri-aku of Larsa was Amorite. Amur-Ba'la of the Amarna Letter is not Amraphel of Genesis 14. This connection, however, does make a strong argument that Amraphel was an Amorite king that was named something like Amur-Ba'la.

5 Kings of the Valley of Siddim

The Valley of Siddim represents the lowland region adjacent to the southern end of the Dead Sea in Israel and Jordan. Siddim is translated as field or plain. During the time of these events, there were a number of kings of small city-states in the region, including: Bera of Sodom, Birsha of Gomorrah, Shinab of Admah, Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the unnamed king of Bela / Zoar.

Bera means "son of evil," and Sodom means "burning." Birsha means "with wickedness," and Gomorrah means "submersion." Shinab means "father's tooth" or "splendor of the father." Admah means "land." Shemeber mean "soaring on high" or "lofty flight." Shemeber could also be split into Shem and Eber which combined means "name of the region beyond." Zeboiim means "deer" or "goats." Bela means "destruction," and Zoar means "insignificance."

Of the five kings of the valley, only one played a role: Bera of Sodom. Sodom was the largest of the cities in the region. After the battle, Bera, Abram, and Melchizedek had a conversation. Bera, whose name means "son of evil," tried to bargain with Abram by asking for the people. Abram, however, gave a tenth of all he had to Melchizedek, whose name means "My king is righteousness." Genesis 14 introduces the contrast between Empire and Shalom that is more developed in the book of Exodus. Empire represents the desire for power and control due to fear and thinks that more material wealth is the solution. Shalom represents true joy and peace knowing that God will fulfill His promises.

Rephaim / Ashteroth-karnaim, Zuzim / Ham, Emim / Shaveh-kiriathaim, Horites / Mount Seir, Amalekites / En-mishpat, Amorites / Hazazon-tamar

Deuteronomy 2:8-12 provides additional information to the events of Genesis 14. The Israelites went away from the people of Esau, who lived in Seir, and away from the Arabah road from Elath and Ezion-geber. They turned in the direction of the wilderness of Moab. "The Emim formerly lived there, a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim. Like the Anakim they are also counted as Rephaim, but the Moabites call

them Emim. The Horites also lived in Seir formerly, but the people of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and settled in their place, as Israel did to the land of their possession, which the Lord gave to them.”

Asteroth-karnaim was in the land of the half tribe of Manasseh (Deuteronomy 3:13, Joshua 13:31). It is located east of the Sea of Galilee and south of Damascus at Tell Ashtara and Al-Shaykh Saad in southwestern Syria.

The Zuzim lived between the Rephaim near the Sea of Galilee and the Emim near the Dead Sea. Therefore, the land of Ham was on the east side of the Jordan River about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. There is an east-west trending valley on the eastern side of the Jordan River close to Jarash, Jordan. It is near the tribal allotted border of Manasseh and Gad. This is a possible location for where the Zuzim lived.

The Emim lived in Shaveh-kiriathaim in the land of Moab. Shaveh-kiriathaim was east of the northern part of the Dead Sea near Mt. Nebo. This was land allotted to the tribe of Reuben. The Horites lived in the region near Mt. Seir in the land of Edom. Also, El-paran, Elath, and Aqaba are all the same location, which is the port city on the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba. All these races of giants mentioned were like the Anakim, but called by different names by different nations. Based on Genesis 14 and Deuteronomy 2, they could all be considered Rephaim.

Based on Genesis 14:5-6, Chedorlaomer and his allies traveled southward along the eastern side of the Jordan River from the Sea of Galilee all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba defeating any army that stood in its way. They then moved northwest to En-mishpat (Kadesh Barnea) near the Egypt / Israel border and defeated the Amalekites. The Amalekites mentioned in Genesis 14 are not the descendants of Esau's grandson – Amalek. The timeline does not match. After this, they defeated the Amorites at Hazazon-tamar (En-gedi) east of Hebron along the western side of the Dead Sea. If you look at the path taken by Chedorlaomer and his allies, it is almost the same path but in reverse that the Israelites traveled through the wilderness.

Genesis 14:1-16 Rewritten

This is a rewritten portion of Genesis 14. This is solely to add elements of this discussion. Treat this as commentary. There is no desire or intent to replace any content of the Bible itself.

And it came to pass in the days of Amur-Ba'la king of Syria, Eri-aku king of Larsa, Puzur-inshushinak king of Elam, and Tudhaliya king of the Gutian people, that they 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). All these kings came as allies to the Valley of the Dead Sea. For twelve years they had served Puzur-inshushinak, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. And in the fourteenth year Puzur-inshushinak and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Al-Shaykh Saad (Syria), Jarash (Jordan), Mt Nebo (Jordan), and Mt Seir (Jordan), as far as Eilat / Aqaba (Israel / Jordan), which is by the wilderness. Then they turned back and came to Kadesh Barnea (Egypt / Israel), and conquered all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, who lived in En-gedi (Israel). And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; and they lined up for battle against them in the Valley of the Dead Sea, against Puzur-inshushinak king of Elam, Tudhaliya king of the Gutian people, Amur-Ba'la king of Syria, and Eri-aku king of Larsa - four kings against five. Now the Valley of the Dead Sea was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country. Then they took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed. They also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.

Then a survivor came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was residing by the oaks of Khirbet es-Sibte, the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and they were allies with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, numbering 318, and went in pursuit as far as the Dan Spring (Lebanon) near Mt Hermon (Syria). Then he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus (Syria). He brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the other people.

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1 Kings 6, 11

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