

## Genesis 14 The Lord your God is with you

### Introduction

Joanne Brooks experienced one of the things that many people dread; a phone call in the middle of the night from the police because something unfortunate has happened. In this case some years ago she was informed that her husband had been involved in a car accident and was now in police custody. The reason for the call was that he had requested that she come and visit him in the police station in Nottingham. The shock of the call would have been bad enough, but the nature of the request was even more troubling for Mrs Brooks. It was to be just one more nightmare of a twenty-seven-year ordeal that she and her husband had to endure. The reason for this difficulty did not lie with either party in this marriage, but with a man who had been her husband's best friend. In their teens and twenties the two men had been practically inseparable, but at some point in that era his friend decided to assume Mr Brook's identity. Over a period of time he collected all his personal data and applied for things like driving licenses in the name of David Brooks. They later lived in different parts of the UK and then drifted apart, but Mr Brooks was unaware of the theft of his identity until a series of unfortunate incidents made them suspect that this problem had occurred. Back to the phone call Mrs Brooks declined the request to travel to the police station and visit her 'husband' for the good reason that her husband was in the house with her at the time of the call. The officer at the end of the line would not believe her until Mr Brooks took the call and gave his personal identifying data, which the impostor in custody had already given. After twenty-seven years David Watkins was finally caught and sentenced to time in prison. What had begun all those years earlier as a simple lie pretending to be his best friend had led to a tragic situation that had caused all kinds of heartache and grief to two families. In a statement to the press Mr Watkins' lawyer claimed that his client regretted so much that he couldn't turn back the clock. [*Daily Mail*, 28 May 2011]

Abram and Lot had gone their separate ways; and for some years life went on in its familiar routine and both men and their families appeared to be prospering. The apparently small error Lot had made in his choice of location appeared to have been no disadvantage, in fact the very opposite. Did Abram in his quieter moments wonder why Lot was doing so well and yet for him in more difficult surroundings life was okay but not how he had envisaged things turning out? Abram was acutely aware that he and his family had little in common with the native Canaanites and yet God had promised him the land, but why was there no sign of progress. In our lives today as we hit middle-age or maybe retirement or some other milestone, we too may question the turns that our life has taken. So many questions to which we have no answers; In the midst of whatever life is throwing at us we have this wonderful promise in Hebrews 13:5-6: *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*<sup>6</sup> So we say with confidence, *"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"* Abram certainly had his melancholic moments, but news of the capture of Lot and his family must have ranked amongst some of the darkest of them. Death or slavery were the two probable outcomes for his relatives –his only relatives in the region. This was a vicious war and the major regional power was a participant and along with their allies had swept over all before them. He must have had a sense of his utter weakness to do anything to change this situation. Liberal Old Testament scholars, from the nineteenth century onwards, like Julius Wellhausen in Germany, claimed that this account was all fictional –just a story to make Abram look great. However, American archaeologist Nelson Glueck investigated this area thoroughly and stated: 'I found that every village in their path had been plundered and left in ruins, and the countryside laid waste. The population had been wiped out or led away into captivity. For hundreds of

years thereafter, the entire area was like an abandoned cemetery, hideously unkempt, with all its monuments shattered and strewn in pieces on the ground' [N. Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*, pp.72-73]. Life in the patriarchal era from around 2,500-2000BC was extremely tough. We too have our health issues, family difficulties and work pressures, yet in all these kinds of situations we must remember those encouraging words from Hebrews 13 –do not be afraid because God is in there with you to bring you through this difficult time.

### 1. **An Unnecessary Problem** (Genesis 14:1-12)

*At the time when Amraphel was king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goyim,* <sup>2</sup> *these kings went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboyim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).* <sup>3</sup> *All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea Valley).* <sup>4</sup> *For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.* <sup>5</sup> *In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emities in Shaveh Kiriathaim* <sup>6</sup> *and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert.* <sup>7</sup> *Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazezon Tamar.* <sup>8</sup> *Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboyim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim* <sup>9</sup> *against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five.* <sup>10</sup> *Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills.* <sup>11</sup> *The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away.* <sup>12</sup> *They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.* [Show Israel map of this period] (a) **The choice to get involved?** It happens all the time –you see a hit and run driver as a witness do you get involved or do you pretend you didn't see anything. Maybe a neighbour or an acquaintance is going through a tricky time and needs help it would be so easy to look the other way and ignore them. When Gaddafi was bombing and killing the citizens of Misrata the easiest option for Governments like our own to say we have enough on our plate in other parts of the world we cannot get involved. We cannot afford to financially, even apart from other considerations. There are not any necessary right or wrongs in these kinds of situations. There can be good cases made for different responses, but in our minds and consciences so often we instinctively know what we should do-whether we do it is a different matter altogether! Abram did not need to get involved in this disastrous situation. It was a political and military conflict that had got rather messy. Lot could not have expected him to intervene. After all, he had taken his chances by living in fertile valley. It was not without a good reason that there was a shortage of people living where Lot chose to settle. If Abram had decided to intervene there were still various options that he might choose to follow. Could he have tried reasoning with the Iraqi king? Might they have been open to handing over Lot and his family, had Abram pointed out their shared ethnic origins? If he was planning to attempt a rescue by force what chance did a large employer with his civilian employees have against a larger number of well-trained soldiers? This was a far from easy choice. It is no different in our world. Jesus in Matthew 5:9 declared: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.* Does that mean Christians should automatically be total pacifists? Were Jesus' words here spoke to believers concerning how we ought to relate to one another in local congregations or were they a warning to governments and the wider society about the futility of violence and war? Were these words spoken to

individuals or to us collectively? In the 1920s and 1930s, as a result of the horrors of World War One, many people were deeply attracted to pacifism. A willingness to do anything to avoid another major war was a popular feeling in the land and served as a backcloth for Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's 1938 attempts to gain 'peace in our time'. With hindsight his approach was misguided, but at the time very few politicians would have taken a different approach. Yet doing nothing was not an option. Whether it is Abram thousand of years ago or today we cannot 'turn a blind-eye' to evil and wrongdoing, but do need to ask God for wisdom to know how we should seek to intervene to resist injustice. (b) **The cost of getting involved?** To stand up for what is right can result in unexpected consequences. There is a price to pay for standing up for what is right. In 2004, a US military reservist named Joe Darby passed a CD containing shocking images to a member of the army's criminal investigation command. The photographs on the disc were taken at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, and depicted US soldiers torturing, humiliating and abusing Iraqi prisoners. The images caused an international uproar. In the weeks that followed, after an investigation, instances of rape and homicide were also uncovered at the prison, photographs of which have since been suppressed by the Obama administration. Eleven soldiers were eventually convicted of charges relating to the incidents at Abu Ghraib, and Darby was awarded a John F Kennedy Profile in Courage Award in 2005. But not all Americans have celebrated Darby's actions. Some, including members of his own family, have branded him a traitor. He now lives in an undisclosed location and has started a new life out of the army [Ryan Gallagher, 5 April 2011, [www.frontlineclub.com](http://www.frontlineclub.com)]. We are familiar with Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and rightly applaud the man from the ethnic minority who intervened to save the robbery victim's life, while risking his own and at the cost of paying for the man's recuperation expenses. If a vote was taken in our land I fear that the actions of the priest or the Levite would be ranked higher than the man that sought to provide assistance to the needy. I must applaud the leaders of the coalition government and remarkably also the official opposition for resisting calls to reduce the levels of international aid to some of the most vulnerable people in the world. Just as I honour this church for the level of giving we set aside for work overseas, together with that in other parts of Scotland. The question posed by Cain, in anger, to God: *Am I my brother's keeper?* (Genesis 4:9), to which he expected the answer 'no'! actually requires the opposite response where that is reasonably possible. Jesus' audience may have been shocked by the implications of the Good Samaritan story, but that ought not to be the case for us today.

## 2. **An Unexpected Deliverance** (Genesis 14:13-16)

(a) **The Information that was necessary** (Genesis 14:13a) <sup>13</sup> *A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew.* Have you ever wondered why this man came to see Abram? It would be easy to assume that he was associated with Lot and naturally the one place he could turn was to his relative Abram. Yet we have no way of knowing the man's ethnic identity or anything beyond his association with the five cities of the plains. The one thing that is clear is that Abram is described in a way that marks him out as an ethnic outsider. This was not because he was unwilling to talk to his neighbours or work with them, but he was clearly different from the majority population in the way in which he conducted his life. We have no way of knowing in what ways he was different, but it does open the door to us to reflect on this point for our own lives in a very different era. Are my values, my vocabulary, the things that I do –are they no different to the people around me who profess no faith or a different faith or is there something distinctive about the way I live my life? Is this a positive and wholesome distinctiveness or is it simply that I am known for a list of things, for example, I don't join in at work /on social occasions? It can be difficult to know how best to

seek to live out our faith in a range of social contexts, but we can ask the Lord for wisdom; we can ask other Christians how they would handle the kind of challenges you may be facing just now; we are in it together with a view to encouraging and supporting each other in the faith. This is why in a number of professions or careers there are Christian agencies that seek to bring together fellow-believers who are hopefully able to encourage one another to maintain a good witness in that particular working environment. My impression of this passage leads me to suggest that though his neighbours may have had a different worldview to Abram, they respected him for his integrity and the standards by which he lived. Hopefully, people around you and me will, in their own minds, acknowledge the sincerity of our faith and the integrity by which we seek to live it out in everyday contexts.

**(b) The planning that was essential** (Genesis 14:13b-16) (i) Building friendships (Gen. 14:13b) *Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram.* Abram was not alone with his family and workers. He had formed alliances, therefore friendships, with some local tribal leaders, Mamre, Eshkol and Aner. Genesis 14:13 refers to a key fact: *all of whom were allied with Abram.* This incident reminds us that it is good to build friendships with people outside our church and who may not share our Christian faith. Those groups of Christians who oppose their people having any ties of friendship with people outside their particular churches have lost something of biblical Christianity. Jesus in Matthew 5:13-16 makes it very plain that we are meant to live in such a way to have a positive influence on the people and circumstances around us. *You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*<sup>14</sup>*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.*<sup>15</sup>*Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.*<sup>16</sup>*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* Salt is no use safely stored in the salt cellar. It has to be released into contact with, for example, some kinds of food to act as a preservative in certain cases or to enhance the flavour of the food when eaten. Light is only effective at night when let loose on the darkness. If we cover it up in some way it will have no impact on the darkness. Yet in our world there are people of good will who hold to very different faiths or none. Sometimes brave people reaching out the hand of friendship can build relationships that can be transformative in our communities. In Egypt since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak there has been a huge rise in religious hatred by extremist sections of the Muslim community on the small vulnerable Christian minority in that country. In a number of communities these people deliberately burned down churches knowing that Christians rarely got permission to rebuild damaged places of worship. However, something extraordinary happened in the village of Sol, in Helwan governate, two hours south of Cairo. It has been a painfully depressing situation for the Christians in that community. But in Cairo a group of young Christians and young Muslims who had worked together during the revolution in the capital city took a decision to go together to this fractured community to seek to restore community harmony. Led by a Christian layman, Hany Hanna, a delegation from the capital included Muslim Brotherhood political head Mohammed el-Beltagy, Salafi Sheik Mohamed Hassan, together with various military leaders; The delegates hosted reconciliation talks in the home of a prominent citizen in Sol and then afterwards, Muslim televangelist Amr Khaled (whose nickname is 'Islam's Billy

Graham’) addressed the crowd outside. He repeated one clear theme to the large number of people present: ‘My message here today for Muslims and Christians is, Let’s be one hand.’ He reported that the military had agreed to rebuilt the five storey church and community centre. A matter of weeks later the shell of the new premises was finished and the interior work well underway carried out by people from across the faith divide in Sol. Hany Hanna, shared his dream with the reporters that day: ‘I think we can be an example to other countries where Muslims and Christians live side by side’. What had taken place in Cairo that had led to this remarkable event? A group of young Christian men in Cairo had noticed that the authorities were treating rather roughly the young Muslim men protesting for greater freedoms in the now well-known Tahrir Square. They gathered a large enough group of Christian men to surround the Muslims and linking arms protected them, especially when they stopped the protests for their times of prayer. Some days later impressed by this kind action a group of young Muslim men did exactly the same for Christians during a time of worship. And even more remarkably they joined forces to surround the historic synagogue in Cairo and protect it from damage and looting during the worst of the troubles at that time. The banner or badge of these protestors had an interlocking crescent and cross and they declared it the symbol of a new Egypt [‘Faith in the Arab Spring’, *Time*, 6 June 2011]. Thank God for Coptic Christian Hany Hanna Aziz Hanna for his courage and boldness, with others, to offer the hand of friendship. (ii) Working with likeminded people for the common good (Gen.14:14-16) *When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.* <sup>15</sup> *During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus.* <sup>16</sup> *He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.* This is an extraordinary success. Abram has 318 trained men of his own, Aner, Eshkol and Mamre have their own small private armies that all combine under Abram’s leadership to defeat a much larger army and recover the people and property that had been taken from the five communities at the southern end of the Dead Sea. There is a parallel to the latter success of Gideon (Judges 7) who also under cover of darkness defeated a much larger enemy force. Abram and his colleagues harassed the raiding parties of these foreign kings over a matter of days or weeks *as far as Hobah, north of Damascus* (Genesis 14:15). This is a distance in excess of 125 miles. With God nothing He asks us to do is impossible. I have chosen these words carefully- ‘With God nothing He asks us to do is impossible’. Will you? Will I? be willing to say, Lord is there a ‘bridge I can build’, a friendship I can make that might have a transformative impact in a workplace, a home or a social setting? Trust the Lord to handle the details but be open to Him using you in ways and contexts you had never thought possible!

### 3. An Unlikely Encounter (Genesis 14:17-24)

There are two kings Abram met after this glorious victory; two men with very different perspectives on what had taken place. (a) The King of Sodom (Genesis 14:17, 21-24) <sup>17</sup> *After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).* <sup>21</sup> *The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”* <sup>22</sup> *But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and*

earth,<sup>23</sup> that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'<sup>24</sup> I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.” The words of the King of Sodom reflect the standard terms of settlement in the Ancient Near East at that time. The people were able to regain their liberty, but their liberators, in lieu of risking their lives and the expenses incurred along the way, were entitled to have all the stolen property and either keep it or sell it and keep the proceeds. What response does Abram give here? does he say that’s fair and go along with an arrangement that no-one present would have dreamed of disputing? No! this man has grown spiritually since the events of Genesis chapter 12. Money is no longer a motivating factor in the choices he makes. Abram is now motivated primarily to bring glory to God and his issue now is how can I honour God in these circumstances in which I find myself just now? This is the kind of big picture question that we can ask ourselves at times. It gives a whole new perspective on the earthly circumstances in which this believer was immersed. What Abram does is an act of extraordinary generosity which the King of Sodom and the four other city-state rulers would not forget for the rest of their days. Around this time a similar incident happened in Syria. Niqmaddu, King of Ugarit was plundered by his enemies. He asked his Hittite (Turkish) overlord to help. King Suppiluliuma rescued the people of Ugarit and their goods, but declined the offer of a material gift from the grateful King of Ugarit. The Hittite ruler declared: ‘Suppiluliuma, the Great King, saw the loyalty of Niqmaddu, and as far as what belongs to Ugarit...Suppiluliuma, the Great King, will not touch anything, be it straw or splinter.’ [V.P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 414] Suppiluliuma was generous in response to prior loyalty shown to him; Abram was even more generous when he had no reason to make such an offer, except for his witness to his faith in God. How do others around you interpret your motivation for living life the way you do? This is a challenge; hopefully, they will grasp something of your faith being lived out in daily life.

(b) **The King of Salem** (Genesis 14: 18-20)<sup>18</sup> Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High,<sup>19</sup> and he blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.<sup>20</sup> And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Melchizedek is possibly the most mysterious person in the Bible. There are various references to him in Psalm 110 and a detailed discussion in Hebrews chapter 7, but from a picture of Abram and his extended family being apparently the only believers in the land we come across this extraordinary man of God who leads and speaks at a celebration service that culminates in the sharing of bread and wine. During the gathering Abram gave a tithe (10%) of his income, the basis for the Jewish and later Christian model of giving to the work of the local church. What a witness at a gathering with a ‘who’s who’ of Canaanite nobility hearing in effect an evangelistic message about our great God and Saviour. Abram would never in his wildest dreams of ever imagining getting these five rulers to attend a worship service, yet here God has opened this door of witness through the faithfulness of His servant Abram. Melchizedek honours Abram for what he has done, but then directs the assembled gathering to bring their praises to God. Abram, the stranger in the land, has acted like a royal monarch in showing kindness to the kings in restoring their people and property, but now following the example of a life honouring to God an opportunity has naturally arisen in which the gospel message has been proclaimed. How many years has he been in the land hoping for this day? I would suggest quite a lot of years. Has he been praying about this –almost certainly yes? Has life been easy for him? No! His life and that of his wife Sarai has been overshadowed by their inability to conceive a child. They have struggled with the ‘why has God allowed this to happen in our lives when we are honouring Him in our daily lives’. When we stop to reflect on this story the similarities to our day are clear. We too can have major issues overshadowing our lives with which we struggle and may never understand yet like this couple we want to trust the Lord even through the darkness of our trials. We can be

encouraged that God provided the opportunity for personal witness for Abram and that he, in partnership with another believer Melchizedek, welcomed these people outside the faith to this extraordinary service. I would be very surprised if there were not people coming to faith in the Lord that day. Be encouraged God can use you, like Abram, to point people to Him. May we commit our future into His hands, for the glory of His name, Amen