

## **Abraham: Friend of God**

Abraham gives us our first important insight in how a godly man deals with warfare. Abraham's small army, consisting of his own household, made a reputation for themselves as well-armed and trained. This army is involved in the first God-directed military action.

Several attributes are apparent in Abraham's leadership of a military campaign of his day against a Middle East king, Chedorlaomer.

Abraham had fully trained and equipped a small army at his own expense. Part of the training program dealt with the hearts of his warriors. Abraham has bred fearlessness into his army for there are 318 warriors facing an enemy with an estimated strength of thirty thousand. We will consider the importance of fearlessness later.

Abraham's army, to accomplish what it did, must have been a highly mobile fighting force, capable of night-action ambush, skilled in tracking, and able to communicate under the most difficult conditions. All of these traits—fearlessness, mobility, and communication—will have a place in the training God gives His army in the wilderness five hundred years hence.

What transpires in this military action by Abraham? Who is the enemy? What tactics will he employ? Resources are available that give some insight into the background for this action.

According to Nelson Glueck, the enemy was a compendium of eastern kings located in the Mesopotamia area known now as Babylon and probably Persia.<sup>1</sup> The leader of the four kings was Chedorlaomer. Evidently, twelve years earlier the confederation had

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson Glueck. Rivers in the Desert, 1959, p.72.

invaded and was collecting tribute from the people in the Jordanian and Dead Sea area. The people eventually rebelled and refused to pay any further tribute, resulting in a disastrous invasion by the eastern kings.

Archaeological evidence from the period reveals that every city and village from southern Syria down to the Negev in the Sinai was destroyed in the invasion. Glueck, speaking of the invasion, says “the whole countryside had been plundered, populations wiped out, and the area looked like an abandoned cemetery, hideously unkempt, with all its monuments shattered and strewn in pieces on the ground.”<sup>1</sup>

After defeating the rebellious kings of the Dead Sea area, Chedorlaomer carried away tremendous amounts of loot and enslaved whole populations.

Chedorlaomer made one mistake, however. Among the captives were Lot and his family. When Abraham heard of Lot’s captivity, he gathered his private army and pursued the enemy. It is interesting that despite the destruction Chedorlaomer causes, Abraham is unconcerned and does not intervene until informed that members of his family are enslaved. This news brings a swift response.

Abraham’s army lacked chariots since it takes considerable resources to manufacture, maintain, and train a chariot force. Although this seems like a deficiency, a chariot force could actually slow his fighting forces down in certain battle situations and limit mobility. Abraham’s highly mobile force operated unrestricted by various terrains.

Logistically, Abraham would be on a forced march taking about fifteen to twenty days. He would need about fifteen cows and sheep as a source of food. It would take about fifty donkeys to carry other supplies.

The foremost weapons of the time included bronze short double-edge swords--a favorite weapon of the Lord due to the fear it strikes in the hearts of the enemy--sickle swords, javelins, spears, and long-range composite bows.

The chief tactical weapon was the composite bow. The range was about three hundred to four hundred yards. The bow was made of four materials: wood, animal horn, animal tendons, and glue. First introduced by the Akkadians in the mid-third millennium B.C., Abram would have had access to bow manufacturing skills while in Ur.

The composite bow was almost unknown in Palestine or Egypt. The composite bow is a technical marvel. It took anywhere from a year to eighteen months to manufacture a composite bow. They are about thirty-five inches long making them highly mobile weapons. The bow was usually individualized for the person utilizing it. It would have taken tremendous upper body strength to handle the bow. Compared with the bows of today, the composite bow was much superior. The draw strength is rated above one hundred pounds.<sup>2</sup>

The arrows were kept in quivers holding about thirty arrows. The arrow heads were made chiefly of bronze strong enough to pierce armor, yet soft enough to do massive damage to the body. The body of the arrow was made from reed, which was grown for this specific purpose. A Bowman could fire about ten arrows per minute. An arrow shower lasting fifteen minutes would expend about one hundred fifty arrows per man.

Tactical formations usually called for backup warriors with slings to protect the archers. Training was extensive. Upper body strength was a must. On the battlefield, archers armed with the composite bow had no peers.

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<sup>2</sup> Yigael Yadin. *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands*, Vol. I, Jerusalem: International Publishing Company: 1963. P. 7-8

Getting to the battlefield was no small task. The probable route from Hebron north would carry Abram through Bethlehem the first day, about fifteen miles distance. At this time Bethlehem was small village. Taking the watershed road, Abram now passed Jerusalem the next day about seven miles away. Given the mountain terrain, Abram camped there and continued to Jericho some nineteen miles the next day.

The next day Abram went alongside the river Jordan about twenty miles to Jokmean where he took on more supplies. The journey from Jokmean to Yenoam--about forty miles--took at least two days from Yenoam to Hazor another day. Hazor was a large town, and Abram resupplied there. Leaving Hazor, Abram made Dan in a day. The final leg of the march from Dan to Damascus took another three days.

During this time, Chedorlaomer was going up the Kings Highway in the Trans Jordan area. The route was much easier for him. But the prisoners and great loot allowed them to make only three to five miles per day. Abram had several days to prepare an ambush. Abram would not attempt to meet this enemy on an open battlefield. Opposed by battle chariots and enemy phalanxes, Abram would have no chance.

Chedorlaomer, Amraphel, and their armies followed the King's Highway north on the east side of the Jordan and north to Damascus on the road to Hobath. Herzog and Mordechai suggest the engagement occurred in the Barada gorge, northwest of Damascus.<sup>3</sup>

The Barada gorge is a deep canyon about one hundred yards wide with a swift flowing river at the side. Travel through the gorge is slow. Once the enemy enters the

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<sup>3</sup> Chaim Herzog and Mordechai, *Battles of the Bible*, Greenhill Books, 2002, p. 34.

gorge, they are unable to maneuver. Pack animals, herds, and flocks of animals along with chariots become a huge liability, blocking an effective counter attack.

The enemy bedded down for the night in this gorge feeling protected by the canyon walls--unprepared for an attack. We do not know other specific details of the battle except Abraham divided his small army, probably into three groups, and attacked in the night, shattering and scattering the invading army.

Assuming the probable tactics, it seems that Abram set two groups of archers on the high canyon walls on opposite sides in order to fire down into the encampment. A third group infiltrated between the prisoners and guards. The prisoners probably had been set on the opposite side of the river to manage them better. Sometime after midnight, the signal was given and the archers let loose with a barrage of a thousand flaming arrows into the tents starting massive fires and confusion. The loose animals stampeded through the north end of the narrow canyon with arrows raining down on the unprotected enemy. It is easy to imagine the havoc caused by such an attack.

Tents aflame, terrified animals trampling underfoot warrior and caretakers, large plumes of smoke further confusing the scene, mass panic seizing everyone leaving no chance of preparing a counter attack. By dawn dead enemy bodies littered the battleground. Those surviving the onslaught had escaped never to return. The hostages were rescued unscathed along with tons of booty.

We do learn in the aftermath that Abraham refused to mix his warriors with those of the kings of Sodom. Moreover, he refused to take for himself any of the spoils of war. He did allow his Amorite friends, Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol, to be paid for their services. The name of Abraham went down in the historical annals as a great king.

## **Lessons learned**

Lessons learned from Abraham's encounter shed light on God's-inspired training.

First, it is apparent that Abraham was prepared. No doubt, he had spent years preparing his private army for warfare. The Lord expects us to prepare for combat. There is no indication that the Lord desires a bunch of sheep to hold off the hordes of hell.

Abraham's army, armed with the foremost personal weapons of the period and trained for close-quarter combat, completed the battle successfully. This is the foremost goal to terrify the enemy. Personal courage out performs technology. The Lord does not waste His resources on the favorite weapons of the enemy that quickly become useless.

The battle indicates Abraham's army was comfortable with night-forced marches, ambush tactics, and with the battleground. All of these are important lessons reinforced in the Lord's combat course with the fledging nation of Israel five hundred years later.

Moreover, the Lord does not make treaties--nor does Abraham. Fighting with his own paid army, Abraham gives Palestine the best in armed warriors of the period. It is interesting that this army is the first 'National Guard.' It is a principle followed by Israel even today.

A passing observation relevant to today's special operations tactic of not leaving men behind finds its roots here. In this first righteous military engagement, Abraham, no doubt--at God's urging--went after Lot even in the face of impossible odds perhaps as much as five hundred to one--maybe even more. The Lord desires impossible odds in order to reveal that it is by His strength the battle is won. Yet Abraham was prepared for the call.

There is a bitter post script to this story with a hard lesson for all. Within fifteen years all of these people that Abraham rescued from enslavement were taken captive once again. This time however, it was by their own lust. No doubt there were hundreds brought back from slavery and only one remained to remember God's goodness. Lot, only of those taken captive remained faithful to the Lord.

Lot's daughters were probably unborn or at the most very young children at the time of the captivity. Apparently, Lot's remembrance of God's mercy and Lot's distress over the degeneration of these wicked people whom God had saved drew Lot closer to His God. But not one, other than Lot himself remembered God's saving act in their lives.

It indeed is a hard lesson. God's saving acts in our daily lives must be written down, orally talked about daily with family or friends, or the lessons acquired by our salvation will be lost in the depths of depravity.

It reminds us of the parable that Jesus tells in Luke 11:24ff about the unclean spirit who returns after the house has been set in order.