

Series: God & Abraham #1176

Title: Genesis 14

Outside and Inside the Scripture

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. As we get our foot in the door of this new week, let me remind you that last week we talked about the credibility of Genesis chapter 14. We heard from a couple of skeptics who said that we cannot trust what Scripture reports but we countered that skepticism with truth. By looking at certain ancient written records and the geopolitics at the time of Abraham we *affirmed* what the Bible says in this chapter. And on Thursday and Friday, as we discussed geopolitics, I introduced you to a Christian scholar by the name of Kenneth Kitchen. Remember him?

He was the author of the penetrating article *The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?* Well, today I would like to pick up on Kitchen again and share with you some insights he gives us in a book of his I would like to recommend to you. The title of the book is *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* and we will get to his insights in a moment. In a sense, we're going to the kitchen for a nice, sweet snack, a little treat we need for our ongoing journey in Genesis.

But first this reminder: if you have not already done so, write to me and get the map I told you about last week. This week we will be talking geography and I have a map that is very clear, marking various locations in Genesis chapter 14. If you would like it, but forgot to ask for it, now is the time to do so. Email me and simply say "map," and I will get it right over to you. My email address is mark@godisministry.org. And all my addresses will be repeated a little later on.

Let's again dip way back, far back into ancient history, at or near the time of the biblical Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph – and see what we have unearthed from that period in history that will be useful to our understanding of the Bible. I feel that Genesis chapter 14 gives us a great opportunity to talk about how extrabiblical, or certain historical resources *outside* of the Bible, lend a great deal of credibility to what is *in* the Bible. And today I want to show you how extrabiblical autobiographical and biographical narratives from *outside* the Scripture are similar in form to the biblical auto and biographical narratives *in* the Scripture.

Let me repeat that: I want to show you how extrabiblical autobiographical and biographical narratives from *outside* the Scripture are similar in form to the biblical auto and biographical narratives *in* the Scripture.

And here is where a scholar like Kenneth Kitchen is *really* helpful. In a chapter on the biblical Patriarchs in his book, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, he considers a range of comparable narration from the biblical world, which has been unearthed by archaeologists, then analyzed and translated by linguists and others, and he puts these into five helpful categories.

We will only look at *one* category, that of what he calls "autobiographical and biographical texts," of both officials and private people. We know what autobiography is. It is an account of a person's life written by that person. And we know what biography is. It is an account of someone's life written by someone else. Maybe you enjoy reading these? I sure do. Well, this part of Genesis is autobiographical in one sense and biographical in another sense.

Here is the *autobiography* relating to Genesis 14. Picture, if you would, sometime in the future (after the events of the war of the kings) and Abraham is out walking with his son Isaac and Abraham says, "Son, let me tell you about the time the four kings of the northeast, over there, from that direction came marching down upon the five kings of the south, look, down there from where our relative Lot was living at the time." And Abraham would go on to explain this event from earlier in his life, telling Isaac about how he had to rescue Lot (Isaac's cousin) from the northeastern kings who took Lot captive as they pillaged the south. In this sense Abraham is giving an autobiographical account of his own life to Isaac.

Then, Isaac captures that history from his father's life and fast forward again and Isaac gets married and his two sons, Esau and Jacob. And again, picture that one day Isaac and Jacob are talking and Isaac gives Jacob a *biographical* account of Jacob's grandfather Abraham. And Isaac re-tells the same story we have in Genesis 14. It is, after all, a fascinating true story!

It actually has a lot of the elements that best-selling books today include: battles, warfare, kings, blood and treasure, surprising attacks, and a big victory from a big underdog! Now when Isaac tells Jacob the story it is part of the biography about the life of Abraham. Well, on and on these stories go – passed from generation to generation, from Isaac then to Jacob and then to Joseph – and eventually to Moses whom writes it all down.

So, right there, in the Bible we have autobiography and biography. Of course, for us, it is all biography because these are the people who lived a long time ago, before any of us. The Bible is a Book of biographies. And it is *the best* Book in the whole wide world. Ah, but is it just the ancient biblical text that presents history to us in this method? No, it is not. In a very similar time period, there is history developing *outside* what we read about in Genesis.

And God has allowed for us to uncover some of that history, which also includes both autobiography and biography and Kenneth Kitchen writes about one such example. This is one of many, but it is a real humdinger! A really remarkable find by the archaeologists in Egypt. (And remember Dr. Kitchen is a world renowned Egyptologist. Egypt is his speciality.)

In Egypt there has been excavated an ancient Egyptian cemetery by the name of Beni Hasan. The site includes a number of notable tombs. Some of these are accessible to the public. And one in particular captures our attention: tomb number three. This is the tomb of Khnumhotep II. He was an Egyptian great chief during the reign of two Pharaohs in the 12th dynasty, Middle Kingdom (20th century BC). And this is the period between the years 2,000-1,901BC, which fits with Abraham's time.

In the tomb, inscribed in the stone walls is a monumental text, both a biography and autobiography written by Khnumhotep II prior to his death. Along with the written text, which I will say more about in a moment, there is a famous painting of the procession of the Aamu, a group of west Asiatic peoples, visitors to Egypt. These visitors came in 1900 BC. Fifteen of the foreign visitors are shown, but the accompanying inscription mentions thirty-seven persons. This is all very well preserved.

And then, in the writing on the walls of the tomb, let me quote Dr. Kitchen, "Khnumhotep speaks not only of his own deeds (and let me break in – that is the autobiography – this great chief was writing about himself and his own life, continuing with Kitchen now) Khnumhotep speaks not only of his own deeds, but takes us through three generations of his own family history under four successive kings (there is the biography, he is writing about his family), [he describes] the relationships of his family with the ruling house, and their various appointments, besides dilating at length on his own deeds and honors (back to autobiography). They are all put in the third person (biography), and he speaks of himself in the first (person – autobiography)...he clearly knew his family history all the way back through four reigns (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Kindle, 56%)." End of quote.

The connection Kitchen and I am making to the Bible is this: likewise, the biblical Patriarchs knew their family history very well and repeated it as such. And that was common at the time when Abraham, and then Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph lived! And we know this because God has allowed for us to find, open, and look inside the tomb of an ancient Egyptian who used both autobiography and biography to record the events of his life and the lives of his family. And, through the painting, to give us a sense for how peoples moved around during those days, sometimes forging alliances and sometimes making war with one another. Such as in Genesis chapter 14.

The Bible stands alone in that this is the very Word of God! And yet, God places His Bible in the context of real, human history. God is sovereignly watching all of history unfold, *some* of which He includes in His Word to us. Other of which we learn by reading auto and biographical accounts later. When we put it all together we can be sure of this: our Bible is reliable and tomorrow we return there, maps in hand. Remember to get your map and join us next time for God Is.

---END---