

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

Genesis 14

Videos from **The Bible Project**: Covenants, Melchizedek, Iniquity

KEY THEMES OF GENESIS 12-50 – THE FOUR PATRIARCHS: ABRAHAM, ISAAC, JACOB, AND JOSEPH

There are five key themes that we are going to be able to see throughout the rest of the book of Genesis:

- 1) **God is going to choose one family so that God can rescue all the nations;** God will rescue all of humanity through God's covenant with Abram.
- 2) **God's blessing to the nations through Abram provides the foundational storyline for the rest of the bible.**
- 3) **God's choice of Abram's family doesn't mean that they are perfect.** On the contrary, they are very dysfunctional. It's on account of God's faithfulness and not theirs that God's promises are fulfilled. Look at just how dysfunctional they are:
 - a. Abraham tries to give away his wife (Genesis 12, 20)
 - b. Sarah forces God's hand by having Abraham sleep with Hagar (Genesis 16, 21)
 - c. Isaac gives away his wife Rebekah (Genesis 26)
 - d. Jacob is a thief and a liar (Genesis 25, 27)
 - e. Joseph's brothers try to kill him (Genesis 37)
- 4) **God remains faithful to them and constantly intervenes to rescue them.**
 - a. Rescues Sarah twice (Genesis 12:17-20; 20:6-10) and Rebecca once (Genesis 26:8-10)
 - b. Provides an heir for Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18, 21)
 - c. Protects Jacob despite his selfishness and deception (Genesis 27-35)
 - d. Transforms the intentions of Joseph's brothers into something that saves nations from famine (Genesis 50:20)
- 5) **God works through people of low status who are weak and marginalized**
 - a. Not the firstborn sons: Abel instead of Cain; Isaac instead of Ishmael, Jacob instead of Esau, Joseph instead of Reuben
 - b. Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:8-10)
 - c. Leah the unloved wife (Genesis 29:31-35)
 - d. Joseph the despised brother (Genesis 37-50)

SYNOPSIS OF GENESIS 12-13

What has happened between the time Abram first appears on the scene in chapter 11 until we get to chapter 14?

CHAPTER 11 – At the end of Genesis 11, Abram and Sarai are introduced. It is notable that in a creation teeming with life and in which God had commanded the people to “be fruitful and multiply” that Sarai is the first person to be “childless” (11:30). With this, we launch into the story of Abraham.

CHAPTER 12 – God calls Abram (from Ur of the Chaldeans). God promises that Abram will be the founder of a great nation; and God will bless him, make his name great, and cause him to bless others. Everyone on earth will be blessed through him. Abram then travels from **Ur to Haran** and from **Haran to Canaan**. First, he stops at **Shechem** and Abram builds an altar there. Then he stops at **Bethel** and builds another altar. But, then there's a famine and he travels from **Canaan to Egypt** to escape the famine.

In Egypt: Abram is afraid for his life, and so he tells his wife Sarai to pretend that she is his sister (something we will see again later on). Pharaoh rewards Abram “the pimp” with riches for Sarai's sake and takes Sarai into his home to be one of his wives. But God intervenes and sends plagues to Pharaoh and his household which Pharaoh interprets as a heavenly rebuke. In turn, Pharaoh rebukes Abram for lying and sends he and Sarai on their way back to Canaan full of riches; a plunder pattern we will see again later.

CHAPTER 13 – **Back at Bethel:** Abram worships God again (vs. 1-4). But, the herdsmen of Abram and Lot (his nephew) have a dispute over grazing rights (vs. 5-7). To settle the dispute, Abram gives Lot the choice of lands: East or West; you choose! Lot foolishly chooses the east even though it is “good to the eyes” and “appears to be land close the city of Sodom (vs. 8-13). After Lot's departure, God again promises to make Abram's descendants as numerous as the dust of

the earth and to give them the land of Canaan (vs 14-18). Vs. 18: “So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron and there he built an altar to the LORD.”



OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 14

- Vs. 1-4 Five Canaanite city-states rebel against Chedorlaomer of Elam.
- Vs. 5-11 Chedorlaomer and his allies defeat the armies of the five city-states, plunder their cities, and carry many people away as slaves.
- Vs. 12 Lot, now living in Sodom, is taken away as a slave.
- Vs. 13-14 Upon learning of Lot’s capture, Abram and his 318 trained servants ride out to rescue Lot.
- Vs. 15 Abram divides his men and initiates a surprise attack at night.
- Vs. 16 Chedorlaomer is defeated, and Lot is rescued.
- Vs. 17-20 As Abram is returning from battle to his home in Hebron, Abram meets Melchizedek, who blesses him. Abram offers him a tenth of all the goods he has recovered from Chedorlaomer.
- Vs. 21-24 In stark contrast, Abram refuses to have any fellowship with Bera, king of wicked Sodom.

SUMMARY OF GENESIS 14

A rebellion of a royal coalition against their overlord leads to a battle between two alliances. Among the rebels are the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are defeated by falling into bitumen pits, an ironic comment on the previous use of bitumen as ziggurat mortar in the tower of Babel story (11:2). Kings rise by bitumen and, also, fall by it.

But in this case, the defeat of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah results in the taking captive of Lot and his goods (14:12). Abram's only option seems to be to form a guerrilla force of his own to rescue his nephew.

After Abram's victory, the king of Sodom offers Abram the spoils if the king can keep the captured Sodomites. But Abram stands firmly before this king (in contrast to his cowering before Pharaoh) and refuses to be made into a mercenary. Abram continues his journey and Lot returns to Sodom.

CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF GENESIS 14:17-24

A	King of Sodom came out to meet Abram
B	Melchizedek brings out bread and wine
C	Melchizedek blesses Abram and brings up God Most High
B'	Abram gives Melchizedek one-tenth of everything
A'	King of Sodom – Gimme, but take

God delivers Abram's enemies into his hand and then Melchizedek, the priest king of Shalem (an ancient name short for Jerusalem), blesses Abram. This design highlights a contrast between Abram's relationship to the king of Sodom and his relationship to Melchizedek, king of Shalem. The king of Sodom wants his stuff back, while the king of Shalem gives to Abram both food and blessing. Abram gave Melchizedek one-tenth of everything (a tithe); which is what the king of Sodom was looking for.

SHINAR

A district of Babylonia in what is now southern Iraq. According to Gen. 10:10, the Plain of Shinar included Babel (Babylon), Erech (Warka), and Accad or Akkade in central Mesopotamia close to Baghdad. The Tower of Babel is said to have been built on "a plain in the land of Shinar" (Gen. 11:2). Amraphel, king of Shinar, was one of the four kings who, according to the passage above, invaded the Dead Sea region and were subsequently pursued and defeated by Abram at Horbah, north of Damascus (Gen. 14:1–16). In later times Shinar was equated with Babylon: Isa. 11:11 speaks of God bringing back a remnant from Shinar (i.e., returning exiles from Babylon); Dan. 1:2 says that Nebuchadnezzar took "Jehoiakim king of Judah ... with some of the vessels of the house of God" to Shinar; Zech. 5:11 predicts the ephah of wickedness will be taken to a house built for it in Shinar.

ELLASAR

The home country or city of King Arioch, who joined a confederation of four kings who attacked the Dead Sea area, captured Lot, and were then pursued and defeated by Abraham (Gen. 14:1–16). The identification of Ellasar is uncertain, but one suggestion is Larsa, a city in southern Babylonia that flourished ca. 2025–1763 BCE. This identification would seem likely if Shinar, the home of Arioch's neighboring king Amraphel (Gen. 14:1, 9), ultimately derives from the nearby Sinjar Mountains of middle Mesopotamia.

ELAM

The region east of the Tigris River, in the Fars province of modern-day Iran. In Genesis 10:22, in the Table of Nations, Elam is listed as a descendant of Shem. Elam is next mentioned here in Genesis 14, which details the coalition of several kings, including the Elamite Chedorlaomer, against the kings of the Dead Sea region. This coalition captured Lot, who was then rescued by his uncle, Abram.

CHEdorLAOMER (כְּדֹרְלַאֲמֵר)

An Elamite king who was the leader of the coalition of eastern kings mentioned in Gen 14:1–16. The name is made up of two Elamite words: *kudur* and *lagamar*. *Kudur* means "protector" and *Lagamar* is the name of the Elamite deity. The the name means "protector of Lagamar."

GOIIM

Ostensibly the kingdom of Tidal, one of the allies of Chedorlaomer and the "king of Goim" (Gen 14:1, 9). Hebrew גוֹיִם (*gôyîm*) means "nations." It's an Akkadian loanword from West Semitic, *ga'u*, "gang" or "group" [e.g., of workmen]; Vg. gentes; LXX ethnē), "gentiles, nations"; KJV alternately "heathen." This term stresses political and social rather than kinship bonds.

SHINAR, ELLASAR, ELAM, GOIIM vs. SODOM, GOMORRAH, ADMAH, BELA, ZEBOIIM

The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 (Descendants of Noah and his sons) lists some seventy entities, which include the whole of the ancient world, as known to the author, divided roughly into racial groups. The second group were descendants of Ham through Cush. And who was Ham? Do we remember the story from Genesis 9:18-29?

SODOM (סְדֹם)

The meaning of the name can be translated as "field," "burning," "enclosed space." Abraham's nephew, Lot, chose Sodom for his residence, though the people there were wicked, "great sinners before the LORD" (13:8–13). Sometime later, the king of Sodom joined with the kings of the other four cities (Gomorraah, Admah, Bela [Zoar], and Zeboiim) to fight an invading coalition of four eastern kings (of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam, and Goim) in the Valley of Siddim. They were

soundly defeated, and Lot was taken captive. Abraham pursued the invading kings and rescued Lot as well as all of the booty taken from Sodom. Upon his return, he was met by the king of Sodom at the Valley of Shaveh. There, the priest Melchizedek blessed him, and the king of Sodom said that Abraham could keep the possessions he had recovered, but Abraham refused (14:1–24).

When one considers the traditions about Sodom (and the other cities) in the Hebrew Bible, one is struck by the difference between the function of Sodom in Genesis 14 and that in the other chapters in Genesis which feature Sodom. Genesis 14 is a construction of various genres dating from the postexilic period. Broadly speaking, it contains a report on a campaign (vv 1–11), a narrative about a liberation which is reminiscent of similar tales from the time of Judges (vv 12–17, 21–24), and the Melchizedek episode (vv 18–20). In this chapter, Sodom does not stand in the bad repute it has in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Although in the first part (vv 1, 2, 8, 9) the lists name five cities and five kings, from v 12 onwards only Sodom and its king play a role. The focus on Sodom is due to the fact that Abraham's nephew Lot lived in this city and was taken prisoner by the four kings from the E. As to the location of Sodom, mention is made of the "Valley of Siddim" that was "full of tar pits" (v 10). But these names leave us in the dark historically as well as geographically. The former name may also be interpreted as "Valley of the Demons."

Quite different is the picture of Sodom given in the other passages in Genesis. The so-called Table of Nations in Genesis 10 (v 19) adds, as we have seen, only secondarily the names of Admah and Zeboiim to those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 13 relates the separation of Lot and Abraham. In this story, attributed to J, additions from P occur. One of these additions reports that Lot saw that "the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the Garden of the Lord or like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. This was before the Lord had destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah" (v 10). The statement in v 12, that Lot settled down in the valley "as far as Sodom" (which suggests that Sodom lay outside Canaan) is, in Genesis 18 and 19, followed by the story about the "wickedness" (already announced in Gen 13:13) of the "men of Sodom," labeled as "great sinners against the Lord." They are held up as an example, illustrative of the way God's justice works.

Analysis of chaps. 18 and 19 shows that the role played by the people of Sodom (and Gomorrah) originates in an independent tradition that was only secondarily linked to the Abraham stories. This tradition initially was of a strictly local nature and originated in the environs of the Dead Sea. The lament over Sodom's wickedness constrains God to intervene; and notwithstanding Abraham's theological reflection whether God is really willing to destroy the righteous along with the godless, the sentence is executed in Genesis 19. This chapter is reminiscent of the flood stories. The transgressions of Sodom's inhabitants mainly consist in sexual debauchery, human hubris, and violation of (the law of) hospitality. No one in Sodom was exempt from this sin (19:4). The destruction of Sodom and the other cities was effectuated by means of a "rain of brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (v 24). It is striking that this story, unlike others (Deuteronomy 29:22; Isaiah 13:19; Jeremiah 50:40; Amos 4:11), does not emphasize the "reversal" of Sodom and Gomorrah. This means that elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the authors introduced changes in the tradition they had in common with Genesis 19, in the process each time also typifying the "sin of Sodom" in a different way. At the end of Genesis 19, Abraham makes his appearance again. It is said that he surveys the whole valley and that he saw smoke rising from the land, "like smoke from a huge furnace" (v 28).

In later biblical literature, Sodom is cited as a warning of God's wrath and potential judgment (Deut. 29:16–28). The general point is stated succinctly in 2 Pet. 2:6: "By turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes (God) condemned them to extinction and made them an example of what is coming to the ungodly." Isaiah notes that the preservation of a remnant prevents Israel from becoming like Sodom (1:9–10; cf. Amos 4:11; Rom. 9:29), but he says that Babylon will become like Sodom (13:19; Zeph. 2:9 says this of Moab). Jeremiah notes that when a city or nation receives the kind of judgment visited upon Sodom, it becomes totally desolate, so that no one lives there (49:18; 50:40). Lam. 4:6 indicates that the exile of Judea was a worse chastisement than the destruction of Sodom, apparently because the suffering was prolonged, while Sodom "was overthrown in a moment." Ezekiel offers an extended allegory of Jerusalem and her elder sister Samaria and younger sister Sodom (16:44–58). Rev. 11:8 may have this passage in mind when it refers to Jerusalem as the city that is prophetically called Sodom. Elsewhere in the NT, Jesus says that on the day of judgment the people of Sodom will fare better than the residents of towns that do not welcome his followers (Matt. 10:15; Luke 10:12) or, specifically, the residents of Capernaum, who have not repented in spite of the great miracles he worked there; indeed, he says that Sodom would have remained until this day if his miracles had been performed there (Matt. 11:23–24). He also says that the judgment to come upon the earth on the day the Son of Man is revealed will be just like what befell Sodom in the days of Lot (Luke 17:28–30).

The sin of Sodom is construed differently. In Isa. 3:9, the blatant aspect of its sinfulness is emphasized: people “proclaim their sin like Sodom” when “they do not hide it.” Jeremiah likens the prophets of Jerusalem to Sodom, because they “commit adultery and walk in lies” and “strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from wickedness” (23:14). In Ezekiel, the “guilt of Sodom” is defined quite specifically: the people of Sodom “had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things” (16:49–50). In Jude 7, the people of Sodom are said to have “indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust.” Most interpreters think that the “unnatural lust” referred to here is an allusion to sex between humans and angels (cf. Jude 6, which alludes to Gen. 6:1–4). If, instead, it refers to a desire for men to have sex with other men, then this would be the only passage in the Bible that calls attention to that aspect of the Sodom story.

Sodom is mentioned 39 times in the Old Testament (19 times in combination with Gomorrah) (See partner references in Genesis 10:19; 13:10; 14:2, 8, 10, 11; 18:20; 19:24, 28; Deuteronomy 29:22; 32:32; Isaiah 1:9, 10; 13:19; Jeremiah 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Zephaniah 2:9). (See solo references in Genesis 13:12, 13; 14:12, 17, 21, 22; 18:16, 22, 26; 19:1, 4; Isaiah 3:9; 1:7; Ezekiel 16:46, 48, 49, 53, 55, 56; and Lamentations 4:6). According to an old tradition, Sodom and Gomorrah, together with three other cities, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar (previously called Bela), formed a so-called Pentapolis.

GOMORRAH (עֲמֹרָה)

The meaning of the name can be translated as “flooded place,” “indentation,” or the like. (See information on Sodom above).

ADMAH

One of the five “cities of the Plain” in the Valley of Siddim at the southern end of the Dead Sea (Gen. 10:19; 14:2). The city was destroyed, along with Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zeboiim, while the fifth city, Zoar, was spared. Admah and Zeboiim became proverbial examples of God’s wrath (Deut. 29:23; Hos. 11:8). The exact site is unknown.

BELA

Zoar (zoh’ahr), one of the five cities of the Plain (along with Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim). Four eastern kings led by Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, defeated these five cities in the valley of Siddim (Gen. 14:1–12). God allowed Lot to flee from Sodom to Zoar before he destroyed Sodom and the other three cities with fire and brimstone (19:18–23). Zoar is mentioned later in connection with the destruction of Moab (Isa. 15:5; Jer. 48:34). The exact location of Zoar is uncertain; it may be at the site of es-Safi, located about five miles south of the Dead Sea.

ZEBOIIM

a site in the valley near the Dead Sea noted as marking the eastern border of Canaan together with Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Lasha (Gen. 10:19). Ruled by Shemeber, it joined a coalition with neighboring cities (14:2) opposing invaders from the north (14:8). Hosea used both Admah and Zeboiim as symbols of utter destruction (11:8), referring presumably to the legendary destruction of the whole region when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed together with “those cities and all the Plain” (19:24–25). Although recent archaeological work has recovered remains of five Early Bronze Age cities southeast of the Dead Sea on the plain below the hill line to the east, no specific identification has been established for Zeboiim to date.

VALLEY OF SIDDIM

A depression at the south end of the Dead Sea that was the scene of a war in which four eastern kings (of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam, and Goim) defeated the kings of five local cities (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Bela [Zoar], and Zeboiim). The valley is said to be filled with bitumen pits, and many of the retreating forces fell into these.

VALLEY OF SHAVEH

The valley where the king of Sodom and Melchizedek, king of Jerusalem, met Abraham as he returned from his battle with the kings of the north. This valley, also called the King’s Valley, was presumably the same as that in which Absalom erected his monument (2 Sam. 18:18). According to Josephus, the monument was set up 450 meters east of Old Jerusalem which places in what was later called the Kidron Valley; the valley that lies east of Jerusalem between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives.

BITUMEN

A type of asphalt or mineral pitch, either occurring naturally or found as a by-product of burning coal or wood. Throughout antiquity this black sticky substance was used as an adhesive or caulk. It is mentioned first in the tower of Babel story, then here, and then in Exodus 2 with the story of Moses and the basket (ark) plastered with “bitumen and pitch.”

OAKS OF MAMRE

A place near Hebron associated with Abraham. In Genesis, after Yahweh promises to give Abram the land of Canaan, Abram settles “by the oaks of Mamre” and builds an altar there (Gen 13:18). Several chapters later, Yahweh (in the form of three visitors) appears to Abraham at Mamre and announces that Sarah will have a son (Gen 18:1, 10). Perhaps the most important role of Mamre is its association with the patriarchs’ burial site. When Sarah dies, Abraham negotiates with Ephron the Hittite to buy a field in Machpelah (east of Mamre) that held a cave (Gen 23:17). By the end of Genesis, Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all buried in the cave (Gen 23:19; 25:9; 35:27–29; 49:30; 50:13). Twice (Gen 14:13, 24) the name “Mamre” refers to a person—an ally of Abraham—an Amorite who was one of Abram’s allies in the battle against Chedorlaomer’s coalition.

THE ROYAL PRIEST MELCHIZEDEK OF SHALEM

Who is Melchizedek and why is he so important in the big picture of the Bible? We don’t know anything from the bible about his family tree. Is he from the line of Noah, or Shem, Ham, or Japheth? No one knows. We aren’t told why he worships Abraham’s God. He isn’t even an Israelite! We aren’t told his family lineage. We aren’t told very much at all about this mysterious priest-king. Melchizedek is only mentioned twice in the entire Hebrew Bible (Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110:4).

Melchizedek is the first explicit royal priest in the book of Genesis. What we do know is that Melchizedek is a Canaanite who somehow knows Yahweh. As a “priest of God Most High” (Genesis 14:18, Hebrew, El ‘elyon), he serves the one whom Abraham acknowledges as “the LORD, God Most High, maker of Heaven and Earth” (14:22).

When Abraham passes by the city of Salem, Melchizedek comes out to meet him, greeting Abraham with a feast and a blessing. Melchizedek pronounces a blessing on Abraham in the name of El ‘elyon, the Creator/Possessor of the skies and land. His blessing is a recognition of Abraham’s special relationship with God, recalling God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 that all the families of the earth will find blessing in him.

In return, Abraham blesses Melchizedek by paying him a tithe, one-tenth of what he has (Genesis 14:20). We are then left with the expectation that Melchizedek and the city he rules will experience God’s blessing sometime in the future.

While there are many gaps in the narrative, Melchizedek is introduced here to show that Abraham encountered Yahweh in and through a royal priest in Jerusalem long before the time of the Levitical priesthood and long before the time of David. And this encounter establishes the category of a royal priesthood in Jerusalem that will be further developed throughout the story of the Bible.

He rules over Salem (Shalem in Hebrew), which is a very important place in the history of the nation of Israel. It is later identified as Jerusalem. See Psalm 76:1-2 where “God’s tent is in Salem, his dwelling is in Zion. It will later be called “Jebus” when it is in the possession of the Canaanites (Joshua 18:28, Judges 19:10-11, and 2 Samuel 5:6-7).

Melchizedek blesses Abram in the name of El-Elyon, the creator/possessor of skies and land. In vs. 12, Abram says that El-Elyon is Yahweh and links Melchizedek’s God to Yahweh Elohim of Genesis 1-2.

This makes Melchizedek a priest of the God of Israel even before Israel ever existed and before Yahweh is known by that name (see Exodus 3:12-15). This connects him to the line of genuine worship that stems back to Seth in Genesis 4:26 where people began to invoke the name of Yahweh.

Melchizedek’s blessing on Abram links back to God’s promise in Genesis 12:1-3: “Whoever blesses you, I will bless.” Thus, we can expect that Melchizedek and the city he rules will experience God’s blessing sometime in the future.

Notice how Melchizedek’s blessing develops God’s own blessing on Abraham. God has promised seed and land, and now Melchizedek adds deliverance from enemies to that blessing. God will bless Abraham with abundant descendants and a promised land, and he will deliver Abram’s descendants from their enemies. See 2 Samuel 5:6-10; Numbers 18:21-24.

We don't hear about Melchizedek in the Bible again until Psalm 110. Psalm 110 is attributed to David, and in this poem, David speaks of someone else who receives the covenant oath of Yahweh—someone whom David calls “lord,” a common term when addressing a king. We can conclude that David is speaking of his future seed who will receive the messianic inheritance, based on 2 Samuel 7.

In that story, God promises David that this seed (see Genesis 3:15) would come from his line of royal descendants, that David's royal descendant would build a house for the Lord, and that God would establish this descendant over his kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-13; 1 Chronicles 17:14). God would be a father to this seed (7:14), so we can conclude that God's son would rule over a kingdom that would last forever (7:16).

The psalmist depicts this seed as a conquering warrior exercising dominance over his enemies (Psalm 110:1). But in a surprising twist, the psalmist announces that this king will also be a priest—not from the expected line of Aaron but a priest in “the order of Melchizedek.” And the psalmist claims that his royal priesthood will last forever.

Psalm 110 paints a clear portrait of this promised seed, the Messiah who would be a royal priest with both an eternal kingdom and an eternal priesthood.

REPHAIM

Pre-Israelite inhabitants of Transjordan (Gen. 14:5; 15:20; Deut. 2:11, 20; 3:11, 13; Josh. 12:4; 13:12; 15:8; 17:15; 18:16); “a mighty people with tall stature who lived in Canaan.” The word doesn't seem to be ethno-centric like “Jew” or “Egyptian” but is more of a descriptive term. The name of these people literally means “terrible ones.” Og of Bashan, the last of the Rephaim, had a bed that was 9 cubits long and 4 cubits wide (Deut. 3:11).

The Rephaim were called the Emim by the Moabites (Deut. 2:10–11). The word Emim (אֵימִים) is derived from the Hebrew word Eima (אֵימָה) which means terror or fear. Hence, the terrible ones.

They were called the Zamzummim by the Amonites (Deut. 2:20–21). Zamzummim (זַמְזוּמִים) comes from the Hebrew word Zimzum (זִמְזוּם) which means ‘buzz’ or ‘hum’ and describes the characteristic noise they produced which is strongly associated with the ancient belief of the noise the spirits of the dead generated, as can be found in the Book of Isaiah: ¹⁹ Now if people say to you, “Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living (Isaiah 8:19).

Another interesting explanation for this name is based on the unique morphology of the Hebrew word Zimzum – which is an onomatopoeia – a word that phonetically imitates the source of the sound that it describes. When one thinks about it, the English translation of this word ‘buzzing’ also imitates the production of the sound it is describing. In other words, the sound of the Rephaim's language sounded to the Ammonites as buzzing. They were a people that speak in buzzing, mumbling, or rumbling noises.

In Deut. 2:10–11, the Emim (Rephaim) are said to have been as tall as the Anakim, who were descended from the Nephilim, the race of giants produced by the mating of the sons of God and the daughters of humans before the flood (cf. Gen. 6:4). The English word “Rephaim” is used in the NRSV only with reference to these pre-Israelite Transjordanians, but the Hebrew word repha'im (which “Rephaim” transliterates) is used in two other contexts in the Bible:

- It is translated “giants” in 2 Sam. 21:16, 18, 20 (cf. 1 Chron. 20:4, 6, 8). The reference is to four Philistine warriors descended from the “Rephaim,” which could mean the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Transjordan (see above) or some mythical race of divine men, or a military guild that had taken this name for itself.
- In poetic literature, the Hebrew word repha'im is translated “shades” and refers to departed spirits whose dwelling place was Sheol. In this sense it seems to refer to the spirits of people who have died; similar to our concept of a ghost (Job 26:5; Ps. 88:10; Prov. 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Isa. 14:9; 26:19).

Is it possible that the Rephaim were literal giants? The Septuagint uses the Greek words gigas and titanes (the source of the English titan) to translate these and other verses, so the ancient Jews certainly considered them to be giants. They are described generally as being between 7 and 10 feet tall and are called “mighty men.” The Egyptians wrote about giants who lived in the land of Canaan, and the folklore of other nations is full of such references. The people of the ancient world accepted the presence of giants as a fact of history, and the Bible presents them as enemies who were destroyed either by the judgment of God or in battle with men.

So where did these giants come from? One theory, based on Genesis 6:1–4, is that fallen angels (the sons of God) had sexual relations with women, resulting in the birth of giants. This is remarkably similar to Greek and Roman myths about demi-gods, but the theory has some theological and biological obstacles. Another theory, also based on Genesis 6, is that the fallen angels, having knowledge of human genetics, indwelt certain men and women who would have the right traits to produce a race of giants and induced them to cohabit with each other.

ZUZIM (זוזים) – In Gen 14:5, a people defeated by Chedorlaomer and his allies at Ham, listed between the Rephaim and the Emim. Its position corresponds to that of the Zamzummîm in the enumeration of prehistoric peoples in the “first introduction” to Deuteronomy (Deut 2:20), from which the author of Genesis 14 borrowed the names of the other early peoples of the Transjordan. Questions arise whether zûzîm in Gen 14:5 is the original writing or a distortion of zamzummîm (as may be suggested by 1 QapGen) and why LXX rendered it “mighty nation,” Tg. Onq. and Tg. Ps.-J. “powerful ones,” Syr “mighty ones,” and the Palestinian Targum “distinguished, noble ones.”

EMIM עימים – Hebrew for “terrible ones” or “frightful ones,” the designation used by the Moabites for giants who occupied their territory in more ancient times. Deut 2:10 describes the Emim as “great and many, and tall as the Anakim,” another race of giants who lived in ancient Palestine. Both the Anakim and the Emim were called Rephaim (Deut 2:11). Because the Emim are associated with ancient Moab, the Zamzummim (or Zuzim) are giants linked with Ammonite territory (Deut 2:20; Gen 14:5). The Emim were defeated by Chedorlaomer and his coalition in Shaveh-kiriathaim (Gen 14:5). Nothing is known about the Emim outside of the OT.

HORITES הֹרִי – A tribe or group of tribes in the mountains of Seir (Gen 14:6; 36:20–30; Deut 2:12, 22). According to Gen 14:6 and Deut 2:12, 22, the Horites inhabited the country of Seir until they were conquered and expelled by the Edomites. This, however, is a reconstruction of Edomite history which originates from a preconception of the Deuteronomistic school fashioned after the model of the Israelites’ treatment of the Canaanites as commanded by Yahweh in Deut 7:1–2. The Deuteronomists and their successors learned from Gen 36:20 that Horites were the inhabitants of Seir. Because (like most of the biblical tradition) they regarded “Edom” and “Seir” as synonymous, they concluded that the Horites had been the Edomites’ predecessors in the country of Seir. However, Seir and Edom originally referred to separate areas in S Transjordan.

AMALEKITES עַמְלֵק – Amalek is one of the six sons of Eliphaz and a grandson of Esau, whose mother was Timna, Eliphaz’s concubine (Gen 36:11, 12; cf. 1 Chr 1:36). Amalek was one of the “chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom” (Gen 36:15, 16). In the biblical tradition, the terms “Amalek,” “Amalekite,” and “Amalekites” are used to designate the descendants of Eliphaz who, like Esau, are linked with the land of Edom. The Amalekites were a nomadic or seminomadic people, descendants of Esau and one of Israel’s traditional enemies. They are not mentioned by name in any extra-biblical source, so the OT provides the only written evidence on this relatively obscure people.

AMORITES אַמֹּרִי – In biblical tradition, the designation of one of the seven to ten nations (Josh 7:7; Gen 15:19–21) that inhabited Canaan before the formation of the Israelite federation. From the line of Canaan in Genesis 10. according to biblical tradition one of the primary peoples in the land of Canaan before the rise of Israel; the others were the Canaanites and the Hittites (see Ezek. 16:3). The term “Amorite” can refer to the basic population of the whole area (e.g., Gen. 15:16; Deut. 1:7). In particular, the Amorites are associated with Transjordan and the kingdoms of Sihon, centered at Heshbon, and Og, centered at Ashtaroth and Edrei. These “two kings of the Amorites” appear as opponents of Israel prior to the settlement in Canaan. Og, with his famous “iron bedstead,” is cited as the last of the celebrated giants. From the perspective of the Israelites, the Amorites were idolaters and perpetrators of iniquity (e.g., Josh. 24:15; Judg. 6:10). Accordingly, God drove them out of the land.