

The People of God and the Kings of Earth

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[0:00] I'd like you to open up your Bibles to the book of Genesis, in Genesis chapter 14, where we're going to find a very interesting story about Abram.

And have highlighted for us, not only different aspects of the life of Abraham, and of the early history of the founder of the nation of Israel, of the father of Israel, but also through these stories, we have learned a great deal about who God is, and what God is like, and not only what he desired for Abram, and what it required of him, but also what he desires of us, and what he would have us to see and believe about him.

And so, that's my prayer this morning, as we go to this passage, that the Lord would speak to us, that the Holy Spirit would reveal to us, not just interesting tidbits from history, but that he would reveal himself to us.

So if you would, let your eyes rest there on verse 1. We're going to read through the entire chapter, which sounds like a lot. It's 24 verses, though. It's not too bad. And I'd like you to stand again to your feet in honor of the Word of God, as we read.

In the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Ariok, king of Elasser, Keter-la-omer, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goyim, these kings made war with Bera, king of Sodom, Bersha, king of Gomorrah, Shinnab, king of Adma, Shemeber, king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zohor.

[1:43] And all these joined forces in the valley of Sidim, that is, the Salt Sea. Twelve years they had served Keter-la-omer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. In the fourteenth year, Keter-la-omer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-Karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Imim in Shaveh-Kiri-Tatim, and the Horites in their hill country of Seir, as far as El-Paron, on the border of the wilderness.

Then they turned back and came to En-Mishpat, that is, Kadesh, and defeated all the country of the Amalekites and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon, Tamar.

Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Adma, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zohor, went out and they joined battle in the valley of Sidim with Keter-la-omer, king of Elam, Tidal, king of Goyim, Amraphel, king of Shinar, and Ariok, king of Elasser.

Four kings against five. Now the valley of Sidim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them and the rest fled to the hill country.

So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions and went their way. They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions and went their way.

[3:00] Then one who had escaped came and told Abram, the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and Doner. These were allies of Abram.

When Abram heard that his kinsmen had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces against them by night.

He and his servants defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the possessions and also brought back his kinsmen Lot with his possessions and the women and the people.

After his return from the defeat of Kederlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh, that is, the king's valley. And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine.

He was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abraham, God by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.

[4:01] And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself. But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich.

I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten and the share of the men who went with me. Let Honer, Eshkol, and Memre take their share. Father, thank you for this event as it happened, but thank you even more that you have recorded it by the hand of Moses in the way that you've recorded it.

And teach us through it this morning, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. Genesis chapter 14 is an important chapter in a number of ways in the context of the book of Genesis and even in the context of the entire Old Testament.

There are a lot of firsts that occur in this particular chapter. In fact, this is the first time in which we find any mention of actual warfare in the book of Genesis.

It is, in fact, the only battle, the only set of battles that's recorded for us in all of Genesis. It's the first in the entire Old Testament. So it's significant in that it introduces us to a form of violence that we've not yet seen in the book of Genesis.

[5:26] We've seen great violence. We've seen mankind reach a point of violence and bloodshed and sinfulness to the point that God flooded the earth. But this is the first time that's recorded for us in the book of Genesis.

It's an actual account of a battle or a series of battles in a war that took place. It's also interesting enough, this is the first time in the book of Genesis and therefore in the Bible that we find the word king.

You won't find anyone given the title of king prior to Genesis chapter 14. And throughout this chapter you find multiple references to various kings so that the word king not only appears for the first time in this chapter, but it appears 27 separate times in this chapter alone more than in any other place in Genesis or the rest of the Old Testament.

So there is an emphasis from the very beginning upon the various kings that are mentioned here and the fact that there are human kings dwelling upon the earth at all, that there are actual rulers over nations and over cities.

That's an important thing to notice from this chapter. In this chapter we find Abram for the first time referred to as a Hebrew. That's not a word that we've come across yet in the book of Genesis.

[6:42] And yet here Abram for the first time is called Hebrew, which at this point in history would have been an ethnic designation. It would have been meant to describe what Abram looked like and what kind of background he had, his ethnic background.

And so it sets him off both from the kings that come into the land and from his allies and the kings of the cities that are mentioned in the valley of Sidim. So that there are a number of important firsts that occur in this book.

And as we recognize those things and we see those things, we're better able to sort of understand what the point of this chapter is in the first place. Because this chapter is not mainly about warfare.

I know various theologians of different times have gone back to this passage to try to prove some sort of theory of just war or perhaps to defend some other approach to Christian involvement in human wars and armies and battles.

But that's not what this chapter is mainly about. Certainly there might be implications for that, but that's not what this chapter is mainly about. We also see the first mention of tithing toward the end of this chapter.

[7:50] But this chapter is not mainly about the issue of tithing. Perhaps it has implications for the Old Testament practice of tithing and even for the way that we as New Covenant believers ought to give.

But that's not what this chapter is mainly about. And what I want to communicate week in and week out as we cover different portions of the book of Genesis is what that section of the book is primarily about and not get distracted by so many other things.

So what we're going to do is we're going to spend two weeks on Genesis chapter 14. This morning we're covering the entire chapter and focusing all of our attention upon that main point that Genesis is making.

And then next week we're going to come back and take a closer look at the end of chapter 14 so that we can try to understand who this mysterious figure called Melchizedek is.

He arrives on the scene here at the end of chapter 14 and then he's never mentioned again in the book of Genesis. He's mentioned only one other time in the entire Old Testament and then he's mentioned again in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews.

[8:52] But he's kind of an enigmatic figure. He's a bit puzzling. We don't know a lot about him. So we're going to come back next week to consider in more detail who this guy is.

Who is he? What's he doing? Why does he show up and why does he disappear? But this morning our focus is upon the entire chapter and asking, what's the main point? Why are these events recorded for us?

And why are they recorded for us in the way in which they are recorded for us? Now in a sense we could say very easily that the main point of Genesis chapter 14 is the main point that we've been on since chapter 12, since Abram was introduced by Moses into the story of the book of Genesis as a whole.

And that is that God is faithful to his promises. That's the main point of all of these chapters that cover the story of Abram. If you're wondering why God would bother to record the history of Abram at all, why not just start with the people of Israel in the land?

Why bother with Abram and the other patriarchs, the other fathers? Why even record all of this for us? We can say that the primary purpose of that is to demonstrate God's faithfulness to the promises that he gave to Abram.

[10:01] He promised him in chapter 12 that he would bless Abram. He promised him that part of that blessing would be the giving to him of a people that descendants, numerous descendants would come from Abram and those people would be given a land upon which to dwell.

And so we have summarized this blessing by saying that God is going about the business of creating a people for himself and putting them in a place so that they and that place would be dedicated to the praise of God.

That's what God is doing throughout these chapters. And as he records the various events that unfold after the giving of that promise, he's demonstrating his own faithfulness.

Another aspect of the promise is that those who bless Abram would be blessed by God. Those who curse Abram, those who come against Abram would in fact be cursed by God.

And so as the story of Abram unfolds, we are seeing God being faithful to his promises both to bless Abram and to bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse Abram.

[11:04] So broadly, we might say the main point of this chapter is the same thing as the main point of chapter 12 and chapter 13 and the chapters to follow. But more specifically, I think we can narrow it down and we can see a more specific point to this chapter as it stands out from the other chapters.

And I think the specific point of this chapter as it relates to that broader theme is answering the question, how will Abram, who has been given great promises by God, who has been blessed by God, how will he, as he lives in obedience and not in disobedience as we saw him in the second half of chapter 12, but as he lives in obedience to God and as he lives the kind of life that would be pleasing to the Lord, how is he supposed to relate to and interact with all the peoples that surround him?

Because we're never alone in the world, are we? We're always having to deal with other people and Abram has to do the same thing. We are no different. We can't run from the world and create our own little private enclave where we don't have to deal with anybody except other Christians.

That's been tried multiple times throughout church history. There have been monks who have established monasteries out in the desert or in the middle of a forest somewhere to try to hide away from the world and that has never worked.

That has never been successful. There have been entire communities of Christians who've tried to isolate themselves from the rest of the world. We see that today. We see various groups of the Amish and others who have made a very real attempt to separate their community from all the other communities of the world.

[12:44] But at the end of the day, that is never successful. Most importantly though, I don't believe that that's how God would have his people to interact with the world. I don't think that God's desire is for us to completely wall ourselves off and separate ourselves from the world.

I believe, as the Scriptures reveal to us, that we are supposed to interact with the world around us. That we are supposed to be connected with people in the world around us.

And those connections will vary. You will have a different kind of connection with one group of people than you will with another group of people. And all that will be determined by your commitment to God Himself.

In fact, I think the driving force of Abram's decisions in this chapter has to do with the way that others are related directly to him and the promises that God has given to him.

What we see Abram carrying out is a response to God's promise to bless those who bless him and curse those who curse them.

[13:49] And we see in addition to that, Abram's continuing concern and his continuing commitment to Lot, his nephew. I think we see in that an application of a later command that we find in the Torah to love your neighbor.

Over and over the Torah tells us, love your neighbor. Jesus repeats that command. The Apostle Paul repeats that command. James repeats that command. And so we are seeing throughout this chapter both Abram's response to God's blessing and cursing of others as they relate to him and Abram's loving of his neighbor in the way that he treats Lot.

Not only here, but in the chapters to follow. Every time Lot is brought up, Abram has a unique sort of relationship that we might describe as that's how you should treat someone that you care about and that you love.

So let's take a look at the text and see if we can't come to a better understanding of what it looks like to be in the world and to have connections with people who are not necessarily faithful to the same God to which you have committed yourself.

to be in the world and have those connections and yet to be separated out from the world and distinct from the world as Abram clearly is throughout this chapter and throughout the entire story of Abram.

[15:05] Now the first thing that we need to see though is we need to see the setting and the situation. We need to have perhaps a better understanding of what's actually happening as these events unfold.

And so as I did a few weeks ago, I made a map for you so you could sort of understand where these different people are coming from. Do we have that map? Oh, there it is. Okay. And so what I want you to see in this map is both the location of some of these places and these kings that are mentioned but also the difference in size and scale.

On the left side of the map, you can see that there's a red circle labeled the Dead Sea Cities and that's a general area. In fact, it's the best guess of scholars as to where the five cities that are mentioned, Sodom and Gomorrah, which you may have heard of, along with the others that are mentioned along with them, that's the best guess of scholars as to where those cities are located and all of them would have been inside of that little red circle.

Now the four kings that are mentioned as having battle with these Dead Sea kings actually come primarily from the east. You can see the greener area there.

That's showing you what's often called the Fertile Crescent. Fertile Crescent because it's shaped like a crescent and because you have these rivers, the Jordan on the left side running from the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea and then you have the other great rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates that are watering these areas so that those areas are fertile but the area in the middle is nothing but desert.

[16:36] It's wasteland. And so this is often called the Fertile Crescent. And for just modern reference, when you look and you see the nation of Elam right there, Elam sits very close to where modern day Iran is.

And then you have Shinar, which sits where modern day Iraq is. And so these countries are in significant locations. But I want you to notice how large those areas are.

And of course they're approximate. They didn't draw precise boundaries the way that we often do today. They're approximate. That's why you've got these ovals there. But I want you to look at how large those are as compared to this little bitty circle that represents the cities of these Dead Sea kings.

And the other two nations that are mentioned are actually unknown to us. We don't know precisely where they are. You can look and see these kings as they're mentioned. You have in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar.

This is verse 1. There's Shinar. You have Ariel, king of Elasser. And we don't really know where Elasser is located. And then of course, Keter-la-omer of Elam. We know where that is. And then finally, Tidal, king of Goyim.

[17:42] That's an interesting phrase because Goyim simply means the nations. It's most likely not the name of any particular nation at all. It's probably the name that was just given to a designated larger group of city-states that perhaps banded together at times, much like these Dead Sea kings have banded together.

And that may have been located further north on the map or it may have been located to the northwest in more modern-day Turkey, what would have been at one point later in history from the time period that we're looking at, ancient Greece.

It may have been some nations around there. We don't really know. But the point that I want you to notice is that there is a vast geographical distance, at least in terms of that world in those times, and there is a vast difference in the size of these nations as they are drawn up together.

And what we are seeing as we see these events described is very, very typical of the relationships between city-states and nations at the time of Abram.

There's nothing that we see in here that would stand out and we would go, well, that's really weird. No, everything is fairly typical. And so what's described for us in the first few verses are two separate groups, two coalitions.

[18:54] You have what we can call the kings from the east, Shinar and Elam and these other two nations. And then you have what we're going to designate as the Dead Sea Kings over here. Two different coalitions.

But one coalition is far superior in power and might than the other. And in fact, they have subjugated the smaller city gates to them. What we learn by detail in the text itself is actually that Keder Laomer, the king of Elam, was actually over.

He had conquered and was receiving a payment, that is, some sort of tribute, some sort of payment of tax, from these Dead Sea cities. So at some point in time, Keder Laomer, or perhaps one of his predecessors, had taken their army around the Fertile Crescent, had marched down through what we call the land of Canaan, or the land of Palestine, and had conquered these kings.

And rather than destroy their cities, he said, I'll let you live. All you have to do is every year, you send me X amount of money. You send that to me, and you will be okay.

Sometimes in these type of agreements, there would also be some benefits to the conquered nations. At times, the conquering nations would say, I want you to be subject to me, and not only will I not destroy you, but if you send the tribute that you're to send every year, then I will also guarantee you protection from other nations.

[20:17] After all, you have the kingdom of Egypt down southwest of Palestine, of the land of Canaan. They're always a threat. And so the king of Elam could always very easily say, I'll protect you from them, and from myself by the way, if you will give me my yearly payment of money.

It's not all that unlike the mob. It's not all that different than the mafia, who will guarantee protection to a business from any other, I guess, criminals or bad folks.

But if they don't make the payment, then they're going to need protection from the gangsters themselves. It's not really unlike that. But what might be surprising to you is that these kind of arrangements and these kinds of agreements between nations were most of the time referred to as a covenant.

Now that's a word that's going to matter greatly to us as we approach chapter 15 in a couple of weeks. It's a word that matters if you're going to understand the Old Testament and even the Bible as a whole.

You need to understand what a covenant is. And the word covenant is normally used to describe these kinds of relationships between Keder Laomer and these Dead Sea kings.

[21:29] This kind of agreement, this kind of contract that they make. You fulfill your part of the bargain and I'll fulfill my part of the bargain. And in fact, as we read through this story, as we move to the next section of the story, when Abram finally comes on the scene, we find that Abram has himself entered into a very similar agreement with some of those who lived nearby him.

I want you to see this so that you can see the language for yourself. Jump down to verse 13. Then one who had escaped from this battle that we'll talk about in a moment, came and told Abram the Hebrew who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and Oner.

So we have three people introduced here. We have Mamre, Eshcol, and Oner. Three brothers. Apparently they've got influence. They're probably wealthy men.

And so we are told that they were allies of Abram. But literally what it says in the original language is that they had a covenant with Abram. They had entered into a covenant with Abram.

These kinds of relationships, these kinds of treaties, these kinds of coming together by various groups of people were very, very common in the ancient world.

[22:44] And the reason why I want you to notice them here is because we will see in a couple of weeks a very big difference between the covenant that God makes with Abram and the kinds of covenants that we're seeing here in Genesis chapter 14.

God's covenant that He makes with Abram and the previous covenant that He's made in Genesis with Noah in Genesis chapter 9 are altogether different. Yes, it's a kind of contract.

Yes, it's a kind of agreement for protection and blessing and provision. But it's entirely one-sided. God doesn't extract a payment from Abram. He doesn't require a payment from Noah for him to keep his end of the deal.

He simply makes a unilateral promise and enters into a covenant, a treaty with Abram and previously with Noah saying, I will do my part. And there is no part for God's people to play in that.

Foreshadowing and looking ahead, of course, to the reality that we are not saved and we are not guaranteed our share in the blessings that God has promised His people because of anything that we do.

[23:49] We have nothing to perform and do on our side of the agreement between us and God for salvation. He has done all of it in and through Jesus. And we merely trust and enter into the covenant with Him.

And we are rescued and delivered and guaranteed blessing and protection and provision by God Himself. But here in chapter 14, these are the typical covenants that you would have seen between nations.

But something breaks down. There is a problem here. There is an interruption in the covenantal agreement between Keterliomer and the Dead Sea kings. Take a look there and you'll see in verse 4.

Twelve years they, that's the Dead Sea kings, twelve years they had served Keterliomer. But in the thirteenth year, they rebelled.

So they stopped sending payment. It's not as if they probably didn't send him a note saying, hey, we're in rebellion. There was probably nothing that happened other than the fact that they did not send the yearly tribute to Keterliomer, which explains the delay in his response.

[24:58] Twelve years they served him. In the thirteenth year, they didn't do anything. And it takes until the fourteenth year for him to do anything. And in the fourteenth year, Keterliomer and the kings who were with him. So apparently he's also got a covenant agreement with these other kings.

They are with him. That is, if he goes out to battle, they have agreed, we will go with you. And likewise, if they had to fight an enemy, he would have gone with them. This is another kind of covenant agreement that we're seeing here.

The kind of typical contract between nations and kings that existed in those days. So he goes out and the kings who were with him, those three kings, they go with him. And they, can you bring the map back up real quickly, Dylan?

And so they would have marched around. Let's see if we can get it. There it is. They would have marched around following the roads that more or less followed the path of this fertile crescent. They would have gone north and then they would have headed west.

And then they would have come down south through the land of Canaan. And as they were going along, these armies were racking up incredible victory on their way to confront the Dead Sea kings.

[25 : 58] There's a point to all of this. Moses, in recording these victories that these kings achieve on their way down south through the land of Canaan, he's trying to show us the might and power of these eastern kings.

We're to be, by the time we arrive at Abram going to battle against them, we are to be almost in awe of the power of these eastern kings. It might not be as easy for you to see simply reading through, but there are a couple of things that we can point out that may help us to see the enormity of their accomplishments.

So, for instance, we're told that as they come along, they defeated, this is verse 5, they defeated the Rephaim in Ashtaroth Karnaim, the Zuzin in Ham, and the Emim in Shavah, Shavah Kiryataim.

All of these peoples are moving from north to south. That's the direction of the campaign of the eastern kings. But these are not your ordinary, average people groups.

The Rephaim, that's a term that is used to describe the giants that we find appearing here and there throughout the Old Testament. These are not ordinary warriors.

[27 : 08] I want you to imagine for yourself an entire tribe of Goliaths. That's what they're dealing with. And there seems to be no problem. There's no mention of a difficult battle.

They march through and they simply defeat them. It's not a problem for them. But there are other groups. The Zuzim are in all likelihood another race of giants that lived in the land.

Probably a branch off of the Rephaim. And they are defeated as they make their way down. The Emim in all likelihood are another race of giants and they are defeated on their way down.

And then there are some more, slightly more well-known groups of people. The Horites in the hill country of Seir. And then finally, we come down in verse 7 to the Amalekites and the Amorites who are mentioned much more frequently throughout the Old Testament.

This is important because these eastern kings are demonstrating their power and might as they march toward a confrontation with their former covenant partners who they are now coming to defeat and destroy and put them under submission once again.

[28 : 14] By the time we arrive at the Dead Sea Kings coming to meet them out in an open field of battle it's almost laughable. I mean these kings rule over vast territories and they've come together and they've defeated very great enemies to the north of these Dead Sea Kings.

And these Dead Sea Kings are not the same kind of kings as the eastern kings. The Dead Sea Kings are more like mayors. They're just over a particular city and the little bit of surrounding country land where those who supplied food for the city would have raised sheep and crops.

That's all they're over. They don't rule over a vast domain. These cities are not even very far from one another. They're fairly closely clustered together if scholars have rightly guessed their approximate locations.

They're not far from one another. Which means that they're not large, vast cities. These are nothing compared to some of the larger cities that existed in the ancient world.

And so by the time you arrive, them actually going out on the battlefield to meet the eastern kings, it's almost laughable. You ought to be thinking, what are you doing? Why did you rebel?

[29:25] And why are you out on a battlefield to try to face these guys? This is not going to go well. And it doesn't. The account of the battle is fairly quick and fairly to the point.

We have the list of the kings in verses 8 and 9 and then the battle itself in verse 10. Now the valley of Sidim was full of bitumen pits. The valley of Sidim would have been very, it would have been right around the Dead Sea, near the middle of the Dead Sea.

Full of bitumen pits. That's tar pits. Okay? That's what it's full of. Those are all over the place over there. Probably much more numerous at this time than they are today, but there are some still today. It was full of bitumen pits.

And as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, see no battle account, right? You even hear a battle account? Was there even a real battle fought? All we know is they go to the battlefield and then they run away.

For all we know, they may have seen the army of the eastern kings and just took tail and run. There's no real battle to be fought here. And they're running and they're in such a desperate way to get away that some of the soldiers that belong to these kings fall into these pits.

[30:31] That's not something you do if you're out for a leisurely stroll. They're running for their lives. They're afraid. And so they fall into these pits as they just kind of chaotically run away.

Verse 11, So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions and went their way. Interesting. Nothing in this account is shocking other than the fact that the Dead Sea kings were actually brazen enough to rebel and then dumb enough to actually step on the battlefield.

Everything else is just as you would expect it to be in the ancient world. There's nothing surprising here. The turn in the story comes in verse 12.

They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother who was dwelling in Sodom and his possessions and went their way. These eastern kings have done everything that kings in the ancient world should have done to protect what was theirs.

They've made, in terms of strategy, they've made no mistakes. They've done everything that they ought to do. But we know, as the readers of the book of Genesis, we know, as those who've been tracking along with Abram, and we have seen the closeness of Abram and Lot, Abram caring so much for his nephew that when there's a disagreement between their herdsmen, he says to Lot, choose the place where you want to go.

[31:55] You take the good land. I'll take what's left. We know that Abram loves his nephew Lot. And so as we're reading this story in the context of Genesis, when you see that, when you see that they also took Lot, you know it's not just an afterthought.

You know that something serious has occurred here that's about to change the destiny of these kings. Verse 13, Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew.

Again, he's made to stand out. He's the Hebrew. He's not like the people around him. He's not like these invading kings. He stands out and he's different from them. They came and told Abram the Hebrew who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and Oner.

They were his allies. So he's not alone. He's got three allies with him. When Abram heard that his kinsmen had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men born in his house, 318 of them, and they went in pursuit as far as Dan.

Now Dan is a bit to the north. It's in the northern part of the land of Canaan. In fact, that's a much later name for the region. It comes from the tribe of Dan. It's a much later name that's inserted here so that the people of Israel could picture in their heads where these things are actually happening.

[33:09] But he pursues. He goes. In other words, the army of Keter Laomer and his allies, they've come. They've accomplished everything they wanted to accomplish. They've got some loot. They've got some slaves.

They're going to head back. Point well made. So they're headed back north. Abram hears that they have his nephew Lot for whom he has a great care and concern. And he immediately takes his 318 trained men.

How well were they trained? We don't know. What was the nature of their training? We don't know. It would all be speculation to say. All we know is that they are in some sense trained for battle and trained for war to engage in these sorts of conflicts.

And so he goes and we find out later toward the end of the chapter that his allies go with him and they go to engage these kings. Now if we were merely reading this part of the story in the way that we read the other parts of the story.

In other words, if we merely viewed Abram and his allies according to their size, according to their experience, the way that we view the Dead Sea kings, then we would think this is a foolish thing for him to do.

[34:13] 318 trained men. Great, Abram. I hope that your allies have a whole lot more because you're facing off against armies who routed everyone on their way here. They've taken down cities and tribes of giants with no problem.

They put the Dead Sea kings, five actual kings of cities, on the run. And you're going to chase after them? Now if we were treating Abram the way we treat every other person in this story, we would say, that's foolish, Abram.

But what we know about Abram is he has the promise. And we know that he is a faithful God. Those who bless you I will bless. Those who curse you I will curse.

So it's not simply Abram who pursues them. It's Abram and his God who pursues them. And the outcome then becomes quite predictable. Notice what happens.

Verse 15. And he divided his forces against them by night. He and his servants and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah north of Damascus. Now we bring the map back up. I put Damascus on the map because we know where it's located with some certainty.

[35:18] And so you can get an idea of the distance that he covered and how far he pushed them north. I mean, he's chasing them out of the land of Canaan. He's chasing them away as far north as he can.

And they're actually on the run. They have been. They put the Dead Sea kings on the run and now they themselves by Abram and his allies and his trained men, they have been put on the run.

In fact, so successful is Abram's campaign that we're told in verse 16 that he brought back all the possessions and he brought back his kinsmen Lot with his possessions and the women and the people.

He conquered them. He took back everything that they had taken, all the possessions, all the gold and all the silver and all the slaves that they had taken. He is able to recover.

That's utter defeat for these kings. And it's inexplicable apart from the miraculous intervention of God and the faithfulness of God to his promise made to Abram.

[36 : 18] These kings engage in battle with Abram and immediately the curse of God comes upon them and they flee northward because they are defeated by Abram and his small force and his allies.

This is an incredible story that, as I said, demonstrates for us once again the faithfulness of God to his promises. But one of the things that I think we ought to take note of as we've walked our way through this story is that Abram relates to these different individuals and groups in different ways.

He relates to Lot as one whom he loves dearly. He relates to Lot as Lot's kinsman, one whom he cares about greatly. He relates to the Dead Sea Kings as one who's come along to save them and to rescue them and to get their things back.

He relates to the Eastern kings as their enemy and he opposes them and he chases after them. But there's someone else that we need to see that he relates to.

And in fact, there is almost a comparison presented for us in the last bit of the chapter between two of the kings and how Abram relates to them.

[37 : 33] Jump all the way down to verse 17. I want you to see this. After his return from the defeat of Keder Laomer and the kings who were with him, once Abraham's done all that he needed to do, we're told the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh, that is the king's valley.

So that would have been just west of the Dead Sea that was on our map. So now we are sort of in the heart of the southern part of the land of Canaan. The king of Sodom comes out to meet Abram.

But then someone else comes. And Melchizedek, the king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. Now pause for a moment. What you need to know, first of all, about this individual.

Salem is most likely the city of Jerusalem. Yerushalom. And here it's Shalom. Peace. It simply means peace. So Melchizedek is the king of peace.

That's what he's called here. And then he's also, his name itself means the king of righteousness. So whatever else we might say about Melchizedek, next week as we take a closer look at him, we need to notice that he stands out from all of the other kings that have been mentioned.

[38 : 48] He's not like them. He's different. He's righteous and he's the king of peace. And more than that, we're told he was priest of God Most High.

Here's someone outside the family of Abram, not a Hebrew, not related to Abram in any way, who yet maintains some sort of relationship with God, so much so that he could be called a priest of the God Most High.

But most importantly is what he does. Verse 19, And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram by God Most High. Melchizedek's first words to Abram are, Blessed be Abram.

Those are his first words. I mean, could you any more clearly belong to the class of those who bless Abram and therefore deserve a blessing from God? You could not. Contrast that with the king of Sodom in verse 21.

And the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me. Those are his first words. Give me. Melchizedek comes to offer a blessing to Abram. The king of Sodom comes to obtain something from Abram.

[39 : 59] Give me what belongs to me. Give me the persons. You can keep the goods. Give me the persons for myself. But Abram replies, I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you say, I have made Abram rich.

He won't take it. He will not take the spoils of war because now Abram has arrived at a place in his life where he understands God is the one who provides for him.

He will not accept these. They are not his. And he does not want the king of Sodom or anyone else at this point in time to be able to stand and say, I gave Abram those things.

Granted, Abram came and defeated the kings and recovered the goods. But Abram wants Sodom, the king of Sodom, to have no right to ever say, I enriched Abram.

I gave Abram what was his. No, Abram says, No, God will provide for me. Take it all and go. Take it all except for one thing. He has given a tenth of everything in verse 20.

[41 : 08] He gave to Melchizedek a tenth of everything. Abram, before he enters into any kind of deal with the king of Sodom, before he even discusses anything, Abram takes all the spoils that he has and he gives a full tenth of it to Melchizedek, recognizing that Melchizedek is a rightful priest of God.

So what we're seeing here is a contrast between the way that Abram relates to Melchizedek and the way that Melchizedek relates to Abram and between the way that Abram and the king of Sodom relate to one another.

There's this difference that I think Moses wants us to notice. He wants us to pay attention. Abram has a different relationship with these two kings. Just as he had a different relationship with the kings of the north versus the Dead Sea kings, he had a different kind of interaction with them.

Now we're seeing a fundamentally different interaction. With one, he offers to him what he has and receives a blessing. To the other, he will receive nothing from him.

Go your way. I don't want anything of yours. Entirely different relationships. The question that we need to ask, I think, is what is it that is informing Abraham?

[42 : 22] What is it that is determining the way in which Abram relates to all of these different kings? What is it? I think it's found both in the words of Melchizedek and in the words of Abram as he repeats, in a sense, Melchizedek's words.

Look again at verse 19. Notice the way that Melchizedek phrases things. Blessed be Abram by God most high, possessor of heaven and earth.

And then back down to verse 22. I have lifted my hand to the Lord God most high, possessor of heaven and earth. These are the only two times in the entire Old Testament where this exact phrase occurs.

The possessor of heaven and earth. Now, if you are reading out of perhaps the King James version this morning or some of the other versions, you will notice that this is translated instead.

I think the New International Version has it translated this way. Instead of being translated the possessor of heaven and earth, those translate, or the King James goes with possessor, I'm sorry, but the New International Version goes with the creator of heaven and earth.

[43 : 31] And so do a handful of other English translations. Some of them render this word as possessor. Some of them render it as creator. Now that, just on the surface, is a good sort of lesson for you.

If you're going to do Bible study and you can't read Hebrew or Greek, and I'm assuming that we don't have a lot of Hebrew and Greek scholars in here. It's perfectly okay. But if you can't read the languages, then you need to have multiple translations side by side so that you can notice when there's something funny going on like this particular word.

word. This particular word is somewhat difficult to translate because in this context, its meaning is not entirely clear. It can take on the meaning of to create or to form or to make something.

And it can also, and most frequently, has the meaning of one who possesses something. That is, one who has bought something and is now the rightful owner of that thing. This word has that meaning most commonly, and it has the meaning of the maker, the creator occasionally.

But when it's used in reference to God, when God is the one who is called the possessor or the creator, it means either God has redeemed, that's the sense of to buy or possess, God has redeemed someone or something, or in fact, it takes on the shade of meaning of God is the creator of that person or that thing.

[44:50] Let me show you a couple of instances of this. I'll show them to you both in the psalm so that you can see that most of the time the context makes it very clear whether it means creator or possessor or redeemer or something along those lines.

Turn over to Psalm 74. Just briefly, I want to show you these two passages in the psalms. In Psalm 74, verse 2, we read this, Remember your congregation which you have purchased of old.

There's the word, purchased. You can underline that in your Bible. Well, what does it mean? Does it mean you created them of old or you redeemed them, bought them of old? Well, the next line shows us clearly what it means in context.

Which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage. This is Hebrew poetry and Hebrew poetry often works like this. It will say something in one line and then it will repeat the exact same thought in the next line choosing different words, different vocabulary.

Same idea, same basic thought presented side by side just so that we can get a more fuller, a more complete, and a more poetic picture of what's being described.

[45:52] So here we know with certainty that this particular word used to describe God is describing God as the owner or the one who has bought, the one who has redeemed his people. But now turn over to Psalm 139.

This might be a passage that you are familiar with. In Psalm 139 verse 13 the psalmist describes God's work of creating him. For you formed, and that's the word.

You can circle it or underline it. For you formed my inward parts and here's the following line that helps us to understand what's meant there. Does he mean you purchased, redeemed my inward parts?

You're the owner of my body? Or does he mean that you've created my body? The next line shows us you knitted me together in my mother's womb. So that clearly in Psalm 139 the idea is that of creating, shaping, and forming.

God is the creator. And in Psalm 74 the idea is clearly that of God as owner or redeemer or possessor of something. It's clear in the context. But when you arrive here, how are we to translate this?

[47:01] Is he the possessor of the heavens and earth, of all of the universe? That's what the phrase heavens and earth means. Is he the possessor of all things? Or is Melchizedek simply proclaiming that he is the creator of all things?

Why is it so unclear? And why do the translations differ? I think it's because when you come to a phrase like this, we begin to see why one word can have what looked to be on the surface very different meanings.

Because we see them converge in this usage. We can see that those two meanings of to possess and to create are not as far apart as we often assume. Because in reference to God who created everything, the heavens and the earth, he is also the rightful owner of everything.

He is the one who formed the world and shaped the world and spoke it into existence. But because of that, he is the rightful owner and possessor of all things. And those realities inform all of the decisions that Abram makes.

If the creator and owner of all things is the very one who has chosen me and then put his blessing upon me, that ought to change the way that I interact with the possessions that I have and the things that I acquire and with the people that are surrounding me.

[48:14] It informs every decision that he makes. So that when it comes time to divide up the spoils of war, Abram recognizes, I don't have to obtain these things in this way.

I don't need to be viewed as some sort of debtor to the king of Sodom or any of these other kings. These are their things. They can have them. Why? Because he's not worried about it. God supplies his needs.

God will enrich Abram. God has enriched Abram. Even in the midst of Abram's foolishness in earlier chapters, God has enriched Abram. God will do that. God will provide for him.

And he knows that. And he also knows that because God is the creator of all things, standing above all of these other kings, stands God, the true king, the true sovereign, over all kings.

And God's sovereignty and God's rulership over the world is what guides Abram's relationships with everyone else. At times, it means that Abram will be in an adversarial relationship with those in the world.

[49:20] And at times, it means that we will have an adversarial relationship with the world around us. At times, we will have to oppose people and movements and institutions because we have been bought by God, we have been formed and fashioned and shaped by Him, we have been redeemed through the blood of Christ and we now belong to Him.

And that is going to, at times, force us to take a stand and be opposed to forces around us, opposed to people around us, opposed to movements around us, opposed to political opinions around us, opposed to institutions around us.

We will have to, at times, stand in opposition and not move and not be changed because that opposition is not determined by our opinions, it's not determined by our preferences, it is determined by the very Word of God that informs us and shows us how to interact with the world around us in various types of circumstances.

Let me just say this real quickly, that if you are able without any real thought at all to always, when you go to the voting booth, to always check off a box simply because it has a particular letter next to it, without any thought as to what they represent or what they stand for on various issues, then it is entirely possible that it's not God's kingship over you that's determining your positions, but your commitment to some other organization rather than God Himself that determines that.

We should be vexed as we enter the voting booth because we are dealing with parties and people that at times oppose God and the things of God from every side of the aisle that there is and in the middle and all around.

[51:08] There is no group, there is no party, there is no politician that we can line up with all the time and if we do line up with them all the time, it means that they're determining our values and not the Word of God. We will have to stand in opposition even to those that in other areas we have agreed with at times.

We will have to. I mean, after all, Abram's relationship with the king of Sodom shifts in the middle. He's the protector of Sodom and then Sodom's coming and saying, give me, give me.

His relationship changes and that will happen for us at times. There will be times when we have to stand and defend others around us. There may be times when the defending of those around us is defending of our brothers and sisters in Christ, the defending of those upon whom we have set a special kind of love the way Abram has for Lot.

And so that will be more natural to us. That will be easier for us. It's always easier for us to stand up for those with whom we have a strong, loving relationship. Other members of the body of Christ.

It's always easier for us to stand up and stand alongside them. And at times we will have to do that. But sometimes we will have to stand next to and lock arms with people that we find ourselves in certain areas in disagreement with them.

[52:25] But on this issue and in this area we find we need to stand with them. Not because we have allied ourselves completely with them, but because our actions are determined by the Word of God and by the reality of who God is and what He is doing in the world.

And so we're not isolated out from them. We don't always stand alone all by ourselves. Poor Christians with no one in the world to relate to. There are times when God will call us to forge temporary alliances with other groups and other people for specific purposes.

And we shouldn't be surprised at that. That shouldn't shock us. I mean, in pursuit of opposing abortion, we're at times going to find ourselves linked up, arm in arm, with people that we disagree with on other issues, be they theological issues or moral issues, but we will find ourselves in agreement on this and so in this area we will stand arm in arm with them.

Or when it comes to the issue of racial justice, we will at times have to stand with people who on other issues we hear in deep disagreement with them, but on this issue we have to stand with them and oppose racism in our culture and around us.

These kinds of interactions with the world are going to happen for us just as they happen for Abram. They are going to. And there has to be not a commitment to a party and not a commitment to someone else's platform.

[53:55] There has to be within us a deep-seated commitment to what God says and who God has revealed Himself to be that ought to guide all of those decisions.

Jesus in coming into the world to redeem us out of the world did not do that in order that He might immediately remove us from the world. He left us here for a reason.

Turn over to John chapter 17 and we're going to close with this this morning. But I want you to see what Jesus has to say on this matter before we're done.

In John chapter 17 we find what is often called the high priestly prayer of Jesus. This is Jesus praying to His Father before He goes to the cross. And much of this prayer is Jesus praying on behalf of and interceding for His followers.

That's why it's called a priestly prayer. Priests intercede on behalf of others and that's what Jesus is doing. But we're going to jump in in the middle here to verse 14. And again Jesus is praying for and about His followers.

[55:00] He says, I have given them Your Word. I've given them something to guide them. I've given it to them. And something happens because of that. And the world has hated them because, now note this, they are not of the world.

In other words, we're separate and we're distinct just as Abram was. Abram's distinction was visible on the surface. He was a Hebrew. And throughout the history of the Old Testament people of God, their distinction from the rest of the world was an outward, oftentimes, physical distinction that they could see or a line of descent that they had.

Our distinction from the world as new covenant followers of Jesus has nothing to do with ethnicity or parentage. It has everything to do with the fact that Christ has chosen us out of the world and given us His Word and called Him to Himself.

And because of that, he says, the world has hated them because they're not of the world just as I am not of the world. I want you to notice here that our being not of the world is not because we want to stand out as different.

It's not because of any choice that we have made. It is because the one to whom we belong is not of the world. So we're not of the world. I do not ask, though, notice verse 15, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

[56 : 26] They are not of the world just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Here it is, the truth of God, the Word of God. Your Word is truth. It's central. It determines things for us.

And then notice verse 18, finally, as you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. We are not of the world, but He doesn't take us out of the world.

In fact, He sends us into the world. And those realities ought to inform and determine how we relate to the world around us at every turn.

We are not of the world and we are not to be uncritically aligned with the world. That is, with people who are not followers of Jesus. But we are not taken out of the world.

We are not separated from it and we are not to cloister ourselves out away from the world, but in fact, we are sent into the world to interact with the world and to be connected with people around us.

[57 : 25] And that is how God accomplishes His purposes through His people. Evangelism happens and people are saved. The gospel is proclaimed when the people of God are surrounded by people who need to hear the gospel.

If you don't have any relationships with any non-Christians, then something is amiss in your world. And I get it. I know how easy it is, especially when you are in the stage of life that I am in and many of you are in where you are raising kids and you are busy with all of that and you are active in church and most of your friends or church friends who have kids that are around your kids, I get it, that your world becomes isolated very easily, which is all the more reason to guard against that, not to simply throw up your hands and say it's just the way that it is.

Believe me, I understand. I am a preacher. Most of my week is spent alone in my office reading and pouring over books. I understand what it is to be isolated from the world and to at times have difficulty forming connections with non-Christians simply because I'm not around them.

but that means that we put greater effort because we've been sent into the world. Abram's not taken out of the world. The people in the land of Canaan are not immediately dismissed from Canaan and wiped off the face of the map the moment Abram arrives.

We are not kept apart from the world. Jesus doesn't intend it. We are not of the world and not corrupted by the world and we ought to stand out and we ought to be different because His word is truth and His word guides us and He has bought us and made us for Himself and yet because of that very reality we ought to be in the world and interacting with the world so that we might share the gospel and others might come to know the possessor of the heavens and the earth.

[59 : 07] Let's pray. do you