

Genesis 14:1-24 // The Way of the King

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[0:00] Please turn with me to page 14 of the Church Bibles and we will be in Genesis chapter 14,!

These kings went to war against Berah king of Sodom, Bersha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemebar king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela, that is, Zoar. All these latter kings joined forces in the valley of Sidim, that is, the Dead Sea Valley. For twelve years they had been subject to Cerdaleomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. In the fourteenth year, Cerdaleomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephites in Ashtaroth-Carnium, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emirates in Shave-Cariathium, and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran, near the desert. Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat, that is, Kadesh. And they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazazon Tamar. Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, the king of Bela, that is Zoar, marched out and drew up their battle lines in the valley of Sidim against Cerdaleomer, king of Belaam,

Tidal, king of Goyim, Aramaphil, king of Shinar, and Arioch, king of Eliasar, four kings against five. Now the valley of Sidim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of them fell into them, and the rest fled to the hills.

The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their food, then they went away. They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Ishkol and Anir, all of whom were allied with Abram.

[2:50] When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night, Abram divided his men to attack them, and he routed them. Pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus, he recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions together with the women and the other people. After Abram returned from defeating Cerdaleomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh. That is the king's valley. Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth, and praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand. Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

The king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself. But Abram said to the king of Sodom, With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord God Most High, creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, I made Abram rich. I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me, to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share.

Well done with all those names, David. Thanks very much. Let's pray as we look at Genesis 14 together. Father, I pray that through the gift of your spirit, that you would quiet in our hearts and minds.

As we look of these stories from long ago, we are looking at the same God who speaks to us now through your son and through your spirit. Would you help us to hear what you have to say to us tonight?

Of the goodness of who you are and the fullness of what it means to have a king who holds all things together. I ask that in Jesus' name. Amen. So as Andrew said at the start in our evening services, we're looking at the life of Abraham through Genesis. But more than that, we're not just

looking at Abraham as an example.

[5:30] We're looking at what the Apostle Paul calls in the letter to the Galatians, the gospel in advance. And he says in Galatians chapter 3, which will come on the screen in a second.

He says, And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles as in those not known by God, by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed.

And the story we're seeing is God is starting to create a new people who will be different from all the surrounding nations about them. Not because they are better than all the other nations, but because they belong to God. They are blessed in order that they can also become a blessing to the nations about them. God is changing people and taking them. And this all starts with God's call on Abraham in chapter 12 to be the beginning of this new people.

Now, as a man of a certain age, I predictably love Anthony Bourdain. Does anybody know who Anthony Bourdain is? All my cultural references are probably like four people. Anthony Bourdain for elder millennials is like the celebrity chef who went around the world, went to places nobody else would go, and ate incredible food.

He's an incredibly complicated man, born out in how his life even ended. And I went recently to see this film, Tony, which came out a couple of months ago, last month, sorry.

[6:53] And the film looks at the beginning of his life, his early years, and it shows this kind of young, raw, arrogant man who ends up in a kitchen, and how the kitchen becomes a kind of place that shapes him.

And as he begins to get shaped, he discovers not simply what he can do, which is cook, but you start to see the influences that are drawn on his life, shaping the man he will become for good and for bad.

And one of the things I loved about the film is you see the different influences that are pulling on him in the different direction, between his creativity, the things he's been blessed with, his natural gifts, but also his ego and his self-destructive tendencies.

And one of the things I love about the film is I think it's asking a really basic question, like how do we become the people we become with the things God has given us? This film explores the question of the thing that we all have to face, because we're all constantly being shaped by things around about us.

Our culture shapes us, our background shapes us, the things we experience shapes us, and perhaps most of all, the things it shapes us are how we understand power and influence and the good things in the world that we can clamber after.

[7:58] And one of the questions I think is underneath Genesis 14, because one of the thrusts of the Genesis story of Abraham being a gospel in advance, is blessed to be a blessing, is what's becoming of this man Abraham, who's the center of faith.

Because Genesis 14 is a story full of kings, kings are fighting, cities are being conquered, people are being captured, and it's a world where power is everything, and violence is simply how the world works.

And right in the middle of this world is Abraham, called by God, who God has made promises to, and God has said to him that through him, the nations of the world will be blessed.

But Abraham finds himself in a world full of conflict, violence, and competing powers, pretty similar to our world today. And Genesis 14 is asking, as a lot of Genesis does, is how does Abraham become a blessing in a world like that?

We're going to work through Genesis 14, there's an outline in your notice sheet if you want to follow along with that. But we'll follow three simple points. We're going to start with verses 1 to 12. And I am going to take the liberty of not trying to repeat all these names, because David did an amazing job, I won't want to undermine that gift he has given us tonight.

[9:07] So the chapter, the last chapter in chapter 13 we were looking at last week, Abraham and his nephew Lot are becoming so wealthy, and God has blessed them so much, that the land they're in can't support everything they've been given.

Which leads to a conflict between them. So Abraham gives Lot the first choice of where he's going to go. And as we were hearing last week, Lot chooses, he's like drawn towards wealth and Sodom, which we're told is explicitly evil.

And that's what he goes to choose. And afterwards, God says to Abraham, he reaffirms his promises to Abraham, that he was still going to bless him and his descendants. And then there's a bit of a shift of gears into Genesis chapter 14, which opens with something quite different, with all these kings at war.

We're introduced to all these rival alliances in different regions. A map is going to come up. This is my attempt at making a map. This took me so long, I'm not even sure it's correct.

But we're going to go with it. I don't know how many reservoirs I dried using AI to try and make a map, but here we are. You have these four kings from the east and these five kings from the area around Sodom.

[10 : 12] And you can look into it more, but none of these guys are good guys. This is not a case of good guys versus bad guys. Like one of their names means evil, another means wickedness, another means father hater, another means destruction, another means devourer.

These are not like, yeah, good guys versus bad guys. But these aren't kings, maybe in the way we think, of kings of giant nation states. They're kings that ruled Saul's city states.

So they are gathering all the way. They often made alliances with each other to band together in order to kind of seize more land. So what is happening in Genesis chapter 14 verses 1 to 12?

Essentially, the five kings from around Sodom, that's those there, they have been submitted under the ruler of, I don't always say how you did it, Chedorlamander is how I've been calling them, king of Elam.

And after 13 years, they decide to band together and rebel against their king. So, he then gathers a pile of allies together and they all essentially go to war with each other. The eastern alliance goes on a campaign, defeating various peoples and territories along the way.

[11 : 19] Eventually, the five kings meet the four kings in the valley of Sidon and the five kings are defeated. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were told at the end, they run away and they get caught in tar pits.

Their possessions are all taken, the people are captured, and along the way, Lot's Abram, Lot, Abram's nephew, also gets captured. So why are we being told all this detail about lots of kings making alliances?

Well, as I said, I don't think you're supposed to read this as like good guys versus bad guys. This is showing us the deeply fractious and broken world where power and violence and self-interest are constantly colliding.

This is the world of Genesis 11. In fact, this is the first mention we have of war in the Bible. And this hasn't come out of nowhere. If you're following the biblical story, this is the result of sin in the world. Genesis 1 and 2 starts with this beautiful picture of creation. Humans at harmony with their God, with one another, with their work and with themselves. The way the world is supposed to be as Jack was praying.

[12 : 25] And one of the words they use in the scriptures about what that reality was like is peace, shalom, a word we'll think about later. Then Genesis 3 happens. Humanity distrusts God's goodness, rejects his authority, decides that they'll define good and evil from themselves.

And what follows is the unraveling of all the good things God has made. Humans hide from God. Brothers turn against brothers. Violence fills the earth. And by Genesis 11, you get the story of the Tower of Babel.

So humanity's desire to make a name for themselves, to make themselves God, to protect themselves, ends in more fractiousness, more division, and more violence. It's trying to paint a picture of sin not just being bad things we happen to do, but something that is so insidious it affects every single aspect of reality, constantly causing division, constantly causing selfishness and harm. It produces radical brokenness in every direction. But the biblical story also has its littered throat up until this point. Something else running alongside that narrative. That's the story of God's grace and his goodness and his sovereignty.

God clothes Adam and Eve. He protects King. He rescues Noah and his family. He gives a covenant over all of creation to protect it. The world is broken, but God has not abandoned us.

[13 : 43] So while we read of these kings at war, just fighting and capturing one another, we're also seeing in the messiness of history, we're seeing God's saving purposes move forward through Abram.

A world fractured by sin, a world driven by power in the wrong sense, and a world marked by violence. And it's into that world, Abram's called to bless. He's called to bless these people at this time.

And right in the middle of it all, Abram gets the news that his nephew has been captured. So as we move into verses 13 to 16, we see how Abram reacts.

So Lot has chosen to live near Sodom. Sodom has been defeated. He's naturally been taken and captured. And it says in verse 14, Another map.

I thought I was making one. I may as well make two. So Abram chases these victorious kings north. He has his own kind of battle we'll see in a second. And he pursues to rescue his nephew.

[14:52] And preparing for this, one of the things that was struck by, and I was also thinking about it after this morning's service, was one of the things Abram does not do, he doesn't look at Lot's decisions in the previous chapter to be like, well, he's pursued wealth and he's gone towards Sodom.

One of the things that Lot, as Abram does not do, is say, well, that's Lot's problem. He chose to do that. He chose to put himself in that situation. He got himself into this mess. He's made his bed, so just let him lie in it.

This is the consequences of bad decision making. And that's not caused the war, but he put himself in the battle line. And when I was thinking about that, I'm like, oh yeah, because that's actually, unfortunately, sometimes the way I can react when I see certain people make certain decisions.

I'm like, well, what do you expect? That's what they did. That's what they were like. In fact, sometimes even as a culture, I think we could even enjoy seeing the downfall of other people who make decisions we don't like.

Whether it's a celebrity, fall from grace, or someone's plans collapse who we don't like, or whether we look at whole groups of people and reduce their brokenness down to the consequences of their own choices.

[15:58] Regardless of what they do or why, this is not the attitude of the people of God is to just ignore that, because it's not the attitude of God himself. Lot's situation, at least in part, is the consequence of some of his choices.

And yet Abraham goes after him, because that's a picture of what grace is like. Grace always pursues and chooses to move towards those who are lost. Grace doesn't begin with, do they deserve this rescuing?

Grace sees someone who's lost, who needs saved, and moves towards them. It's at the heart of the character of God. It's the power of beauty of who God is. I remember years ago, I was doing Connect, which is the Navigator's Internship Program.

And I was actually writing studies in Romans at the time. Romans 5, and you're doing that in roots. Romans 5 to 8, the beauty and power of God's love. Yeah, in my home life, there was like sort of addiction in our family.

And one of my parents was struggling really bad with addiction to the point where I've been very disruptive. That's a huge understatement. And my gran, who was dealing with a lot of it, she used to anger me because she would consistently move towards this person with love.

[17:07] I remember studying Romans and saying, you've got to just let her be the victim of her own choices. She'll never learn otherwise. And my gran, who is not an academic woman, said to me, that is not how love works.

You don't just love people based on what they do for you. You love to move towards those in need. I mean, talk about a moment of the Holy Spirit coming in and convicting me and kind of kicking me right in the heart in a good way. To be like, oh, that is not the kind of God.

If God did that with me, he would never move towards me. Grace, the heart of God, which is embodied by Abraham, moves towards this person who's lost and seeks to save. And the story continues and how he does it in verses 15 and 16.

During the night, Abraham divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions together with the women and the other people.

Abraham doesn't just rescue Lot, he rescues everyone who has been taken captive. This is blessed to be a blessing. He comes in and rescues and takes back.

[18:13] It doesn't just save Lot, he reclaims everybody. And we know that Abraham isn't alone. Verse 24 tells us that Anan, Ashkel, and Mamre joined him. And actually, as we're looking at this

passage, this man, this man who God has blessed to kind of come in and save and to rescue, he himself is accumulating more and more power and wealth.

He has his coalition. Abraham's a coalition. He has an army. He's starting to beat the kings that just beat the kings. This is becoming a powerful man. And a man of increased wealth, increased influence, and increased blessing that God has given him.

But what will he do with the things God has blessed him with? Because he could easily just become like one of the other kings in the ancient world. Actually, we're looking at kings in the morning. You see that a lot of the kings who are blessed by God do not choose to follow God.

Someone, will he become someone who uses his military success to accumulate more wealth and more power and influence for himself? Again, I was talking to Greg about this. Don't hear what I'm not saying.

This is not about power being inherently a bad thing. We all have power. We all have influence. It's the choice of what do we do with that? What does that look like when we are part of the people of God?

[19:26] The kings of Genesis 14 use power to secure for themselves, to expand their territory and make themselves great. This is the impulse you see at Babel.

We will make a name for ourselves. Me and you, we're not likely to be kings anytime soon, I don't think. But we have that same impulse. I definitely have that same impulse in my heart to seize control, to define reality and make myself great.

It's rooted to the heart of every human. Will Abraham do the same? Will he use it to be a blessing? Which sets us up for a kind of final encounter in this chapter because Abraham's about to meet two very different kings in verses 17 to 24.

So what comes next is a kind of slightly mysterious scene. So after Abraham returns, he meets these two very different kings that come to him. You have the king of Sodom and you have the king of Salem.

So first, the slightly mysterious Melchizedek who is now, if you keep in count, this is the tenth king we've met so far in this chapter. And we're not told much about him.

[20:31] His name means king of righteousness and he is described as both the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, which is an incredibly unusual combination to be both.

Now Salem is connected with Jerusalem, Jerusalem, but the name is also much more than just a place. That word Salem is also the word connected to Shalom, peace.

He's the king of peace, which is a place and the biblical concept. And the biblical idea of peace is not just there's no fighting anymore, that we just have walls up to kind of stop people fighting with him or it's the harmony and goodness you see of Genesis 1 and 2, of all things under God's rule and reign functioning the way they're supposed to be.

Now I'm not going to spend too much time talking about the identity of Melchizedek. Sorry if you're disappointed in that. There's a sermon in our series from Hebrews, Last Term, you can look at. But one of the reasons I'm not going to is because the passage doesn't actually really spend much time exploring who he is.

It's more what he does in the passage that's important. So what does Melchizedek do first? Well Melchizedek blesses Abraham bringing out bread and wine and sings him in verse 20, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth.

[21:45] And praise be to God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand. So this priest king comes out with blessing, meets Abraham and reminds Abraham that God is the one who has given him victory.

And Abraham's response? Abraham responds by giving Melchizedek a tenth of everything. And that's an early picture of where we see the concept of what we call tithing, giving 10% of something away.

And in doing this, Abraham is acknowledging and agreeing that his victory and blessing does ultimately come from God. Abraham would have easily looked and said, they're my soldiers, they're my army and I've got even more wealth.

But he agrees, he's like, yeah, this is God's victory. God has blessed, God has given. And he then blesses Melchizedek and he blesses God with the things he's been given. Because one of the things about blessing, when we use that word, biblical blessing is never supposed to end in the person that it's being given to.

Blessing moves, always goes on. He's been blessed in order to be a blessing. And the blessing isn't just things, the blessing isn't just influence, it's not the stuff, it's the source of the blessing itself, which is God, which both him and Melchizedek in this moment through maybe some form of early worship are engaging with and agreeing with.

[23:04] Then as this happens, the slightly, I don't know any better word for it, slightly tone deaf King Sodom re-enters the narrative. He's like looking on in all this and then he comes in in verse 21 and says, the king of Sodom said to Abraham, give me the people and keep the goods for yourself, which is pretty abrupt if you walked in and he just says something like that.

Now on the surface that may even sound a little generous. I'll tell you what, you keep that and I'll keep this and we'll work out a little deal between us. Culturally it's not. It's actually slightly offensive, I think, what the king of Sodom is doing here but more than that, I think Abraham clearly knows by how he responds that he's not going to join in with how the world works here.

The economy of the kings seem to be, you take that, I'll take this and we'll have a little agreement and Abraham refuses and instead Abraham says this, with raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God most high, creator of heaven and earth, that I'll accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal so that you will never be able to say I made Abraham rich.

Yes, he doesn't take, the suggestion is he kind of gives some of it back, he's going to take nothing, let alone credit from this guy who we'll read about later in other chapters. This is a really significant moment I think in Abraham's story.

Remember, it's just a few chapters ago, this is the guy who earlier in Genesis fled to Egypt, lied about his wife, put his wife in danger and hid. Now, we are seeing a man who is growing in faith.

[24:38] He's learning that he doesn't need to grasp or manipulate or compromise to secure his future. He can trust God because with Melchizedek he knows that God holds all things. God is the source of blessing and the source of strength and the source of power.

And that becomes important as we look through the rest of Abraham's story over the next few weeks as again and again Abraham is going to learn that blessing isn't something he grasps for himself but it's something that is given by God.

And that's why this final scene isn't just about Abraham meeting two random kings. It's a picture of two very different kingdoms. Sodom demands and takes.

Sodom offers wealth, creates obligation. Well, Kizadek is the priest king comes and blesses and gives. He's generous. He knows and trusts that God is the source of all blessing.

Abraham refuses to take part in the way that Sodom sees the world and instead he trusts God as the source of all provision and goodness. It is God who has called and saved and blessed Abraham to be a blessing.

[25:46] That's the promise we began with. This is a picture of the gospel in advance. He's changing this man as he's changing a nation as they reorientate how they understand the world not based on the chaos and the violence and the power and the wealth they see all around them but how God makes himself known to his people to call them to himself.

And just to end we're going to reflect a little bit on Jesus the ultimate priest king. So Abraham has been formed. He's been made in somebody new. He's learning that being a blessing by God isn't accumulating everything by yourself.

It's about becoming the kind of person through whom God can bless. Blessing is flow. And he's not finished yet. We're going to keep looking at the life of Abraham and how God interacts with him as a prototype of the kind of people of God.

That's the story of God's grace throughout the scripture. God doesn't simply save people so they can just simply believe something different. He saves and restores and transforms them into a whole new kind of people.

So all the other nations all the other people are looking and being like why is that the case? They don't point to themselves they point to a good God who said this is where we get this from this is stuff but this relationship.

[26:53] But this isn't just a story about Abraham becoming a man of influence and we just need to become people of good influence. This is a story of Abraham who's often called the father of faith. A man through whom God has promised that all the nations will be blessed through his descendants.

And ultimately Abraham's descendants God will send a completely different kind of king. The true and greater king. Psalm 110 verse 4 which is a prophetic Psalm about the coming Messiah

connects Melchizedek directly to the coming Messiah.

It says the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek this king who is a priest who's also a king of peace and a king of righteousness but he's also a priest of all these things and Psalm 110 connects these and in the New Testament particularly in Hebrews they take that thread and explicitly tell us this priest king is Jesus.

When you contrast Jesus as the king the king Jesus the priest king Jesus especially against the kings of Genesis 14 it shows so the kings of Genesis 14 essentially shows a broken world where you just operate in brokenness and sin and selfishness.

You seize power for yourself you secure it for yourself you defeat others. There's nothing like Jesus as a king. Jesus comes from the true king and not just shows him what he's like as a king but the kingdom of God itself.

[28:21] The king of kings does not use power to get people to serve him instead he uses his power to serve and to save. He doesn't conquer by violence he lays down his life. He doesn't grasp for power he rescues his enemies by laying aside his majesty to inaugurate a whole new kingdom.

And more than that Jesus is the ultimate king he doesn't just like come in and sort out warfare he defeats the very cause of all the problems in the world all the injustice that we experience sin and death by sacrificing his own life in a way that Abram could never do.

And he doesn't just rescue from dangerous situations through his resurrection he claims us as his own calling us children of God now bringing eternal peace shalom restoration in a way Melchizedek could never do.

He doesn't just give us an example of how to live he gives us his spirit that starts to change us from the inside out which changes our hearts becoming a new kind of person.

So what kind of people are we becoming is based on what kind of king we are following what kind of kingdom we really believe true blessing and true power and true authority lie. Melchizedek and Abraham constantly point back to God a good God who blesses and gives gives ultimately himself and says you're now blessed to be a blessing in the world.

[29:45] We either make ourselves kings which is in direct conflict to God or we follow the king who through God's saving grace changes us into people who look like the true saving king Jesus.

People who are shaped to be like their king. People who have been blessed to be a blessing. I'm going to pray and invite the band up and we're going to sing together. Amen. With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord God most high creator of heaven and earth that I'll accept nothing belonging to you to this world.

So we will never be able to say whatever we may think of in our lives that has made us rich. Instead we look to you God who makes us rich as rich or bound anything this world can offer.

You make us rich with the restoration of our lives from death and darkness into a whole new kingdom because of the king Jesus you have sent. Who the king Jesus who still reigns today over our lives and over your kingdom.

And I pray Lord that as we think about what it means for us to live in a place where darkness and competing powers are still very much present would you help us to know what it means to be people who always raise our eyes and see you as the source of all things good.

[31:06] I ask that in Jesus name. Amen.