

Text: Gen. 14:1-16

Title: "Pilgrims and Kings"

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Introduction: The history of Baptists is a history of the relationship between pilgrims and kings. English separatists fled persecution in England to Amsterdam under the leadership of John Smyth in the early 1600's. Smyth eventually disbanded his own church and joined the Mennonite Church with the majority of his followers. A minority of that church, however, understood that Mennonites believed some Gnostic and Pelagian heresies, so led by Thomas Helwys these 8-10 church members refused to follow Smyth into the Mennonite church, excommunicated Smyth with the other members who followed him, and returned to England in 1611 to establish the first English Baptist Church.

That little group was severely persecuted. Thomas Helwys was imprisoned after writing *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (1612). This work is sometimes described as the first English defense of the freedom of religion. In that work Helwys identified the first beast of Revelation as the Church of Rome and the second beast as the Church of England. In one copy of this work, Helwys wrote a note to King James (the namesake of the KJV Bible translation):

"Hear, O king, and despise not the counsel of the poor, and let their complaints come before thee.

"The king is a mortal man and not God, therefore has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual lords over them.

“If the king has authority to make spiritual lords and laws, then he is an immortal God and not a mortal man.

“O king, be not seduced by deceivers to sin against God whom you ought to obey, nor against your poor subjects who ought and will obey you in all things with body, life, and goods, or else let their lives be taken from the earth.

“God save the king” [David Beale, *The Mayflower Pilgrims*, 168-171].

History is full of examples of the meeting of pilgrims and kings. We have such a meeting in Genesis 14. The passage tells us of nine kings and two pilgrims, or “Hebrews” (v. 13, from the Hebrew word meaning *to pass over*, or *pass through*).

I will not try to repeat the names of the kings, but the two pilgrims are Abraham and Lot. The kings present a challenge for these pilgrims, and I want to notice some principles about life as a pilgrim in a world of kings from their example this morning.

I. Kings value earthly things; faithful pilgrims value the promises of God (vv. 1-11; review 13:14-18).

Illustration: Nelson Glueck is known as one of the leading Palestinian archaeologists of modern times, and he describes evidence he has found of the invasion described by our chapter as follows:

“The rebellion of the small kings of the cities on the east side of the Dead Sea against what must have been the extortionate rule of absentee suzerains was brutally crushed. This comparatively minor insurrection was thereupon

utilized as a pretext to settle old scores and to raid and ravage with unleashed ferocity for as much booty as could possibly be won. An older order was crumbling. From southern Syria to central Sinai, their fury raged. A punitive expedition developed into an orgy of annihilation. I found that every village in their path had been plundered and left in ruins, and the countryside laid waste. The population had been wiped out or led away into captivity. For hundreds of years thereafter, the entire area was like an abandoned cemetery, hideously unkempt, with all its monuments shattered and strewn in pieces on the ground" [Nelson Gluek, *Rivers in the Desert*, 72-73; quoted by Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 313-314].

Application: We quickly get the impression from this passage that being king is not all it is cracked up to be. Our passage describes a set of rulers that had poured their lives into obtaining earthly treasure and earthly power. By the end of the chapter, none of these kings have very much to show for all their ambition.

Living for earthly things is a waste of a life. The things of this world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, are all passing away (1 John 2:15-17). Being king can look glamorous and glitzy, but in the end it is bitter and empty if only spent on obtaining earthly renown, possessions, and pleasure.

The kings of our passage also provide for us an important contrast to the way Abram viewed the land (Gen. 13:14-18). God has promised his people that which the kings of the earth long for but can never have. The catch is that these promises are for a life to come.

This is what makes an earthly pilgrim different than an earthly king. The earthly pilgrim is willing to just pass through the world for now and to wait in faithful obedience for a reward that he cannot now see. Earthly kings care nothing for the promises of God because the deceitfulness of riches have choked out any value they might see in the Word of God (Matt. 13:22, Mark 4:19).

Are you living as a pilgrim for a reward that you cannot now see? Or are you determined like any earthly king to get yours now before it is too late? Rather than valuing earthly things, faithful pilgrims value the promises of God.

II. Kings offer false security; faithful pilgrims trust the Lord (v. 12).

Illustration: Presidential candidates sometimes take it upon themselves to offer people hope. One has written a book called *The Audacity of Hope*. The title of the book comes from a message by his pastor, Jeremiah Wright, of the same title. It was also the title of the speech he gave at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, by which he rose to national prominence.

That speech said in part, "In the end, that's what this election is about. Do we participate in a politics of cynicism or a politics of hope? John Kerry calls on us to hope. John Edwards calls on us to hope."

Application: Well, it turns out that John Kerry and John Edwards lost. So if in 2004 your hope was the hope that Barak Obama talked about in his speech, a hope that was bound up in Kerry and Edwards, your hope was severely disappointed. We need to be careful about choosing the objects of our hope, don't we?

I think Lot likely hoped for great things when he moved into Sodom. Ultimately, those hopes were dashed. Remember that in chapter 13 he had seen the well-watered plains and pitched his tent toward Sodom. Now in chapter 14 he is living there and placing his well-being in the hands of the king there. The king let him down.

We need to make sure that we are not placing our hope in kings of the earth, nor our well-being in the hands of the government or its politicians. How can we say, "I will not eat unless the government feeds me!" when God has said "And when ye pray, say 'Lord, You give us this day our daily bread'"? One of the lessons of this chapter is that the kings of the earth are not worthy of the reliance of the pilgrims of the Lord. Kings offer false security; faithful pilgrims trust the Lord.

III. Kings make alliances for political gain; pilgrims make sacrifices for their brothers (vv. 13-16).

Illustration: My brother Kent is also a pastor, and so I am especially blessed to have in him not only a brother, but also a co-laboring ally in a very special sense. Not everyone can say they have a brother like that. But even when a brother is not an ally, we love him more than our allies simply because he is our brother. Abrams relationship with Lot takes on some of these characteristics. Lot refuses to be Abram's ally, but Abram remembers treats Lot like a brother in some specific ways.

A. Abram remembered the difference between mere allies and brothers (vv. 13-14).

Application: Allies deserve our help because they are a help to us; brothers deserve our help because of the relationship God has given us with them.

Our relationship to one another in this family in Christ is not all about connecting with people who do something good for me. Nor is it so that the relationship ends when I'm not getting the help I need anymore. To the contrary, our relationship to one another is a function of our common bond in Christ. It is defined by what God has done to us.

We have the same Father. We are brothers. We should not treat one another like mere political allies that we can use for a while and then discard once we think that we are no longer receiving the help we should from them. Abram remembered the difference between mere allies and brothers, and so must we as faithful church members.

B. Abram risked danger because of the failure of his brother (v. 14).

Illustration: My dad used to say that we kids were consumers and that he was looking forward to the day when we became producers. Every time I do my taxes and look at the amount of money I'm sending social security now to help support my dad, I know that I have reached the goal he had in mind for me.

Application: There are two kinds of pilgrims in this passage – a consumer and a producer. The producer is the one who is accomplishing much for the Lord, and the consumer is the one who is a drain on those who are trying to accomplish much for the Lord.

Each of us needs to examine our lives and assess what side of this ledger we are on in the work of the ministry. Are we spiritual producers – those who are ready to help others with our lives like Abram was, or are we spiritual consumers – those who are always needing the rescue of others?

There are times when we need to bear one another's burden, but also times when we need to carry our own knapsack (Gal. 6:2-5). Producers are ready to bear the burdens of others, whereas consumers fail to pull their own weight as they should. In Abram's case in this passage, this readiness even meant risking danger and personal harm to compensate for a brother's failure.

C. God's reward was deliverance in support of Abram's care for his brother (vv. 15-16).

Application: Remember how Gideon had only 300 men with whom he defeated an innumerable host of Midianites. A similar thing happens here. What we have in this passage is nothing less than the miraculous victory that Gideon accomplished over the Midianites. God is pleased when we care for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and His miracle-working power anoints the church where this kind of care is taking place.

When there is division and unrest between brothers among God's people, the fullness of God's blessing goes missing as well. Kings make alliances for political gain; pilgrims make sacrifices for their brothers, and every sacrifice is remembered, rewarded, and blessed by a gracious and well-pleased God.

Conclusion: So as we look at our lives can we say we are endeavoring to be faithful pilgrims? It all starts with dethroning ourselves and allowing the Lord to be our King. Then we trust His promises and live for His reward. The fleeting earthly pomp, possessions, and pleasures of this world are quickly lost by those who live for them. Instead, may our prayer ever be, "Lord, make me a pilgrim, not a king."

“Make me a stranger on earth, dear Savior,  
Make me a stranger more like Thee.  
Help me keep my focus on heavenly treasures,  
And not on earthly things may it be.

“Lord, lead me onward as a pilgrim  
Bound for heaven never to roam.  
Make me a stranger on earth, dear Savior,  
Till I see my heavenly home.

“Lord, I’ve found myself loving earthly treasures:  
Simple pleasures taking your place.  
Nothing can measure to heavenly treasures:  
Hearing “Well done,” and seeing Your face.

“Lord, lead me onward as a pilgrim  
Bound for heaven never to roam.  
Make me a stranger on earth, dear Savior,  
Till I see my heavenly home.”

[“Make Me a Stranger” by Mac Lynch]

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*