

Whose Kingdom Come?

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[0 : 00] I wonder, did anyone think, as we read, that we might have got the wrong book? Anyone check? We were actually in Genesis.

Is this still the same story that we've been in? Because this chapter starts, isn't it, way up high with a kind of satellite view of the world. And last time, we finished right down on ground level.

Remember, Uncle Abram and his nephew Lot choosing where to build their lives. What plot of land will they have? Remember, Lot chose a land that God didn't promise, but that he saw would be, he thought, a blessing to him.

He lived by only what he could see in front of him. But God promised Abram a better land where he would bless him and his family and through his family would bless the whole world.

But he couldn't see it yet because he lived by faith. But faith in who? Faith in what?

[1 : 11] That is what our chapter this morning wants us to zone in on. And it does that by zooming right out from those two plots of land onto the world stage.

What do we see through the wide lens? Well, it's something like we might have watched in Narnia, Lord of the Rings, that kind of thing.

Anyone know the title of the final film in the Hobbit trilogy, the battle of the, what, five armies? Well, here are nine armies.

It's crazy, isn't it? It's epic. And in the middle of that is Abram. And so as we zoom back in from that wide angle view, back into a world of conflict, focusing in gradually, gradually on Abram, we are invited to see how God's family lives in a war-torn world, in a fallen world, where conflict is the air we breathe, the water we swim in.

Is there anyone in control? Is there anyone we today, as God's people, can trust in? Well, the clue is in the one king in this chapter who doesn't go into battle.

[2 : 37] In a world where conflict rages, where politics reigns, where people fight for control, we see that there is one king of peace. And the question Genesis wants us to ask ourselves today is, does our hope and strength then come from that king?

Of all the kingdoms of the world, kingdoms great and small, kingdoms far away and kingdoms closer to home, is his the kingdom that we long for and pray for to come?

Or are we looking today to the kingdoms, the powers, the politicians, the agendas of this world to come through for us, to win for us, to make it right?

I've got two points this morning to help us think through those questions together. Firstly, we see a world at war. Now, this time last year, if I had asked you where you would find cities like Mariupol, like Kersin, like Zaporizhia, I imagine that we wouldn't have any idea.

If I asked you which country is the capital of Kiev, you might have wondered why I was saying it wrong. Now, of course, we know that those cities are found in Ukraine.

[4 : 02] But how did we find that out? Imagine, like me, you didn't suddenly read the Wikipedia page on Ukraine. You didn't suddenly study a map of Ukraine.

I imagine, like me, you found that out because you heard the news that those places had been invaded, that they had been torn apart by war.

Now, I say that because this passage this morning might seem just out of this world. But distant, strange, ancient history. Perhaps as you read it, you thought, I have no idea where these places are, who these kings are, or what they want, what they're fighting for.

But isn't that how it always is when we hear of distant wars? How many of us could place those cities on a map of Ukraine?

How many of us have looked at a map of Ukraine? And yet, the names of those places, others, are now simply part of the background noise that fills our lives.

[5 : 05] Even if we've tuned out of the war, we can't turn off the noise. Because, friends, we live in a world where conflict surrounds us.

It's not countries at war, governments falling out, infighting, culture wars. Is that not all humming, humming in the background this morning?

Or the things that are never reported, conflict at work? Tension in our homes, falling out in our families.

Can you remember a time when you didn't know that there was conflict out there in the world or much closer, much more personally? As we pick up this morning in Genesis 14, the first thing that we need to do is collapse the 4,000 years that separates us and them.

It sounds like a long time, doesn't it? If you were to imagine 4,000 years stretched out on a timeline, if you were to read the history of those 4,000 years, it would take a long time.

[6 : 15] I just want us to turn the timeline from this way and put it this way and look straight down the years and see that the world that Genesis plunges us into here is our world.

Because it is a world at war. I could show you a map of where these places are. And I did wonder this week whether that would be wise.

I spent time thinking about it. I decided I wouldn't show you a map. Why? Well, because that is not what we do, is it? When we hear of war.

It doesn't hit us here, does it? We don't go and study it. It hits us here. It weighs on us. It upsets us. It breaks us. This would have been equally disorientating to the first heroes of Genesis who themselves had never seen a map of this place, never set foot in this place.

[7 : 16] And so this chapter puts us right back there with them. And it brings them right up to today.

And so if we are confused by this, let me try and describe it in a way that we might hear it today. And doesn't it sound weirdly familiar? Okay, over to our reporter on the ground.

Today, a coalition of four superpowers from the north came to settle an old score. For 12 years, Kettle Lauma controlled the Jordan Valley to the south.

But last year, five cities broke away from his rule. After months of mobilizing and stockpiling weapons, the snubbed overlord called on his allies to join him in a scorched earth offensive against the rebel cities.

Together, the kings moved south down the Jordan Valley, crushing every tribe that stood in their path. The kings of the five rebel cities were prepared for reprisals and drew up battle lines in the valley.

[8 : 25] But nothing could have prepared them for the onslaught that followed. Their defenses were easily broken and the soldiers were scattered. To add salt to the wounds, some of those defending Sodom and Gomorrah fell into tar pit.

As they tried to flee the battlefield, while the rest took cover in the hills. Their families watched on helplessly as their cities were overturned.

Their goods plundered and their food stolen. The kings of the south were left crushed and humiliated by their northern overlord and his supporters.

With their dominance renewed and their power brutally demonstrated, the four kings turned north and started on their way home with their prize in hand.

It's uncertain what the future holds for this region. But whatever it is, it doesn't look like the power of Keralaua is going to be challenged anytime soon.

[9 : 22] Back to you in the studio. Now, some of that is weird, isn't it? But some of it could have happened yesterday.

Would it shock you to hear something like that on the news tomorrow? Perhaps. Perhaps. Perhaps. But in another sense, no. Because we know that we live in a world where things like that happen.

Conflict is the air we breathe in a fallen world. And before we get to the point of the passage, for us to get the point of the passage, we need to recognize and own that reality.

That this is not, in a sense, ancient history. Because it's still going on. And perhaps for some of us today, that reality does weigh on us heavily.

Because our hearts get wrapped up in conflict, don't they? In every conflict, even the ones we're not involved in, we hope in winners and losers, don't we? We set our hope on an outcome.

[10 : 28] We want somebody to be victorious. We want somebody to be undone. If it's us, if it's our fight, of course, we want to win. We desperately don't want to lose.

And really, the whole point of this chapter is to do with how we as God's people live in a world at war. Where kings go to war, which king do we hope in?

Where kingdoms rise and fall, whose kingdom is it that we long for, pray for? Because what happens next? Well, the war out there lands on the doorstep of God's family.

Verse 12, the kings from the north also carried off Abram's nephew, Lot, and his possessions since he was living in Sodom. So where will Abram, where will the man of faith turn now that conflict has come?

And if there's only one thing we take away from this this morning, it's this. Genesis wants us to know, brothers and sisters, that in our world at war, there is one king of peace to whom our hearts, our allegiance rightly belongs.

[11 : 42] And this is our second and longer point this morning, our king of peace. Up to verse 12, we could well have wondered, what on earth this has to do with us?

What on earth this has to do with Genesis? But in verse 13, look who comes into the story. A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram, the Hebrew.

Abram, the Hebrew. Our forefather. This is God's family. It lands on our doorstep. Now, Abram isn't looking for trouble, is he? He's staying out of the way.

He's by the great trees. But it doesn't stop the great war coming to him. And that is a reminder for us. Just a side point.

That is a reminder for us this morning, isn't it? That however far from trouble we try to run, trouble will always find us. However hard we try, we can't opt out of living in a fallen world.

[12 : 41] We can't imagine that being a Christian, having a certain lifestyle, raising our children in a certain way, will protect us and our families from this reality.

From conflict. You know, sometimes Christians withdraw from the world thinking that that will put some distance between us and the curse. But there is only one thing.

One thing that can save us from sin and the curse. And it is not a sheltered lifestyle. Abram found the perfect spot, didn't he? He could wait quietly, patiently for God's promise.

Well, it turns out, no, he can't. Because he's still living in a fallen world. And so if we can't run from conflict, and we can't, what do we do?

Where do we turn, then, in the face of a world at war? Well, firstly, Abram puts his trust in God's promise. You're going to be sick of hearing me say that by the summer.

[13 : 47] That's a really good thing. Because that is what Genesis wants us to get from this. That we can and should trust God's promise in Christ to us completely.

Because he's true to his word. And how does Abram trust in God's promise? Just have a look at verse 14. What does he do? 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.

So there's 318 guys who can fight, who live with him. And when he hears his nephews being captured, they all chase the kings right up the country, the whole length of the land, to Dan.

Now remember who they are chasing. Who are these kings? What have they done? They have just wiped everyone off the map. They have destroyed everyone in their path.

And now Abram wants to go after them and defeat them with 318 men. Five kings were no threat. No problem.

[14 : 56] And Abram thinks he can take them with these handful of guys. As I thought, it would be a bit like if Orkney declared war against NATO. That is what we're talking about.

These kings, they were kings of kings. They ruled vast kingdoms and empires. They're not interested in Abram. They've not come after him. He's not defending.

He's on the offensive against them. He has chased them in order to attack them. So what chance does he stand? Humanly, none.

Why does he do it? Well, because God had made him a promise. God promised to be his God. Anyone who curses you, he said, I will curse.

Those who bless you, I will bless. And now the kingdoms of the world have come. They've threatened and cursed Abram's family. So what does Abram expect God to do in the face of an impossible battle to win?

[16 : 04] He fully expects God to overthrow and to curse his enemies, to give him the victory. What right does he have to expect that purely and simply because God had told him he would?

He promised. And God is as good as his word. 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, brought back his relative Lot and his possessions together with the women and other people. We know God did that. We know God did that.

Not only because that's the only way that it could have happened, but later on, of course, God's king tells Abram this. Praise be to God, most high, who delivered your enemies into your hand.

God is as good as his word. He is true to his promise. Now, that is as true today for us as it was back then.

[17 : 08] But how specifically would that have spoken to the first heroes of this book? What or who are they going to face over the border when they go into this land?

Who's going to be there? Invincible enemies. Powerful kingdoms. Great kings. And what will be the test for them when they get to that land, when they see these invincible kingdoms?

Surely it is the same test. The same test. Are they going to trust God to be true to his word? Did they? What happened?

Two guys said God promised. 40,000 said no chance. They did not follow, did they?

The faith of their father Abraham. And so what is the test for us, friends? What is the test for us when the war, the conflict comes to us?

[18 : 14] What we see, what we think is invincible opposition. A war we cannot win. What do we do? Where do we turn?

Ideas, views, policies in our parliaments that we think cannot be challenged. Hearts, we think, are too hard, too resistant to turn to Christ.

Wrongs, we think, can never be put right. Is it a different test for us? Surely it is the same test of whether we trust the same God who promises to build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

He promises to make his enemies his friends through the cross of Christ. He promises those who love him that we will live with him in a new world where righteousness dwells.

All things will be well there. To be clear, this is not about God being stronger than everyone else, though he is. This is about God being 100% committed to seeing through his promises in this world whatever stands in his way.

[19 : 33] And it is about us living with our trust in his word and not by the probabilities that we see in front of us.

A war that we think we cannot win. What has God said? The father of the faithful put his trust in God's promise. And God always keeps his promises.

And then secondly, what does he do? He gives his allegiance to God's king. So when Abram gets home, he's met by two kings.

Lots of kings here. Just two of them come. Just read with me from verse 17. After Abram returned from defeating Kedol-Alma and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Sheveh.

That is the king's valley. Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God most high. Now, we know a little bit about the king of Sodom.

[20 : 36] He's already been in this story. We read in chapter 13, the people of Sodom were wicked and sinning greatly against the Lord. We get the measure of this guy.

But what about this other king, Melchizedek? He's the very opposite. He is priest of God most high.

Now, this is one of the most mysterious and confusing things that happens in the whole Bible.

We don't have time to cover the whole thing today. Where does this guy come from? He seems super, super important, doesn't he?

And yet he's not in the story at all before this or again after it. This is a one-time cameo appearance that he comes in. And how does he know the Lord? He doesn't seem to be connected to Abram.

He doesn't appear to be part of Abram's family. And what does it mean that he's priest of God most high? Who's worshiping God that he would be a priest for them?

[21 : 39] There's so many questions. I don't have the answers. But we're going to see how the Bible grapples with the identity of this person as we go on. But the things we know that we need to know about who Melchizedek is are here on this page.

He is the king of Salem. That is really important in this chapter because Salem comes from the word shalom, which means peace.

Peace. Peace. In a world at war, there is a king of peace. He's proved that, hasn't he? Because he's the only king in this story who hasn't gone into battle. He is the king of peace. He stands over and above the wars, the agendas, the conflicts, the kings of this world. Even more significantly, even though the first readers of this book don't know it yet, this king of peace is king over the very city that will one day be their very own home.

[22 : 48] Salem will become Jerusalem. Salem. And even though we know that and they didn't know that, what they do know is that over the border in the land that God has promised them is the home of a king who is like no other king and of a priest who is like no other priest.

And that should be enough, shouldn't it, to keep their hearts fixed on a place and on a city that they haven't yet seen but that God has promised where this king, where this priest comes from.

We also know Melchizedek is able to speak for God. He gives Abram God's blessing. Blessed be Abram by God Most High. Given that that's a central part of the message of Genesis, God's blessing, well that makes Melchizedek very, very important, doesn't it?

We know too that Abram gives Melchizedek his total, his undivided allegiance because he gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything that he had.

He is paying homage to this king. He is my king. This is what Abram's saying. It's a sign of his commitment to this guy rather than the other king who's standing here.

[24 : 06] The king of Sodom, notice, makes a counteroffer. Give me the people. Keep the goods for yourself. Sounds like a good offer, doesn't it? Keep everything.

The riches, the wealth of those kingdoms, those four great kingdoms, the plunder of the earth that Abram has gathered. Keep that, says the king. Abram says, no.

Why does he turn down this deal? Have a look. Abram said to the king of Sodom, with a raised hand, I've sworn an oath to the Lord God most high, creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, or even a thread, the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, I made Abram rich.

He says, no, because he doesn't want anything to do with this guy. He doesn't want this king's money. He doesn't want to be an ally of his kingdom. Even if it meant him letting go of the honor that he had fought for, the wealth he had earned, the protection that he was due from this guy, he gives it up.

He lets go of it. He doesn't want it. And instead, Abram allies himself with who, the God who created all things, and God's king, who gives him God's blessing.

[25 : 34] And Abram gives him blessing, and honor, and wealth, and power. Okay. Two offers on the table this morning.

There are two offers on the table this morning for us. God's king, or the kingdoms of this world. And which will we choose?

It is the same choice, isn't it? It said earlier, that the Bible does wrestle with this question. Who is Melchizedek? What part is he playing in God's story?

Well, we read earlier from Hebrews, because it tells us, Melchizedek is here to point us in a unique way to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God's one chosen king, who comes to us from God's place to give us God's blessing.

He is the prince of peace. He gives shalom, wholeness, completeness, renewal, all things being very good.

[26 : 43] We're not told where he comes from, where he, when he is out of sight, and so says Hebrews, without beginning of days, or end of life, he resembles the son of God.

Which means that Melchizedek is standing in here, isn't he? Just holding the place of Jesus. He even comes with bread and wine.

Bread and wine. It's a sermon in itself. And so just as the father of the faithful gave him his total and undivided allegiance, so friends should we.

How do we navigate a world of conflicting agendas, conflicting, clashing personalities, countries, parties, personalities, families, friends, husbands, and wives, do we get wrapped up in the fireworks and the drama and the conflict here and now?

Is that where our hearts are? Do we join ourselves to the political causes of this day and age? Do we go along with the line that we're told to follow?

[28 : 00] Genesis says, in a fallen world of warring kings and kingdoms, put your trust only in God's promise and give your allegiance only to God's king.

Those things come together, don't they? We can't. We can't trust God's word without giving ourselves body and soul to Christ. And we can't give ourselves completely to Christ without putting our trust in God's word.

Our trust this week will be tested, won't it? As it is every week, our trust will be tested when the kingdoms of this world look stronger, bigger, better than God's kingdom.

When the kingdoms of this earth offer us more, what we see to be more than the promise of God that we can't yet see, our allegiance will be tested also when the kingdoms of this world offer us something that looks better than Christ.

But God shows himself here to be so completely trustworthy, his king to be so full, perfect, and sufficient that we can always choose every day, brothers and sisters, to trust and obey and never regret having done so.

[29 : 26] never look back and regret a day that we put our trust in Jesus Christ because God always keeps his promises and Christ always gives God's blessing.

and that choice might be costly for us materially and humanly as it was for Abram but Melchizedek describes God as the creator or the possessor of heaven and earth and Abram takes that, doesn't he, as he speaks back to the king of Sodom, I have put my trust in the one who holds the whole world in his hands.

all the possessions of the earth belong to my God. Even when allying ourselves to Christ affects our finances, our security, our opportunities, God is still the possessor of the universe and that gives, God gives his faithful one this assurance, doesn't he?

15 verse 1, do not be afraid, do not be afraid, I am your shield, your very great reward. So friends, how do we live in a fallen world?

How do we deal with conflict? Well, who do you trust? Where does your allegiance lie? Let our trust rest in our faithful creator and let our allegiance lie with his king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 01] Let's pray for that together now. God, our Father, how we thank you for Jesus, our Prince of Peace.

How we praise you that though we were at once rebels against you, though, Father, in many ways we still are and though some of us may still be to the bone rebels against you, that you sent your king in love not to make war against us but to bring us peace.

Father, how we thank you that you give us your blessing in Jesus Christ and you do not curse us in him. Father, we pray for your forgiveness for times where we have put our hope in what is not Jesus, us, where we have seen our future, Lord, hanging in the hands of those who are not him.

Father, we know that only he gives your blessing. We know that you are trustworthy, that your promise is true. And so we pray, Lord, we believe. Please help our unbelief.

Please help us all this week to put our trust in you, to know your word, to know what you have promised and to rest our lives upon it and to put our hands into the hands of Jesus Christ, your king.

[32 : 33] How we thank you for him and we pray in his name. Amen.