

Battles and Money

"And he tithed to Melchizedek"

Introduction

Shabbat shalom. Today we read the first military battle in the Bible. Sure, there have been scuffles, personal ones between siblings and even controversy between Nimrod and the folks at Babel, but today we see the first armed battle. And like most battles in the world even to this day, we don't usually have much interest in them until they touch one of our own. The last time there was peace throughout the globe was in 1837, so the historians say. So it's understandable that we will give a deaf ear to latest reports of wars and battles somewhere on the earth. That is, until someone we know, or even someone from our nation is involved in a conflict. You've noticed that, haven't you? Unless there were those 2 aid workers from Perth captured by the Taliban, we might not have known or cared about the war on terror at that time.

So in today's story, four kings go to battle against 5 kings. That sounds like the modern equivalent of the world wars of the 20th century, doesn't it? You must remember that kings in those days were more like mayors, governing little more than cities in geography, yet, it was a major conflict in the region we now call the Middle East.

And we will see something else in today's lesson, the beginning of taxation in worship. This is called the law of the tithe. It's not a favorite topic for many people, but it's right in God's economy to address it, even so early in the Bible. And finally we will see the first of the modern terms for the Jewish people. Let's get to it. Read Gen 14.

Wars in the Middle East

The battle is brewing and the battle takes on major proportions. The only one who seems to enjoy life in the midst of it is Abram. We need to see that conflict is brewing in all regions, all named here. Kadesh, all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, who lived in Hazazon-tamar. Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; in the valley of Siddim, Elam and Goyim and Shinar and Ellasar. These places are all known in their day, just not in our day. But of note is that it covers the entire area, just labeled in the last chapter as north, south, east and west, which will later in the Bible be called the "Four Corners." War is everywhere. Did you know the last time in the earth that there was complete peace, which means, no where that anyone was recording war, was 1837? Almost 200 years ago. And now with the War on Terror and so many other local skirmishes, there is almost nowhere that doesn't know war. So it was in the days of Abram. Abram is minding his own business and dealing with family, when all of a sudden, news arrives that Lot has been captured. Lot again becomes the central character. His pitching his tents toward Sodom in the last chapter now has him living there, entangled in their affairs and in their life. He is captured and Uncle Abram comes to the rescue. So Moses wants to write about Lot, and Abram and Sodom and Gomorrah. The plot thickens.

But it's like an action movie. The hero calls on his trained men, they go to battle, they defeat the bad guys, who are all wearing black, collects the kidnapped nephew, and they go home, to live happily ever after.

Two Kings

The first king

On the way home, two kings are contrasted. Now some of you may know the little book *A Tale of Three Kings* by Gene Edwards (1980, Christian Books, Auburn Maine). Edwards compares Saul, Absalom and David. His thesis is God wants us to be broken and thus usable in His Kingdom. Submission and authority are the ongoing theses of his sketchy book. Interesting little book.

In this book, the book of Genesis today we see comparison of two other kings. They are the King of Sodom and the King of Salem. One is also a priest; the other is simply a governor. One loves God and worship; the other is interested in bounty and wealth. Sound like a familiar contrast in this book?

Listen to these words from verse 18, "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and (also he) said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand. "And he gave him a tenth of all." This is the King of Salem. He comes on the scene without introduction, as is common. We see no ancestry, no genealogy, no mother or father. Just bam, he's here. Maybe we will have a flashback later to find out a bit more, or a prequel like Star Wars does, but for now, let

us content ourselves with his appearing and his statement. And let us content ourselves to notice Abram's reaction to him.

The King of Salem, later this is called City of Salem, which is rendered in Hebrew, Jerusalem, is named Melchizedek. His name means King of Righteousness. The rabbis unanimously identify him as Shem, son of Noah. (Nedarim 32b, Midrash Tehillim 76.3, Targum Jonathan). Some Jewish believers see him as someone different altogether.

Here is a priest of God, not of stars and witchery, of God Most High and not of the moon and idols. Melchizedek blesses Abram and thus confers on Abram and to his children the rite [and the right] of being the priests for the Jewish people and for the rest of the world. (Psalm 110 says, a priest forever according to the order (or because of the words of) Melchizedek.)

Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually. Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. Those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.

But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

¶ Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?

For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe," (Hebrews 7.1-13)

This long reading was to help us understand the point of the Hebrews writer. That is, that a new priesthood had to come after the Temple was to be destroyed. The new priesthood would be better than the Levitical priesthood. The new priesthood would be antedated and in type from earliest days, notably the days of Melchizedek. Thus the 'loins' imagery. So the Aaronides gave tithes to the Melchizedekians, who are According to the author, who are they? They are the followers of Y'shua, who is in similitude to Melchizedek. See? In other words, Y'shua is like Melchizedek. He is better than Aaron. He is after all the Messiah and Saviour of the world; that's got to be better than any old ordinary priest. Amen?

The other king

Compare this king, the king of Salem with the other king of note, the King of Sodom, Bera. We already know that Sodom is a place known for evil. "Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD. (Gen. 13.13) Their leader well identified with them and collectively represented them in his remarks to Abram. Sounded just like the Shinar Babel men of chapter 11. Listen in verse 21 here, "Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself." Goods, goods, goods. That's all the Sodomites wanted. The men for themselves and the bartering and exchanging of products. No priesthood, no worship, no tithing, just give it all to me.

Do you remember the story of the Newer Testament in Luke, of the Prodigal Son and his father? We read there about the boy who wanted it all, and said to his father, "Give me everything!"(15.12) It was as if he wished his father dead, so that he could collect the life insurance moneys. And the land, and the property and all that was his dad's. Shame. After a series of misadventures that sound like Don Quixote, Lazarillo de Tormes and the Homer's Odysseus all rolled up in one, the son awakens to his own shame, and cries out, "Father, make me like one of your hired hands." (15.19) Hear the verbs, my friends, and you will learn much about the nature of brokenness (*a la* Edwards) and the nature of God. The son said first, "give me" and later he cried, "make me." At the first he wanted goods, and at the last he wanted his father. When will we learn this lesson as well? When will relationship with God and with one another be more important than all the bounty of this life? When will we gain by giving up? When will we emulate the King of Salem and get His peace, rather than the King of Sodom and lose it all?

One more thing, I promised this. One of the modern terms for the Jewish people who would come from the loins of Abram is Hebrews. We have read from the book of the Newer Testament which is addressed to Jewish Christians, or Hebrews, and it is the language of the land of Israel and in which we often pray here.

The first use of the word Hebrew is found in our text today. Verse 13 calls our father, Abram the Hebrew. It comes from a lot of languages that all mean the same thing, "one who crosses over." Of course, it is literal as Abram left the Iraqi crescent near Ur, traveled to Haran and found his way to Canaan. When he crossed over the Jordan River, he became a Hebrew, one who crosses over. And maybe it is fitting to ponder his crossing from Sodom to Salem as we conclude today. Abram went from the conquest of the kings and lived his life in Salem,

that is, in peace. He abandoned Sodom which will have its conclusion in a few chapters, to live in Salem. Don't you want to do that as well?

Summary

No wonder tithing is taught as a principle from the beginning. No wonder that Melchizedek is used as an imagery of our Saviour Y'shua. He was the one who gave of His life to Abram so that Abram might give back to him. What a beautiful picture of the Messiah who gave His life for us, on the cross at Calvary in Jerusalem, 2000 years ago, so that we might get in on His blessings and life, through bread and wine, that is, through relationship with Him.

[Lot is spared by Uncle Abram here and by Abram's intercession in future chapters as well. Here he rescues Lot in the war with Babylon, and later (chs. 18-19) Abraham's intercession (18:23-32; 19:29) effects Lot's deliverance. The picture of Abraham that emerges here is the same as that in 20:7: "He is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live."]

Dear friends, we have eternal life due to the Saviour, due to His love and forgiveness. His Resurrection has proven His new covenant. His teaching is great, but it goes well beyond that to His life and death. No amount of good works will give us enough information to help us overcome evil. No amount of information will help us overcome our own evil inclination. Only the messiah can repair our relationship with God which will in turn give us pleasure with Him.

If you have never experienced this eternal and new life about which we are speaking, if you are yet outside the relationship with God, then pray with me. If you haven't yet been restored into fellowship with Him, maybe God is removing a veil from you today. Won't you

pray this prayer and ask God to forgive you of your sins, whatever they might be, and come home to pleasure with God?

Lord forgive me in the name of the Messiah, the Serpent Bruiser, Y'shua himself. Forgive me for all my sins, and make me clean again. Give me eternal life in the name of Y'shua and make me born again. I trust you.