

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

Copyright © 1878

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WE are here presented with an historic record of the revolt of five kings from under the hand of Chedorlaomer, and a battle consequent thereon. The Spirit of God can occupy himself with the movements of "**kings and their armies,**" when such movements are in anywise connected with the people of God.

In the present case, Abraham personally had nothing whatever to do with the revolt or its consequences. His "**tent and altar**" were not likely to furnish an occasion for the declaration of war, nor yet to be much affected by the outbreak or issue thereof. The proper portion of a heavenly man could never, by any possibility, tempt the cupidity nor excite the ambition of the kings and conquerors of this world. However, although Abraham was not affected by the battle of "**four kings with five,**" yet Lot was.

His position was such as to involve him in the whole affair. So long as we are enabled, through grace, to pursue the path of simple faith, we shall be thrown completely outside the range of this world's circumstances; but if we abandon our high and holy position as those whose "**citizenship is in heaven,**" and seek a name, a place, and a portion in the earth, we must expect to participate in earth's convulsions and vicissitudes.

Lot had taken up his abode in the plains of Sodom, and was, therefore, deeply and sensibly affected by the wars of Sodom. It must ever be thus. It is a bitter and a painful thing for the child of God to mingle himself with the children of this world. He can never do so without serious damage to his own soul, as well as to the testimony with which he is enlisted.

What testimony was Lot in Sodom? A very feeble one, indeed, if one at all. The very fact of his settling himself there was the death-blow to his testimony. To have spoken a word against Sodom and its ways would have been to condemn himself,- for why was he there? But in truth it does not by any means appear that to testify for God formed any part of his object in "**pitching his tent toward Sodom.**"

Personal and family interests seem to have been the leading springs of action in his heart; and though, as Peter tells us, "**his righteous soul was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, from day to day,**" yet had he but little power to act against it, even if inclined so to do.

It is important, in a practical point of view, to see that we cannot be governed by two objects at the same time.

For example, I cannot have before my mind as objects my worldly interests and the interests of the Gospel of Christ.

If I go to a town for the purpose of setting-up in business, then, clearly, business is my object, and not the Gospel. I may, no doubt, propose to myself both to attend to business and to preach the Gospel as well; but, all the while, either one or the other must be my object.

It is not that a servant of Christ may not most blessedly and effectually preach the Gospel and attend to business also: he assuredly may; but, in such a case, the Gospel will be his object, and not business.

Paul preached the Gospel and made tents; but the Gospel was his object, and not tent making.

If I make business my object, the Gospel preaching will speedily prove to be formal and unprofitable work; yea, it will be well if it be not made use of to sanctify my covetousness. The heart is very treacherous; and it is often truly astonishing to see how it deceives us when we desire to gain some special point.

It will furnish, in abundance, the most plausible reasons; while the eyes of our understanding are so blinded by self-interest or unjudged willfulness, as to be incapable of detecting their plausibility. How frequently do we hear persons defending a continuance in a position which they admit to be wrong, on the idea that they thereby enjoy a wider sphere of usefulness.

To all such reasoning, Samuel furnishes a pointed and powerful reply: "**To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.**"

Which was - Abraham or Lot - able to do the more good?

Does not the history of those two men prove beyond a question that the most effectual way to serve the world is to be faithful to it, by separating from and testifying against it?

But be it remembered that genuine separation from the world can only be the result of communion with God.

I may seclude myself from the world, and constitute myself the centre of my being, like a monk or a cynic; but separation to God is a totally different thing. The one chills and contracts, the other warms and expands.

- That drives us in upon ourselves; this draws us out in love and interest for others.
- That makes self and its interests our centre; this makes God and his glory our centre.

Thus, in Abraham's case, we see that the very fact of his separation enabled him to render effectual service to one who had involved himself in trouble by his worldly ways.

“When Abraham heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan . . . and he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.”

Lot was Abraham's brother, after all; and brotherly love must act.

“A brother is born for adversity;” and it often happens that a season of adversity softens the heart, and renders it susceptible of kindness, even from one with whom we have had to part company; and it is remarkable that, while in verse 12 we read, “**they took Lot, Abraham's brother's son;**” yet in verse 14 we read, “**when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive”**

The claims of a brother's trouble are answered by the affections of a brother's heart. This is divine.

Genuine faith, while it always renders us independent, never renders us indifferent. It will never wrap itself up in its fleece while a brother shivers in the cold.

There are three things which faith does: it “**purifies the heart;**” it “**works by love;**” and it “**overcomes the world;**” and all these results of faith are beautifully exhibited in Abraham on this occasion.

- His heart was purified from Sodom's pollutions;
- He manifested genuine love to Lot, his brother; and, finally,
- He was completely victorious over the kings.

Such are the precious fruits of faith,- that heavenly, Christ-honoring principle.

However, the man of faith is not exempt from the assaults of the enemy; and it frequently happens that immediately after a victory one has to encounter a fresh temptation.

Thus it was with Abraham.

“The king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him.”

There was, evidently, a very deep and insidious design of the enemy in this movement.

“The king of Sodom” presents a very different thought, and exhibits a very different phase of the enemy's power, from what we have in “**Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him.”**”

In the former, we have rather the hiss of the serpent; in the latter, the roar of the lion: but whether it were the serpent or the lion, the Lord's grace was amply sufficient; and most seasonably was this grace ministered to the Lord's servant at the exact moment of need.

“And Melchizedec, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine, and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of Heaven and earth; and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.”

We have here to remark, first, the peculiar point at which Melchizedek enters the scene; and, secondly, the double effect of his ministry.

He did not come forth when Abraham was in pursuit of Chedorlaomer, but when the king of Sodom was in pursuit of Abraham.

This makes a great moral difference.

A deeper character of communion was needed to meet the deeper character of conflict.

And then as to the ministry, - the “**bread and wine**” refreshed Abraham’s spirit, after his conflict with Chedorlaomer; while the benediction prepared his heart for his conflict with the king of Sodom. Abraham was a conqueror, and yet he was about to be a combatant, and the royal priest refreshed the conqueror’s spirit, and fortified the combatant’s heart.

It is peculiarly sweet to observe the manner in which Melchizedek introduces God to the thoughts of Abraham. He calls him “**the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth;**” and not only so, but pronounces Abraham “**blessed**” of that same God. This was effectually preparing him for the king of Sodom.

A man who was “**blessed**” of God did not need to take aught from the enemy; and if “**the possessor of heaven and earth**” filled his vision, “**the goods**” of Sodom could have but little attraction.

Hence, as might be expected, when the king of Sodom made his proposal, “**Give me the persons and take the goods to thyself,**” Abraham replies, “**I have lift up my hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.**”

Abraham refuses to be enriched by the king of Sodom. How could he think of delivering Lot from the power of the world, if he himself were governed thereby? The only true way in which to deliver another is to be thoroughly delivered myself. So long as I am in the fire, it is quite impossible I can pluck another out of it. The path of separation is the path of power, as it is also the path of peace and blessedness.

The world in all its various forms is the great instrument of which Satan makes use, in order to weaken the hands and alienate the affections of the servants of Christ. But, blessed be God, when the heart is true to him, he always comes in to cheer, to strengthen, and to fortify, at the right time.

“The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.” (II Chronicles 16:9).

This is an encouraging truth for our poor, timid, doubting, faltering hearts. Christ will be our strength and shield. He will “**cover our heads in the day of battle;**” he will “**teach our hands to war and our fingers to fight;**” and finally “**he will bruise Satan under our feet shortly.**”

All this is unspeakably comforting to a heart sincerely desirous of making way against “**the world, the flesh, and the devil.**”

May the Lord keep our hearts true to himself in the midst of the ensnaring scene around us.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
