

Genesis 14:1-24

by John Calvin

John Calvin's sermon on Genesis 14 explores Abram's courageous rescue of Lot and the spiritual lessons of ambition, faith, and divine providence.

Scripture: Genesis 14:17, Genesis 14:22, Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 7:1, Hebrews 7:4, James 5:12

Topics: "Divine Intervention", "Christ's Priesthood"

Description

John Calvin expounds on the historical account of Abram's victory over the kings, emphasizing the divine intervention and protection granted to him as a chosen servant of God. The narrative showcases Abram's faith, courage, and integrity in refusing the spoils of war, attributing his success to God alone. Melchizedek's appearance as a priest and king foreshadows Christ's dual role as the eternal Priest and King, symbolizing the superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Levitical priesthood. Abram's oath to the king of Sodom reflects his commitment to honesty and righteousness, setting a standard of integrity for others to follow.

Transcript

1. And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations;

1. Et fuit in diebus Amraphel regis Sinhar, Arioch rex Elasar, Cedorlaomer rex Helam, et Thidhal rex gentium,

2. That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.

2. Fecerunt bellum cum Berah rege Sedom, et Birsah rege Hamorah, Sinab rege Admah, et Semeber rege Seboim, et rege Belah: ipsa est Sohar.

3. All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea.

3. Omnes isti conjuncti sunt in valle Siddim: ipsa est vallis Maris salis.

4. Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

4. Duodecim annos servierant Cedorlaomer, et decimotertio anno defecerant.

5. And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim,

5. Decimoquarto autem anno venit Cedorlaomer, et reges qui erant cum eo, et percusserunt Rephaim in Astheroth Carnaim, et Zuzim in Ham, et Emim in Saveh Ciriathaim,

6. And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan, which is by the wilderness.

6. Et Hori in monte suo Sehir, usque ad planitiem Pharan, quae est juxta desertum.

7. And they returned, and came to Enmishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezontamar.

7. Reversi sunt autem, et venerunt ad Hen -- misphat, ipsa est Cades: et percusserunt omnem agrum Amalecitarum, et etiam Emoraeum habitantem in Haseson -- thamar.

8. And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim;

8. Et egressus est rex Sedom, et rex Hamorah, et rex Admah, et rex Seboim, et rex Belah, ipsa est Sohar, et ordinaverunt cum eis praelium in valle Siddim,

9. With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five.

9. Cum Cedorlaomer rege Hela, et Thidhal rege gentium et Amraphel rege Sinhar, et Arioch rege Elasar: quatuor reges cum quinque.

10. And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.

10. Vallis autem Siddim plena erat puteis caementi: et fugerunt rex Sedom et Hamorah, projeceruntque se illuc, et residui in montem fugerunt.

11. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way.

11. Et ceperunt omnem substantiam Sedom et Hamorah, omnemque escam eorum, et abierunt.

12. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

12. Ceperunt quoque Lot et substantiam ejus, filium fratris Abram, et abierunt, quia ipse habitabat in Sedom.

13. And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.

13. Et venit quidam qui evaserat, et nuntiavit Abram Ebraeo, qui habitabat in quercubus Mamre Emori fratris Eschol, fratris Haner et ipsi erant foederati cum Abram.

14. And when Abram 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.

14. Audiens autem Abram quod captivus ductus esset frater suus, armavit a se institutos pueros domus suae, octodecim et trecentos, et persecutus est usque ad Daniel

15. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.

15. Et divisit se super eos nocte, ipse et servi ejus, et percussit eos: persecutusque est eos usque ad Ilovah, quae est a laeva Dammesec.

16. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

16. Et reduxit omnem substantiam, et etiam Lot fratrem suum, et substantiam ejus reduxit, atque etiam mulieres et populum.

17. And 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, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

17. Et egressus est rex Sedom in occursum ejus, postquam reversus est ipse a caedendo Cedorlaomer, et reges qui erant secum, ad Vallem Saveh: ipsa est Vallis regis.

18. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

18. Et Melchisedec rex Salem protulit panem et vinum: et ipse erat sacerdos Deo altissimo.

19. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

19. Et benedixit ei, et dixit, Benedictus Abram Deo excelso, possessori coeli et terrae.

20. And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.

20. Et benedictus Deus excelsus, qui tradidit hostes tuos in manum tuam: et dedit ei decimam de omnibus.

21. And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

21. Et dixit rex Sedom ad Abram, Da mihi animas, et substantiam tolle tibi.

22. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,

22. Et dixit Abram ad regem Sedom, Levavi manum meam ad Jehovam Deum excelsum, possessorem coeli et terrae,

23. 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:

23. Si a filo usque ad corrigiam calceamenti, si accepero ex omnibus quae sunt tibi: ne dicas, Ego ditavi Abram.

24. Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

24. Praeter ea tantum quae comederunt pueri, et partem virorum qui profecti sunt mecum, Aner, Eschol, et Mamre: ipsi accipiant partem suam.

1. And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel . The history related in this chapter is chiefly worthy of remembrance, for three reasons: first, because Lot, with a gentle reproof, exhorted the men of Sodom to repentance; they had, however, become altogether unteachable, and desperately perverse in their wickedness. But Lot was beaten with these scourges, because, having been allured and deceived by the richness of the soil, he had mixed himself with unholy and wicked men. Secondly, because God, out of compassion to him, raised up Abram as his avenger and liberator, to rescue him, when a captive, from the hand of the enemy; in which act the incredible goodness and benevolence of God towards his own people, is rendered conspicuous; since, for the sake of one man, he preserves, for a time, many who were utterly unworthy. Thirdly, because Abram was divinely honored with a signal victory, and was blessed by the mouth of Melchizedek, in whose person, as appears from other passages of Scripture, the kingdom and priesthood of Christ was shadowed forth. As it respects the sum of the history, it is a horrible picture both of the avarice and pride of man.

The human race had yet their three progenitors, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, living among them; by the very sight of whom they were admonished, that they all sprung from one family, and one ark. Moreover, the memory of their common origin was a sacred pledge of fraternal connection, which should have bound them to assist each other, by mutual good offices. Nevertheless, ambition so prevailed, that they assailed one another on all sides, with sword and armor, and each attempted to subdue the rest. Wherefore, while we see, at the present day, princes raging furiously, and shaking the earth to the utmost of their power; let us remember that the evil is of ancient date; since the lust of dominion has, in all ages, been too prevalent among men. Let us, however, also remark, that no fault is worse than that loftiness of mind, which many deem a most heroic disposition. The ambition of Chedorlaomer was the torch of the whole war: for he, inflamed with the desire of triumphing, drew three others into a hostile confederacy. And pride compelled the men of Sodom and their allies to take arms, for the purpose of shaking off the yoke.

That Moses, however, records the names of so many kings, while Shem was yet living, (although derided by profane men as fabulous,) will not appear absurd, if we only reflect that this great propagation of the human race, was a remarkable miracle of God. For when the Lord said to Noah himself, and to his sons, Increase and multiply, he intended to raise them to the hope of a far more excellent restoration than would have taken place, in the ordinary course of nature. This benediction is indeed perpetual, and shall flourish even to the end of the world: but it was necessary that its extraordinary efficacy should then appear; in order that these earliest fathers might know, that a new world had been divinely inclosed within the ark.

By the Poets, Deucalion with his wife, is feigned to have sown the race of men after the deluge, by throwing stones behind him. 356 But it followed of necessity, that the miserable minds of men should be deluded with such trifles, when they departed from the pure truth of God; and Satan has made use of this artifice, for the purpose at discrediting the veracity of the miracles of God. For since the memory of the deluge, and the unwonted propagation of a new world, could not be speedily obliterated, he scattered

abroad clouds and smoke; introducing puerile conceits, in order that what had before been held for certain truth, might now be regarded as a fable.

It is however to be observed, that all are called kings by Moses, who held the priority in any town, or in any considerable assembly of men. It is asked, whether those kings who followed Chedorlaomer dwelt at a great distance; because Tidal is called the king of nations? There are those who imagine that he reigned over different nations far and wide; as if he was a king of kings. The ancient interpreter fetches Arioch from Pontus; 357 which is most absurd. I rather think the true reason of the name was, that he had a band composed of deserters and vagrants, who, having left their own country, had resorted to him.

Therefore, since they were not one body -- natives of his own country -- but gathered together from a promiscuous multitude, he was properly called king of nations. In saying that the battle was fought in the vale of Siddim, or in the open plain, which, when Moses wrote, had become the Salt Sea, it is not to be doubted that the Dead Sea, or the lake Asphaltites, is meant. For he knew whom he was appointed to instruct, and therefore he always accommodated his words to the rude capacity of the people; and this is his common custom in reference to the names of places, as I have previously intimated.

Before, however, the battle was fought, Moses declares that the inhabitants of the region were partially beaten. It is probable that all had been scattered, because they had no leader, under whose auspices they might fight, until five kings advanced to meet them with a disciplined army. Now, though Chedorlaomer had rendered so many people tributary to him by tyranny rather than by lawful authority, and on that account his ambition is to be condemned; yet his subjects are justly punished for having rashly rebelled.

For although liberty is by no means to be despised, yet the subjection which is once imposed upon us cannot, without implied rebellion against God, be shaken off; because 'every power is ordained by God,' notwithstanding, in its commencement, it may have flowed from the lust of dominion, (Ro 13:1.) Therefore some of the rebels are slaughtered like cattle; and others, though they have clothed themselves in armor, and are prepared to resist, are yet driven to flight; thus, unhappily to all concerned, terminates the contumacious refusal to pay tribute. And such narratives are to be noticed that we may learn from them, that all who strive to produce anarchy, fight against God.

10. And the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled . Some expound that they had fallen into pits: but this is not probable, since they were by no means ignorant of the neighboring places: such an event would rather have happened to foreign enemies. Others say, that they went down into them for the sake of preserving their lives. I, however, understand them to have exchanged one kind of death for another, as is common in the moment of desperation; as if Moses had said, the swords of the enemy were so formidable to them, that, without hesitation, they threw themselves headlong into the pits. For he immediately afterwards subjoins, that they who escaped fled to the mountains. Whence we infer, that they who had rushed into the pits had perished. Only let us know, that they fell, not so much deceived through ignorance of the place, as disheartened by fear.

12. And they took Lot . It is doubtful whether Lot remained at home while others went to the battle, and was there captured by the enemy; or whether he had been compelled to take arms with the rest of the people. As, however, Moses does not mention him till he speaks of the plundering of the city, the conjecture is probable, that at the conclusion of the battle, he was taken at home, unarmed. We here see, first, that sufferings are common to the good and the evil; then, that the more closely we are connected with the wicked and the ungodly, when God pours down his vengeance on them, the more quickly does

the scourge come upon us.

13. And there came one that had escaped . This is the second part of the chapter, in which Moses shows, that when God had respect to his servant Lot, he gave him Abram as his deliverer, to rescue him from the hands of the enemy. But here various questions arise; as, whether it was lawful for Abram, a private person, to arm his family against kings, and to undertake a public war. I do not, however, doubt, that as he went to the war endued with the power of the Spirit, so also he was guarded by a heavenly command, that he did not transgress the bounds of his vocation.

And this ought not to be regarded as a new thing, but as his special calling; for he had already been created king of that land. And although the possession of it was deferred to a future time; yet God would give some remarkable proof of the power which he had granted him, and which was hitherto unknown to men. 358 A similar prelude of what was to follow, we read in the case of Moses, when he slew the Egyptian, before he openly presented himself as the avenger and deliverer of his nation.

And for this reason the subject ought to be noticed, that they who wish to defend themselves by armed force, whenever any force is used against them, may note from this fact, frame a rule for themselves. We shall hereafter see this same Abram bearing patiently and with a submissive mind, injuries which had at least, an equal tendency to provoke his spirit. Moreover, that Abram attempted nothing rashly, but rather, that his design was approved by God, will appear presently, from the commendation of Melchizedek.

We may therefore conclude, that this war was undertaken by him, under the special direction of the Spirit. If any one should take exception, that he proceeded further than was lawful, when he spoiled the victors of their prey and captives, and restored them wholly to the men of Sodom, who had, by no means been committed to his protection; I answer, since it appears that God was his Guide and Ruler in this affair, -- as we infer from His approbation, -- it is not for us to dispute respecting His secret judgment.

God had destined the inhabitants of Sodom, when their neighbors were ruined and destroyed, to a still more severe judgment; because they were themselves the worst of all. He, therefore, raised up his servant Abram, after they had been admonished by a chastisement sufficiently severe, to deliver them, in order that they might be rendered the more inexcusable. Therefore, this peculiar suggestion of the Holy Spirit ought no more to be drawn into a precedent, than the whole war which Abram had carried on.

With respect to the messenger who had related to Abram the slaughter at Sodom, I do not accept what some suppose, that he was a pious man. We may rather conjecture that, as a fugitive from home, who had been deprived of all his goods, he came to Abram to elicit something from his humanity. That Abram is called a Hebrew, I do not explain from the fact of his having passed over the river, as is the opinion of some; but from his being of the progeny of Eber. For it is a name of descent. And the Holy Spirit here again honorably announces that race as blessed by God.

And these were confederate with Abram . It appears, that in the course of time, Abram was freely permitted to enter into covenant and friendship with the princes of the land: for the heroical virtues of the man, caused them to regard him as one who was not, by any means, to be despised. Nay, as he had so great a family, he might also have been numbered among kings, if he had not been a stranger and a sojourner. But God purposed thus to provide for his peace, by a covenant relating to temporal things in order that he never might be mingled with those nations. Moreover, that this whole transaction was divinely ordered we may readily conjecture from the fact, that his associates did not hesitate, at great risk, to assail four kings, who (according to the state of the times) were sufficiently strong, and were flushed

with the confidence of victory. Surely they would scarcely ever have been thus favorable to a stranger, except by a secret impulse of God.

14. When Abram heard that his brother was taken captive . Moses briefly explains the cause of the war which was undertaken; namely, that Abram might rescue his relation from captivity. Meanwhile, what I have before said is to be remembered, that he did not rashly fly to arms; but took them as from the hand of God, who had constituted him lord of that land. With reference to the words themselves, I know not why the ancient interpreter has rendered them, 'Abram numbered his trained servants.' For the word רִיק (rik) signifies to unsheathe, or to draw out. 359 Now Moses calls these servants חַנִּיכִים (chanichim ,) not as having been educated and trained for military service, as many suppose; but rather (in my opinion) as having been brought up under his own authority, and imbued from childhood with his discipline; so that they fought the more courageously, being stimulated by his faith, and going forth under his auspices; 360 and were ready to undergo every kind of danger for his sake. But in this great household troop, we must notice, not only the diligence of the holy patriarch, but the special blessing of God, by which it had been increased beyond the common and usual manner.

15. And he divided himself against them . Some explain the words to mean that Abram alone, with his domestic troops, rushed upon the enemy. Others, that he and his three confederates divided their bands, in order to strike greater terror into the foe. A third class suppose the phrase to be a Hebraism, for making an irruption into the midst of the enemy. I rather embrace the second exposition; namely, that he invaded the enemy on different sides, and suddenly inspired them with terror. For the circumstance of time favors this view, because he attacked them by night. And although examples of similar bravery occur in profane history; yet it ought to be ascribed to the faith of Abram, that with a small band, he dared to assail a numerous army elated with victory. But that he came off conqueror with little trouble, and with intrepidity pursued those who far exceeded him in number, we must ascribe to the favor of God.

17. And the king of Sodom went out . Although the king of Sodom knew that Abram had taken arms only on account of his nephew, yet he went to meet him with due honor, in order to show his gratitude. For it is a natural duty to acknowledge benefits conferred upon us, even when not intentionally rendered, but only from unexpected circumstances and occasions, or (as we say) by accident. Moreover, the whole affair yields greater glory to God, because the victory of Abram was celebrated in this manner. He also marks the place where the king of Sodom met Abram, namely, "the king's dale," which I think was so called, rather after some particular king, than because those kings met there for their pleasure. 361

18. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth . This is the last of the three principal points of this history, that Melchizedek, the chief father of the Church, having entertained Abram at a feast, blessed him, in virtue of his priesthood, and received tithes from him. There is no doubt that by the coming of this king to meet him, God also designed to render the victory of Abram famous and memorable to posterity. But a more exalted and excellent mystery was, at the same time, adumbrated: for seeing that the holy patriarch, whom God had raised to the highest rank of honor, submitted himself to Melchizedek, it is not to be doubted that God had constituted him the only head of the whole Church; 362 for, without controversy, the solemn act of benediction, which Melchizedek assumed to himself, was a symbol of preeminent dignity.

If any one replies, that he did this as a priest; I ask, was not Abram also a priest? Therefore God here commends to us something peculiar in Melchizedek, in preferring him before the father of all the faithful. But it will be more satisfactory to examine the passage word by word, in regular order, that we may thence better gather the import of the whole. That he received Abram and his companions as guests belonged to

his royalty ; but the benediction pertained especially to his sacerdotal office .

Therefore, the words of Moses ought to be thus connected: Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and seeing he was the priest of God, he blessed Abram; thus to each character is distinctly attributed what is its own. He refreshed a wearied and famishing army with royal liberality; but because he was a priest, he blessed, by the rite of solemn prayer, the firstborn son of God, and the father of the Church. Moreover, although I do not deny that it was the most ancient custom, for those who were kings to fulfill also the office of the priesthood; yet this appears to have been, even in that age, extraordinary in Melchizedek.

And truly he is honored with no common eulogy, when the Spirit ratifies his priesthood. We know how, at that time, religion was everywhere corrupted since Abram himself, who was descended from the sacred race of Shem and Eber, had been plunged in the profound vortex of superstitions with his father and grandfather. Therefore many imagine Melchizedek to have been Shem; to whose opinion I am, for many reasons, hindered from subscribing. For the Lord would not have designated a man, worthy of eternal memory, by a name so new and obscure, that he must remain unknown.

Secondly, it is not probable that Shem had migrated from the east into Judea; and nothing of the kind is to be gathered from Moses. Thirdly, if Shem had dwelt in the land of Canaan, Abram would not have wandered by such winding courses, as Moses has previously related, before he went to salute his ancestor. But the declaration of the Apostle is of the greatest weight; that this Melchizedek, whoever he was, is presented before us, without any origin, as if he had dropped from the clouds, and that his name is buried without any mention of his death. (Heb 7:3.)

But the admirable grace of God shines more clearly in a person unknown; because, amid the corruptions of the world, he alone, in that land, was an upright and sincere cultivator and guardian of religion. I omit the absurdities which Jerome, in his Epistle to Evagrius, heaps together; lest, without any advantage, I should become troublesome, and even offensive to the reader. I readily believe that Salem is to be taken for Jerusalem; and this is the generally received interpretation.

If, however, any one chooses rather to embrace a contrary opinion, seeing that the town was situated in a plain, I do not oppose it. On this point Jerome thinks differently: nevertheless, what he elsewhere relates, that in his own times some vestiges of the palace of Melchizedek were still extant in the ancient ruins, appears to me improbable.

It now remains to be seen how Melchizedek bore the image of Christ, and became, as it were, his representative, **■ντ■τυπος** (avtitupos. 363) These are the words of David,

"The Lord sware, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek," (Ps 110:4.)

First, he had placed him on a royal throne, and now he gives him the honor of the priesthood. But under the Law, these two offices were so distinct, that it was unlawful for kings to usurp the office of the priesthood. If, therefore, we concede as true, what Plato declares, and what occasionally occurs in the poets, that it was formerly received, by the common custom of nations, that the same person should be both king and priest; this was by no means the case with David and his posterity, whom the Law peremptorily forbade to intrude on the priestly office.

It was therefore right, that what was divinely appointed under the old law, should be abrogated in the person of this priest. And the Apostle does not contend without reason, that a more excellent priesthood than that old and shadowy one, was here pointed out; which priesthood is confirmed by an oath. Moreover, we never find that king and priest, who is to be preeminent over all, till we come to Christ. And as no one has arisen except Christ, who equalled Melchizedek in dignity, still less who excelled him; we hence infer that the image of Christ was presented to the fathers, in his person.

David, indeed, does not propose a similitude framed by himself; but declares the reason for which the kingdom of Christ was divinely ordained, and even confirmed with an oath; and it is not to be doubted that the same truth had previously been traditionally handed down by the fathers. The sum of the whole is, that Christ would thus be the king next to God, and also that he should be anointed priest, and that for ever; which it is very useful for us to know, in order that we may learn that the royal power of Christ is combined with the office of priest.

The same Person, therefore who was constituted the only and eternal Priest, in order that he might reconcile us to God, and who, having made expiation, might intercede for us, is also a King of infinite power to secure our salvation, and to protect us by his guardian care. Hence it follows, that relying on his advocacy, we may stand boldly in the presence of God, who will, we are assured, be propitious to us; and that trusting in his invincible arm, we may securely triumph over enemies of every kind.

But they who separate one office from the other, rend Christ asunder, and subvert their own faith, which is deprived of half its support. It is also to be observed, that Christ is called an eternal King, like Melchizedek. For since the Scripture, by assigning no end to his life, leaves him as if he were to survive through all ages; it certainly represents or shadows forth to us, in his person, a figure, not of a temporal, but of an eternal kingdom. But whereas Christ, by his death, has accomplished the office of Priest, it follows that God was, by that one sacrifice, once appeased in such a manner, that now reconciliation is to be sought in Christ alone.

Therefore, they do him grievous wrong, and wrest from him by abominable sacrilege, the honor divinely conferred upon him by an oath who either institute other sacrifices for the expiation of sins, or who make other priests. 364 And I wish this had been prudently weighed by the ancient writers of the Church. For then would they not so coolly, and even so ignorantly, have transferred to the bread and wine the similitude between Christ and Melchizedek, which consists in things very different.

They have supposed that Melchizedek is the image of Christ, because he offered bread and wine. For they add, that Christ offered his body, which is life-giving bread, and his blood, which is spiritual drink. But the Apostle, while in his Epistle to the Hebrews, he most accurately collects, and specifically prosecutes, every point of similarity between Christ and Melchizedek, says not a word concerning the bread and wine. If the subtleties of Tertullian, and of others like him, were true, it would have been a culpable negligence, not to bestow a single syllable upon the principal point, while discussing the separate parts, which were of comparatively trivial importance.

And seeing the Apostle disputes at so great length, and with such minuteness, concerning the priesthood; how gross an instance of forgetfulness would it have been, not to touch upon that memorable sacrifice, in which the whole force of the priesthood was comprehended? He proves the honor of Melchizedek from the benediction given, and tithes received: how much better would it have suited this argument to have said, that he offered not lambs or calves, but the life of the world, (that is, the body and blood of Christ,) in

a figure?

By these arguments the fictions of the ancients are abundantly refuted. Nevertheless, from the very words of Moses a sufficiently lucid refutation may be taken. For we do not there read that anything was offered to God; but in one continued discourse it is stated, 'He offered bread and wine; and seeing he was priest of the Most High God, he blessed him.' Who does not see that the same relative pronoun is common to both verbs; and therefore that Abram was both refreshed with the wine, and honored with the benediction?

Utterly ridiculous truly are the Papists, who distort the offering 365 of bread and wine to the sacrifice of their mass. For in order to bring Melchizedek into agreement with themselves, it will be necessary for them to concede that bread and wine are offered in the mass. Where, then, is transubstantiation, which leaves nothing except the bare species of the elements? Then, with what audacity do they declare that the body of Christ is immolated in their sacrifices? Under what pretext, since the Son of God is called the only successor of Melchizedek, do they substitute innumerable successors for him? We see, then, how foolishly they not only deprave this passage, but babble without the color of reason.

19. And he blessed him . Unless these two members of the sentence, 'He was the priest of God,' and 'He blessed,' cohere together, Moses here relates nothing uncommon. For men mutually bless each other; that is, they wish well to each other. But here the priest of God is described, who, according to the right of his office, sanctifies one inferior and subject to himself. For he would never have dared to bless Abram, unless he had known, that in this respect he excelled him. In this manner the Levitical priests are commanded to bless the people; and God promises that the blessing should be efficacious and ratified, (Nu 6:23.) So Christ, when about to ascend up to heaven, having lifted up his hands, blessed the Apostles, as a minister of the grace of God, (Lu 24:51;) and then was exhibited the truth of this figure. For he testifies that the office of blessing the Church, which had been adumbrated in Melchizedek, was assigned him by his Father.

Blessed be Abram of the most high God . The design of Melchizedek is to confirm and ratify the grace of the Divine vocation to holy Abram; for he points out the honor with which God had peculiarly dignified him by separating him from all others, and adopting him as his own son. And he calls God, by whom Abram had been chosen, the Possessor of heaven and earth, to distinguish him from the fictitious idols of the Gentiles. Afterwards, indeed, God invests himself with other titles; that, by some peculiar mark, he may render himself more clearly known to men, who, because of the vanity of their mind, when they simply hear of God as the Framer of heaven and earth, never cease to wander, till at length they are lost in their own speculations. But because God was already known to Abram, and his faith was founded upon many miracles, Melchizedek deems it sufficient to declare that, by the title of Creator, 366 He whom Abram worshipped, is the true and only God. And although Melchizedek himself maintained the sincere worship of the true God, he yet calls Abram blessed of God, in respect of the eternal covenant: as if he would say, that, by a kind of hereditary right, the grace of God resided in one family and nation, because Abram alone had been chosen out of the whole world. Then is added a special congratulation on the victory obtained; not such as is wont to pass between profane men, who puff each other up with inflated encomiums; but Melchizedek gives thanks unto God, and regards the victory which the holy man had gained as a seal of his gratuitous calling.

20. And he gave him tithes of all . There are those who understand that the tithes were given to Abram; but the Apostle speaks otherwise, in declaring that Levi had paid tithes in the loins of Abram, (Heb 7:9,) when Abram offered tithes to a more excellent Priest. And truly what the expositors above-mentioned

mean, would be most absurd; because, if Melchizedek was the priest of God, it behoved him to receive tithes rather than to give them. Nor is it to be doubted but Abram offered the gift to God, in the person of Melchizedek, in order that, by such first-fruits, he might dedicate all his possessions to God. Abram therefore voluntarily gave tithes to Melchizedek, to do honor to his priesthood. Moreover, since it appears that this was not done wrongfully nor rashly, the Apostle properly infers, that, in this figure, the Levitical priesthood is subordinate to the priesthood of Christ. For other reasons, God afterwards commanded tithes to be given to Levi under the Law; but, in the age of Abram, they were only a holy offering, given as a pledge and proof of gratitude. It is however uncertain whether he offered the title of the spoils or of the goods which he possessed at home. But, since it is improbable that he should have been liberal with other persons' goods, and should have given a very a tenth part of the prey, of which he had resolved not to touch even a thread, I rather conjecture, that these tithes were taken out of his own property. I do not, however, admit that they were paid annually, as some imagine, but rather, in my judgment, he dedicated this present to Melchizedek once, for the purpose of acknowledging him as the high priest of God: nor could he, at that time, (as we say,) hand it over; 367 but there was a solemn stipulation, of which the effect shortly after followed.

21. And the king of Sodom said . Moses having, by the way, interrupted the course of his narrative concerning the king of Sodom, by the mention of the king of Salem, now returns to it again; and says that the king of Sodom came to meet Abram, not only for the sake of congratulating him, but of giving him a due reward. He therefore makes over to him the whole prey, except the men; as if he would say 'It is a great thing that I recover the men; let all the rest be given to thee as a reward for this benefit.' And thus to have shown himself grateful to man, would truly have been worthy of commendation; had he not been ungrateful to God, by whose severity and clemency he remained alike unprofited. It was even possible that this man, when poor and deprived of all his goods, might, with a servile affectation of modesty, try to gain the favor of Abram, by asking to have nothing but the captives and the empty city for himself. Certainly we shall afterwards see that the men of Sodom were unmindful of the benefit received, when they proudly and contemptuously vexed righteous Lot.

22. And Abram said to the king of Sodom , I have lift up mine hand , etc 368 This ancient ceremony was very appropriate to give expression to the force and nature of an oath. For by raising the hand towards heaven, we show that we appeal to God as a witness, and also as an avenger, if we fail to keep our oath. Formerly, indeed, they raised their hands in giving votes; whence the Greeks derive the word ($\chiειροτονη$ v,) 369 which signifies to decree: but in the rite of swearing, the reason for doing so was different. For men hereby declared, that they regarded themselves as in the presence of God, and called upon him to be both the Guardian of truth, and the Avenger of perjury. Yet it may seem strange that Abram should so easily have put himself forward to swear; for he knew that a degree of reverence was due to the name of God, which should constrain us to use it but sparingly, and only from necessity. I answer, there were two reasons for his swearing. First, since inconstant men are wont to measure others by their own standard, they seldom place confidence in bare assertions. The king of Sodom, therefore, would have thought that Abram did not seriously remit his right, unless the name of God had been interposed. And, secondly, it was of great consequence, to make it manifest to all, that he had not carried on a mercenary war. The histories of all times sufficiently declare, that even they who have had just causes of war have, nevertheless, been invited to it by the thirst of private gain. And as men are acute in devising pretexts, they are never at a loss to find plausible reasons for war, even though covetousness may be their only real stimulant. Therefore, unless Abram had resolutely refused the spoils of war, the rumor would immediately have spread, that, under the pretense of rescuing his nephew, he had been

intent upon grasping the prey. Against which it was necessary for him carefully to guard, not so much for his own sakes as for the glory of God, which would otherwise have received some mark of disparagement. Besides, Abram wished to arm himself with the name of God, as with a shield, against all the allurements of avarice. For the king of Sodom would not have desisted from tempting his mind by various methods, if the occasion for using bland insinuations had not been promptly cut off.

23. That I will not take from a thread even to a shoe - latchet . The Hebrews have an elliptical form of making oath, in which the imprecation of punishment is understood. In some places, the full expression of it occurs in the Scriptures, "The Lord do so to me and more also," (1Sa 14:44.) Since however, it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, in order that the obligation of oaths may be the more binding, this abrupt form of speech admonishes men to reflect on what they are doing; for it is just as if they should put a restraint upon themselves, and should stop suddenly in the midst of their discourse. This indeed is most certain, that men never rashly swear, but they provoke the vengeance of God against them, and make Him their adversary.

Lest thou shouldst say . Although these words seem to denote a mind elated, and too much addicted to fame, yet since Abram is on this point commended by the Spirit, we conclude that this was a truly holy magnanimity. But an exception is added namely that he will not allow his own liberality to be injurious to his allies, nor make them subject to his laws. For this also is not the least part of virtue, to act rightly, yet in such a manner, that we do not bind others to our example, as to a rule. Let every one therefore regard what his own vocation demands, and what pertains to his own duty, in order that men may not prejudge one another according to their own will. For it is a moroseness too imperious, to wish that what we ourselves follow as right, and consonant with our duty, should be prescribed as a law to others.

Footnotes

356

See Ovid's *Metamorphosis* 1.

357

"Arioch rex Ponti." -- Vulgate

358

"Dieu a voulu donner un patron singulier de la puissance qu'il luy avoit bailee, laquelle estoit encore incognue aux hommes." -- French Tr

359

"Comme s'il disoit, Il tira hors de sa maison trois cens dixhuit serviteurs." -- "As if he had said, He drew out of his house three hundred and eighteen servants." -- French Tr

360

"Animosius sub fide et auspiciis ejus bellarent."

361

"Quan quod animi causa reges illuc convenirent."

362

"Non dubium est quin illum constituerit unicum totius ecclesiae caput." -- "Il ne faut pas douter que Dieu ne l'ait constitue chef unique de toute l'Eglise." -- French Tr

363

"Il faut voir comment Melchisedech a eu la figure de Christ engravée en soy, et est comme la representation et correspondance." -- French Tr

364

"Ceux qui dressent d'autres sacrifices pour nettoyer les pechez, on forgent d'autres sacrificateurs." Those who prepare other sacrifices to cleanse from sins, or make others sacrificing priests. -- French Tr

365

Oblationem; yet the word ought not to be rendered oblation, because this term in English always implies that the offering is made to God; whereas Calvin speaks of the bread and wine simply as being presented by Melchizedek to Abram. -- Ed.

366

"Creationis elogio testari," etc. -- "De donner a Dieu ce titre de Possesseur du ciel et de la terre." To give to God this title of Possessor of heaven and earth. -- French Tr

367

"Nec tunc potuit de manu (quod aiunt) in manum tradere." -- "Ne luy a peu lors builler de main a main, comme on dit." Nor was he then able to commit it to him, from hand to hand, as they say. -- French Tr

368

A portion of the 22d verse, which is commented upon without being given in the original, is here inserted, in order to make the whole more clear to the reader; it also appears in the French Translation. -- Ed.

369

Literally, to stretch forth the hand.

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