

## The Church & Foreign Powers

### Abraham & Abimelech

Genesis 21:22-34

July 21st, 2024

#### I. Introduction: Constantine the Great

Constantine the Great was the Roman Emperor of the fourth century who brought about \_\_\_\_\_ for the Church. Constantine saw the sign of the Cross in the heavens, above the sun, bearing the inscription: *Conquer by this*. Obeying the vision, he took up the sign of the Cross—the Greek letter  $\chi$  (*chi*)—as his battle standard, and his army proceeded to their battle against Maxentius. As the vision had foretold, Constantine triumphed. He deduced from this victory that God was in fact with the Church of the Crucified One, so he decided he should be with her too. He converted to Christianity and with him, he led the Roman Empire into a friendly alliance with the people it had once persecuted.

#### II. The Text — Gen. 21:22-34

*22 And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do. 23 Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt." . . .*

#### III. Abraham & Abimelech

In our passage, Abimelech, a foreign power—a man in authority outside of God’s covenant people—moves toward God’s covenant people. And why does he do this? He does so because he clearly sees that God is with them: “God is with you in all that you do.” Abraham and his household are faithfully living before the Lord, and the Lord is very tangibly blessing their faithfulness—and this man notices. He notices, and he wants in. The result of their pact is mutual \_\_\_\_\_. Abraham gets to live at peace with Abimelech. His complaints find redress. Bad actors are taken care of. He gets to plant down and worship the Lord in quietness and peace. See 1 Tim. 2:1-2.

#### IV. A New King (Exo. 1:1-14)

There’s a foil to this story, however. At the beginning of Exodus we learn of a different kind of foreign power. A new king arises in Egypt who is the \_\_\_\_\_ to Abimelech, who after saw God’s covenantal blessings resting upon His people drew near. But this new king in Egypt is driven mad by it. He is not a God-fearer, but a man-fearer. He sees it and hates it, and seeks to extinguish God’s blessing that rests upon His people. He can’t extinguish it. But he will certainly give his all.

The question of God’s people’s relationship with powerful figures resurfaces here, and it’s the other extreme. God’s people, blessed by God, are treated as a threat to be extinguished. There’s no mutual blessing. No pact. No friendliness. But, nevertheless, God’s people \_\_\_\_\_; through it they come out victorious. The more pharaoh afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.

## V. Negative World

We still live in a world that has powerful figures who are outside of the church, and in the present hour—in this negative world—many of them are not coming out to us like Abimelech, wondering if we'd like to live on friendly terms with them. Our leaders by and large, like the new king who forgot Joseph, have forgotten Jesus. They have forgotten what a boon and blessing it has been for them to be in fellowship with the Church. If that's the case, what should we learn from all these things? In particular, how does God encourage and exhort us through this biblical and historical reality in our current reality?

**First.** This is a reminder that we should not put our trust in princes, or in powerful men. Why? Because they are \_\_\_\_\_. They are inconstant. And, moreover, they're finite. They'll die, and their help will come to nothing. Even powerful men who move toward the Church will die, and some new pharaoh will crop up in his place. See Psa. 146:3-4.

**Second.** These things direct us to keep our eyes focused upon the root of either response—hostility or friendship—which is the \_\_\_\_\_ of God that rests upon His people as we faithfully walk with Him. Princes are fickle. They are not to be trusted. They are largely out of our control. But it is within our control to walk faithfully with our God, no matter what, and to look to Him to bless us.

Whether powerful people love us or hate us—or love us *and then* hate us—our priority is to please the Lord, to fear Him and walk humbly with our God. This is what the early Church did in the Roman Empire whether they faced a Nero or a Constantine. And this is what we are to do whether we have a Christian prince, or a company of fleabags who hate us. Our marching orders remain the same because the covenant does not change. Our God does not change. Our strategies might. How we engage culture might. How we vote might. How we train might. But all of that is only \_\_\_\_\_ in a new context—it is never something different than faithfulness. See Psa. 46.

**Third.** We need to view our situation \_\_\_\_\_, that is, we need to view it in relation to God's activity. This phenomenon is of God. This fickleness of princes—favoring or hating His people—is from God. Why does God do this? He means to test us (Prov. 21:1). The Lord steered Abimelech's heart to favor Abraham, to move toward him in friendship. And He also hardened pharaoh's heart so that he afflicted God's people. The Lord is in control of these things. Why, then, does He turn the heart of kings against us? To test us that we might be strengthened in our faith and character.

**Fourth.** This reminds us that the Church \_\_\_\_\_. The Church militant is the Church triumphant in glory. But the path to our victory is the path of the Cross. We will have our own cross to bear. The Church will win. No matter how much pharaoh oppresses God's people, he will not extinguish them. The Church's roots will spread into every inch of this world, and bear fruit, until there is no more room for those who hate her.

## VI. Conclusion