

Abraham  
by Hamilton Smith.

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## Foreword

It would hardly be possible to overestimate the importance of a knowledge of God's dealings with Abraham and his seed for a proper understanding of the Bible. To him the Lord said, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12: 3). From Galatians 3: 16 we learn that that seed was "Christ," and in Him alone are all the blessings of the covenant realized.

Abraham is also one of the most interesting characters of Bible history. There are few people mentioned so frequently in the Scriptures. Concordance pages show that besides the many, many places where his name appears in the Old Testament, he is mentioned more than seventy times in eleven books in the New Testament. He has the distinction of being called "The Friend of God" (James 2: 23 ).

To fit Abraham for the place God had purposed for him, the God of glory appeared to him (Acts 7: 2) and gave him wondrous visions — visions of the Lord Jesus (John 8: 56) and visions of a heavenly city "which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11: 10).

The practical lessons we learn from his life are emphasized in Mr. Hamilton Smith's book — Abraham, the Friend of God. We trust it may be blessed of the Lord as have been his former books, including those on Joseph, Elijah and Elisha.

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The God of Abraham praise,  
Who reigns enthroned above;  
Ancient of everlasting days  
And God of love:  
Jehovah, great I AM,  
By earth and heaven confessed,  
I bow and bless the sacred Name,  
Forever blessed.  
The God of Abraham praise  
At whose supreme command  
From earth I rise to seek my joys  
At His right hand.

He calls me to forsake  
Earth's wisdom, fame and power,  
And Him my only portion make,  
My shield and tower.  
The God of Abraham praise,  
Whose all-sufficient grace  
Shall guide me all my pilgrim days,  
In all my ways.  
He calls a worm His friend,  
He calls Himself my God,  
And He shall save me to the end,  
Through Jesus' blood.  
He by Himself hath sworn,  
I on His oath depend,  
I shall, on eagle wings upborne,  
To heaven ascend:  
I shall behold His face,  
I shall His power adore)  
And sing the wonders of His grace  
For evermore.  
— T.Oliver.

## **On the Other Side of the River**

### **Genesis 11: 27-30**

To understand and profit by the history of Abraham it is necessary to realize the character of the world in which he lived, and from which he was called.

#### The Background of His Life

The Apostle Peter refers to the time before the flood as "the world that then was." The Apostle Paul speaks of "this present evil world" (Gal. 1: 4); and finally, he speaks of "the world to come" — "the Millennial world" (Heb. 2: 5). There is, then, the world that then was, the world that now is, and the world to come.

The world before the flood was ruined at the fall, and became utterly lawless. For sixteen hundred and fifty years God bore with the increasing wickedness of men, until the whole world having become corrupt before God and filled with violence, judgment fell and "the world that then was, being

overflowed with water, perished" (2 Peter 3: 6).

After the flood the world that now is had its commencement. It was marked by entirely new elements. Government was introduced so that, in the mercy of God, wickedness should not go unpunished. Man was made responsible to curb evil by exercising judgment on the wicked. Noah was told, "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." But as man had failed in innocence and ruined the world before the flood, so man failed in government and ruined the present world. As ever, when man is set in responsibility, he fails, and that from the outset. Noah, who was set to govern, fails to govern himself. He gets drunk and is mocked by his son. In the main these things, alas, have ever marked the government of the world. Those put in authority fail to govern, and those in opposition mock at their failure. Moreover, we see that, as time passes, men misuse government to exalt themselves, and act in independence of God. They say, "Let us build us a city . . . and let us make us a name." Finally the world became apostate and fell into idolatry, for we read, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the river [Euphrates] in the old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, the father of Nahor: *and they served other gods* " (Joshua 24: 2).

As a restraint upon man's evil, the world was separated into different families, with distinct nationalities, and divers tongues.

Such then, was the commencement, and such the character of the present evil world which is fast ripening for judgment. A world in which government is constituted by God, but ruined in the hands of men, who act independently of God, exalt themselves and finally apostatize from God, falling into idolatry.

### ***The Turning Point in His Life***

For over four hundred years God bore with this world and then the God of glory appears to a man on earth and commences to act on an entirely new principle — that of the sovereign call of God. It does not set aside the government of the world; it makes no suggestion as to improving or reforming the world, or correcting its evil. It leaves the world just as it is, but it asserts God's paramount claim upon an individual, who is elected in sovereign grace, and called out of the world.

We cannot but realize the importance of this great truth, when we see from the New Testament that it is still the principle on which God is acting today. The Church is entirely composed of individuals that are called by grace. The Apostle Paul clearly states that God has not only "saved us" but also "called us"; and that this calling is "an holy calling . . . according to His own purpose" (2 Tim. 1: 9). Again, in his epistle to the Romans we are reminded that believers are "the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8: 28). So in writing to the Hebrew believers, the Apostle appeals to them as "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3 :1). The Apostle Peter tells us we are "called . . . out of darkness into His marvellous light," and, he adds, "the God of all grace . . . hath called us unto His eternal glory" (1 Peter 2: 9; 1 Peter 5: 10).

It is clear then that believers are not only "saved" but "called." Naturally the first concern of an anxious soul is, like the jailer of old, "What must I do to be saved?" Having found salvation through faith in Christ and His finished work, we are too often content to rest in the knowledge that our sins are forgiven and that we are sheltered from judgment and saved from hell. We are slow to see that the same gospel that brings the good news of salvation from judgment proclaims the call of God to the glory of Christ. The Apostle can not only say to the Thessalonian believers that "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation," but immediately adds that "He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2: 13, 14).

These different passages clearly show that if God calls us it is because He has a purpose in His heart which He desires to gratify. Moreover we learn that the "call" involves that we are called out of one world lying in darkness, or ignorance of God, to come into the marvellous light of all that God has purposed for Christ in another world. Further, if we are called to heaven, it is that we may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The prize of the calling on high is to be with Christ and like Christ.

### ***Our Interest in His Life***

These then are some of the blessed truths that are connected with the call of God and illustrated in the life of Abraham. The practical importance of the story of Abraham's life lies in the fact that this great truth of the calling of God is brought before us, not by a doctrinal statement, but as exhibited in the life of a man of like passions with ourselves, and therefore in a way that the simplest can understand.

What powerful, mighty Voice, so near,  
Calls me from earth apart —  
Reaches with tones so still, so clear,  
From th'unseen world my heart?  
'Tis solemn: yet it draws with power  
And sweetness yet unknown:  
It speaks the language of an hour  
When earth's forever gone.  
It soothes, yet solemnizes all!  
What yet of nature is,  
Lies silent, though the heavenly call;  
No earthly voice like His.  
'Tis He. Yes, yes; no other sound  
Could move my heart like this:  
The voice of Him that earlier bound  
Through grace this heart to His.  
In other accents now, 'tis true,  
Than once my spirit woke,  
Through life and peace, through which it grew  
Under His gracious yoke.  
Blest Lord, Thou speak'st, 'twas erst Thy voice  
That led my heart to Thee —  
That drew me to that better choice

Where grace has set me free!  
Then wouldst Thou that I should rejoice,  
And walk by faith below —  
Enough, that I had heard Thy voice,  
And learnt Thy love's deep woe.  
Thy glory, Lord — this living waste  
Thenceforth no rest can give:  
My path was one with earnest haste,  
Lord, in Thy rest to live.  
Yes! then 'twas faith — Thy Word: but now  
Thyself my soul draw'st nigh —  
My soul with nearer thoughts to bow  
Of brighter worlds on high.  
And oh! how all that eye could see  
To others now belongs!  
The eternal home's enough to me —  
My soul's eternal songs.  
For Thou art near: Thou call'st me now  
In love I long have known,  
While waiting on Thy will below —  
Till Thou my hopes shouldst crown.  
And Thou wouldst have me soon with Thee;  
Thou, Lord, my portion art:  
Thou hast revealed Thyself to me —  
Thy nature to my heart!  
My happiness, O Lord, with Thee  
Is long laid up in store,  
For that bless'd day when Thee I'd see.  
And conflict all be o'er.  
Yes! love divine in Thee I know;  
The Father's glories soon  
Shall burst upon my ravished view —  
Thyself my eternal crown!

Thou makest me brighter hopes to prove,  
Because nearer Thou art;  
With secrets of eternal love  
Thou fillest my longing heart.  
How shall I leave Thee, Lord?  
This joy is from Thyself: it is  
My brightest hope without alloy,  
My pure, eternal bliss.

With Thee, O Lord, I all things have, —  
Unclouded joy divine  
In Thee, who first these "all things" gave  
Forever to be mine.

Yet I will wait, in labour still  
In Thy blest service here:  
What Thou hast given me to fulfil  
Thy will — to me is dear!  
I well can wait! Thou waitest yet,  
The word of that dread hour,  
Which shall Thy foes forever set  
As footstools of Thy power.

Yet, Lord! were once Thy will fulfilled,  
How better far with Thee,  
With Thee, my joy, my strength, my shield,  
In cloudless light to be?  
O endless joy! how shall my heart  
Thy riches all unfold:  
Or tell the grace that gave me part,  
In bliss no tongue hath told?  
Lord! Let me wait for Thee alone:  
My life be only this —  
To serve Thee here on earth, unknown;  
Then share Thy heavenly bliss.

# The Call of God

## Genesis 11: 31 to Genesis 12: 3

In the first portion of the life of Abraham there passes before us the path of faith that answers to the call of God; the hindrances to the path; the faith that takes the path; and the blessings in the path as well as the failure, temptations, and conflicts in the path.

## THE CHARACTER OF THE CALL

### *A Divine Call*

The first great truth we learn in the opening portion of Abraham's history is the blessed character of the call of God. From Stephen's address, recorded in Acts 7, we learn that "the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia." Here then we discover that which distinguishes the call from every other call, it comes from God — the God of glory. In this world with its cities and towers reaching up to heaven here is nothing that speaks of God, but only that which exalts and displays the glory of man. "The God of glory" speaks of another scene in which there is nothing of man but everything that displays God. This is the God who, in wonderful grace appears to a man who was living in a world estranged from God and sunk in idolatry. It is then the glory of the One that appears to Abraham that gives such importance to the call, and gives faith its authority and power to answer to the call.

### *A Separating Call*

Secondly, we learn that the call is a separating call. The word to Abraham is, "Get thee *out* of thy country, and *from* thy kindred, and *from* thy father's house." Abraham is not told to remain in the city of Ur and deal with man's wickedness, or attempt to improve its social condition, or reform its domestic ways, or attempt to make it a better and a brighter world. He is called to come out of it in every form. He is to leave the political world - "thy country"; the social world — "thy kindred," and the family world — "thy father's house."

The call today is no less definite. The world around us is a world that has the form of godliness without the power - the world of corrupt Christendom; and the Epistle that tells us that we are partakers of the heavenly calling exhorts us to separate from its corruption. We are to "Go forth therefore unto Him [Jesus] without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13: 13). It is not that we are to despise government — it is still God's appointment. Nor can we neglect family ties — they are ordered of God. Nor are we to cease to be courteous, and kind, and do good to all men as we have opportunity. But, as believers we are called from taking part in political activities of the world, the social round, and the whole sphere in which unconverted members of our families find their pleasure without God. We are not asked to reform the world or seek to improve its condition, but to come out from it. The word is still, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6: 17, 18).

## ***An Assuring Call***

Thirdly, if the call of God separates Abraham from this present world, it is in view of bringing into another world "a land," that God says, "I will show thee." If the God of glory appears to Abraham it is in order to bring Abraham into the glory of God. Thus the wonderful address of Stephen that commences with the God of glory appearing to a man on earth, ends with a Man appearing in the glory of God in heaven. In closing his address, Stephen looks up stedfastly into heaven and sees the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and he says, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." Looking upon Christ in the glory we see the wonderful purpose that God has in His heart when He calls us out of this present world. He has called us to glory, to be like Christ and with Christ in a scene where everything speaks of God and all that He is in the infinite love of His heart.

God does not say to Abraham, "If you answer to the call I will immediately give you possession of the land," but God says, "I will show thee the land." So God gives us with Stephen, if we answer to His call, to see the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off. We look up and see Christ in the glory.

## ***An Advantageous Call***

Fourthly, there is great present blessing for the one who answers to the call. As separated from this present evil world, God says to Abraham, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I *will bless thee, and make thy name great.*" The men of this world seek to make a great name for themselves; they say, "Let us make us a name." But God says to the separated man, "I will bless thee and make thy name great."

The tendency of our natural hearts is always to seek to make a name for ourselves, and the flesh will seize upon anything, even the things of God, to exalt itself. This tendency was seen even among the disciples of the Lord when they had a strife as to which of them should be accounted the greatest.

The scattering of man at Babel, and the divisions of Christendom, as well as every strife among the people of God, can be traced to this one root — the vanity of the flesh seeking to make itself great.

The lowly mind of the Lord Jesus was to make Himself of no reputation. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a Name which is above every name." God has made His Name great, and to the one that has His lowly mind and follows Him outside the camp in answer to the call, God says, "I will make thy name great." God can make a much greater name for the believer in His world of glory than we can make for ourselves in this present evil world.

If honestly confessed, it would be found that the true motive for many remaining in a false position, is the secret desire to be great, and thus they shrink from the path of obscurity outside the religious world of the day. Can we not see in Scripture, as in daily experience, that those who have been spiritually great among the people of God have ever been separated men — men who have answered to the call of God; while any departure from the separated path has led to the loss of influence and all true spiritual greatness among the people of God.

## ***A Beneficial Call***

Fifthly, God says to Abraham, "*Thou shalt be a blessing.*" In the outside path, not only would Abraham, himself be blessed, but, he would be a blessing to others. We do well to mark the import of

these words. How often a believer remains in an association which he would admit is not according to the Word of God on the plea that he will be more useful to others than in the outside place of separation. However, God does not say to Abraham, "If you stop in Ur of the Chaldees, or in the halfway house It Haran you will be a blessing," but, answering to God's call he is told, "Thou shalt be a blessing."

### ***A Preserving Call***

Sixthly, Abraham is told that in the outside place he would have the preserving care of God. He may indeed have to face opposition and trial, for it is ever true that "he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" (Isa. 59: 15), but God says to the separated man, "I will bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." The separated man is preserved from many a trial that overtakes the believer who remains in association with the world. The mercy of the Lord saved Lot from the doom of Sodom, but, in that false association he lost everything — wife, children, wealth, and name.

### ***An Effectual Call***

Seventhly, acting in faith in God's word Abraham is told, "*In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*" We know the use that the Spirit of God makes of this promise. He says, "The scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen on the principle of faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. 3: 8). Abraham did not, and could not foresee the far reaching effect of the principle of faith on which he acted in answering to the call of God, but God foresaw that it was the one way of blessing for all the families of the earth. So now in our little measure, none but God can foresee the far reaching effect in blessing for others that may result from one soul that in simple and whole-hearted faith, answers to the call of God.

### ***The Hindrance to Answering the Call of God***

We have seen the blessed promises that are connected with the call of God, and we shall learn how faith responds to the call. First, however, in this deeply instructive history, we are permitted to see how often the man of faith may be hindered for a time from answering to the call.

From Stephen's address, recorded in Acts 7, we learn that the call came to Abraham, "when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran." In answering to this call he is hindered by the ties of nature. The call came to Abraham, but nature apparently can at times profess great zeal in answering to the call, and even take the lead, for we read, "Terah took Abram . . . and went forth from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan." Nature may essay to tread the path of faith, and, at the start, do the right thing with the best of intentions; but in its self-confidence nature always undertakes to do more than it has the power to accomplish. Thus it comes to pass that while Terah leaves Ur "to go to the land of Canaan," he never reaches the land. Nature stops halfway at Haran, and there he dwells to the day of his death.

But what of Abraham, the man of God? For a time he allows himself to be hindered from fully obeying the call of God. It was not simply that his father was *with him* but he allows himself to be led by his father, as we read, "Terah took Abram." The result being that he stops short of the land to which he is called. So we read, in Stephen's address, he came "out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, *when his father was dead*, he removed into this land."

How many of us have been hindered for a time from taking the separate path, consistent with the

call of God, by some loved relative. The call reaches the believer; he acknowledges the truth, but delays to answer to it because some near relative is not prepared for the outside place. The soul clings to the hope that by waiting a little the relative will be brought to see the call, and then both can act together. Faith, however, cannot lift nature up to its own level, though, alas, nature can drag down and hinder the man of faith. Many pleas can be raised to excuse this halfway halt, but in reality it is putting the claims of nature above the call of God. Then, as in Abram's history, God may have to roll death into the family circle and remove the one that we allowed to hinder us in obeying God's call. Thus it was not until his Father was dead that Abram fully answered to the call of God.

To walk with God! Oh fellowship Divine!  
Man's highest state on earth — Lord, be It mine!  
With Thee may I a close communion hold,  
To Thee the deep recesses of my heart unfold:  
Yes, tell Thee all — each weary care and grief  
Into Thy bosom pour, till there I find relief.  
Oh! let me walk with Thee, Thou Mighty One!  
Lean on Thine arm, and trust Thy love alone;  
With Thee hold converse sweet, where'er I go;  
Thy smile of love my highest bliss below;  
With Thee transact life's business, doing all  
With single aim for Thee, as Thou dost call.  
My every comfort at Thy hand receive,  
My every talent to Thy glory give.  
Thy counsel seek in every trying hour,  
In all my weakness trust Thy mighty power.  
Oh! may this high companionship be mine  
And all my life by its reflection shine.  
My great, my wise, my never-failing Friend,  
Whose love no change can know, no turn, no end!  
My Saviour-God! Who gav'st Thy life for me,  
Let nothing come between my heart and Thee!  
From Thee no thought, no secret would I keep,  
But on Thy breast my tears of anguish weep.  
My every wound to Thee I take to heal,  
For Thou art touched with every pang I feel  
In Thee, and Thee alone, I now confide

And Thee I'd follow, as my Lord and Guide.  
Thy Holy Spirit for my guide and guest.  
Whate'er my lot, I must be safe and blest.  
Wash'd in Thy blood, from all my guilt made clean,  
I in Thy righteousness alone am seen:  
Thy home, my home — Thy God and Father mine!  
Dead to the world — my life is hid with Thine;  
Its lightest honours fade before my view —  
Its pleasures, I can trample on them too.  
With Thee, by faith I walk in crowds alone,  
Making to Thee my wants and wishes known:  
Drawing from Thee my daily strength in prayer,  
Finding Thine arm sustains me everywhere:  
While through the clouds of sin and woe, the light  
Of coming glory shines more sweetly bright;  
And this my daily boast, my aim, my end,  
That my Redeemer is my God — my Friend!

## **Faith and Unbelief**

### **Genesis 12: 4-20**

Abraham has been set free from the ties of nature, though at the painful cost of death coming into the family circle. After his father was removed by death, Abraham obeys the call, as we read, "So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken unto him."

He takes Lot, his nephew, with him, and Lot, with his worldly-mindedness, will prove an encumbrance to him. In the case of his father, Abram who was called allowed nature to lead, for "Terah took Abram," and this became a deadly hindrance. In the case of the nephew, Abram takes the lead, for we read "Abram took... Lot," and therefore, while this may become a weight, it cannot hinder faith answering to the call.

When nature took the lead, we read, "They went forth. . . from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan." But they never reach the land under the leading of Terah. Now, when faith takes the lead we gain read, "They went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and *into the land of Canaan they came*" v. 5).

### ***A Contrast***

Arriving in Canaan, they find "the Canaanite was then in the land." This is deeply significant. Of

Abraham, God had said, "I will bless thee." Of Canaan, God had said, "Cursed be Canaan." If God brings Abraham — the man of blessing — into the land of promise, he at once discovers that the Devil has already brought into that very land the man of the curse. In this way the Devil seeks to thwart the purpose of God, and hinder the man of faith from entering into possession of the land.

### ***A Comparison***

So with the Christian, he is called out of the present world, he is a partaker of the heavenly calling, he is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. But, answering to the call and leaving the world, he finds that he is opposed by "spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6: 12). The believer that seeks to enter into his spiritual blessings will find there is arrayed against him spiritual wickedness seeking to prevent him taking the heavenly ground that is the only true and proper portion of the Church.

For Abraham, Ur of the Chaldees was in the past; the possession of the land was yet future. In the meantime he had neither the world that he had left, nor the better world to which he was going. This, too, is the position of the Christian who answers to the call of God. He has left this present evil world and he has not yet reached the world to come.

What then, we may ask, is the portion of the one who answers to the call, and what will sustain him in this outside position? Here the story of Abram is rich with instruction and encouragement.

### ***Obedience of Faith***

First, be it noted, that the great principle on which Abraham acted was the principle of faith. Obviously, if he has left one world, and has not reached the other, he has nothing for natural sight. It is not that he did not *see*, but, what he saw was by faith. Thus we read, "*By faith Abraham*, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed"; and, again; "*By faith* he sojourned in the land of promise." He, and his, lived by faith, and finally we read, "These all died *in faith*" (Heb. 11: 8, 9, 13).

### ***Path of Faith***

Secondly, answering to the call of God on the principle of faith, Abraham, and those with him, became 'strangers and pilgrims.' As the Holy Spirit, in the New Testament, can say of them, they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11: 13). This comes before us very strikingly in his history. In Haran, where Abraham was detained for a time, we read, he "dwelt there"; but, arrived in the land, we read he "pitched his tent" as one that had no certain dwelling place. Moreover, we read that he "passed through the land." As a stranger he had but a tent in his world; as a pilgrim he was passing through to another world.

### ***Portion of Faith***

Thirdly, we learn what sustained Abraham in this pilgrim path. We are told, "The LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land." Mark well these two things. First, the twice repeated statement "the LORD appeared" unto him; secondly the land is set before him as a future possession. He sees the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off. He pursued his journey as a stranger and a pilgrim in the light of the glory of the God who had called him, and the

blessedness of the land to which he was going. So we read in the New Testament, "He looked for a city which hath foundations," and again, He looked for "a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Heb. 11 :10, 16).

Nor is it otherwise with ourselves. It is only as we have Christ Himself before us in His glory, and the blessedness of the heavenly home to which we are going that we shall, in any little measure, bear the stranger and pilgrim character. It is not enough to know the doctrine of Christ, and that heaven lies before us at the end of the journey, but, like the Apostle, the desire of each heart should be, "That I may know Him," and "apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3: 10, 12).

Taking a place outside this world in answer to the call, it is possible to grow in personal acquaintance with the Lord Himself, for He has said, "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him."

### ***Response of Faith***

Fourthly, After the LORD appeared to Abraham, we immediately read, "*There builded he an altar.*" This surely speaks of worship. In the Epistle to the Hebrews those who "go forth" unto Christ without the camp, not only take up their pilgrim character, as having no continuing city, but they become worshippers who "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually" (Heb. 13: 13-1 5).

Abraham not only realized something of the glory of the land in the far future, but he caught a glimpse of the glory of the One that had appeared to him. The gift of the land might well call forth his thanksgiving, but the blessedness of the Giver made him a worshipper. It is ever thus, for worship is the outflow of a heart that is filled with the glory of the Person we adore.

### ***Resource of Faith***

Fifthly, Abraham "*called upon the Name of the LORD.*" This speaks of dependence upon the Lord. Whatever his needs, whatever the privations of his pilgrim journey, whatever opposition he may have to meet, whatever temptations might cross his path, he had an unfailing resource — he could call upon the Name of the Lord.

In every day of difficulty the godly find their resource in the Lord. In the day of ruin before the flood there were those who, like Cain, "went out from the presence of the LORD"; but, there were also the godly who "began. . . to call upon the Name of the LORD" (Gen. 4: 16, 26). So in the dark days of Malachi the godly found their resource in the LORD, for we read, they "thought upon His Name" (Mal. 3: 16). In the early days of the Church, believers were known as those who "called on this Name" (Acts 9: 21). In the midst of their persecutions it was to the Lord that they turned. And in the midst of the ruin of these last days, we are assured that there will be still those "that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2: 22).

However striking the faith of Abraham, we are made to realize that he is a man of like passions with ourselves. No one takes the path of faith without being tested. The test is allowed to discover, on the one hand our weakness, and on the other the grace and faithfulness of God.

## ***The Faithlessness of Abraham***

In Abraham's history the test came in *the* form of a famine. It was a severe test for "the famine was grievous in the land." If the LORD allows the famine, the LORD can surely meet the needs of His own in the famine. However, under the pressure of his need, Abraham allows the circumstances to come between his soul and the LORD. Instead of calling upon the LORD, he followed the dictates of mere reason, or common sense, and, for a time, stepped out of the path of faith and "went down into Egypt." Instead of counting upon God to sustain him he goes down to the world for help.

Having taken this false step, he finds, that though his immediate needs are met, he is faced with fresh difficulties occasioned by his false position. He fears that he will be killed in order to satisfy the lusts of Egypt.

Having taken a position in which he can no longer count upon God to preserve him, he is left to his own resources to meet this fresh difficulty. Left to his own devices he sinks below the level of the world and acts a lie. With this equivocation he seeks to protect himself at the expense of his wife.

Unbelief, carrying its own judgment, constantly leads into the very evil, one seeks to avoid. As it has been said, "The sons of men would build a tower lest they should be scattered abroad, and the Lord scattered them *because* they built it. Abram, fearing lest Pharaoh should take his wife, says she is his sister (as if God would not preserve him), and *therefore* Pharaoh takes her into his house" (J.N.D.). So again, at a later day in similar circumstances, Elimelech leaves the land of God in order to escape the fear of death by famine, only to find that death awaits him in the land of Moab (Ruth 1 :1-3).

Abraham finds indeed, by this false step, relief from his immediate need, and even acquires riches, but at what a cost. For, in Egypt, he can pitch no tent and raise no altar, nor call upon the Name of the LORD.

## ***The Faithfulness of Abraham's God***

Yet, in spite of all failure, God is faithful to His own. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. God does not give up His people when they break down. He acts on our behalf, though in His governmental ways we have to suffer for our folly. Thus it was that God acted on behalf of his failing servant. So we read, "the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife."

In result, when the deceit is discovered, Abraham is dismissed by the world, for, Pharaoh says, "Behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way." And Pharaoh takes care that he does go, for he "commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had." Alas, when the world dismisses the people of God, not because of their faithful witness to God, but, because of their own shameful conduct!

Thus, in the goodness of God, His poor servant is set free from a false position, but not without reproach and shame.

Lord Jesus, Thou who only art  
The endless source of purest joy,  
Oh! come and fill this longing heart;  
May nought but Thee my thoughts employ.

Teach me on Thee to fix my eye,  
For none but Thee can satisfy.  
The joys of earth can never fill  
The heart that's tasted of Thy love;  
No portion would I seek until  
I reign with Thee, my Lord, above,  
When I shall gaze upon Thy face  
And know more fully all Thy grace.  
When from Thy radiant throne on high  
Thou didst my fall and ruin see,  
Thou cam'st on earth for me to die,  
That I might share that throne with Thee.  
Loved with an everlasting love,  
My hopes, my joys are all above.  
Oh, what is all that earth can give?  
I'm called to share in God's own joy.  
Dead to the world, in Thee I live,  
In Thee I've bliss without alloy:  
Well may I earthly things resign;  
"All things" are mine, and I am Thine!  
Till Thou shalt come to take me home,  
Be this my one ambition, Lord,  
Self, sin, the world, to overcome,  
Fast clinging to Thy faithful Word:  
More of Thyself each day to know,  
And more into Thine image grow.

## **Refusing and Choosing**

### **Genesis 13**

The reality of Abraham's restoration to the path of faith is speedily put to the test. Circumstances arise that manifest he is once again living in the light of the heavenly country, and can therefore afford to refuse the well-watered plain that is chosen by his worldly-minded nephew.

## ***Recovery from Failure***

Abraham has been dismissed from Egypt. Where he goes is a matter of indifference to the world. Abraham however, was a true man of faith, though, like ourselves, he at times breaks down in the path of faith. Having tasted the blessedness of the outside place, nothing will satisfy his soul but getting back into the place of blessing from which his feet had strayed. So we read, "Abram went up out of the land of Egypt. . . into the south . . . and he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been . . . unto the place of the altar."

As with every truly restored soul he retraces his path step by step until, once again, he is found in his stranger and pilgrim character with his tent, as a worshipper with his altar, and as a dependent man calling upon the Name of the Lord.

## ***Result of Failure***

The restoration of Abraham is complete; but the result of Abraham's failure is seen in others. A saint never fails without affecting others for evil, though he himself may be restored. The effect of his failure upon Lot at once comes to light. In Terah we have seen the man of nature who can make a fair profession, but cannot take the path of faith that leads outside the world. In Abraham, we have seen the man of faith who, acting according to the word of the LORD, takes the outside place, though at times he may fail in this path. In Lot we see a true believer, who takes the outside place, not in faith in God, but under the influence of man. Already we have read that when Abraham departed from Haran, "Lot went with him" (Gen. 12: 4). Again, when Abraham went up out of Egypt, we read, "Lot went with him" (Gen. 13: 1). Now, for the third time Lot is described as the man "which went with Abram."

Lot represents a large class who take up a right position outside the world, but do so under the influence of a friend or relative rather than from personal exercise and faith in God. From the beginning of his path Lot was characterized by walking in the light of another. Alas! in different ways, and measures, how often we may, like Lot, act with those who have faith without having it ourselves, only to find that we shall not stand when tried by temptation.

When the test comes, believers who walk in the light of another will break down and give up a path which has no attraction for the flesh, about which they never had any exercise, and for which they have no personal faith.

## ***The Snare of Riches***

How often, too, the test today takes the form that it did in the story of Abraham and Lot. As we read, "there was strife." We learn further that the immediate cause of the strife was their possessions. We do well to notice the twice-repeated statement that they were not able to dwell together, and the deeply significant cause of the division, "for their substance was great." How often, since then, believers have been divided by jealousy of one another's spiritual gifts or temporal riches. The abuse of spiritual gifts was a source of division in the assembly at Corinth. The apostle can say to this assembly, "In everything ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance and in all knowledge." But these very riches became a cause of strife and division, for, says the apostle, "There is among you envying and strife, and divisions"; and he adds that they were "puffed up for one against another" (1 Cor. 1: 5; 1 Cor. 3: 3; 1 Cor. 4: 6). Poverty might have led them to cling to one another; their riches became a cause of division.

In the case of Abraham and Lot their temporal riches became the occasion of division. We may

well ask, "Where were these temporal riches acquired?" When first Abraham entered upon the path of faith, and Lot went with him, they took "all their substance." But it was no cause of strife (Gen. 12: 5). In Egypt, however, Abraham acquires great wealth so that after his restoration we read, "He was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold."

The wealth that he acquires through turning aside from the path of faith becomes a cause of strife and division between brethren. Striving together these brothers cease to be a witness to God before the Canaanites and the Perizzites that dwelled in the land

### ***The Position of Faith***

Nevertheless, Abraham is a restored man in a true position with a right motive; whereas Lot, though in a right position is only a follower of others. Therefore, while strife becomes the sad occasion of revealing the worldly-mindedness of Lot, it also brings to light the heavenly-mindedness of Abraham, who can renounce things seen. Abraham says, "Let there be no strife, I pray, between me and thee. . . for we be brethren." The man which is in a position for which he has not faith will in the end become a source of strife among brethren and had better separate from the man whose faith he cannot follow.

Abraham, with the heavenly country before him, can afford to renounce the present world with its prospect of ease and plenty. Lot can choose, and if he takes the best according to nature and sight, Abraham will be content to take the path that God chooses for him, be it rough or smooth, knowing that it will end in the land of promise with all its blessedness.

### ***The Choice of the Flesh***

Under the influence of others, Lot had accepted the outside path: left to his own choice he shows that the world is in his heart (vv. 10-13). Without seeking direction from God, he chooses his path according to sight. "Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld the plain of Jordan." It was an alluring sight and had promise of present ease and plenty. Everywhere there was water for his flocks, without the labour of digging wells. So fruitful was the plain that it was "even as the garden of the LORD." Most significant of all, it was "like the land of Egypt." Alas! Lot having followed Abraham into Egypt had acquired a taste for Egypt's pleasures and thus had strengthened the desire for worldly ease and plenty.

So Lot chooses all the plain of Jordan, gives up the separate path, for which he never had personal faith, and forever leaves the land of Canaan. There was nothing gross or wrong in choosing a well-watered plain; but it proves that the heart is not set on the unseen land of God's promise. Moreover, the real danger of the well-watered plains is that Satan had reared Sodom in their midst.

Abraham remains in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwells in the cities of the plain. Having left the path of faith and chosen the path of sight, and worldly ease, his way is ever downward, for we next read that he 'pitched his tent toward Sodom.' Of this city we are told "The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." We shall yet learn that for Lot there is no recovery. Lower and lower he sinks, until at last he passes from the scene under a cloud of shame and dishonour.

### ***The Confession of Faith***

Abraham, freed from the encumbrance of his worldly-minded nephew, receives fresh communications from the LORD. Lot had allowed himself to be guided by the sight of his eyes apart

from the direction of the LORD. The result being that the sight of his eyes stirred the lust of his heart, and his feet followed the choice of his heart.

Now Abraham uses his eyes, but at the direction of the LORD, for, when Lot was separated from him, the LORD said, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art." He is to look in every direction at the land which the LORD has given him. And well for us, when freed from the weight of those who have no faith for the outside path, if we too set our minds on things above and "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen," and seek to enjoy every part of the revelation that God has given to us of the world to come, the heavenly country with its city which hath foundations.

In this sense, we can still answer to the LORD'S direction to Abraham when he said, "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee." Set free from mere followers, rising above all petty strife and allowing the LORD to choose his path, Abraham enjoys a rich unfolding of the world to come for which in patience he waits. In the meantime he moves through the land with his tent and his altar.

This world is a wilderness wide,  
I have nothing to seek or to choose;  
I've no thought in the waste to abide;  
I have nought to regret nor to lose.  
The Lord is Himself gone before;  
He has marked out the path that I tread:  
It's as sure as the love I adore;  
I have nothing to fear nor to dread.  
There is but that One in the waste,  
Which His footsteps have marked as His own;  
And I follow in diligent haste  
To the seats where He's put on His crown.  
'Tis the treasure I've found in His love  
That has made me a pilgrim below;  
And 'tis there, when I reach Him above,  
As I'm known, all His fullness I'll know.  
Till then, 'tis the path Thou hast trod,  
My delight and my comfort shall be:  
I'm content with Thy staff and Thy rod,  
Till with Thee all Thy glory I see.

— J.N.D.

Called from above, and heavenly men by birth

Who once were but the citizens of earth)  
As pilgrims here, we seek a heavenly home,  
Our portion, in the ages yet to come.  
There all the saints of ev'ry clime shall meet,  
And each with all shall all the ransomed greet,  
But oh! the height of bliss, my Lord, shall be  
To owe it all, and share it all, with Thee.  
Thou wast "the image" in man's lowly guise,  
Of the invisible to mortal eyes;  
Come from His bosom, from the heavens above,  
We see in Thee Incarnate, "God is love."  
Thy lips the Father's name to us reveal;  
That burning pow'r in all Thy words we feel,  
Then to our raptured hearts we hear Thee tell  
The heavenly glories which Thou know'st so well.  
No curse of law, in Thee was sov'reign grace,  
And now what glory in Thine unveiled face!  
Thou didst attract the wretched and the weak,  
Thy joy the wand'rers and the lost to seek.  
That precious stream of water and of blood  
Which from Thy pierced side so freely flowed,  
Has put away our sins of scarlet dye,  
Washed us from ev'ry stain, and brought us nigh.  
We are but strangers here, we do not crave  
A home on earth, which gave Thee but a grave;  
Thy cross has severed ties which bound us here,  
Thyself our Treasure in a brighter sphere.  
As I bid adieu to the world's fancied pleasures  
You pity my weakness. Alas! did you know  
The joys of salvation, that best hidden treasure,  
Would you have me forsake them? Ah never, ah no!  
In the gay scenes of life I was happiness wooing,  
But ah, in its stead I encountered but woe;

And found I was only a phantom pursuing,  
I never once found it. Ah never, ah no!  
How bright now the sunbeams of glory are shining  
Around my sweet path as to heaven I go;  
With Christ in my heart on His promise reclining,  
Shall I yield up my treasure? Ah never, ah no!  
But now in the path which you call melancholy,  
I drink of the joys that the world does not know;  
Come taste them and try them, you'll own your past folly,  
Nor again bid me flee them. Ah never, ah no!  
By the counsels of Jesus my feet are directed,  
My faithful Companion, we intimate grow;  
With His love I am blest, by His arm I'm protected;  
Would you have me forsake them? Ah never, ah no!

## **Victory and Defeat**

### **Genesis 14**

In Genesis 12 we have traced the blessedness of the path of faith in answer to the call of God, and how our steps can slip unless held by the power of the Lord.

In Genesis 13, we have seen the renunciation of the world by the believer who reads the path of faith; and, in contrast, the sorrowful choice of the world by the believer who allows himself to be governed by sight.

Genesis 14 presents the conflicts of the world - nations warring against nations - during which the believer, who has refused the world, obtains the victory; while the believer, who walks by sight, falls under its power. Further we learn that the world's conflicts will finally issue through the judgments of God in the deliverance of God's people and the establishment of the reign of Christ as Priest and King. This is typically set forth in Melchizedek, king of Salem.

### ***Conflict (vv. 1-11)***

The chapter opens with a solemn picture of this present evil world. It is a scene in which the nations form themselves into groups, and enter into alliances to carry out their schemes of aggrandizement, and to defend themselves from attacks.

Moreover, it is a lawless world where men are forced to serve governments against their will, or rebel against governments to obtain their liberty (v. 4).

Thus the whole world, whether in high places or in its lower spheres — the mount or the wilderness (v. 6) — becomes a scene of warring interests, and selfish conflicts.

### ***Capture (v. 12)***

The account of these world conflicts leads to what is so deeply instructive — the contrast between the believer who is governed by sight, and the one who walks by faith. In the course of these conflicts, Lot, the man of sight, falls a captive to the world; Abraham, the man of faith, is victorious over the world.

Thus we read that the victorious kings "took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed." It is significant to notice that Lot, of whom we read in a former chapter, who chose all the plain of Jordan, and "pitched his tent *toward* Sodom" (Gen. 13: 12), has now taken a further step on his downward course; for here we read, he "*dwells in Sodom.*" We may be sure that it was never Lot's intention to dwell in Sodom, when he pitched his tent toward Sodom. But one false step leads to another. Drawing near to the world, he is soon in the world; and dwelling in the world he becomes involved in its conflicts, and falls a captive to its power.

It is still true that the believer who settles down in the world, has no power against the world. Where there is not the faith that keeps the coming of glory in view, there is not the faith to overcome the present evil world. This is the case of Lot. He never overcame, but was constantly overcome by one evil influence after another. He accepted the outside path under the leading of Abraham rather than of faith in God. When the test comes he falls under the influence of fair prospects that appeal to the sight of the eyes. Having drawn near to the world he falls still further under its influence, and settles down in Sodom. Finally, dwelling in Sodom, he finds in the day of conflict he is a lonely man. without strength, without friends to help, and **unable to count** upon the support of God. Powerless in the day of battle, he falls a captive to his enemies.

### ***Contrast (vv. 13-16)***

In contrast to Lot, who chose the world, and becomes its captive, there is presented before us the man who renounced the world and is victorious over it. Lot, as we have seen, is unprepared in the day of battle; Abraham, dwelling as one apart, is ready for conflict. He has in his household those who have already been trained for conflict, and he is ready to fight the good fight — not, indeed, Like the world for personal aggrandizement, or to obtain the riches of this world, but to rescue a brother who has fallen under its power.

The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, and we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. None the less the Christian conflict is very real. We contend for the truth, and seek to deliver those who are in danger of falling into the religious world, or have already been taken captive in its toils.

Paul, living in the light of another world and glorying in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world was crucified to Paul and he to it, fights the good fight and escapes the snare of those who would be rich whereby they pierce themselves through with many sorrows. He has great conflict for those who were in danger of falling under the power of the religious world (Col. 2: 1).

Likewise Jude, in the spirit of Abraham, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh, is ready earnestly to contend for the faith, can have compassion on those believers who have been taken captive by the world, and seek to pull them out of the fire (Jude 3, 22, 23).

### ***Compensation (vv. 17-24)***

Moreover, Abraham is not only victorious over the hostility of the world, but he is proof against

its horrors and its gifts. We may rise above the world's enmity, and yet fall beneath its kindness. And we are never more in danger of a fall than in the moment of a victory. This the enemy knows full well and so comes with his temptations at a moment when we may be off guard. Thus with Abraham, "the king of Sodom went out to meet Abram after his return" from his triumph over the opposing kings.

But if the king of Sodom comes to tempt Abraham, the king of Salem is there to support him.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Holy Spirit has given us the spiritual significance of this fine scene. There Melchizedek is introduced as a type to set forth the glories of Christ. His name, and that of his country, signify that he was King of Righteousness and King of Peace. Moreover, he was "the priest of the Most High God" (Heb. 7: 1-3). As a king, he brings righteousness and peace to his subjects; as a priest, he leads the praises of his people to God. As the representative of God before man, Melchizedek blessed Abraham on behalf of God; as the representative of man before God, he blessed the Most High God on behalf of Abraham.

Thus, in the coming Millennial days, God will be known as the Most High, who will deliver His earthly people from their enemies and deal in judgment with every hostile power. Then, indeed, Christ will shine forth as King and Priest. So we are told by direct prophecy, "He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne: and He shall be a priest upon His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zech. 6: 13). He will be the true King of Righteousness, the King of Peace, and the Priest of the Most High God.

Melchizedek having brought forth bread and wine, the needs of Abraham are met and his joy secured, and thus he can dispense with the gifts of this world. Abraham has lifted up his hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, the one who possesses all the fulness of heaven and earth. Blessed by God, he will take nothing from the world lest it should say, "I have made Abram rich."

Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and enriched with the unsearchable riches of Christ, the believer can rise above the seductions of this world, refuse its gifts and honours, and pursue in peace the life of faith in the path of separation. And faith treads this path in the light of the world to come. Faith knows that all the conflicts of this world will come to their end in the glorious reign of Christ, when His poor failing people will be delivered from all their enemies and righteousness and peace will be established, as we read, "He shall judge the people with *righteousness* and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring *peace* to the people" (Ps. 72: 2, 3).

Father, Thy sovereign love has sought  
Captives to sin, gone far from Thee:  
The work that Thine own Son hath wrought  
Has brought us back in peace and free.  
And now as sons before Thy face,  
With joyful steps the path we tread,  
Which leads us on to that bright place  
Prepared for us by Christ our Head.  
Thou gav'st us in eternal love,  
To Him to bring us home to Thee,  
Suited to Thine own thought above,

As sons like Him, with Him, to be  
In Thine own house. There love divine  
Fills the bright courts with cloudless joy;  
But 'tis the love that made us Thine,  
Fills all that house without alloy.  
O boundless grace! what fills with joy  
Unmingled all who enter there,  
God's nature, love without alloy,  
Our hearts are given e'en now to share.  
God's righteousness with glory bright,  
Which with its radiance fills that sphere,  
E'en Christ, of God the power and light,  
Our title is that light to share.  
O mind divine, so must it be  
That glory all belongs to God:  
O Love divine, that did decree  
We should be part, thro' Jesus' blood.  
O keep us, Love divine, near Thee,  
That we our nothingness may know,  
And ever to Thy glory be  
Walking in faith while here below.

## **Sonship and Inheritance**

### **Genesis 15**

In Genesis 11 to 14 we have seen the public witness of Abraham before men. In the second portion of his history, presented in Genesis 15 to 21, we have the personal exercises of his soul before God. It is clear that Abram's departure from Haran, his tent, his altar, his renunciation of the world, and his victory over the kings, were all matters of public knowledge, setting forth the Life of faith and the glorious end to which it leads. Now we are to learn his inner exercises that lie behind his public testimony.

It is of the deepest moment to realize we are not merely called to be witnesses of facts that are true, but to testify of truths that have affected our own souls.

In these marvellous scenes there is personal intercourse between God and a man of like passion with ourselves. God appears to Abraham in visions and by personal visits, in which He talks with Abraham and even accepts his hospitality. In these communications God reveals the purpose of His

heart concerning Abraham and his posterity, and treating him as a friend, discloses His mind concerning the world.

### ***Revelation of God (v. 1)***

Abraham, on his side, can with full confidence spread out his needs before God, tell out his difficulties and lead for others. Such condescending grace on the part of God, and confiding trust on the part of Abraham, is deeply instructive to ourselves. In the light of the full revelation of God as our Father, it is possible for believers to enjoy yet greater intimacy with God, though in a less familiar manner. We may well challenge our hearts as to how much we know of this blessed intimacy that, in all the sweet confidence of children, can bring every difficulty to God, spread out our needs before Him, and, in the confidence of love, plead on behalf of others. We are at least encouraged by these lovely scenes to cultivate this intimacy with God.

The occasion of these fresh communications is deeply instructive. Abraham had just refused this world's gifts and honours. Now we read, "*After these things* the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Having aroused the enmity of the world, over whom he had gained a victory, he will need a shield. Having refused the gifts of this world he will have the rewards of God. And God's protection, and God's rewards, far exceed all that this world can offer. With God for our shield we need not fear the reprisals of defeated enemies: with God for our reward we can dispense with this world's gifts.

### ***Response of Faith (vv. 2, 3)***

The response to this communication is beautiful in its simple trust. God had said, "I am . . . thy exceeding great reward." Abraham with the utmost confidence, taking God at His word, asks, If this be so, what wilt Thou give me? Moreover, he spreads out his need before God. He says, as it were, "You have spoken of my seed, You have promised me the land, but I go childless and all my possessions will pass to my servant, Eliezer. You have given me the land and spoken about my seed, but, behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and a servant is my heir."

### ***Reward of Grace (v. 4)***

In reply the word of the LORD came to Abraham and, IS ever with God, His gifts exceed our requests. Abraham ad asked for a son, and, in reply, God promises him not only a son but also an inheritance for the seed. Sonship and inheritance are the two great themes of God's reply. The word to Abraham is, "He that shall come forth of thine own bowels shall be thine heir," and, "I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur. . . to give thee this and to inherit it." The whole scene illustrates the truth of Romans 8: 17, "If children then heirs." Sonship and m inheritance, whether for the earthly people of God or the heavenly, are inseparably connected. Our future prospects are connected with our character as sons. If we are sons, then we must be heirs. God does not have sons without providing for them an inheritance.

### ***Reckoning of Righteousness (vv. 5-7)***

But this beautiful picture illustrates a further truth, that believers are "all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 26). Faith existed before, but this is the first time that we read that a man "believed in the LORD." We see, too, this faith illustrated in all its simplicity. Abraham is brought

forth from his own circumstances, and all that he is asked to do is to *look*, and *listen*, and *believe*. He is to look away from Sarah, himself, the earth, and everything of nature, and says the LORD, "Look now toward heaven." And as he looks to the stars, he is to listen to what God says, "So shall thy seed be." Then we read, "He believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness."

We know how the Spirit of God has used this picture in Romans 4, to set forth the way the believer in Christ is accounted to be in a righteous condition before God. To us sinners, Christ is presented, and God says, as it were, "look" and "listen." *Look* toward heaven and fix your eye on Christ in glory, and *listen* to what God says about Christ. That He has died for all, that God is satisfied with Jesus and His work. Looking to Jesus, and listening to what God says, the needy soul believes in Jesus as the One that has died for him, and God says of the one that believes, he is reckoned by God to be clear of all his sins and in a righteous condition before God, and further, he is a child of God, and if a child then an heir.

### ***Remission of Sins (vv. 8-10)***

Moreover, Abraham learns that the ground of all blessing must be sacrifice. So we have ever to remember that the everlasting basis of our blessing is the great sacrifice of Christ. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." There may be very different measures of appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ, probably set forth by the different animals that Abraham was told to offer, but sacrifice alone can secure the blessing.

Seeing that all blessing for us depends upon the great sacrifice of Christ, it will ever be the effort of the enemy to attack and belittle His mighty work. It is ours to contend for the truth and drive away every unclean bird that would deny the sacrifice and trample underfoot the blood of Christ.

Moreover, if the sacrifice is the ground of all blessing there must be on our side the individual appropriation by faith of the death of Christ. The "sinking sun," the "deep sleep," and the "horror of great darkness," all speak of the exercises of soul in entering into the deep meaning of the Cross. Did not Paul know something of these experiences when, after he had seen Christ in the glory, "he was three days without sight, and neither did eat or drink" (Acts 9: 9)?

Further, Abraham has to learn that the road to the glory is a pathway of suffering. His seed would assuredly enter the Promised Land, but they will first pass through affliction. Thus the four truths of Romans 8: 17, that we are sons of God, heirs of Christ, suffering with Christ, and going on to the glory, are exemplified in the story of Abraham, who learns that beyond the furnace of affliction there is the light of the glory.

Beyond the storms I'm going,  
Beyond this vale of tears,  
Beyond the floods o'erflowing,  
Beyond the changing years;  
I'm going to the better land,  
By faith long since possessed:  
The glory shines before me,  
For this is not my rest.

The glory shines before me,  
I know that all is well;  
My Father's care is o'er me,  
His praises I would tell:  
The love of Christ constrains me,  
His blood has washed me white;  
Where Jesus is in glory,  
'Tis home, and love, and light.  
O Lord, we would delight in Thee,  
And on Thy care depend;  
To Thee in every trouble flee,  
Our never failing Friend.  
When human cisterns all are dried,  
Thy fullness is the same;  
May we with this be satisfied,  
And glory in Thy name.  
No good in creatures can be found,  
All, all is found in Thee;  
We must have all things and abound,  
Through Thy sufficiency.  
Thou who hast made our heaven secure  
Wilt here all good provide;  
While Christ is rich, can we be poor?  
Christ who for us has died!  
O Lord, we cast each care on Thee,  
And triumph and adore;  
Oh, that our great concern may be  
To love and praise Thee more!

## **The Flesh and the Law**

### **Genesis 16**

In Genesis 15 we have learned that the blessing has been definitely promised to Abraham, in

sovereign grace, on the ground of sacrifice; thus setting forth the great truth that every blessing, whether for God's earthly or heavenly people, comes to them in sovereign grace, and yet perfect righteousness, through the death of Christ.

In this chapter we have the account of Abraham's attempt to secure the promise of the heir, through the flesh on the ground of works, or his own efforts.

### ***The Test***

God has promised Abraham a son, and Abraham had believed God (Gen. 15: 4-6). But His patience is put to the test, for we read, "Now Sarai, Abram's wife bare him no children." How then is he to obtain the heir? Under the test, his patience broke down: instead of waiting God's time he attempts to obtain the promised blessing by his own efforts. In the epistle to the Hebrews, Abraham is brought forward as the great example of those who "through *faith* and *patience* inherit the promises" (Heb. 5: 12-15). In his history, as so often with ourselves, we see that on occasions he breaks down in the very things of which, in the main, he is a striking example. In Genesis 12, as we have seen, his faith failed when put to the test. Here, in Genesis 16, his patience breaks down under a fresh test.

### ***The Temptation***

As in the former case, Egypt was at hand to tempt him from the path of faith by relieving him of all the exercises that such a path entails, so now the *Egyptian maid* is at hand to suggest relief from further waiting. Though himself restored, the result of his lapse into Egypt is still manifest. Something of the world had been introduced into his household which, if he acts in the flesh is ready to be used. How true it is that what a man soweth that shall he also reap. Through careless walk we can easily introduce something of the world into our homes, which in due time will give the flesh an opportunity to manifest itself.

In Galatians 4: 21 to 26 the Apostle Paul refers to this incident and gives us its spiritual meaning. He reminds the Galatian Assemblies that Abraham had two sons, one by a bondmaid, the other by the free woman, and that the son of the bondwoman was born after the flesh, but the son of the free woman was by promise.

### ***The Teaching***

Then he tells us that these things are an allegory setting forth the two covenants — the covenant of law connected with Sinai, which leads to bondage, set forth by Hagar and her son; and the covenant of grace, connected with Jerusalem which is above, leading to liberty, set forth by Sarah and her son.

### ***The Tendency***

The Galatian believers, though truly converted and having the Spirit, were turning back to the law as a rule of life, and were thus, in practice making their blessing depend upon their own efforts. To use the language of the allegory they became the children of Sinai, and developed a character marked by the traits of the flesh. If connected with the liberty of Jerusalem above, which sets forth sovereign grace, they would have set forth the character of Christ. Instead of this they were, as the result of putting themselves under law, manifesting a proud, vain-glorious spirit which led to envy, so that they were biting and devouring one another, and being drawn into the world (Gal. 4: 21; Gal. 5: 15, 26). The

apostle longed that Christ might be formed in them, so that the beautiful character of Christ might shine forth from them (Gal. 4: 19).

Turning then to the story of Abraham, we see that the only result of seeking to obtain the heir by his own fleshly efforts is to introduce into his household that which has the character of the flesh, "That which is born Of the flesh is flesh." Nature can only produce nature. So Abraham's natural efforts only produce the natural man that in due course will persecute the spiritual seed.

### ***The Tragedy***

In the meantime a jarring element is brought into the family. The one who represents the efforts of the flesh despises the one through whom the blessing will come (v. 4). Sarah and Hagar, setting forth what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit, cannot agree, "for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5: 17). Moreover the man that is brought into his household gravitates toward the world, for he is found in the wilderness of Shur on the borders of Egypt (v. 7). He is, moreover, a hard character who is against every man, and stirs up every man against himself (v. 12).

### ***The Type***

The application of these truths to ourselves is plain. We may, like Abraham be true believers, and like the Galatians have the Spirit, and yet, in our daily life, we may make the law our rule of life. We may thus allow the thought that our being in the favour and grace of God our Father depends upon our own good walk and legal efforts. The results will be twofold. First, we develop a hard and self-righteous character that is proud of itself and jealous of others. Secondly, we shall fail to enjoy the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and so lack grace and love, and entirely fail to produce the fruit of the Spirit that sets forth the character of Christ (Gal. 5: 1-6, 22).

### ***The Interpretation***

The interpretation given in Galatians shows that what is set forth in the allegory is not a sinner seeking justification by his works, but rather a believer, who is already justified, seeking holiness of life by his own legal efforts and in his own strength.

It is evident that Christendom has fallen into this Galatian legality. It is not that Christian truths have been entirely given up, but that the legal system set forth by Hagar, has been introduced into the Christian profession, so that there are very many true Christians kept in bondage of soul through seeking to regulate their lives by the law in order to walk well, and thus obtain the favour of God, instead of seeing that right walk flows from the blessed fact that through the death of Christ they are already in the everlasting favour of God, and can only walk rightly in the strength of Christ.

Typically, the story may set forth the history of Israel under the law seeking to obtain the promises by their own works. In result they find themselves, like Hagar, cast out of their land and wanderers in a wilderness world in which they are contrary to all men and every man against them. Nevertheless the nation is beloved for the father's sake, and hence the providential care of God is never withdrawn from them, even as Hagar found that in the wilderness there was a well and the angel of the LORD, and that God saw all her distress.

Child of God, by Christ's salvation,

Rise o'er sin and fear and care —  
joy to find in ev'ry station,  
Something still to do or bear;  
Think what Spirit dwells within thee!  
Think what Father's smiles are thine!  
Think that Jesus died to win thee,  
Child of God, wilt thou repine?  
Haste thee on from grace to glory,  
Armed by faith and winged by prayer,  
Heaven's eternal day's before thee,  
God's right hand shall guide thee there;  
Soon shall close thine earthly mission,  
Soon shall pass thy pilgrim days,  
Hope shall change to glad fruition,  
Faith to sight, and prayer to praise.

— H.L.

Lord, Thou hast drawn us after Thee,  
Now let us run and never tire;  
Thy presence shall our comfort be,  
Thyself our hope, our sole desire.  
Our present Saviour, while no fear  
Nor sin can come if Thou art near.  
What in Thy love possess we not?  
Our star by night, our sun by day,  
Our spring of life when parched with drought,  
Our wine to cheer, our bread to stay,  
Our strength, our shield, our safe abode,  
Our robe before the throne of God!  
Unchangeable, Thy gracious love  
Our earthly path hath ceaseless viewed;  
Ere knew our beating heart to move,  
Thy tender mercies still pursued;  
Ever with us may they abide,

And close us in on every side.

## **The Almighty God and the Everlasting Covenant**

### **Genesis 17**

#### ***Listening to God's Revelation of Himself (vv. 1, 2)***

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read of Abraham that "after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promises" (Heb. 6: 12-15). The story of Hagar and Ishmael has shown that, under pressure he failed in patience. That story closed with the statement that "Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram." Now we read, "When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram." For thirteen years he patiently endured. During these years there is no record of any communications to Abraham. God waits until all hope is over to obtaining the blessing by the efforts of the flesh.

Having experienced the futility of his own efforts to obtain the promised heir, and having been kept waiting until he is ninety and nine, and thus realized his utter weakness, the LORD appeared to Abraham and revealed Himself as "the Almighty God." This, as it has been pointed out, was a great advance upon former communications. In Genesis 15, we have read that God revealed Himself to Abraham as his shield and exceeding great reward. There it was a revelation of what God was *for* Abraham; here it is a revelation of what God *is* in Himself.

Connected with this revelation, the LORD said to Abraham, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." As we have seen, Abraham's way had not been altogether perfect. Though he was a man of true faith and patience, in the matter of turning aside to Egypt he had failed in faith; in the matter of Hagar, he had failed in patience. Now, having learned his weakness, he learns that God is Almighty. If then, God is Almighty, God's purposes and promises will surely come to fruition, however impossible their fulfilment may appear to nature, and sight, and the flesh. Abraham only has to remember that God is Almighty and at once every difficulty will disappear, every obstacle will be surmounted, and in quiet faith and patience he will be enabled to wait for God to act in God's own time. No longer is Abraham to expect anything from nature. Everything depends upon God from first to last. So God can say, "I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." We can say, "If God will"; who but the Almighty God can rightly say, "I will"?

#### ***Falling on His Face Before God (v. 3)***

The effect of this fresh revelation on Abraham is striking. When the word of the LORD came to Abraham in a vision revealing what God was for Abraham, at once Abraham thought of himself, and, in happy confidence speaks to God, spreading out his needs, and stating his difficulties before God. Here, when God personally visits Abraham, revealing who He is in Himself, Abraham falls upon his face as a listener, and God speaks to him. He realizes his own nothingness in the presence of God's greatness, and at once he takes the lowly place on his face. The former communications led Abraham to think of himself, and his need. This revelation leads him to think of God, and forms in him a character that is consistent with the One that meets his need: He walks before God and is perfect.

How beautiful are these practical examples of the blessed intimacies between God and the

believer! God so inspires Abraham with the confidence that He is for Him that Abraham can speak with God; then Abraham is brought into the lowly place before God so that God can speak with him.

In our present day we require and have these different revelations of God. We need to know all that God is *for us* in His grace and love; and such knowledge leads to sweet intimacy and communion with God by which we can pour out our needs before Him, as to all our difficulties and trials. But we also have the revelation of all that God is *in Himself* as the Father. This revelation leads to a true sense of our nothingness before Him, while at the same time the heart delighting in its Object is formed into the likeness of the One upon whom we gaze. "We are changed into the same image from glory to glory." Thus whether in Abraham's day or in ours, the right appreciation of the revelation of all that the Lord is would lead to likeness to Himself. In this sense, we should walk before the Lord and be perfect.

### ***Receiving Communications from God (v. 4)***

Then we are permitted to hear the blessedness of these communications as God talks with Abraham. First, Abraham is told that the grace of God would flow out to the nations. If God is Almighty He can overcome every barrier and bless the Gentiles.

Secondly, in connection with the revelation of God as the Almighty, Abram's name is changed from Abram to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." Thus God puts honour upon His servant.

Thirdly, Abraham is told that he would be exceedingly fruitful. Not only through Abraham would nations be blessed, but through him there would be fruit for God upon earth.

Fourthly, while the nations would be blessed, yet Abraham and his seed would be in the closest relationship with God. "I will establish My covenant," said God, "between Me and thee and thy seed after thee." And that covenant will be an everlasting covenant by which God covenants to be the God of Abraham and his seed after him.

Fifthly, God not only makes an everlasting covenant, but secures to Abraham and his seed, "an everlasting possession.

### ***Responsibility Towards God (vv. 9-13)***

These then are some of the blessings of the everlasting covenant that God makes with Abraham. The covenant presents God's settled purpose to bless, for seven times, in the course of this communication God says, "I will." Now Abraham learns that God looks for an answer in the believer's life to His own grace. Abraham is to walk before God and be perfect.

As Christians we are not asked, even as Abraham was not asked, to walk well in order to obtain the blessing, but to walk in a way suited to God because we are blessed. To thus walk and be perfect before God, calls for dependence upon God and His Almighty power. But this involves the entire refusal of the flesh. To this end circumcision was introduced, as a sign that the flesh is to be mortified, if the walk is to be perfect before God. In Genesis 15, death was brought in as the ground of justification; here the refusal of the flesh, by that which speaks of death to the flesh, is in order to holiness of walk.

If God covenants to bless by His Almighty power, here must, on our side, be no confidence in the flesh or allowance of its activity. For the believer today, circumcision is, we know, "of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2: 29). The refusal of the flesh is not to be merely an outward neglecting of the body of which the world can take account, but

the refusal of She flesh in all its inward workings in the heart — its self-confidence, self-righteousness, vanity and lusts - as that which has been condemned in the cross (Col. 2: 11).

There is the solemn reminder that the allowance of the flesh in the believer will lead to governmental judgment even to cutting off from God's people.

Sarah is blessed with Abraham and is ennobled with a change of name. In the presence of these communications Abraham is filled with joy: for, doubtless, in this passage the laughter speaks of joy, not unbelief.

### ***Pleading With God (vv. 18-21)***

Abraham pleads for Ishmael, and God hears his prayer. Nevertheless, twice over Abraham is reminded that the covenant is established in Abraham's promised son who is to be called Isaac.

From Romans 9: 6-9, it would seem that Ishmael sets Forth the unbelieving mass of Israel. There we read, "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called." The unbelieving mass of the nation are children of Abraham according to the flesh; but only the believing remnant are the true seed according to promise. Nevertheless, even the children according to the flesh would be great upon the earth.

### ***Keeping the Covenant With God (vv. 22-27)***

Having finished this great communication God left off talking with Abraham. The self-same day Abraham is careful to keep the covenant by performing the rite of circumcision. He puts into practice the word that he had heard, and acts consistently with the revelation that God has made of Himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord! be it soon! Thou know'st our heart,  
In this sad world, no rest  
Can find nor wish but where Thou art:  
That rest itself possessed!  
Soon shall we see Thee as Thou art:  
O hope for ever blessed !  
Thou'lt call us, in our heavenly part —  
The Father's house to rest.  
O rest! ineffable, divine,  
The rest of God above:  
Where Thou forever shalt be mine;  
My joy, eternal love!  
His counsels, all fulfilled in Thee;  
His work of love, complete: —  
And heavenly hosts shall rest, to see

Earth blest beneath Thy feet.

— J.N.D.

God's Almighty arms are round me,

Peace, peace is mine!

Judgment scenes need not confound me,

Peace, peace is mine!

Jesus came Himself and sought me;

Sold to death He found and bought me;

Then my blessed freedom taught me,

Peace, peace is mine!

While I hear life's surging billows,

Peace, peace is mine!

Why suspend my harp on willows?

Peace, peace is mine!

I may sing with Christ beside me,

Though a thousand ills betide me;

Safely He hath sworn to guide me!

Peace, peace is mine!

Every trial draws Him nearer,

Peace, peace is mine!

All His strokes but make Him dearer,

Peace, peace is mine!

Bless I then the hand that smiteth,

Gently and to heal delighteth,

'Tis against my sins He fighteth,

Peace, peace is mine!

Welcome every rising sunlight,

Peace, peace is mine!

Nearer home each rolling midnight,

Peace, peace is mine!

Death and hell cannot appall me,

Safe in Christ whate'er befall me,

Calmly wait I till He call me,

Peace, peace is mine!  
Jesus, the Lord, our righteousness!  
Our beauty Thou, our glorious dress!  
Before the throne in this arrayed,  
With joy shall we lift up the head.  
Bold shall we stand in that great day,  
For who ought to our charge shall lay,  
While by Thy blood absolved we are  
From sin and guilt, and shame and fear?  
Thus Abraham, the Friend of God,  
Thus all the saints redeemed with blood,  
Saviour of sinners Thee proclaim,  
And all their boast is in Thy name.  
This spotless robe, the same appears  
In new creation's endless years;  
No age can catch its glorious hue,  
The robe of Christ is ever new  
Till we behold Thee on the throne  
In Thee we boast, in Thee alone  
Our beauty this, our glorious dress,  
"Jesus, the Lord, our righteousness."

## **Blessings and Privileges**

### **Genesis 18**

In Genesis 17 we learned how God revealed Himself to Abraham as the Almighty — the One who can and will fulfil His promises of blessing in spite of every difficulty. In the light of this revelation Abraham is to walk before God and be perfect, having no confidence in the flesh.

In Genesis 18 we are permitted to see the blessings and privileges of one whose walk is consistent with the revelation of God as the Almighty. The chapter unfolds four great privileges that such an one can enjoy. First he has the personal manifestation of the LORD to him (vv. 1-8). Secondly, he has the assurance of the coming blessing through the promised heir (vv. 9-15). Thirdly, he is treated as a friend to whom God confides what He is about to do (vv. 16-21). Fourthly, in confidence and nearness to God he can intercede on behalf of others (vv. 22-33).

### ***Divine Visitation (vv. 1-7)***

The first great privilege that the believer enjoys, who walks before God in the light of the revelation that God has given of Himself, and who has no confidence in the flesh, is the personal manifestation of the LORD.

The chapter opens with Abraham sitting at his tent door. As a stranger with his tent he is at rest outside the strife of this world. Is there not a danger, in this our day, of believers being distracted and excited by over-occupation with the events taking place in the world? Would that we knew more of the rest of spirit that is the outcome of answering to the call of God and taking the outside place in confidence in God and having no confidence in the flesh! To such an one God comes, as in the case of Abraham, to commune in the most intimate way. The manner of His coming is striking. Abraham looks up and sees that "three men stood by him." As the story develops we learn that two were angels who in due course appear as such in the gate of Sodom (Gen. 19: 1). The other, we know, was none less than the LORD, Himself, appearing in human form, a foreshadowing of the time when the Son of God becomes Incarnate and dwells among the children of men.

### ***Divine Ministry (vv. 6-8)***

Apparently there was no outward token by which Abraham, or others, could have discerned the presence of Jehovah. All that the world would have seen were three men appearing at his tent door. Abraham, with the spiritual discernment of a man of faith walking in nearness to God, distinguishes the LORD from the two angels, and in reverence bows himself to the ground and addresses Him personally, for he says, "Lord, if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant." He asks to be allowed to wash their feet, and invites them to rest under the shadow of the tree while he sets refreshment before them.

Abraham is permitted to do as he had said. A meal is prepared and set before them, "and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat." Today, if walking in the yet deeper knowledge of God revealed as Father, is it not possible for believers to enjoy this sweet and intimate fellowship with Divine Persons. Not, indeed, in the particular manner in which the LORD appeared to Abraham: but, by the Spirit, Who has come from the Father, can we be led into the most blessed communion. Little, indeed we may know of it, but, nonetheless it can be known. On that last night, in the Upper Room, the Lord intimates that when He left the disciples it would still be possible for them to enjoy in the power of the Spirit, an intimacy far deeper than any they had known while the Lord was present with them. Having spoken of the Spirit that the Father would send, He says, "At that day," the day in which we live, "he that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and *will manifest Myself to him,*" and again the Lord adds, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him and *We will come unto Him, and make Our abode with him*" (John 14: 16-25).

Here, too, for the first time we have the mention of feet washing in Scripture. Here as elsewhere the thought of feet washing is to refresh the one whose feet are washed. Abraham has the high privilege of washing the feet of the One who, in the years to come, will become flesh and, in the greatness of the love that delights to serve others will, in His condescending grace, wash His poor disciples' feet.

### ***Divine Communication (vv. 9-15)***

The Lord takes this occasion by this moment of holy intimacy to confirm the faith of Abraham by

assuring him of the coming birth of his son. This concerns Sarah, 50 the LORD asks, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" Then the LORD says, "I will certainly return unto thee at this time of the year; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son" (N. Tr.). For any but a Divine Person to have spoken thus would have been mere presumption. We cannot count upon a day. God can say, "I will certainly return." Thus the faith of Abraham is confirmed by the assurance of the LORD'S own words. And still the Lord delights to assure our trembling hearts with the certain word of the One who can say, "I will." "I *will* come again, and receive you unto Myself." "I *will* not leave you comfortless: *I will* come to you" (John 14: 3-18).

Abraham hears this great promise with the full realization of the glory of the One who speaks, and therefore expresses no astonishment, raises no difficulties, and expresses no doubt. In marked contrast Sarah's faith and discernment is not equal to her husband's. She hears what is said, but has little realization of the glory of the Speaker. She doubts what is said because of what she finds in herself. She is old and her body worn out, therefore she argues that what the Lord has said cannot come true, and in her heart she laughs in unbelief at the very suggestion of having a son. She is rebuked for her unbelief and Abraham is reminded that, however impossible the fulfilment of the promise on the ground of nature, there is nothing too hard for the Lord.

Charged with her unbelief, Sarah is ashamed to own the truth. As so often, fear of consequences leads to lying and deceit. She "denied, saying, I laughed not." It may have been true that she did not laugh aloud; but she laughed in her heart and has to learn that she is in the presence of One who can read the heart and see behind tent doors.

### ***Divine Prophecy (vv. 16-20)***

Very blessedly, in the years to come, God speaks through the prophet Isaiah of Abraham as "My friend" (Isa. 41: 8). In this scene we see God treating Abraham as a friend. Truly, as it has often been said, to a servant we speak of things that concern his work, to a friend we speak of that which we may be about to do, though it may have no direct concern with our friend. Here then Abraham is treated as a friend, for God says, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" The reason that God treats him as a friend is very blessed, for, the Lord says, "I *know him*, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." The one that the Lord treats as a friend is not only one that believes in the Lord, but also orders his household in the fear of the Lord.

To us the word of the Lord is, "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you"; and He adds, 'Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you" (John 15: 15).

Treating Abraham as a friend the Lord tells him of the judgment that He is about to bring upon the cities of the plain. But let us remember that these communications come to the man who, as we have seen, lives apart from the world, has renounced the world, and gained the victory over the world. Unless we escape the corruptions of the world we shall be saying with the mere professor, "Where is the promise of His coming?" The Apostle Peter warns us not to be in ignorance of the solemn fact that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night bringing judgment upon an ungodly world.

Already we have learned that "the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Gen. 13: 13). Now we learn that their sin cried out to the Lord for judgment, for it was "very grievous." God waits and bears long with the wickedness of men, but He is not indifferent to sin. It cries out to Him until at last it is ripe for judgment. But, even so, the Lord is slow to judge. First we

read of the two angels, that they "rose up from thence, and *looked toward Sodom*" (v. 16); then they "*went toward Sodom*" (v. 22); finally, we read, "there came two angels *to Sodom* at even" (Gen. 19: 1).

### ***Intercession (vv. 22-33)***

Two angels have passed on to execute the judgment of the Lord on the doomed cities. Abraham is left alone standing before the Lord. At once he takes the place of the intercessor. He intercedes on the ground that it is impossible to destroy the righteous with the wicked. Therefore he pleads with God to spare the city if there are found therein fifty righteous men. Then he pleads for it to be saved if there are forty-five righteous men; then he comes down to forty, thirty, twenty, and at last he pleads if there be only ten men. Each time God, in His grace, grants his request; until, at last, it is Abraham's faith fails to draw upon that grace of God that, where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.

At a later date God could say to Jeremiah of the doomed city of Jerusalem, "If you can find *a man*, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it" (Jer. 5: 1). We know that Man has been found: Christ is the "One mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all." Through this Man we are bidden to intercede for all men ( 1 Tim. 2: 1-6).

What is the garish world to me —  
    Its tinsel and its joys?  
Thy glory and Thy grace I see,  
My soul is satisfied with Thee,  
    And earth no more annoys.  
Thou hast the Father's name declared,  
    The Father's love hast shown;  
And I Thy heavenly voice have heard,  
    Thy powerful life-imparting word  
    My inmost soul hath known.  
Thou art my shelter, loving Lord,  
    The bread on which I feed,  
My rock with living water stored —  
    Forever be Thy name adored,  
    My soul can know no need.  
Yea. Thou art everything to me,  
    Star of the morning bright;  
Thy love declared in death I see,  
    Thy glory and Thy victory  
    In resurrection light.

Love not the world: its smiles, its hopes  
    May lure thee on;  
But cup of joy, and dream of bliss,  
    Will soon be gone.  
Those dreams will fade, as mist in morn;  
    Those hopes will die;  
And in that cup of seeming joy,  
    Deep sorrows lie.  
Love not the world: it, with its lusts,  
    Must pass away;  
Its pleasures sweet, its hopes so bright,  
    Must all decay.  
Its glories, too, must have an end,  
    Must pale and die,  
And all its empty bubbles burst;  
    They're Satan's lie.  
But he who does the will of God,  
    For aye will live,  
And drink the streams of heaven's delights,  
    Which Christ will give.  
He'll weep no more on that blest shore;  
    No marvel this,  
For joys well up, and fill his cup,  
    There's naught but bliss.  
Dear fellow-pilgrim in the path,  
    Look up! look on!  
There waits above, a home of love,  
    Where Christ is gone.  
And pleasures bright in courts of light  
    Will satisfy  
A heart at rest, supremely blest,  
    With Jesus nigh.

# Friendship With the World

## Genesis 19

In Genesis 18 we have seen the blessings of a believer whose walk is consistent with the revelation of God as the Almighty.

In Genesis 19 there comes before us the sorrows of a believer who has given up the separate path, and walks in association with a judgment-doomed world. We shall see, indeed, that he is saved, but so as by fire, and passes out of the story under a cloud leaving behind him the memory of a life of shame.

### ***A Striking Contrast***

The opening verses of these two chapters evidently set Abraham and Lot in striking contrast. In Genesis 18: 1, Abraham comes before us as sitting in his tent door. In Genesis 19: 1, Lot is seen sitting "in the gate of Sodom." One believer is outside the world in his true pilgrim character, with his tent; the other is, not only in the world, but, he is actually taking part in its administration; he sits in the gate — the place of judgment.

### ***The End of a Downward Path***

Once Lot was in the outside place, that answers to the call of God — but there only as a follower of others. A little trouble arises and at once he gives up the path of faith and separation, and chooses the well-watered plain, and "pitched his tent *toward Sodom*" (Gen. 13: 12). Next we learn that he "*dwelt in Sodom*" (Gen. 14: 12). Now, at last, we read, "*Lot sat in the gate of Sodom.*"

But the city in which Lot has an honoured place as a magistrate, is a judgment-doomed city, and the time has come when the city is ripe for judgment. From the Lord's own words, in Luke 17, we know that this solemn scene is a foreshadowing of the judgment about to fall on this present evil world. There we read, "As it was in the days of Lot . . . thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17: 28-32).

We are living in the days just before the Son of Man is about to be revealed, and we are warned by the Lord Himself, that in these our days we shall find a terrible condition similar to that which existed in the days of Lot. This makes this chapter of immense practical importance, as presenting the true character of the world around us, and, above all, as setting forth conditions so hateful to God that at length He has to intervene in judgment.

### ***The Breakdown of Testimony***

What then were the conditions in Sodom that brought down the judgment of God? Two things characterized the city. First, the men of Sodom were "wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Gen. 13: 13). Secondly, a true believer was holding a place of honour in the city, associated with sinners in seeking to judge and maintain order in the world. It was then a city characterized by the association of sinners before the Lord with believers in the Lord. It is this condition, so hateful to God, that marks the world of today, and that will very soon bring the present period of grace to a close. It is not simply the wickedness of the world that ends the day of grace. The wickedness of the world may show itself in different forms at different times, but it cannot be greater today than when it perpetrated

the crowning sin of crucifying the Lord of glory. It is rather the breakdown of the Christian profession whereby even true believers are found in the world, not as witnesses to the grace of God, but in closest association with the world, that God will not tolerate and that makes the judgment so imminent. When those who were left to be a witness to the grace of God settle down in the world and cease to be any witness for God, the end is not far off.

### ***The Message of Warning***

We have the warning challenge of the apostle in clear and unmistakable words, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: and what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness: and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (2 Cor. 6: 14, 15).

In spite of these plain words, what do we see on every hand today? Not only a world filled with violence and corruption — this has ever been — but, on every hand we see true believers, in flagrant disregard of the Word of God, associated with unbelievers and those who mock at divine things. It has been truly said, "Evangelical leaders even, can now take their places openly on public platforms with Unitarians and sceptics of almost every grade; and societies, secret or public, can link together all possible beliefs in the most hearty good fellowship. It is this that marks the time as so near the limit of divine long-suffering, that the very people who are orthodox as to Christ can nevertheless be so easily content to leave Him aside on any utilitarian plea by which they may have fellowship with His rejectors."

When those who profess to be ministers of Christianity cease to be witnesses for Christ and, sinking down to the level of the world, become themselves the leaders in all worldliness, then, indeed the salt has lost its savour, and the Christian profession, having become nauseous to Christ will be spued out of His mouth and the judgment will fall upon the world.

Surely, then, the destruction of Sodom should speak to every conscience, and lead us to take heed to that word which says, "Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18: 4).

### ***The Ministry of Angels***

There are, moreover, other lessons for us to learn from this solemn scene. In the preceding chapter the LORD appeared to Abraham accompanied by two angels. Here it is only the angels that come to Sodom. Abraham, in the outside place with his tent, enjoys sweet communion with the LORD. Lot, sitting in the gate of Sodom, will have no visits from the LORD. His soul may be vexed with the filthy conversation, and unlawful deeds of the wicked, but he will enjoy no communion with the LORD.

Furthermore, while the LORD came to Abraham in the full light of day, the two angels come to Sodom "at even." They come, not to give a public witness to Sodom, but, as it were, in the secrecy of the evening gloom to pull a falling saint out of the fire of judgment (Gen. 18: 1; Gen. 19: 1).

We may gather from Scripture that the service of angels has a twofold character. On the one hand they are the executors of judgment; on the other hand they are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Ps. 104: 4; Heb. 1: 14). We see them in this twofold service at Sodom. In judgment they had come to destroy the city: providentially, they were there to rescue a true believer from a false position! Good to know that, in our day, though judgment is about to fall on

Christendom, every true believer will be saved From judgment, even though, with many, it may be like Lot, their works destroyed but they themselves saved yet so "as through the fire" (1 Cor. 3: 15, N.Tr.).

### ***Lot's Inconsistency***

Further we see that Lot, being a true believer, recognizes the heavenly visitors, treats them with due reverence, seeks to honour them, and shelter them from the insults of the men of the world. Alas! only to find that he has no power to restrain their wickedness. In his extremity he is even prepared to sink to the vile expedient of abandoning his two daughters to their lust in order to quell the disturbance. His efforts only arouse the anger of the men of Sodom. They tell him to "stand back." They argue that this man, who came into their midst as an alien, now takes upon himself to act as their judge. With these threatening words they press sore upon Lot who is only saved from the violence of the mob by the providential action of the angels.

### ***Lot's Failure***

The angels' directions to Lot to warn his relatives that the LORD is about to destroy the city, brings to light the solemn fact that the believer in a false position has no power in testimony. Lot "went out and spake to his sons in law," warning them of the coming judgment. "But he seemed as one that mocked." It was indeed a witness to the truth, but it condemned himself. Had he not professed to be a righteous man, and yet had he not been so attracted to Sodom that he had chosen to dwell there, and even take a leading part in its affairs? Did he then really believe that the LORD was about to destroy the city? His whole life was a flat contradiction to his testimony. Little wonder that he seemed as one that mocked to the men of Sodom.

Nor is it otherwise today. Can we wonder that the world pays little heed to any warnings uttered by the professed ministers of religion who themselves are leaders in worldliness.

### ***Lot's Hesitation***

Even while warning others, Lot is loath to leave Sodom; for when urged to haste from the doomed city, we read "he lingered." Nevertheless, the mercy of the LORD "brought him forth and set him without the city." His wife and two daughters are brought out with him but all his possessions are left behind. He is saved so as through the fire.

Delivered by the mercy of God he is told to "escape to the mountain." He admits the mercy that has saved him, but he has little faith in the preserving care of the One that directs him to the mountain. Moved by fear and unbelief, he pleads that the little city of Zoar may be spared for a place of refuge. His prayer is granted; and as the sun rises Lot enters Zoar.

How solemn are these words, "The sun was risen." It speaks of a cloudless day with no sign of the coming judgment. As the Lord tells us of the men of Sodom, "they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded." All went on as usual, "But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all." The Lord adds the solemn words, "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17: 28-30). So, at a later day, the Apostle can write "that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5: 2, 3).

## ***Lot's Wife***

Lot's wife looked back. Lot personally was a righteous man, though caught in the toils of the world. His wife was a mere professor who, though she leaves the city, has her heart still there. She looks back to the place of her affections and becomes an everlasting warning to professors who, in a moment of fear may separate from the world, but have never known the call of the LORD. How solemn are the Lord's own words, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17: 32).

In contrast to Lot, saved through fire, and his wife who looked back, we have a glimpse of the separate man who looked on to the city which hath foundations. Abraham was in "the place where he stood before the LORD." He sees from afar the destruction of the cities of the plain. Then we learn what is so highly instructive, that if Lot is saved from the overthrow of the cities it is because "God remembered Abraham." Lot, as he sat in the gate of Sodom, might have said, "What good is Abraham to the world dwelling apart in his tent?" Yet it is of Abraham, in the separate path, that God had said, "*Thou shalt be a blessing.*" So it came to pass; for if Lot is saved it is because God remembered Abraham.

## ***Lot's Fear***

Though saved from the doom of Sodom, poor Lot is still the victim of fear. The very city of his choice he ears to dwell in, so he falls back on the mountain to which he had been told to flee. But even so, he goes to he mountain driven by fear of men rather than led by faith in God. There he becomes involved in the infamy of his daughters to pass from the history with no record of his end, leaving behind a posterity that becomes the constant enemy of God's people.

How solemn and searching to all our hearts is this history of a believer who, though once in the path of separation from the world gave it up to sink into association with the world, there to find that he could have no communion with God; no power to restrain the evil of the world; no power to witness to the truth, and no confidence in the preserving care of God: finally to pass from the scene under the dark shadow of great shame. Well indeed, if the story leads us to feel our own weakness, and casts us upon the One Who is able to keep us from falling and present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

Farewell to this world's fleeting joys,  
Our home is not below;  
There was no home for Jesus here,  
And 'tis to Him we go.  
To Him in yonder world of love,  
Where He has gone before:  
The home He changed for Calvary's cross,  
Where all our sins He bore  
He bore our sins that we might be  
His partners on the throne!  
The throne He'll shortly share with those

For whom He did atone  
Up to our Father's house we go,  
To that sweet home of love:  
Many the mansions that are found  
Where Jesus dwells above  
And He who left that home above,  
To be a sufferer here,  
Has left this world again for us  
A mansion to prepare.  
His errand to the earth was love,  
To wretches such as we!  
To pluck us from the jaws of death,  
Nailed to th'accursed tree.  
Th'accursed tree was the reward  
Which this sad world did give  
To Him who gave His precious life  
That this lost world might live.  
And has this world a charm for us,  
Where Jesus suffered thus?  
No! we have died to all its charms  
Through Jesus' wondrous cross.  
The cross on which our Saviour died  
Has won the crown for us!  
In thankful fellowship with Him  
We bear our daily cross.  
Set free in grace — He vanquished him  
Who held us in his chains —  
But more than this, He shares with us  
The fruit of all His pains.  
To all His ransomed ones He'll give  
(To us amongst the rest):  
With Him to dwell, with Him to reign,  
With Him forever blest

Farewell, farewell, poor faithless world,  
    With all thy boasted store;  
We'd not have joy where He had woe —  
    Be rich where He was poor.  
The mists hang dank, on front and flank,  
    My straining eye can naught discover;  
    But well I know that many a foe  
    Around that path doth hover.  
Nor this alone would make me groan —  
    Alas, a traitor dwells within me;  
    With hollow smile and heart of guile,  
The world without, too, plots to win me.  
    Thus I'm beset with foes, and yet  
    I would not miss a single danger:  
    Each foe's a friend that makes me wend  
My homeward way — on earth a stranger.  
    For never haze dims upward gaze —  
    Oh, glorious sight! for there above me  
    Upon God's throne there sitteth One  
Who died to save — who lives to love me!  
    And like the dew each dayspring new  
    That tender love shall onward lead me:  
    My thirst doth slake, yet thirst awake  
Till every breath shall pant, "I need Thee."  
    No wisdom give; I'd rather live  
    In conscious lack dependent on Thee:  
    Each parting way I meet this eye  
Then proves my claim to call upon Thee.  
    No strength I ask, for Thine the task  
To bear Thine own on Shepherd-shoulder  
Then faith may boast when helpless most,  
And greater need makes weakness bolder.  
    Then, Lord, Thy breast is, too, my rest;

And there, as in my home, I'm hidden,  
Where quiet peace makes groanings cease,  
And Zion's songs gush forth unbidden.  
Yes, e'en on earth may song have birth,  
And music rise o'er nature's groanings,  
Whilst Hope new born each springing morn  
Dispel with joy my faithless meanings. — F.C.J.

## The Works of the Flesh

### Genesis 20

In Genesis 19 we have seen Abraham in the high places 'where he stood before the LORD,' outside the world and preserved from the hour of trial that came upon them that dwelt upon the earth.

### *An Old Repeated Sin*

In Genesis 20 Abraham is once again journeying toward the south country, and dwelling upon the border land of Egypt. In this doubtful position he again acts in a way that brings him under the rebuke from the man of the world.

Abraham fails in the same way that he had done some twenty years before, though the circumstances are somewhat different. Then, under the stress of famine, he had turned aside from the land and slipped into Egypt. Here, without any such trying circumstances, but simply from the fear of man, he denies the one through whom God had definitely assured him the promised heir would come (Gen. 18: 10). In one case he gives up the testimony of the inheritance; in the other he beclouds the testimony to the heir. As then, so now, behind every failure of the people of God, the enemy is attacking some great truth connected with their calling. Today, he is specially attacking the truth as to the true relationship of the Church to her Head in Heaven.

The fact that after so many years Abraham should fail in the same way, only aggravates the offence. For now it is no mere novice in the path of faith, but one who has walked long in the outside place of separation from the world who breaks down.

Another great lesson that we can learn from this sad episode is that *the flesh in God's people never changes*. This is a solemn truth that we are slow to realize, but that we all have to learn, and at times through bitter experience. There is, indeed, grace to deliver us from the power of the flesh, and to keep us from its evil; but the evil flesh from which we are kept never changes. The flesh may tend to show itself in different forms in different individuals; but, whatever form its evil may take, that is the form of evil it will retain from the beginning of our history to the end.

This twice repeated failure on the part of this man of God is surely recounted, not to discourage us, or turn us back on our weakness, but, rather, to cast us upon the true source of all confidence and strength. One has truly said, it is only when we have learned that we are "unable to do without God for a moment that we find that He is for us moment by moment." But it is easy to say that we cannot do without God; it is a harder thing-to learn experimentally, perhaps by repeated failure, that we are

dependent upon God moment by moment.

With the fear of man before him, Abraham loses faith in God. Failing in faith, he falls back on his own resources and acts in the duplicity of the flesh. He says of Sarah, his wife, "She is my sister." He tells the truth to hide the truth, and again exposes his wife to shame to preserve his own life.

### ***A God Ever Faithful***

Nevertheless, however great their failure, God does not give up His people. He will never cast away His pearls because of some grit that attaches to them. He will deal with all in us that is contrary to Himself — it may be at painful cost to ourselves — in order to make us partakers of His holiness. And not only does God deal *with*, but He acts *for* His poor failing people. So in this scene God intervenes in a marked way to preserve Sarah from the shame to which Abraham's duplicity had exposed her. Abimelech is kept from wronging Abraham, and is even warned that Abraham is a prophet, and that unless Sarah is at once restored to Abraham, death will surely come upon his household. Further, Abimelech is told that the very man who had so wronged him, is one who is in such a position of nearness to God that he can pray for him. In spite of his failure, he is a prophet and an intercessor with God: and God does not deny these high privileges because of his failures.

### ***A Rebuke Justified***

Nevertheless, the privileges of being a prophet and an intercessor, only increase the evil of his duplicity. This the world is not slow to appreciate; for at once Abimelech calls Abraham, and challenges him as to what he has done. In plain language Abimelech truly says, "Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." Not only had Abraham failed in faith in God, not only had he wronged his wife, but he had wronged the man of the world. Abraham had sunk, not only beneath the height of his calling, but beneath the conduct of a decent man of the world.

Further, Abimelech challenges Abraham as to what led him to do this thing. Abraham answers, "I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me for my wife's sake." How low this man of God has fallen. Carried away by his own thoughts, thinking only of himself and his safety, he acts with a duplicity that clearly shows that at that moment he himself had not the fear of God before him, however much he may charge others with the lack of the fear of God.

### ***A Lamé Excuse***

Moreover, as so often when a believer fails there is the effort to palliate the failure, instead of the honest confession, "I have sinned." No three words in human language are so hard for either a sinner or a saint to utter as the words, "I have sinned." So Abraham seeks to excuse his duplicity by explaining that it was quite true that Sarah was his sister, even though he had held back the truth that she was also his wife.

### ***An Unjudged Root of Unbelief***

Moreover, it comes out that this failure has an unjudged root of unbelief far back in his history. In a false position he lowers the testimony of God to the apprehension of the world, by saying, "When God caused me to wander from my father's house." He does not say, "When God called me to a heavenly country and a city which hath foundations," but he would give the impression that, like any

mere prodigal, God had caused him to wander from his father's house. In these circumstances he and his wife had entered into a compact of unbelieving duplicity.

### ***A Conduct Unbecoming***

In spite of Abraham's failure, Abimelech, man of the world though he is, acts in a righteous and even liberal way that is in striking contrast to Abraham's conduct. In the day of power and victory over the enemy Abraham refused to take "from a thread even to a shoe latchet" from the king of Sodom. In the day of weakness and unbelief he will accept sheep, and oxen, and menservants, womenservants, and a thousand pieces of silver, from the king of Gerar.

Nevertheless, though giving gifts to Abraham, Abimelech does not hesitate to reprove his wife in terms of contempt, for he says, "Behold, I have given *thy brother* a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes." Had she been rightly veiled, as Abraham's wife, she never would have been seen by Abimelech or taken into his house. The veil speaks of the women being exclusively for the one to whom she belongs.

As believers, if it were seen that we were exclusively for Christ, the world would not wish to have us in its company. Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ;" and, as a result the world was crucified to him, and *he was crucified to the world*. Failing to maintain this single-hearted devotedness to Christ, we shall, like Sarah, lose the respect of the world and come under its just reproof.

The root of their failure being exposed, Abraham once again resumes his true place in reference to the world as an intercessor (vv. 17, 18).

God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.  
Deep in unfathomable mines.  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up His bright designs,  
And works His sovereign will.  
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and will break  
In blessings on your head.  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace:  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.  
His purposes will ripen fast,

Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.  
Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain

## **The Birth of the Heir**

### **Genesis 21**

In Genesis 17 and Genesis 18 God has been revealed as the Almighty — the One who carries out His promises in spite of the weakness of His people and the wickedness of the world.

In Genesis 19 the evil of the world is fully demonstrated; while, in Genesis 20 the evil of the flesh and the weakness of God's people are manifested.

The world and the flesh having been exposed, we learn in Genesis 21 that God's set time has come and the long promised heir is born (vv. 1-7); the bondwoman and her child are cast out (vv. 8-21); and the world has to own that God is with the man of faith (vv. 22-34).

#### ***The Birth of Isaac (vv. 1-5)***

Everything on man's side having broken down, we learn that the "set time of which God had spoken" has come and the promised heir is born. He is called Isaac, meaning "laughter," and in due time circumcised in accordance with the directions and commands of the Lord. Everything takes place in God's set time," and according to God's Word.

In the birth of Isaac we have a striking type of Christ, of Whom we read, "When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son" (Gal. 4: 4). Christ is the One through whom all the blessings promised to Abraham are secured, whether for Israel, the direct seed, or for the Gentile nations.

#### ***The Effect of That Birth (vv. 6-9)***

In the two incidents that follow we see the effect of the birth of the heir. In the one scene there are those who rejoice; in the other there are those who mock. Again, do not these two incidents strikingly bring before us the twofold effect of the birth of Christ? Sarah said, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me." Time was when her laughter was the expression of her unbelief; now it is the overflow of the joy of her heart. Moreover, her faith recognizes, and owns, that the birth of the son is so wholly of God, and lies so entirely outside the thoughts of man, that she asks, "Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck?" So impossible was this to nature, that no man would have said it. Only God would have said it; and only One who is Almighty could carry out what He said.

So when at last the Christ of God became Incarnate there were those who, in harmony with heaven, recognized the intervention of God and could rejoice over the birth of the long promised heir. With joy Mary delights to own, "He that is mighty hath done to me great things." Zacharias sees that God hath visited His people, "To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; the oath which He swore to our father Abraham" — these and all "that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 1: 49, 68-73).

But if there were those who rejoiced at the birth of Isaac, there were also those who mocked, and we see what calls forth their enmity. There came a day when "*a great feast*" is made in honour of the heir. This honour put upon the heir arouses the jealousy and enmity of those who had long held a position in the household of Abraham.

So in the history of our Lord, it was the recognition of His supreme and unrivalled place that drew forth the jealousy and enmity of religious flesh. The wise men from the East worship Him as the King of the Jews and immediately all Jerusalem is troubled, and Herod, the false king, seeks to kill the holy child.

### ***The Lesson for Us (v. 10)***

There are, however, other lessons for us in this deeply instructive scene. In the Epistle to the Galatians the apostle quotes the words uttered by Sarah to Abraham, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." In this passage the apostle uses Isaac, not as representative of Christ, but of believers — those who are the subjects of sovereign grace. He says, "We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." Moreover, as he uses Isaac to set forth all that we are as born of the Spirit, so he uses Ishmael to set forth our old man — all that we are as born after the flesh. He shows, too, that the man that is after the flesh is entirely opposed to the man that is after the Spirit. "As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now" (Gal. 4: 28-31).

### ***The True Character of the Flesh (vv. 11, 12)***

Even as the coming of Christ into the world exposed all that man is after the flesh, and awakened the enmity of the flesh, so, in the history of our own souls, the more Christ has His true place in our affections, the more we discover the true character of the flesh that is still in us. If we make Christ a feast — if we give Him His true place in our hearts, we discover there is present with us that old man that ever seeks to intrude and exalt self. This raises the great question, Am I going to spare the flesh by gratifying, indulging and exalting self, or am I going to refuse the flesh that Christ may have the supreme place in my life?

The Corinthian believers were indulging the flesh in a worldly form; the Colossian saints were in danger of ministering to the flesh by religious ritual; while the Galatian assemblies were giving place to the flesh by legality. They were putting themselves under law as a rule of life. But so far from producing a Christlike life they only developed the fleshly life with its vain glory, and envy, and strife. So the apostle says, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son." We are to refuse the law as a rule of life and the flesh which it stirs up. It is not that the believer slights the law, or is indifferent to its moral requirements. Far from this; but he is to refuse to put himself under the principle of law. Christ hath made us free from the law as a means of obtaining blessing; and we are to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, looking to Him to keep us moment by moment. How truly this was the experience of the Apostle Paul. Christ had the supreme place in his affections, for he could say,

"For to me to live is Christ." The result was he refused his own righteousness which was of the law, and had no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 1: 21; Phil. 3: 3). He cast out the bondwoman and her son.

To refuse the flesh will call for self-denial, and this involves suffering. So to cast out the bondwoman was "grievous in Abraham's sight." He is reminded, however, that all blessing is connected with Isaac. To deny oneself and follow Christ will entail a cross — or suffering, but it will lead to great blessing in association with Christ.

### ***The Picture of Israel***

Hagar and Ishmael as wanderers in the wilderness, with the water spent, may set forth typically the present position of Israel, as a result of seeking to obtain the blessing under law, and so rejecting Christ the promised seed. The earthly people of God are cast out of their land and have become wanderers in the world. Yet, as cast out of the land, Israel is still the object of God's providential care even as God provided for Hagar and her son.

### ***The Testimony of the World (vv. 22-24)***

In the closing scene of the chapter the man of the world owns that God is with the man of faith that walks in separation from the world. Time was when the man of faith slipped, and acting in unbelief, came under the reproof of Abimelech. Now the promised heir has come and is given his rightful place by Abraham, and the bondwoman and her son have been cast out. What is of God is owned as supreme and all that is of the flesh has been refused, with the result that Abimelech has to acknowledge, "God is with thee in all that thou doest." Instead of reproving Abraham, as in former days, he is reproved by Abraham. Nor is it otherwise today.

If Christ has His true place in our lives, if we refuse the flesh, and by faith walk in true separation from the world, the result will be that the very world will see and admit that God is with us.

### ***The True Character of the World (vv. 25-34)***

Nevertheless, while the world may have to admit that God is with His people who walk in separation, nonetheless, it will seek to deprive the people of God of their means of spiritual refreshment. It will seek to stop our wells. Like Abraham, we may well resist the world's efforts and reprove the world; but, like Abraham, let us seek to mingle with our reproofs the spirit of grace that seeks to impart to the world something of our blessing as represented by the seven ewe lambs.

The closing verses would appear to present the climax of Abraham's spiritual history. We have seen that the world has to acknowledge that God is with him; now we see that Abraham is with God. He calls on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God, and he lives as a pilgrim in the land.

God's ways are not like human ways,  
He wears such strange disguises;  
He tires us by His long delays,  
And then our faith surprises.  
While we in unbelief deplore,  
And wonder at His staying,

He stands already at the door,  
To interrupt our praying.  
He takes a leader from the Nile,  
Where mother hands have laid him;  
Hides him in palaces the while,  
Till He has right arrayed him.  
He sends him to the desert's hush,  
With flocks and herds to wander;  
Then meets him in the burning bush,  
New mysteries to ponder.  
Why should we doubt His care and grace,  
As though He had forgotten?  
As though time's changes could efface  
What love had once begotten?  
As though He'd lost us from His thought  
And moved on now without us,  
Whose love has always goodness wrought,  
And constant been about us?

— J.E.R.

Oh, what a voice was that which once the patriarch Abram heard,  
"Take now thy son, thine only son, thine Isaac, so endeared,  
And unto far Moriah's land at once arise and go,  
Offer him, a burnt offering, there, on a mount that I shall show."  
That voice he knew and lingered not — his inmost soul obeyed,  
Counting that God could raise him up, though even from the dead.  
He took his son, the fire, the knife, with two at his command;  
Three days they journeyed on, until they saw th' appointed land.  
Then as they trod the way alone, their converse none might share,  
The father laid the wood he clave upon the son to bear.  
The fire, the knife, were Abraham's part, by faith obedient still,  
Assured that God who gave the word, would all His word fulfil.  
They reached the spot — his son he bound, and on the altar laid;  
He took the knife to slay his son, when lo! the hand was stayed;

A voice from heaven arrests the stroke — another victim bled.  
And Abraham received his son as risen from the dead.  
Fair picture of a mightier love that gave the Son to die!  
A holier sacrifice, whose place none other could supply.  
The two who "both together" went until the work was done  
Which glorifies forevermore the Eternal Three-in-one.  
E.H.C.

## **The Offering Up of Isaac**

### **Genesis 22**

We have seen that the first portion of Abraham's life presents his public testimony as a man of faith walking in separation from the world, in answer to the call of God (Genesis 12 to 14). In the second part of his history, commencing with the words, "After these things," we learn the inner exercises of his soul in his personal relationships with God (Genesis 15 to 21).

### ***The Last Phase of Abraham's Life***

With the twenty-second chapter of Genesis we enter upon the last phase of his life. It also commences with the words, "After these things." In this, and the following chapters, there passes before us certain incidents which, in a very distinct way, set forth in type the ways of God in carrying out His purposes for the glory of Christ and the blessing of man.

In Genesis 21 we have seen in the birth of Isaac at "the set time" a foreshadowing of that great moment of which we read, "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son made of a woman" (Gal. 4: 4). In Genesis 22 we shall see a type of the death and resurrection of Christ — the Lamb of God's providing. In Genesis 23 the death and burial of Sarah sets forth in type the setting aside of Israel, the Genesis bride, in consequence of the rejection of Christ. In Genesis 24 while Israel is set aside we have the calling out of the Church — the heavenly bride, set forth in Rebekah.

While we seek to profit by the typical aspects of these striking incidents, we must not overlook their moral bearing. If this twenty-second chapter is a marvellous presentation of the love of God in giving the Son, morally it sets forth in a striking way the faith of Abraham.

### ***The Supreme Test***

The moral teaching comes before us in the opening words: "And it came to pass after these things, that God tried Abraham" (N. Tr.). In that great chapter in the Epistle to the Hebrews which presents before us those who have trodden the path of faith, we find that Abraham has an outstanding place. It is not only that he is presented as one who by faith answered to the call of God, but he is highly privileged as having his faith tested beyond that of any man before or since. In the history we read that God said to him, "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah: and offer him there for a burnt offering." The inspired comment in Hebrews is, "*By faith* Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac," the very one in whom all the promises

centred, and of whom it was said, "That in Isaac shall thy seed be called." He was told to do that which to sight and natural reason would make the fulfilment of the promises of God impossible. But, we learn, that he acted, not according to mere reason, but, "by faith . . . accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence he received him in a figure."

### ***The Act of Obedience***

When the children of Job were taken from him, he very blessedly submitted to what God had allowed, for he said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away." But Abraham's faith is tried with a much severer test, and rises to a far higher level. He is not simply asked to submit passively to the will of God, but, he is called to take part actively in that which was contrary to nature, anguish to a father's heart, and, apart from God's direction, in outrage against the laws of God and man. But, Abraham, with God-given faith, answers to the test. With calm deliberation, he rises up early in the morning, saddles his ass and taking two young men and Isaac his son, he "went unto the place of which God had told him."

For three days he travels on his way. Time and opportunity was thus given to thoroughly enter into what he was called to do. For three days this terrible trial was before his soul. During these days he had to face the agony of offering up his son. It was not an act hurriedly done under some momentary impulse. It was deliberately done after having entered into all that it cost him. His love to his son, the feelings of Isaac and his love to his father, God's promise that "in Isaac shall thy seed be called" — all was fully faced, but faith triumphed.

Had unbelief been at work there was time given to turn back. But faith persevered, and on the third day, the place having come in sight, he "said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and *come again* to you." Faith, accounting that God can raise from the dead, can say with the utmost confidence, we will "come again."

We are not tested in the same manner as Abraham, but good for us, when our loved ones are taken, if we can say, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God *bring with Him*." Faith knows that though for a time they are taken from us — and have gone yonder to worship — they will "come again."

### ***Father and Son***

Isaac inquires, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" In faith Abraham replies, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb"; and without further word, they pass on "both of them together." Without resistance or complaint, Isaac submits to be bound to the altar, and Abraham "stretched forth his hand to slay his son.

Then the angel of the Lord intervenes. Abraham's hand was withheld from plunging the knife into his son. Abraham's faith has answered to the test and God says, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." Acting in the fear of God, he overcame the fear of man in doing that which man would have utterly condemned.

### ***Another Father — Another Son***

Viewing this remarkable scene in its typical bearing, there rises up before us the greatness of the love of God in giving His Son to die for us. The word to Abraham is "take now *thy* son," telling us that

God "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Rom. 8: 32). Then Abraham is told that he is to take his "only son." Three times in the chapter is it emphasized that Isaac is his "only" son (vv. 2, 12, 16). Again this speaks of the love of God by which "He gave His *only* begotten Son" (John 3: 16). Further, Abraham is reminded that the son he is to offer up is one "whom thou lovest," speaking to us of the fact that Christ is the One of whom it is said, "The Father loveth the Son" (John 3: 35). It is significant that this, the first mention of love in the Bible, is in connection with a scene that speaks of the love of God, the Father, for the Son.

### ***Perfect Obedience***

Moreover, if the scene brings before us the love of God in giving the Son, so also it presents the perfect submission and uncomplaining obedience to his father's will. In all this there is the bright foreshadowing of the perfect obedience of Christ to the Father which led Him to say in view of death, "Not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22: 42).

Further, during the three days' journey the wood of the burnt offering is borne by Isaac, while the fire and the knife are in the hand of Abraham. Throughout the years of His ministry the Lord bore the knowledge of His coming death. Over every step of His way there was the shadow of the Cross. The crowds may wonder at "all things which Jesus did," but He knew that the won of Man would be delivered into the hands of men (Luke 9: 44). The apostles may follow Him to Jerusalem with visions of the Kingdom being set up in power, and Christ reigning on a throne of glory, but He knew that He was moving on the shameful Cross.

Nevertheless, if men are allowed to crucify the Lord, the fire and the knife, speaking of judgment and death, were in the **hands of God. Men** may think that they can crucify, or release the Lord according to their will, But the Lord can say to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above" (John 19: 11). No eye could pierce the darkness of that great scene when the fire and the knife fell upon Christ. But all that took place then was taken from God's hand, for Christ could say, "*Thou* hast laid Me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon Me, and *Thou* hast afflicted Me with all Thy waves" (Ps. 88: 6, 7).

### ***Perfect Communion***

Then there comes a moment when the "young men" are left behind and Abraham and his only son go up alone to the mount. This surely speaks to us of that great moment of which the Lord has to say, "Whither I go thou canst not follow Me now" (John 13: 36). And yet the Lord can say, "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone" (John 3: 29). Thus, of Abraham and Isaac we twice read, "They went both of them together" (vv. 6, 8), speaking to us of the perfect communion of the Father and the Son presented so blessedly in the Gospel of John as the Lord Jesus moved forward to the Cross to become the great burnt offering by which God is perfectly glorified. The Lord could say, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work"; again, He could say, "I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me." Later He can say, "I do always those things that please Him"; and again, "I and the Father are one" (John 5: 17, 30; John 8: 29; John 10: 30).

### ***Perfect Submission***

Arriving at the place, Isaac is perfectly submissive to the one that acts. Abraham builds the altar; Abraham laid the wood in order: Abraham bound Isaac, his son; Abraham laid him upon the altar, and

Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son. So of Christ we read, "He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth . . . Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief" (Isa. 53: 7-10).

### ***Comparison and Contrast***

It is significant that in all the offerings the victim was first killed, and then laid upon the altar. Here the offering becomes a more striking type of Christ in that he is first bound to the altar before the knife is taken to slay him.

But every type must fall short of the reality. In the type the angel of the Lord arrests the hand that held the knife, and Isaac is spared. At the Cross no hand was put forth to stay the power of death. The love of the Father spared not the Son, and the love of the Son submitted to the Father's will in going into death. An angel may strengthen the Lord in the Garden, but there was no angel to shelter from judgment at the cross.

In a figure, Abraham receives Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11: 19). But if Isaac is to go free, death must come on the ram caught in the thicket — a further type of the Lamb of God's providing. In the course of this wonderful scene Abraham utters the two prophetic statements; first, "God will provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering"; secondly, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided" (N. Tr.). As the Lord could say, 'Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad' (John 8: 56).

God renews His promises to Abraham on the ground of sacrifice, and confirms His promise of blessing to all the nations of the earth through the risen seed. Here we know, from the Epistle to the Galatians, that the seed is Christ, for, says the apostle, "To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seed, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ" (Gal. 3: 16).

The genealogy of the closing verses seems purposely given at this point to introduce Rebekah, the one that so blessedly sets forth the heavenly bride of Christ.

O blessed Lord, what hast Thou done!  
How vast a ransom paid!  
God's only well-beloved Son  
Upon the altar laid!  
The Father in His willing love  
Could spare Thee from His side;  
And Thou couldst stoop to bear above,  
At such a cost, Thy bride.  
While our full hearts in faith repose  
Upon Thy precious blood,  
Peace in a steady current flows,  
Filled from Thy mercy's flood.

What boundless joy will fill each heart,  
Our every grief efface,  
When we behold Thee as Thou art,  
And all Thy love retrace.  
Unseen we love Thee, dear Thy name!  
But when our eyes behold,  
With joyful wonder we'll proclaim,  
"The half hath not been told!"  
For Thou exceedest all the fame  
Our ears have ever heard;  
How happy we who know Thy name,  
And trust Thy faithful Word!  
The Lamb of God to slaughter led,  
The King of Glory see!  
The crown of thorns upon His head,  
They nail Him to the tree!  
The Father gives His only Son;  
The Lord of glory dies  
for us, the guilty and undone,  
A spotless Sacrifice!  
Thy Name is holy, O our God!  
Before Thy throne we bow;  
Thy bosom is Thy saints' abode,  
We call Thee Father now!  
Enthroned with Thee now sits the Lord,  
And in Thy bosom dwells;  
Justice, that smote Him with the sword,  
Our perfect pardon seals.  
Eternal death was once our doom;  
Now death hast lost its sting;  
We rose with Jesus from the tomb,  
Jehovah's love to sing.

— R. C. C.

I'm a pilgrim and a stranger,  
Rough and stormy is my road,  
Often in the midst of danger;  
But it leads to God.  
Clouds and darkness oft distress me:  
Great and many are my foes;  
Anxious cares and thoughts oppress me:  
But my Father knows.  
Oh, how sweet is this assurance,  
'Midst the conflict and the strife!  
Although sorrows past endurance,  
Follow me through life.  
Home in prospect still can cheer me;  
Yes, and give me sweet repose,  
While I feel His presence near me:  
For my Father knows.  
Yes, He sees and knows me daily,  
Watches over me in love;  
Sends me help when foes assail me,  
Bids me look above.  
Soon my journey will be ended,  
Life is drawing to a close;  
I shall then be well attended:  
This my Father knows.  
I shall then with joy behold Him,  
Face to face my Saviour see;  
Fall with rapture and adore Him  
For His love to me.  
Nothing more shall then distress me  
In the land of sweet repose;  
Jesus stands engaged to bless me:  
This my Father knows.

# The Death of Sarah

## Genesis 23

In the twenty-third chapter we have the record of the death and burial of Sarah. As so often, in these Old Testament histories, the facts related have a typical as well as a moral significance. That this is no fanciful conclusion is clear from the twofold interpretation of these events given to us in the New Testament.

### *An Allegory*

In the Epistle to the Galatians the apostle gives us the allegorical significance of Hagar and Sarah. Hagar and her son represent the law and those who are seeking blessing under law; while Sarah and her children represent the unconditional promises of God and those who are blessed in sovereign grace (Gal. 4: 21-26). The people of Israel, having put themselves under law, sought to obtain blessing on the ground of their own efforts; the result being they only brought forth the evil works of the flesh, and rejected Christ who was presented to them in grace, and through whom they could have received blessing on the ground of the promises made to Abraham. Peter, addressing the nation after the death and resurrection of Christ, can say, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abram, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first, God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3: 25, 26). This offer of grace was rejected by the nation, and as a result, for the time being, God's earthly people are set aside.

### *Christ's Earthly Bride*

The death of Sarah following upon the offering up of Isaac, would seem to bring before us this setting aside of the nation of Israel, that followed upon their rejection of the grace offered to them on the ground of the death and resurrection of Christ. Sarah, type of Christ's earthly bride, passes from the story, and Rebekah, type of the heavenly bride, comes into view.

### *A Plain Declaration*

Such then would appear to be the typical meaning of the death and burial of Sarah. There is, however, the moral significance of these incidents, so clearly brought before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. There we learn that these saints of old not only lived by faith but they "all *died in faith*, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (Heb. 11: 13, 14).

Here, then, we see the faith of Abraham in the presence of death; the confession that he is but a stranger and a pilgrim, and, by his actions, declaring plainly his pilgrim character before the world.

### *Faith's Prospect*

Abraham's faith had received Isaac at the word of the Lord, when his own body was as good as dead. His faith had offered up Isaac, at the word of the Lord, accounting that God was able to raise him

up even from the dead. Now, in like faith, he buries Sarah in the sure and certain hope of resurrection. In faith he had ascended Mount Moriah to offer up his son. In like faith he now races the cave of Machpelah to bury his wife. The moment has come when he has to bury his "dead out of sight," but his faith knows that his loved one will come again and have her part in that better, and heavenly, country to which his faith was looking on.

### ***The God of Resurrection***

God had revealed Himself to Abraham as the Almighty, and as the God of resurrection, and had assured him that the land wherein he was a stranger — all the land of Canaan — was given to him for an everlasting possession (Gen. 17: 8). All was his by *promise*, though not yet in *possession*. In the faith of God's promise he was careful to lay the body of Sarah to rest in the Promised Land. In the land of Canaan she had lived with Abraham as a stranger and a pilgrim; "in the land Of Canaan" she had died; and "in the land of Canaan" she was buried (vv. 2, 19). In the same faith, at a later date, the sons of Isaac bury their father at Hebron, in the land of Canaan (Gen. 35: 27-29). So, too, in due time, Jacob, though he dies in Egypt, is buried in faith by his sons in the land of Canaan, in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 50: 13). In the like fine faith, Joseph when he came to die, takes an oath of the children of Israel that they shall carry his bones from Egypt to the land of Canaan (Gen. 50: 25, 26; Ex. 13: 19).

### ***Godly Sorrow***

If, however, in these scenes we see shining examples of the faith of God's elect in the presence of death, we also learn that *faith does not set aside natural Affection*. Thus we read, "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" (v. 2). Full well faith knows that our loved ones that die in the Lord will rise again, and that for them death is gain, but nonetheless we rightly mourn and feel their loss. Our sure and certain hope of resurrection tells us indeed, as the apostle reminds us, that our sorrow is not the sorrow of those who have no hope. But there is no word to say we are not to sorrow. None could know the power of resurrection like the One who is Himself the resurrection and the life, and yet He wept at the grave of Lazarus.

### ***A Promise Fulfilled***

Furthermore, we see that in the presence of death, Abraham still acts as becomes one that is a stranger and a pilgrim. He confesses before the sons of Heth, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you." As such he gains the respect of the world, for they say, "Thou art a prince of God among us" (v. 6, N.Tr.). How striking the contrast to poor Lot — the believer who gave up his pilgrim character to dwell in Sodom. Such an one the world treats with well-merited contempt, for in the day of his trouble they say, "Stand back. . . this one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge" (Gen. 19: 9). Sixty years before this God had said to Abraham that one result of answering to the call of God, and taking the outside place, would be that God would make his name great (Gen. 12:2). Here we see this word fulfilled, for the very world has to own that this separate man is "a mighty prince of God." Poor Lot who sought to make himself great in the world, as a judge in the gate, has to "stand back" and take a place of contempt in the eyes of the world.

### ***A Lowly Mind***

Nevertheless, Abraham does not presume upon the high respect in which he is held by the world,

in order to exalt himself. He does not speak of his dignities, of his high calling, or of the glories that lie before him. In the days of the Lord, when the careless world would make Him a King, He makes Himself of no reputation and departs into a mountain alone (John 6: 15). In like spirit, Abraham refuses to magnify himself. He does not seek that the world should bow to him as a mighty prince, but rather he is marked by the lowly mind, for twice we read, he "bowed himself to the people of the land" (vv. 7-12).

### ***A Righteous Character***

The kindness of the world would press upon Abraham a burying place as a gift. True to his pilgrim character he refuses to take the place of a prince that receives gifts, and is content to be the stranger that pays for his wants. He refused to use the praise of the world to exalt himself, and he will not let the kindness of the world move him from the path of strangership. As before he had refused he gifts of the king of Sodom, so now he declines the gifts of the children of Heth. He buys the burying place, and, as becomes a stranger, in all his dealings with the world, he acts in strict righteousness paying "four hundred shekels of silver, *current money with the merchant.*"

In all these ways we see that Abraham in his day was one that called upon the Lord out of a pure heart, and followed righteousness, faith, love, and peace.

### ***The Bride***

Midst the darkness, storm and sorrow, one bright gleam I see:  
Well I know the blessed morrow Christ will come for me.  
Midst the light and peace and glory of the Father's home,  
Christ for me is watching, waiting — waiting till I come.  
Long the blessed Guide has led me by the desert road;  
Now I see the golden towers — City of my God.  
There amidst the love and glory, He is waiting yet;  
On His hands a name is graven He can ne'er forget.  
There amidst the songs of heaven, sweeter to His ear  
Is the footfall through the desert, ever drawing near.  
There, made ready are the mansions, glorious, bright and fair;  
But the Bride the Father gave Him still is wanting there.  
Who is this who comes to meet me on the desert way,  
As the morning star foretelling God's unclouded day?  
He it is who came to win me on the cross of shame  
In His glory well I know Him, evermore the same.  
Oh, the blessed joy of meeting, all the desert past!  
Oh, the wondrous words of greeting He shall speak at last!

He and I together ent'ring those bright courts above;  
He and I together sharing all the Father's love.  
Where no shade nor stain can enter, nor the gold be dim;  
In that holiness unsullied I shall walk with Him.  
Meet companion then for Jesus, from Him, for Him made;  
Glory of God's grace forever there in me displayed.  
He who in His hour of sorrow bore the curse alone  
I who through the lonely desert trod where He had gone.  
He and I in that bright glory one deep joy shall share:  
Mine, to be forever with Him; His, that I am there.

## **The Call of Rebekah**

### **Genesis 24**

In the offering up of Isaac, recorded in Genesis 22, we cannot fail to see a striking type of the death and resurrection of Christ. Then, in Genesis 23, the death and burial of Sarah would typify the setting aside of Israel — God's earthly people — that followed upon their rejection of Christ. In this chapter there is a beautiful picture of the calling out of the Church that takes place during the time Israel is set aside.

### ***Three Great Truths***

We know that after the death and resurrection of Christ, He ascended to glory and took His place at the right hand of God. Then, there followed that great event, the coming of the Holy Spirit — a divine Person, to dwell with and in believers on earth. These three great truths mark the day in which we live; first, that there is a Man in the glory — Christ Jesus; secondly, there is a divine Person on earth — the Holy Spirit; thirdly, the Holy Spirit has come to form the Church, guide her through this world, and present her to Christ in the glory.

### ***A Comprehensive View***

These are the great truths that pass before us in type in the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis. The immense importance of the chapter lies in the fact that it presents in a picture what each divine Person in the Godhead is engaged in during the day in which we live. As we look around we see the increasing wickedness of the world, and the increasing failure and weakness of the people of God. Looking upon all this confusion we can easily become depressed and cast down. When, however, we look at the picture presented in this chapter we see in a comprehensive view what God is doing to carry out His own purposes. Other Scriptures may bring into prominence the faith as well as the failure of believers, for our encouragement and warning; but here there comes before us in all its blessedness what God is effecting for the glory of Christ, in spite of every adverse influence, whether in ourselves, the world, or the devil. Seeing then what God is doing, and the object that He has before Him, and knowing that all

that God has purposed He will assuredly carry out, will keep the soul at rest in the midst of a scene of turmoil. Moreover, it will make us intelligent in the mind of God and save us from disappointment from false expectations. Further, we shall be saved from expending our energies in so many activities that, while they have the benefit of the world in view, are wholly outside the purpose of God.

In the course of the story there comes before us three main subjects: First, the directions of Abraham to his servant (vv. 1-9). Secondly, the mission of the servant in Mesopotamia (vv. 10-61). Thirdly, the meeting between Isaac and Rebekah in the land of Canaan (vv. 62-67).

### ***The Father's Purpose***

Abraham's directions very blessedly set forth the counsels of God the Father concerning the Son, and what God is doing in the world today by the Holy Spirit in carrying out His purposes.

First, we learn that the great object of the servant's mission was, as Abraham said, to "*take a wife unto my son.*" The servant was sent to Mesopotamia with this single object in view. Having found the bride and brought her to Isaac his mission would be accomplished. It was no part of the servant's work to interfere with the political or social interests of Mesopotamia. The Holy Spirit is not here to improve or reform the world, or bring peace to the nations, or even convert the world. He is not here to right the wrongs of the poor, or remove oppression, and relieve man from disease, and want, and misery.

There is One that in due time will, indeed, bring peace and blessing to the world. One who has been here and proved that He had the power and grace to relieve man of every pressure. Alas! we nailed Him to a cross, and He is gone, and so the misery of the world remains. Nevertheless, He is coming again to bring in the blessing; but, in the meantime Jesus is in the glory and the Holy Spirit is down here to obtain the bride for Christ — the heavenly people — and conduct her to Christ in the glory.

Christendom, alas, has so entirely missed the mind of God that it looks upon Christianity as merely a religious system for the improvement and uplift of man, in order, as it is said, to make the world a better and brighter place. If this is all that people see in Christianity little wonder that they are giving up its profession, for it is evident that after nineteen centuries the world grows worse rather than better, and today it is filled with increasing violence, and corruption, and men's hearts are failing them with fear of things coming upon the earth.

It is true that God, in His providence cares for His poor creatures and can, and does, restrain the evil of men, and that where the truth is received it will certainly bring a measure of improvement in temporal circumstances, but with our thoughts formed by the Word of God we shall see that the Holy Spirit is here to take a people out of the world for Christ in glory.

Then the servant is told that the bride for Isaac is *not to be of the daughters of the Canaanites.*" Abraham says she is to be of "my kindred." The Canaanites were under the curse and devoted to judgment. There can be no link between Christ in the glory and a world under judgment. Isaac's bride was not to be a stranger but one that already belonged to Abraham's family. So the Church is formed not of unbelievers, nor of a mixture of believers and unbelievers, but wholly of the family of faith.

Further, the servant is warned that *in no case is he to bring Isaac back to Mesopotamia.* During the time that the servant was in Mesopotamia, Isaac was in Canaan, and there was no link between Isaac and the people of Mesopotamia. So, we know, today there is no direct link between Christ in the glory and the world as such. Failing to see this, the efforts of Christendom, as well as of many sincere Christians, are entirely directed to doing the very thing that the servant is twice warned not to do. The

attempt is made, in a variety of different forms, to bring Christ back to the world and attach His Name to benevolent schemes for the reformation and improvement of the world. Such efforts are entirely outside the work of the Spirit who is here, not to bring Christ back to the world, but to take a people out of the world for Christ. It is true that in due time Christ is coming back to the world, but let us not forget that the last time the world saw Christ was upon the cross to which they had nailed Him. The next time they see Him will be when He comes "in flaming fire taking vengeance upon them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1: 7-9).

Finally the servant is told that God's angel would go before him. We know that the angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Their service ever seems to be of a providential and guardian character. The Holy Spirit deals with souls, while the angels would seem to act in relation to circumstances. An angel may direct Philip as to the way he should take; but the Spirit directed him in dealing with a soul (Acts 8: 26, 29).

### ***The Servant's Mission***

This portion of the story is rich with instruction for our souls seeing that it typically presents, not only the object of the coming of the Holy Spirit, but also the way the Spirit takes to carry out this object.

The servant comes to Mesopotamia well equipped for his service, for we read, "All the goods of his master were in his hand," reminding us that the Holy Spirit has come to teach us "all things," to guide us into "all truth," and show us "all things that the Father hath" (John 14: 26; John 16: 13-15).

The servant's work in Mesopotamia has a fourfold character: First, he finds the bride appointed for Isaac (vv. 10-21); secondly, having found the bride, he distinguishes her from all others (v. 22); thirdly, he weans her heart from Mesopotamia, and attaches her affections to Isaac (vv. 23-53); finally, he leads her across the desert to Isaac (vv. 54-61).

### ***The Bride Found***

First, then, we learn from the prayer of the servant, the great purpose of his mission. He does not pray for the men of the city, or their daughters; he is engrossed with one object, to find the one appointed for Isaac. The Holy Spirit has come, not to convert the world, but to bring to light the elect of God — the bride appointed for Christ.

Moreover, we see that the infallible sign of the appointed bride will be that she is *marked by grace*. The servant prays, "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher I pray thee that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, *and I will give thy camels drink also*: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac." From these words it is clear that the servant was not sent to select a bride from the daughters of men for Isaac, but to find the appointed bride (v. 14), and that grace would be her characteristic mark.

The prayer is granted, for when Rebekah comes upon the scene and is put to the test, she answers to the servant's request, and says, "I will draw for thy camels also." In all this we are reminded of the Spirit working in grace in those who are the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit" (1 Peter 1: 2).

## ***The Bride Adorned***

Secondly, the servant, having found the appointed bride is not content with a work of grace which he can see, but, he publicly distinguishes the bride from all others by adorning her with the golden earrings and the bracelets of gold, which others can see. Not only is the Spirit here to produce a work of grace in the believer, but there is to be seen in the believer the fruits of being sealed by the Spirit - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and self-control. These precious jewels would become a witness to others, and distinguish the believer from the world around.

## ***The Story Told***

Thirdly, we see the pains that the servant takes to link the affections of Rebekah with Isaac. Again, this sets forth the work of the Spirit whereby believers are strengthened in the inner man in order that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith. This part of the servant's work is introduced by the question, "Is *there room* in thy father's house for us to lodge in?" Very blessedly Rebekah's answer again goes beyond the servant's request. He only asks for "room;" she says there is "provision" as well as room (v. 25). Laban, too, can say to the servant, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord." So we read, "The man came into the house" (vv. 31, 32). The Holy Spirit has come to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us (John 16: 14). But we do well to take home to ourselves this great question, "Is there room?" Are we prepared to put ourselves about to make room for the Holy Spirit? The flesh and the Spirit "are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5: 17). We cannot entertain the Spirit if ministering to the flesh. To make room for the Spirit, and to be minding the things of the flesh is impossible. Are we prepared to refuse the indulgence of the flesh in the passing things of time, in order to make room for the Spirit to lead us into the deep and eternal things of God? Are we making room and provision for the Spirit? "Room" and "provision" were made in the house of Bethuel for the servant of Abraham, with the result that the servant is able to speak of Isaac, to engage the affections of Rebekah with Isaac, and lead her to Isaac.

## ***The Bride Won***

Having been warmly welcomed into the house, at once the servant bears witness to Isaac. He reveals the mind of his master concerning Isaac, and so doing he takes of the things of Isaac and shows them unto Rebekah. He speaks of the wealth of his master, and shows that all is given to Isaac — "Unto him hath he given all that he hath." So the Lord, Himself, tells us that "All things that the Father hath are Mine," and that the work Of the Spirit will be to take of His things and show them unto us (John 16: 15).

## ***The Response***

Having spoken of Isaac and the purpose of Abraham for the blessing of Isaac, the servant pauses to see the effect of his message. Does not the Spirit deal with us in like manner? Does He not wait to see if we respond to His unfoldings of Christ, before He makes us the public witness to Christ? In the picture there is a ready response, with the result that at once "the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah." In like manner if we respond to the unfoldings of the Spirit concerning Christ, will He not make us the witnesses of redeeming love — the jewels of silver; the witnesses of divine righteousness - the jewels of gold; and the witnesses of practical sanctification — the raiment.

## ***The Decision Made***

Finally, having engaged the affections of Rebekah with Isaac, the servant's one great aim is to lead Rebekah to Isaac. The servant says, "Send me away to my master." He had come to find the bride, and having accomplished that end, he would fain be away. He had not come to find the bride and settle her in her old home, but to lead her into a new home.

The relatives would detain Rebekah at least ten days. The servant's desire is to be away, and by his report of Isaac, he forms the same mind in Rebekah. If we allow the Holy Spirit to have His way with us — if we hinder Him not, He will form our minds according to His mind, to think as He thinks about Christ, to detach our hearts from the things where Christ is not, and to engage our affections with Christ where He is. Too often we hinder the work of the Spirit by clinging to the world, its politics, its pleasures, and its religion. But the world cannot hinder if our hearts are set upon reaching Christ in glory. The brother and mother may seek to detain Rebekah, but after all, the decision rested with her. They said, "We will call the damsel and inquire at her mouth." So the great question for Rebekah is, "Wilt thou go with this man?" This is still the question for each one of us. Do we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit, and are we prepared at all cost to follow His leading?

Christendom has almost entirely ignored the presence of the Spirit, with the result that the great profession has settled down in the world that has rejected Christ and from which Christ is absent. It is a great moment when our hearts are so attached to Christ in the glory that, like Rebekah of old, we say, "I will go."

## ***A Pathway Followed***

The immediate result of her decision was that "they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men." If we let it be known that we are forgetting the things that are behind and are set for heavenly things, it will not be simply a question of our giving up the world, but the world will give us up; we shall be "sent away."

Then we read that "Rebekah arose. . . and *followed the man*; and the servant took Rebekah, and went *his way*." Believers, oftentimes, while gladly submitting to God's way of salvation, would fain go their own way to heaven. Our exercise should be to know "His way" and to follow as He leads. To follow the Spirit will not be to follow some inner light, as men speak, but will ever be to walk according to the Word of God; and the Spirit, using the Word of God will always gather to Christ.

Thus Rebekah, following the man, finds herself on a wilderness journey. For the moment she has neither the home of Laban, nor the home of Isaac. So if we follow the leading of the Spirit, we shall find, as one has said, that, "We have neither the earth in which we are, nor heaven to which we are going." Nevertheless, as Rebekah travelled the four hundred miles of desert journey, she has a bright prospect before her, for at the end, Isaac, to whom her heart has been attached, is waiting to receive her. In like spirit the Apostle Paul, with Christ in the glory at the end of his pilgrim path, can say, "One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I pursue, looking towards the goal for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3: 13, 14, N.Tr.).

## ***The Goal Reached***

The mission of the servant in Mesopotamia ever had in view the great day when the bride, having

been guided across the desert, is presented to Isaac. In all these scenes Isaac had taken no active part, nor had he left the land of Canaan. All was left in the hands of the servant. Nevertheless, Isaac was far from indifferent to the mission of the servant, and the coming of the bride. At eventide Isaac comes from the way of the well Lahai-roi to meet the bride. The significant meaning of the well is said to be "the well of him that liveth and seeth." If this is so, it would suggest the undoubted truth that all through our wilderness journey we are under the eye of One who lives and sees. As the Apostle says, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost . . . seeing he *ever liveth* to make intercession for them (Heb. 7: 25).

### ***The Coming***

Further we see that Isaac definitely comes to meet the bride, for Rebekah enquires, "What man is this that walketh in the fields *to meet* us?" The picture presents Isaac as one who is waiting for and wanting, his bride. Our desires after Christ may often be feeble, but He ever longs for the moment when His bride will be presented to Him. Ere He went away, He could say to His disciples, "If I go . . . I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14: 3).

### ***The Marriage***

When at last Rebekah sees Isaac, "she took a veil and covered herself." Immediately, the marriage follows, for we read, "Isaac took Rebekah . . . and she became his wife and he loved her." So, too, after our wilderness journey, when the great work of the Holy Spirit is accomplished, and for the first time we see the Lord Jesus face to face — when He receives us to Himself — then at last these wonderful words will be fulfilled, "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready."

When creation was completed, Eve was presented to Adam as his bride, the first type of the great mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, and which tells of God's eternal purpose to secure a bride for His Son. Through the long centuries, and amidst all changing dispensations, God has ever kept in view the great day of the marriage of the Lamb. God's people may fail and break down, as they have done in every dispensation; the world, increasing in violence and corruption may tempt and often overcome the people of God; the devil may oppose and set up the false woman who becomes drunk with the blood of saints. Nevertheless, in spite of the failure of God's people, the efforts of the devil and the temptations of the world, God never turns aside from His great purpose to secure a bride for His Son. At the end of God's Book we are permitted to see in vision the great day of the marriage of the Lamb, and at the very close we have a beautiful presentation of Jesus waiting for the bride, and the bride, in her true attitude, as led by the Spirit, looking for the coming of Jesus. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." His answer is, "Surely I come quickly," and the bride responds, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

### ***The Incentive for Us***

How much disappointment we should be saved if, in all our service we ever had before us the great object that is ever before the Spirit of God — the presentation of the Church to Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing on the great day of the marriage of the Lamb. Our view, and our service, is too often narrowed down to a small locality and our little day; then when everything seems to fail locally, and generally, we are broken-hearted and disappointed. If, however, our great object is

to gather souls to Christ in view of the marriage of the Lamb we shall not be disappointed, whatever the sorrow and failure by the way. There will be no broken hearts, no regrets, no disappointments when at last we hear the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come." Let us then press forward through sorrows, through trials, through weakness, through every kind of opposition, knowing that at the end there is the great day of the marriage of the Lamb.

The typical teaching of these chapters closes with the account of Abraham's children by Keturah, given in the first six verses of chapter twenty-five. These children, from whom many Eastern nations have their origin, receive "gifts," and thus come in for blessing through their connection with Abraham. Nevertheless, Isaac is placed in striking contrast to the other sons of Abraham. To others he may give gifts; to Isaac he gives all that he has.

This may set forth in type the great truth that Christ, Is risen from the dead, is the Heir of all things, and that after receiving His heavenly bride, He will enter upon the earthly inheritance in connection with restored Israel, while the nations of the earth will also receive blessing.

The deeply instructive history of Abraham closes with the brief record of his peaceful end at "a good old age," and the burial by his sons Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah. Thus in striking contrast to poor Lot, Abraham finishes his pilgrim path with the respect and honour due to one who was "the friend of God," and "the father of all them that believe."

### ***MEMORIALS OF ABRAHAM***

by Horatius Bonar

Only a tomb, no more,

A future resting place

When God shall lay thee down and bid

All thy long wanderings cease.

This cave and field — no more

Canst thou thy dwelling call

That land of thine, plains, hills, woods, streams,

The stranger has it all.

Thy altar and thy tent

Are all that thou hast here.

With these content thou passest on.

A homeless wanderer.

Thy life unrest and toil,

Thy course a pilgrimage,

Only in death thou goest down

To claim thy heritage.

A heritage of life  
Beyond this guarded gloom,  
A kingdom, not a field or cave,  
A city, not a tomb.