

Abraham in Genesis 18, 19.

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Article 10 of 47 **Short Meditations**

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The elevation of Abraham in Genesis 18, 19, is something very peculiar.

He seems to apprehend the Divine Stranger and His angelic companions *at once*, needing no introduction, or notice, or revelation — as Joshua, Gideon, and others, in like circumstances, did. "He was accustomed to the Divine presence," as one has said. This opens these wondrous chapters.

The Lord does not come to regulate him in any way, either to rebuke or instruct him morally. Abraham is before him in the place and character and attitude of one who was fully prepared for His presence.

Accordingly, the Lord makes His ways and thoughts known to Abraham, as a man would to his friend. He reveals secrets to him which do not concern himself — had they done so, in a sense Abraham would have been entitled to hear them; the Lord would surely tell them to him. But he has no personal concern in the matters communicated. They are the Lord's thoughts and purposes touching a city and a people with whom Abraham had no intercourse whatever. They were strangers to him and he to them — and that most advisedly. So that the Lord now deals with Abraham as a *friend* - not even as a *disciple*, much less as a *sinner*, but as a friend.

Abraham apprehends this. He was entitled to do so. Grace expects to be understood, and surely delights in being understood. And so, if the Lord invite us we should go; if He draw nigh to us, we should draw nigh to Him.

And so it is here. The Angels, seizing on the mind of their Lord, retire; and Abraham, doing the like, draws near, and there speaks for this city and people. He has nothing to ask for himself. No, surely. He had no confession to make or requests to prefer for himself, but as the Lord had spoken to him about Sodom, he Dew speaks to the Lord about it. He intercedes, as one near to God, as one who was at ease touching himself, and thus at leisure to attend to others.

Every feature in this picture is full of grace and dignity. There is nothing of feebleness or dimness here — all is strength and elevation.

But this is continued.

The next morning, as we read in Gen. 19, Abraham gets him up to the place where he had been speaking to the Lord about Sodom, somewhere on the hills of Judea, overlooking the plain of Jordan, or the vale of Siddim, where Sodom lay; and there he beholds the burning of that city under penal fire from heaven. He sees the judgment of the Lord. He sees it from on high, where he and the Lord had been talking together the day before.

Now this is of one character with all the rest. This is still elevation of the highest order. This is *heaven's* relationship to judgment, God's own relationship to it. Abraham was not rescued out of it like Lot; nor calmly taken through it like Noah; nor merely borne away ere it came like Enoch — but

beyond them all, he is given heaven's own place in relation to it. He looks down upon it executed on others, having nothing to say to it whatever, not having to be either removed from the scene of it before it come, or carried safely through it after it had come. He was in nothing less than heaven's own relation to it.

This is very great indeed. And this is the Church in the Apocalypse; not as in 1 Thess. 4 simply, but beyond that; as in the Apocalypse. The crowned Elders there are on high, as the judgments take their course on the plain or earth below. Abraham-like, they behold the judgments as from God's place. It is not mere translation to heaven before they come, like Enoch, (for that had taken place before,) nor is it simply carriage through them, when they had come, like Noah; but they behold them executed, like Abraham from on high.

As Abraham's place in Gen. 18 had been the present place of the Church, learning the secrets of God, (see John 15: 15), so his place in Gen. 19 is the *Apocalyptic* place of the Church, surveying the judgments of the Lord on the earth. Abraham had the fact communicated to him first; and then, he saw the accomplishment of that fact below, and apart from himself. In these things he is as the Church of God.

But these wondrous chapters suggest a general thought upon Divine judgments. We trace a series of them in Scripture: as in the days of *Noah*; *Lot*; *Israel in Egypt*; *Israel on the shore of the Red Sea*; *Deborah* in the Book of Judges; the *Church on earth*, as in 1 Cor. 11; the *Church in glory*, as in Rev. 5; the elect *Remnant* in Rev. 15; the *heavens* in Rev. 19. And on each of these occasions we see the people of God differently, or rather variously, occupied. And there is beauty, force, and significancy in it all; for *the manner in which faith occupies itself will be found to be suited to the character of the judgment*.

Noah witnessed Divine judgment on *sin*, and his own deliverance, through grace, out of it. He worshipped, rendering a burnt-offering to the Lord. (Gen. 8)

Lot was rescued — saved so as by fire — and suitably with such a fact, we get no altar, or sacrifice, under his hand. He was pulled out of the fire, and that was all. (Gen. 19)

Israel in Egypt, like Noah, witnessed Divine judgment on *sin*, being in like manner, themselves delivered by grace. And like Noah, they worshipped, celebrating their redemption by a feast on a sacrifice, eating of the lamb whose blood was sheltering them. (Ex. 12)

Israel on the shore of the Red Sea, different from this, were delivered from *the hand of enemies*, judgment on whom they were witnessing. They, therefore, had a song — as well became them on such an occasion. (Ex. 15)

Deborah was in the same conditions, the same relation to Divine judgment. She witnessed God's judgment on *the enemies of her people*; and therefore, like Israel on the Sea, she and Barak have a song. (Judges 5)

The Church on earth witness God's judgment upon sin — and by their feast, like Israel in Exodus 12, they celebrate their own redemption. They rehearse, with thanksgiving, the salvation of God, in the Lord's Supper. (1 Cor. 11)

The Church in glory witness God's judgments on *the world*, anticipating their own kingdom — and consequently, like Israel on the Sea, or Deborah in the Book of Judges, they have a song prepared for their heavenly harps. (Rev. 5)

The martyred Remnant, in their day, have a song — for the judgment they celebrate is upon *the*

enemies that had withstood them, after the manner of Israel on the shore of the Red Sea. (Rev. 15)

The heavens triumph with a great shout, when she that had been corrupting the earth with her fornication falls under the hand of the Lord. (Rev. 19)

Here we have variety in the way in which faith occupies itself in a day of Divine judgment. There are judgments on *sin*, and judgments on *enemies*; and corresponding deliverances by *grace* and by *power*. It is seasonable to sing, when a judgment on enemies has been accomplished, and a deliverance out of it by power; but a judgment on sin, and our deliverance by grace, (we ourselves having been guilty and exposed to the judgment,) have rather to be celebrated in a worshipping, chastened spirit. There was, therefore, no song in Exodus 12; there is a song in Exodus 15.

But in the midst of all this, Abraham's act and attitude are as full of beauty and fitness and significancy as anything we see in these cases. He surveyed a scene of judgment upon sin — but he had not been in danger of the judgment, he had had no part in the sin that was judged. He had not been exposed to it. He had had nothing to say to the cities of the plain. In this his story differs from that of Noah — for Noah was in the scene of judgment — and from that of Israel in Egypt, or of the Church of God on earth. They, like him, witness the judgment of sin — but they had been exposed to it themselves, and were delivered by grace and the blood of Jesus. Not so, Abraham in Gen. 19. He needed no personal deliverance from the judgment that had visited the cities in the plain of Jordan; but he surveyed it. He had heaven's relation to it. He stood in the contemplation of it on that height where he had, the day before, been with the Lord.