

Abraham

Genesis 12 - 25.

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Section 3 of: **The Patriarchs: Being Meditations upon Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job; The Canticles, Heaven and Earth.**

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In earlier parts of the book of Genesis, I have already traced two distinct histories — that of the antediluvian saints, or the times from Adam to Enoch; and that of Noah and of those who followed him, down to the scattering of the nations.

The first of these histories occupies Gen. 1 - 5, the second, Gen. 6 - 11.

In the chapter which follows — Gen. 12 — the story of Abraham begins, and is continued down to Gen. 25. This forms the third portion or section of the book of Genesis, and presents to us a new era in the ways of God. And in all this, I am sure, there is beautiful moral order, and an unfolding of the dispensational wisdom of God. For in these things the heavens and the earth are made, by turns, to take up the wondrous tale of that wisdom, and to rehearse divine mysteries — such mysteries as, "in the fulness of time," will be accomplished, when, as we know, He shall gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth. Eph. 1: 10.

Adam in innocency was a man of the earth. He had to enjoy it, knowing it all as his, but knowing nothing as his beside. But when he was sent out of Eden, he became a stranger in the earth. He received no commission to improve or furnish it. He had simply to till the ground for a living, and the translation of Enoch tells us, that the destiny and inheritance of that earliest household of God was *heavenly*.*

*The family of Cain was the contradiction of this, in those antediluvian days. They tilled the ground for something more than livelihood. Their tillage led to the culture and advancement of the world as a system of gain and pleasure. And thus were the two families distinguished — the one was formed by faith, or by obedience to the revelation of God; the other by the despite of it, as the world is to this day.

In Noah, however, in process of time. the purpose of God is different. Noah is a man of the earth again. He leaves the ark in a character very different from that in which Adam had left the garden. Noah left the ark under commission to keep the world in order, as judge and ruler. It was not strangership on it, but citizenship in it, and government of it, that was now again the divine thought. But a second apostasy was witnessed in the midst of Noah's descendants. In process of time, they affected independency in the earth, casting off the fear of God, and seeking to do for themselves without Him, as Adam had (seeking to be as God) in the garden of old.

Abraham, upon all this, finds grace in the eyes of the Lord. He is called out from this apostate scene; and, as we might expect, from this alternate telling of heavenly and earthly mysteries, after Noah the man of the earth, Abraham is called to be a heavenly man.

The Lord said to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." This was the character of the call of Abraham. It was not a call from moral pollution, or from

idolatry or the like; it was a call from the associations of nature and of the earth. There were idols to be left, I doubt not. See Joshua 24: 2, 3. But it was not the leaving of them that constituted the nature of the call. Yet Abraham, touching the earth, was to be like Adam outside the garden. He leaves Ur of the Chaldees, as Adam left Eden. He received no commission to cultivate the land of Canaan for the Lord, or to conquer and govern the people there. The arrangements of the world were left just as they were. Abraham had nothing to say to the nations through which he passed on his way to Canaan; and when he reached that land, he found the Canaanite there, and there he left him as he found him.

Government had been set up in Noah, and nations had been organized; as natural relationships had been instituted at the beginning, or in Adam. But Abraham is called from all this. God Himself is received by faith; and the things of nature which Adam might have conveyed to him, or the things of government which Noah might have secured to him, are left behind.*

*In their day, Abraham's seed, or the nation of Israel, are again an *earthly people*; and they exhibit the very opposite of all this. They smite the nations of Canaan; and instead of being called from kindred and country, they are called to all such things; men, women, children, and even cattle (for not a hoof was to be left behind), journeyed from Egypt to Canaan — from a land of strangers to their own inheritance.

In our patriarch, then, we see the election and the call of God. He was of the corrupt, departed family of man, without a single claim on God. But sovereign grace (in the virtue of which all the redeemed, according to eternal counsel, stand) had made him its object; and under such grace he is, in due time, manifested as a chosen one, and is called of God to be a heavenly stranger in the world. Scripture speaks of him as the father of all them that believe. Rom. 4. We may, therefore, expect to find the life of faith exhibited in him; and so we do find it, as this little book designs to show.

But in this "life of faith" we do not merely look for the principle of dependence on God, or of confidence in Him, though that may be the thought immediately suggested by such words. It signifies much more. It is a life of large and various energies; for according to God, or Scripture, faith is that principle in the soul which not only trusts Him and believes Him; it is also that which apprehends His way, acts in concert with His principles and purposes, receives His promises, enjoys His favour, does His bidding, looks for His kingdom, in His strength gains victories, and by His light walks in light; and thus it is ever, though variously, exhibiting a life according to Him, or formed by communion with Him.

All this is strongly marked for our observation.

Heb. 11 shows us all this — the life of faith in its vast diversity of exercise and action. Accordingly, we shall find, in the life of Abraham, occasions where confidence in God was the virtue exercised; occasions, too, where strength was put forth and conflict endured; and again, where surrender of rights and submission to wrongs were the virtues. And the life of faith is beautiful in its variety; for this variety is but the changeful glowing of the same mind, the mind of Christ, in the saint.

But again. We are not to understand that we get *nothing else* than this light and power of faith in the believer or saint. Perfectness in this variety of the life of faith is not to be found save in Him who is set before us as "the Author and Finisher of faith," and whose way, from beginning to end, and in every incident of it, was the great exemplar of this life in full unsullied brightness. Still, however, the life of Abraham, or of David, or of Joseph, or of Paul, is to be called the life of faith; for it was the life of those in whom that principle was, though betraying again and again, and that too in different ways, the pravity of nature, the workings of unbelief, and the counsels of a heart prone to converse with flesh and blood, and to take the way of a revolted world.

This life of faith our Abraham entered upon with beautiful simplicity and earnestness. "He went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan he came." He went out, not knowing whither he went. He took God for his security and his portion; and, as another has said, "it is in this that the Spirit of God rests, as characteristic of his approved faith; for, by separation from the world, on the ground of implicit confidence in God, he lost everything, and got nothing but *the word of God*."

We do not like such conditions. The heart resents them; but the renewed mind approves them, and justifies God in them. The *sufferings* of Christ are first, and then the *glories*. 1 Peter 1: 11. Job was nearer his good thing in God, when he lay in ashes amid the potsherd, than when he was happy in his nest. Israel did not descend Mount Lebanon, and enter Canaan after a fruitful journey, through a land of cities and villages, and corn and wine, and rivers and vineyards; but they paced it slowly, through one desert after another. And so Abraham was called out from all, to go he knew not whither; but this he knew, that it was God who had called him. And this was faith's beginning. "He went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan he came."

He came, however, rather to sojourn than to dwell there. He moves from place to place, and in every place it is but a tent he pitches. He had been told by the God of glory, that the land should be *shown* him. He should *have* it in *his seed* for ever, but in *his own person* he was but to *see* it. And, accordingly, we find him *surveying it carefully*, but not *occupying any of it*. For this was the right answer of such a promise. He *looked* on the land, because the promise was that it should be shown him. He went first to Sichem and to the plain of Moreh; from thence, southward, to the neighbourhood of Bethel and Ai. But he was a man of the tent, and of the tent only, wherever he went. The Canaanite was then in the land, and he was the occupier of the soil; and Abraham did not dispute with him for a foot's breadth of it. He surveyed it, and had such possession of it as faith and hope imparted; but he sought no personal, present inheritance there. The promise lived in his heart, and the promise was his measure as well as his joy. Gen. 12.

Quickly, however, another man in our Abraham is before us; for, like all of us, beloved, he was a man of *nature*, as he was a man of God; and there is none perfect in the life of faith, as we said before, but the Master Himself. Famine touches the land into which the call of God had brought him. A strange surprise this may well be thought to have been. But faith would have been equal to it. Faith in Paul was equal to a like surprise. Called into Macedonia by the voice of God, a prison awaited him. But Paul stands the shock, though Abraham falls before it. Paul and his companion sing hymns in the prison in Macedonia; but Abraham practises a lie, seeking help from the famine of Canaan in another land, of which his call under the God of glory had made no mention whatever.

Such things have been, and still are, found among the saints. There are "Little Faith" and "Great Heart" among the elect, as well as flesh and spirit — nature and the new mind in each of them. But this we may know: that if nature *rule us*, nature will *expose us*. Even the man of the earth, Pharaoh of Egypt, puts Abraham to shame; and his journey, instead of being onward in the witness of his tent and in the joy of his altar, was that of a wearied foot, because it was that of a rebuking heart. He has to "do his first works," to retrace his steps, and regain his standing — sorrowful works at all times. He has to leave "by-path meadow" for the King's highway again, betaking himself back from Egypt to the place between Ai and Bethel, where he had raised his altar at the first.

What say we to this, beloved? The flocks got in Egypt accompany him home. The glitter of the gold and the silver — the offerings of a land that lay beyond where the God of glory had called him — adorn and set off his return. All this is so indeed. But what say we to all this? again I ask. Is the bleating and the lowing of such flocks and herds in our ears like the soft music of an approving

conscience? or this glittering wealth like the brightness of the divine presence which was now lost to Abraham? I am bold to answer for Abraham, though I may not for myself, that his spirit knew the difference. The wearied heart was but feebly relieved by all that he brought with him from the land of Egypt, or out of the house of Pharaoh. Sure I am of this. It could not but be so with such a man. "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul," must have been his experience; and his action in the scene which immediately succeeds, as I judge, tells us something of this.

Lot, his younger brother, or his brother's son, who had come with him out of Ur into Canaan, now becomes the occasion of trial to Abraham, as the famine had lately been. But faith in Abraham triumphs, I may say, to admiration. The very style in which he gives this trial its answer seems to say, that he will return fourfold to the life of faith for that which nature had so lately, as it were, taken away from it. The herdmen of the two brothers, the elder and the younger, cannot feed their flocks together. They must separate. This was the occasion of trial which had now arisen. But "let Lot choose," is Abraham's language. In a fine sense, he will act on the divine oracle, "the elder shall serve the younger." Lot may choose, and leave Abraham what portion he please. The well-watered plains may be his; Abraham can trust the Lord of the country, though he lose them. He may have to *dig* wells instead of *finding* them; but it is better to dig for them in the strength of God, than to find them in the way of covetousness; better, as it were, to wait for them in Canaan, than to go after them again down to Egypt. Gen. 13.

This is beautiful recovery. And in this way will faith, at times, exercise judgment On unbelief, and clear itself again. And now the Lord visits him, as He had not as He could not, have done in Egypt. The God of glory, who had called Abraham into Canaan, could not go with him into Egypt but to the man who was surrendering the best of the land to his younger brother, in the joy of restored confidence in God, He will delight to show Himself.

Where, then, are we, beloved? I will ask. Where is our spirit? On which road with Abraham are we, as at this moment, travelling? Are we knowing Egypt in the bitterness of self-reproach, or a regained Canaan in the joy of God's countenance? Is it a walk with God we are taking every day? The life of faith knows the difference between the checks of the worldly mind and the enlargements of the believing mind. Abraham knew these things. He knew, in spirit, what Egypt was — the place of gold and of silver, and of rebuke and death. he knew what it was to regain Ai without an altar on the road; and he knew what it was to rest again, with altar and tent, in the plains of Mamre.

Thus the chequered life of faith begins. But there is vastly more in it than this. And in this variety of action in the life of faith, we notice its *intelligence*, the exercise of the mind of Christ, or of the spiritual sense, which discerns things that differ, which has capacity to know times and seasons according to God. This fine endowment of the saint we find in Abraham, in the next passage of his history.

The battle of the kings is recorded in Gen. 14 While that was a mere contest between such, Abraham has nothing to say to it. Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds. But as soon as he hears that his kinsman Lot is involved in that struggle, he stirs himself.

Everything, as we read, is beautiful in its season. There is a time to build, and a time to pull down. There was a time for Abraham to be still, and a time for Abraham to be active; a time to be silent, and a time to break silence. And he understood the time. Like the men of Issachar afterwards, he knew the time, and what Israel ought to do. God's principles were Abraham's rules. Lot was taken prisoner, and the kinsman's part was now Abraham's duty. The battle-field in the vale of Siddim shall be his now, as the tent had been his till now in the plains of Mamre. The mind of God had another

lesson for him than that which he learnt while the potsherd of the earth were alone in the conflict; and a time to break silence calls him out at the head of his trained servants.

Excellent and beautiful indeed in a saint is this intelligence of the mind of Christ, and beautiful is everything in its season. Out of season the very same action is defiled and disfigured. For the *material* of an action is not enough to determine the *character* of an action. It must be *seasonable* likewise. Elijah, from his elevation, may call down fire from heaven on the captains and their fifties; and so, the two witnesses, in the day of Rev. 11. But it will not do for the companions of the lowly, rejected Jesus to act thus on the Samaritan villagers. Luke 9. It is only in its season that anything is really right. How was the garden of Gethsemane (made sacred as it was by the sorrows of the Lord Jesus) disfigured by the blood which Peter's sword drew there! What a stain on that soil, though the power of Christ was present to remove it! But another sword was doing right service when it hewed Agag in pieces. For when vengeance is demanded, when the trumpet of the sanctuary sounds an alarm for war, vengeance or war will be as perfect as grace and suffering. It is for God to determine the dispensational way, and to make known the dispensational truth. That being done, all life of faith is just that manner or order or character of life that is according to it. "The duties and services of faith flow from truths entrusted. If the truths be neglected, the duties or services cannot be fulfilled." And the good pleasure of God, or His revealed and dispensed wisdom, varies in changing and advancing ages. Noah, in a few generations before Abraham, would have avenged the blood of one made in the likeness or image of God, in the same spirit of faith, as Abraham allowed one army of confederate kings to slay another. It is neither the "sword" nor the garment," as the Lord speaks in Luke 22, that must needs be the due instrument of service, or symbol of faith; but either of them, according as it severally expresses the dispensational good pleasure of God at the time.

This is much to be observed; for the distinguishing of things. that differ, and the rightly dividing of the word of God or of truth, is expected, among other virtues, in the life of faith. Abraham was endowed with this fine faculty. He walked in the light of that day, as God was in the light. He knew the voice (if the silver trumpet; when, as it were, to gather to the tabernacle, and when to go forth to the battle.

But there is more than this in our patriarch at this time. Two victories distinguish him — one over the armies of the kings, and one over the offers of the king of Sodom.

The first of these Abraham gained, because he struck the blow exactly in God's time. He went out to the battle neither sooner nor later than God would have had him. He waited, as it were, till "he heard the going in the mulberry trees." Victory was therefore sure; for the battle was the Lord's, not his. His arm was braced by the Lord; and this victory of Abraham's was that of an earlier sling and stone, or of the jaw-bone of an ass, or of a Jonathan and his armour-bearer against a Philistine host; for Abraham's was but a *band of trained servants against the armies of four confederated kings*.

The second, still brighter than the first, was achieved in virtue of fellowship with the very springs of divine strength. The *spirit* of the patriarch was in victory here, as his *arm* had been before. He had so drunk in the communication of the King of Salem — had so fed on the bread and wine of that royal, priestly stranger — that the king of Sodom spread out his feast in vain. The soul of Abraham *had been in heaven*, and he could not return to the world.

That was his blessed experience in the valley of Shaveh. Happy soul indeed! Oh for something more than to trace the image of it in the book! Zacchaeus, in his day, was a son of Abraham in this generation, or according to this life and power. Zacchaeus so drank in the joy and strength that are to be known in the presence of Christ, that the world became a dead thing to him. He had sat at table

with the true Melchizedek, and had eaten of His bread and drunk of His wine. Jesus had spread a feast for His host at Jericho as He had in other days for Abraham in the valley of Shaveh; and, strengthened and refreshed, this son of Abraham, like his father of old, was able to surrender the world. Behold, Lord, says he, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man of anything by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. He could give Abraham's answer to the king of Sodom, for he had had Abraham's refreshment from the King of Salem.

Surely, beloved, this is the way of victory in all the saints. The springs of strength and joy are found in Jesus. May you and I be able to look at Him and say, All my fresh springs are in thee." "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." And what are all conquests in God's account but such?

"'Tis within

The fervent spirit labours. There he gains
Fresh conquests o'er himself, compared with which
The laurels that a Caesar wears are weeds."

Such, then, are the victories of faith.

But we have more still; and in the next scene, in Gen. 15 we see faith's *boldness*.

And let me ask, for our common comfort, what more precious with God Himself than this? The intelligence of faith is bright, and its victories glorious; but in the accounting of the God of all grace, its boldness surpasses all.

After Abraham's victory over the world, or over the offers of the king of Sodom, the Lord comes to him with some great pledges and promises. After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. Gen. 15: 1. After the heat of the preceding day, it was meet, in the ways of grace, that Abraham should be owned again, and encouraged again. But faith is bold, very bold, apparently aiming higher than the purposes and undertakings of grace. And this is a wonderful moment to contemplate. Abraham seems to throw back the words of the Lord. "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward," says the Lord. "What wilt thou give me?" Abraham replies — "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?"

This was bold; but, blessed to say it, not too bold for the ear of the Lord who finds His richest joy in the language of faith like this.

Good it is to have a *portion*; but Abraham sought an *object*, an object for the heart; something far more important to us. Adam found it so. Eden was not to him what Eve was. The garden with all its tributes did not do for him what the helpmeet did. Eve opened his mouth; she alone did that, because she alone had filled his heart. Christ finds it so. The Church is more to Him than all the glory of the kingdom — as the pearl and the treasure were more to the men who found them, than all their possessions, for they sold all to get them. The strayed sheep, the lost piece of silver, the prodigal son, are more to heaven — to the Father, to the Shepherd, to the Spirit, and to angels — as occasions of joy, than all else; just because the heart has got its object — love has found its answer. This is the mind of Christ. Affection puts the heart on a journey; and it cannot rest, in the midst of all beside, without its object; and it says even to the Lord and His pledges, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?"

But bold faith this was indeed, appearing thus to throw back the words of God. But it was precious to Him. Yea, it was precious to Him on the highest kind of title; for faith, acting thus and craving after this manner, spoke the way and the taste of the divine mind itself. For God Himself looks for children, as Abraham did. It is not the spirit of bondage that is to fill His house, but that of adoption; it is not servants but children He will have round Him. He has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to *Himself*." He has found in His children an object for *Himself*; and Abraham was, therefore, but telling out the *common* secret of his own heart, and of the bosom of God. And at once his desire is answered; and the sight of the starry heavens is made to pledge to the patriarch something better than all portions and all conditions, for the Lord says to him, "So shall thy *seed* be."

How truly may we say, never does faith aim more justly than when it aims high, and draws with a bold hand. Never is the mark it sets before it more God's own purpose. "Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God," says the prophet to the king, "ask it either in the depth, or in the height above;" range through the divine resources, and use them. What king Ahaz would not do, wearying the Lord by his reserve, and unbelief, and slowness of heart, Abraham does and continues to do. His soul continues in the same power of faith to the end of this action. He holds on in the same track. "I'll give thee this land to inherit it," says the Lord to him shortly afterwards. "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" is his reply to the Lord. This is of the same fine character; and being so — bespeaking the boldness of faith — it is still infinitely acceptable with the Lord. Abraham seeks something beyond a promise. Not that he doubted the promise. He was sure of it. It could never fail. Heaven and earth would pass away, ere it could pass away. But "oath and blood" to seal it were desired by Abraham. He loved *covenant* title, and his faith sought it; but sought no more than grace and purpose and sovereign good-pleasure had already designed to give him.

And there lies the richest, fullest consolation. *Faith is never too bold to please the Lord*. In the days of His flesh, He often rebuked the reserves and suspicions of little faith, but never the strength and decision of a faith that aimed as at everything, and would not go without a blessing. So, the very style in which, in this fine chapter (Gen. 15), He answers the faith of His servant, tells us of the delight with which He had entertained His servant's boldness. The very *style* of the answer speaks this in our ears; as afterwards in the case of the palsied man in Luke 5; for there the words, "Man, thy sins be forgiven thee," tell how the heart of the same Lord, the God of Abraham, had been refreshed by the faith which broke up the roof of the house without apology, in order to reach Him. And it is the same here. When a fine, bold unquestioning faith sought for a child, the Lord God took Abraham forth that very night, and, showing him the starry heavens, said to him, "So shall thy seed be." When like faith would have the land secured by something more than a word of promise, the same Lord pledges the covenant by the passage of a burning lamp between the pieces of the sacrifice.

This *style*, as I said, is full of meaning. It eloquently (may I say?) bespeaks the divine mind. The Lord does not content Himself by merely promising a child, as by word of mouth, or by merely giving some other assurances to Abraham that the land shall be the inheritance of his seed; but, in each case, He enters on certain actions, and conducts them with such august and striking solemnities, as lets us know instinctively, the delight with which He had listened to these demands of faith.

Would that we knew our God as He is to be known, for His praise and our comfort! Love delights to be used. Love is wearied with ceremoniousness. It is, in its way, a trespasser on love's very nature, and on its essential mode of acting. Family affection, for instance, puts ceremony aside all the day long. Intimacy is there, and not form. Form would be too cumbrous for it, as Saul's armour was for David. It has not proved it, and cannot therefore wear it. Love is doing the business of the house in

one and another, and the common confidence of all allows it to be done in love's way. So will the Lord have it with Himself. The intimacy of faith is according to His grace, and ceremony is but a weariness to Him.

Grace, as we sing at times, is "a sea without a shore," and we are encouraged to launch forth with full-spread sails. The pot of oil would have been without a bottom, had the woman's faith *still* drawn from it; and the king of Israel's victories would have been in quick succession, till not a Syrian had been left to tell the tale, had his faith trod the field of battle as one who knew it only as a field of conquest. 2 Kings 4 and 13. But we are straitened. The boldness of faith is too fine an element for the niggard heart of man that cannot trust the Lord: though, blessed to tell it, it is that which *answers*, as well as *uses*, the boundless grace of God.

The believing mind is the happy mind; and it is the obedient mind also, the God-glorifying mind. It is the thankful and the worshipping mind; the mind too that keeps the saint the most in readiness for service, and in separation from pollutions. We may be watchful, and it is right; we may be self-judging, and it is right; we may be careful to observe the rule of righteousness in all that we do, and it is right: but withal, to hold the heart up in the light of the favour of God, by the exercise of a simple, child-like, believing mind, this is what glorifies Him, this is what answers His grace, this is what above all proves itself grateful to Him with whom we have to do. "We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." It is not attainment, it is not watchfulness, it is not services or duties, which entitle us to take that journey, that gives the soul entrance into that wealthy place of the divine favour — *by faith* we have access into this grace wherein we stand.

But we go onward still in this history, and find it rich in other instructions and illustrations of the life of faith.

Sarah now comes forth for the first time in independent action. Gen. 16, 17.

The famine had already, as we saw, tempted Abraham to seek the *land* of Egypt, and he got the resources of *that* land, with shame and sorrow, and a wearisome journey back again to Canaan. Sarah now tempts him to seek the *bondmaid* of Egypt.

We know what this Egyptian bondmaid is, from the divine teaching of the epistle to the Galatians. She is the covenant from mount Sinai, the law, the religion of ordinances; and Sarah, in her suggestions to Abraham, that he should take this Egyptian, represents *nature*, which always finds its relief and its resources in flesh and blood, finds its *religion* there also, as well as everything else.

The Spirit had not as yet dealt with Sarah's soul. At least, we have had no manifestation of this. She was an elect one surely; but our election goes long before we become the subject of divine workmanship; and, as yet, spiritual life, the life of faith, the operation of the truth on Sarah through the Holy Ghost, had not been witnessed. She had not as yet been spoken of by the Lord. She had not been the companion of her husband in the exercise of his spirit before God, nor his fellow-disciple in God's school. She was not called out with Abraham to number the stars, or to watch the sacrifice. She was still, I may say, in the place of *nature*; and accordingly she invites her husband to give her seed by her Egyptian handmaid.

That is her place in this action; and Abraham becomes the saint *betrayed by nature*, led in nature's path, surprised by a temptation from that quarter now, as he had been before by the pressure of famine.

But all this is unbelief and departure from God. It is the way of man, the way of nature; not of faith or of the Spirit. We naturally resort to the law, the bondwoman, the religion of ordinances, when

the soul feels its need; as we naturally go down to Egypt, or seek the world, when our *circumstances* are needy. It is unbelief and departure from God, as is seen even in Abraham; but to leave God and the restorings of His grace, when the soul has need, is a more grievous offence and wrong against Him, than to seek help as from Egypt, when our circumstances have need. My poverty may tempt me to use shifts and contrivances, which is bad enough; but if my conscience want healing, if breaches within need repairing, that I may walk again in the enjoyed light of His countenance, and I go to mere religion, or to ordinances, or to anything but the provisions of His own sanctuary, this is still worse.

The Hagers and the Pharaohs, the bondmaids and the wealth of Egypt, are poor resorts for the Abrahams of God. But so it has been, and so it is, through the working of nature. But Abraham (we will now see for our comfort) is under God's eye, though led by Sarah's suggestions. God has His place in him as well as nature; and He will assert it for his restoring. He rises on his soul in a fresh revelation of Himself, demanding of His saint the fresh obedience of faith. "I am the almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." For Abraham's soul had lost this truth, the almightiness or the all-sufficiency of God. He had gone in to Hagar; he had taken up confidence in the flesh; he had left the ground he had stood upon in Gen. 15; but the Lord will not and cannot allow this; and therefore rises, in a renewed revelation of Himself, on the spirit of His saint; and it is a rising "with healing in its wings;" for Abraham falls on his face, convicted and abashed, and the soul is led again in paths of righteousness.

Surely there are to this hour such moments in the history of "them that believe," as well as of their "father Abraham." Abraham had not fallen on his face, when the Lord appeared to him and spoke to him in chap. 15. There he stood, conscious that he was in the light with the Lord. But darkness had now come over his soul, and he is not ready for the Lord. He is on his face, silent and amazed. He is not standing, urging the suits of faith, as there; but on his face, silent and confounded. The change in his experience is great; but there is no change in the Lord; for it is the same love, whether He rebuke or comfort. If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with Him; if we confess our sins, we have forgiveness with Him; if we be able to stand before Him, He will feed and strengthen us; if we must needs fall convicted in His presence, He will raise us up again.

This is a fine, earnest path of the spirit of a saint. There is a deep reality here. Departure from God proves itself to be bitterness; but God proves Himself to the soul to be restoration and peace; and under His gracious hand faith is afresh emboldened, and Abraham plies his suit, as one that was again in the vigour of chap. 15, and seeks of God that Ishmael might live before Him.

How one longs to have one's own soul formed by these blessed revelations of grace, and the inwrought work of faith which answers them. The scene changes; but God and the soul are together still. There is reality — reality in the sadness and in the joy, in the light of the divine countenance and in the hiding of our own face as in the dust.

All this may be said of the life of faith, as seen in Gen. 16, 17. But on entering upon the next scene of action, in Gen. 18, 19, I would observe, that in the life of Abraham we get something beside these exercises and illustrations of faith. We get *exhibitions of certain divine mysteries also*.

All the facts in this history are simple truths. They happened just as recorded. But there is this twofold design in them: either to give samples of the life of faith in a saint, or to give illustrations of some great ways and purposes of God.

And such illustrations of the divine counsels and mysteries is the common way of divine wisdom throughout Scripture. What was the tabernacle or the temple but a place for the constant rehearsal of mysteries, such as atonement and intercession, and the varied order of God in the worship

and services of His house, or in the ministry of grace? For such were the sacrifices and the services there, the feasts, and the holy days, and the jubilees. What, in like manner, were the exodus, and the journey through the wilderness, and the entrance into Canaan, the wars there, and then the throne of the peaceful one? Were not all these, whether institutes of the sanctuary, or facts in the history, exhibitions of the hidden, eternal counsels of the divine bosom?

Now chapters 18, 19 of this history suggest this recollection. These chapters are to be read together, and afford us a large and vivid exhibition of certain great truths, which concern us at this moment, in as full a sense as ever the facts themselves, which convey them to us as in a parable, concerned Abraham and his generation.

Sodom, in that day, was the world. It had been warned, but had refused instruction. It had proved incurably departed from God, and beyond correction. Sodom had been visited and chastened in the day of the victory of the confederated kings — as we saw in chapter 14; but it was Sodom still, and was, at this time, in advanced iniquity, in a state of ripened apostasy, her last state worse than her first.

Sodom was the world in this day. The Lord Jesus, in His teaching, gives it morally that place, just as another generation had been the world in Noah's day. See Matt. 24; Luke 17. They are like figures, presenting to our thoughts "this present evil world," which is ripening itself for the judgment of God.

At such a crisis, however, in this day of the judgment of Sodom, or the overthrow of the cities of the plain, as in every other like day, there are two incidental matters to be deeply pondered by our souls; there is *deliverance out of the judgment*, and there is *separation before it come*. There is Lot, and there is Abraham. Lot is delivered, when the hour of the crisis comes; Abraham is separated before it comes.

All this is much to be weighed in our thoughts. *Judgment, deliverance, separation*, — these are the elements of the action here, and these are full of meaning, and of application to our own history as the Church of God, and to the world around us.

Before this action opens, Abraham had been in a heavenly place. He was a stranger on the earth, having his tent only, and wandering from place to place without so much as to set his foot on — and now, when the judgment comes, he is apart from it altogether, like Enoch, the heavenly Enoch, in another and earlier day. of judgment. Each of these, in the day of visitation, was outside, beyond, or above the scene of the ruin; not merely delivered out of it when it came, but separated from it before it came.

Abraham had already stood with the Lord Himself on an eminence which overlooked Sodom, as he and the Lord had walked together from the plain of Mamre; and now, when the judgment spends itself on that apostate, polluted city, Abraham is again, in that high place, beholding the desolation afar off. He was (in the spirit of the place where he stood) in company with Him who was executing the judgment. But Lot is only rescued. Lot is a delivered man, Abraham is a separated one. As Abraham is the Enoch, Lot is the Noah of this later day, and is drawn forth from the devoted city.

What mysteries are these! What solemn realities, in the counsels of God, are here rehearsed for our learning! Do we know what we are looking at in all this? Do we not see great purposes of God, as in a glass, in this varied and eventful action? Have we to ask, Where is this mystic ground, on which we are here standing? Surely, beloved, we ought to know it. In this action, the world, as Sodom, is typically meeting its doom; the righteous remnant, as in Lot, are delivered in that hour of wrath; and

the Church, as in Abraham, already separated and borne above, looks afar off on the scene of the mighty desolation. Surely these mysteries are before us in this action at Sodom "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." The world, the Church, and the kingdom, are here in mysteries or types; the thing that is to be judged; the thing that is to be separated to heavenly glory; the thing that is to be delivered, and thus reserved for the earth again after the purification. Enoch, Noah, and the deluged creation are again here in Abraham, and Lot, and the doomed cities of the plain.

These are mysteries of which the Book of God is full. And thus is it again and afresh witnessed to us, what we are and where we are, though travelling on to all appearance, in the common track of everyday human life, with a generation, in the spirit of their mind, still, as ever, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

Many incidental things might occur to the mind in this, as in other sections of this wonderful history; such as the visit of the Son of God to Abraham; Abraham's intercession for Sodom; the angels' reserve towards Lot; and the contrasted characters of the two saints — the saint of the tent, and the saint in Sodom. But my purpose, in this little book, does not take in such details. But I would ask, in closing this action in chapters 18, 19. Are we, beloved, apprehensive of the moment in which we are living? Is "man's day" brightening up to its meridian before us, ascending to its noontide splendour? And what think we of that? Are we joining in the congratulations of man with his fellow, that thus it is? Or is all this brightness suspected and challenged by us, as the sure precursor of God's judgment? Do we know that the god of this world finds a house "swept and garnished" as thoroughly a scene for his evil and destructive energy as a Sodom? Do we judge, with our generation, that this cannot be? Or do we hold it in mind, that it is in such a house that he will work at the closing of Christendom's history? And are we waiting for the Son of God to take us up to that mystic eminence where of old He took His Abraham? The Lord give us grace to occupy such ground! And we shall the more easily and naturally do so, if, like Abraham, we are saints of the tent and not of the city — such saints (again like Abraham) as rejoice, "in the heat of the day," to hold communion with the Lord of glory.

After this we go, with our patriarch, into the land of the Philistines, where he sojourns during the times of Gen. 20, 21.

The old compact between Abraham and Sarah is acted on again, after so long a time acted on now at Gerar, as before it had been in Egypt. It had been made between them ere they left their native country. It was brought out with them from the very place of their birth. It was, I may say, in them older than anything of God; and after many changes and exercises it is in them and with them the same thing still.

It was a very evil thing — both subtle and unclean. It was false and yet specious, and savoured strongly of the serpent, of him that is a liar and the father of lies. Abraham was forced to betray it, vile as it was, to the king of Gerar. "It came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me: at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother." This was worse than we might even have feared. There was not a principle in the life of faith that was not gainsaid by so vile a compact as this, brought from the very place of their nativity with them. And such is the flesh, the inbred corruption. Its way, whenever taken, is shame and deep dishonour. It degrades a saint even before men. It is that which will confound and expose an Abraham before an Abimelech. And it never changes, or improves, or

ceases to be. It is the same in Egypt, and at Gerar. It lives in us still, and follows us everywhere. We get it at our birth from the loins of Adam; and we are, for the common consistency of our way as the called of God, to mortify and refuse it.

Wretched indeed it is to have to see such a thing as this. But the Spirit of God hides nothing. There it lies before us, this vile and wicked thing in the pathway of the recording Spirit. We have, however, other happier objects.

The progress of Sarah's soul, under the light and leading of the Lord, is to be tracked in its own peculiar and instructive path. Under the influence of the flesh she had, at the outset, joined Abraham in this unclean compact, of which I have just spoken. In unbelief, she had afterwards, as we also saw, given Hagar to her husband; and then, in the haste and rebellion of the heart, she resented the effects of that unbelief, and cast out the bondwoman, whom she had adopted and settled in the family. But at the command of the Lord, Hagar had gone back to her; and now, at the time of this action, she had borne with her in the house for fourteen years. There was, however, no manifestation of the renewed mind, or the life of faith, in her. It was even during these years, that in unbelief she had laughed at the promise, behind the tent-door. But still, I may say, she had, during this time, in one sense, *been at school*; and she seems to have learnt a lesson, for she submitted patiently and unresistingly, to the presence of the bondwoman and her child in the house of her husband. We hear of no fresh quarrels between them. This was witness of her being in the hand of God, till at length, as we know, she was given faith to conceive seed. Heb. 11. A great journey, however, after all this, is now about to be taken by her spirit. She is to take the lead even of her husband. And happy this is — common enough, too, among the saints — but happy, very happy. And were we of a delivered heart — a heart given up to the desire of Christ's glory only — we should rejoice in these discoveries, made in the regions of the Spirit, though we ourselves would have to be humbled by them. "The last shall be first, and the first last." These are among the ways of "new-born souls," and to be discerned still by those who "mark the steps of grace." Paul could say of some, "Who also were in Christ before me;" but we may be bold to add, in that case, though he did not, "The last were first." And the generous liberty of the redeemed soul will but glory in these sovereign actings of the Spirit.

Sarah's elevation above Abraham in the things of the kingdom of God is now to appear in illustration of all this. In obedience to the command, Abraham calls the child that was born, Isaac. But Sarah *interprets* that name: and this is a finer exercise of soul over the gift of God. To obey a word is good; but to obey it in the joy of an exercised heart, and in the light and intelligence of a mind that has entered into the divine sense of that word, is better. Abraham called the child that was born to him, Isaac: but Sarah said "God his made me to laugh; and all they that hear it will laugh with me." The oracle of Gen. 17: 19 was made more to her than a command to be observed. It had springs of refreshing in it, and kindlings of soul. It was full of light and meaning to the opened understanding of Sarah. And this leads to strength and decision. This Deborah of earlier days will brace the loins of Barak. "Cast out this bondwoman and her son," says Sarah to Abraham; for she was happy in the liberty of grace and promise, while he was still lingering amid the claims of nature, and the desires which his own loins had gendered. "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." And this was *Scripture*, as we read in Gal. 4; this was the voice of God. This decision of faith, in the liberty of grace, gets its sealing at once under God's own hand. "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free," says the Spirit. And what met the mind of the Lord, in the days of His 'flesh, like the faith which was bold and free, after this manner? the faith which would use Him without ceremony, which reached Him through a crowd, which pressed in through the silent reproaches of a misjudging Pharisee, or through the

injurious whispers of a self-righteous multitude! And how much of the energy of the Spirit in St. Paul is engaged in giving the sinner this precious boldness, this immediate assurance of heart in Christ, in spite of law, conscience, earth, and hell!

This boldness of faith in Sarah, this challenge of the bondwoman, this demand (in her own behalf too) that she might enjoy her Isaac all alone, is *Scripture*. Gal. 4: 30. She spake as "the oracles of God." But in Abraham nature now acts. He would fain retain Ishmael. This is no strange thing. Nature now acts in Abraham, and faith in Sarah; as, on an earlier occasion, which we noticed, nature had acted in Sarah and faith in Abraham. But nature in Abraham must submit. He must not let Sarah be entangled any longer as with this yoke of bondage. The house must be freed of Ishmael, for it is to be built only in Isaac. "The son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman."

But all this quickly bears its fruit. Hagar being now gone, and the house settled in Isaac according to this demand of faith, glory is therefore quickly ready to enter. For this is the divine order. Having "access into this grace wherein we stand, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Such is the order of the Spirit in the soul of such a saint; and such is the order now in the mystic house of our Abraham.

Abraham is sought by the Gentile. This is full of meaning. In the days of stress and famine, Abraham seeks the Gentile, whether in Egypt or in Philistia; but now, the Gentile seeks Abraham. This is a great change. Abraham's house, as we have seen, is now established in grace. Ishmael is dismissed, and Isaac is gloried in. In mystic sense, Israel has turned to the Lord, the veil is taken away, Jerusalem has said to Christ, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord," her warfare is therefore accomplished, and she is receiving the double. The Gentile seeks Israel. Abimelech and Phichol, the king and his chief captain, come to Abraham.

This is a great dispensational chance. Israel is the head now, and not the tail. The skirt of the Jew is now laid hold on by the nations; for the Jew has, by faith, laid hold on the Lord, and the nations say, God is with you. Gen. 21: 22; Zech. 8: 23.

This is full of meaning; and Abraham on all this (led of the Spirit) is full of thoughts of glory or of the kingdom. And rightly so. Because, when the Jew is sought by the Gentile, instead of being trodden down or degraded by the Gentile, the kingdom is at hand. Accordingly, on the king of Gerar seeking him and suing him, our patriarch raises a *new* altar; not the altar of a heavenly stranger, as in Gen. 12, but an altar to "the everlasting God;" not an altar in a wilderness-world, but an altar beside a *grove* and a *well*; the one being a witness that the solitary place had been made glad, and that the wilderness was rejoicing; the other, that the peoples of the earth were confederate with the seed of Abraham.*

*The Lord Jesus, in His day, acknowledged this same pledge or symptom or the kingdom. For when the Greeks came up to the feast and asked to see Him, as the Gentile here seeks Abraham, His thoughts are immediately upon His glory. He knows indeed that glory is to be reached only by His death, and so He testifies; but still, His thoughts go out at once to the glory. See John 12: 23.

All this bright intelligence of faith in Abraham is very beautiful. We have already seen other actings of it in him. He knew a time of peace and a time of war, and acted accordingly in the day of the battle of the five kings with four. So, again, he knew his heavenly place, and took it, when the fire of the Lord was judging the cities of the plain. So, again, as this Gen. 21 very remarkably shows us, he also knew when to suffer wrong and when to resent, when to be passive and when to assert his rights. For now, in the time of this chapter, when the Gentile seeks him, he reproves Abimelech for a well of water which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. *But he had not complained of this injury*

until now; for Abimelech said to him, "I wot not who has done this thing; neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but today." And this is exceedingly beautiful. It is perfect in its generation. Abraham had till now suffered, and taken it patiently, because till now he had been a heavenly stranger on the earth; and such patient suffering in such an one is acceptable with God. But now, times are changed. The heavenly stranger has become the head of the nations, sought by the Gentile; and rights and wrongs must now be settled, and the cry of the oppressed must be heard.

All this has great moral beauty in it. I know not how sufficiently to admire this workmanship of the Spirit in the mind of Abraham. He was an Israelite who knew the seasons of the year — when to be at the Passover, and when at the Feast of Tabernacles. He knew, in spirit, when to continue with Jesus in His temptations, and then again, when the day arrived, how to surround Him with hosannahs as He entered the city of the Son of David. All such various and blending lights shone in the spiritual intelligence of his soul. God, by the Spirit, communicated a beautiful mind to Abraham. In other days, he would not have so much of this earth as to set his foot on — he would surrender the choice of the land to Lot — he would leave the Canaanite where he found him — he would refuse to be enriched by the king of Sodom even in so little as a thread or a shoe-latchet — he would wander up and down in his tent here, a stranger from heaven — but now, in a day signified and marked by the hand of God, he can be another man, and know his millennial place, as father of the Israel of God, and their representative as head of the nations. He can keep the Feast of Tabernacles in its season. His rebuke of Abimelech — his entertaining him — his enriching him — his giving him covenant pledges — and all this in such easy, conscious dignity — and then his new altar or his calling on God in a new character, and his planting a grove, all bespeak another man, and that a transfiguration, if I may so speak, had taken place in him, according to God.

All this I judge to have a great character in it. But I will not any longer stay here; for there is still more in this fine life of faith which our father Abraham, through grace, tracked to the very end, holding still the beginning of his confidence.

And here let me say, this life of faith is, in other words, life spent in the *power of resurrection*. It is the life of a dead and risen man. It is a lesson, if one may speak for others, hard indeed to be learnt to any good effect, but still it is the lesson, the practical lesson of our lives, that we are a dead and risen people. At the outset Abraham, in spirit, took that character. He left behind him all that nature or the world had provided him with. He left what his *birth* introduced him to, for that which *faith* introduced him to. And as he began, so he continued and ended, with failings by the way indeed, and that too again and again, but still to the end he was a man of faith, a dead and risen man.

As such an one he had received Isaac, some twenty years ago, not considering his own body now dead, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb; and as such an one he now offers him on the altar at the word of the Lord. The promise was *God's* — that was enough for him. For *faith* is never overcome. It has divine, infinite resources. The believer fails again and again; but faith is never overcome, or comes short of its expectation. Gen. 22.

This is the way of faith, when Isaac was demanded.* And the same overcoming faith we trace in the very next scene, the burial of Sarah. This was the same faith, the faith of a dead and risen man, the faith which had already *received* Isaac and *offered* Isaac, now buries Sarah. Abraham believed in resurrection, and in God as the God of resurrection, the God who quickens the dead, and calls those things that be not as though they were. The cave of Machpelah tells us this. "Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes, *in sure and certain hope*," was the language of Abraham's heart there. His purchase of that place, with all his care to make it his own, to have it as his *possession*, while beyond

it he cared not for a single acre of the whole land, tells us of his faith in resurrection. His treaty for it with the children of Heth is like his words to his servants at the foot of mount Moriah, "Abide ye here with the ass, while I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." Each of these things bespoke beforehand what he knew about his Isaac and his Sarah. He committed each of them into the hands of Him who, as he knew, quickens the dead. The corn of wheat dying, as he knew, was to live again. The handful of sacred dust, as he knew, was to be gathered again. Death itself was eyed in like victory of faith, as had already been eyed the fire, and the wood, and the beloved victim on the altar. Gen. 23.

*There are *mysteries* as well as *illustrations of faith* in these things; but I cannot follow them here. The offer of Isaac on Moriah, we none of us doubt, is a mystery. So, I surely know, is the action of Hagar and Ishmael in Gen. 21. It is the picture of the present *outcast but preserved Jew* — a homeless fugitive, destined, however, for future purposes of mercy. See Gal. 4: 25. But I follow not these things particularly here.

These were the victories of faith again. Faith in our patriarch, after this manner, talked calmly with all circumstances, and won the day over them all in their turn. Beautiful victories of "precious faith"! And they are gained still. Faith still disposes of one circumstance after another as it rises. It meets our own personal condition as "dead in trespasses and sins;" it meets the difficulties and temptations of the way; it meets the last great enemy. Let me not make a wonder of meeting things on the journey, or at the end of it, if I have already met what withstood me at the outset. Faith will go to mount Moriah, or to the cave of Machpelah, if it have already gone out in the starry night with the Lord at Hebron. If it have met death in my own person, it may meet it in my Isaac or my Sarah. One speaks, the Lord knows, of His grace, and not of one's own experience. But still, beloved, let each of us say, Am I not at peace with God? Do I not know that He is for me? Do I not know that my estate of sin, guilt, and condemnation has been met in His grace? Do I not know that I am washed, accepted, adopted? Have I not gone out with Abraham, as in the night of Gen. 15, and found relief for my own state by nature, and shall I then tarry on my way, though the trial of mount Moriah await me, or the death and burial at Machpelah? If faith have already met sin, it is to know itself conqueror over even death. Let our souls be accustomed to the thought that the *brightest victory of faith was achieved at the beginning* — that if at peace with God in spite of sin, we may reckon on strength and comfort from Him in spite of the trials of the way, and on power and triumph in Him in spite of the end of it. Faith which has done its *first* work has done its *greatest* work. "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." God is glorified in these reckonings of faith. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

It is the power of life over death, life in victory, that faith uses. It was such power of victorious life that Abraham possessed himself of by faith. The sepulchre is empty, and the grave-clothes are lying there, as the spoils of war. The deadness of his own body, the altar of his Isaac and the grave of his Sarah, were visited and inspected by a *risen* man, in the light of the faith of Him who is the Quickener of the dead, and calleth those things that be not as though they were.

These are the great things of faith in the souls of the elect. But further still, in this fruitful, shifting history. Abraham, at the end, is seen to hold his first ground, as well as to work his earlier victories. He maintains, through grace, erect and firm, that very attitude which he had at once and at the first assumed, when by faith he hearkened to the call of God.

That call of God had done these two things with Abraham, I might say *for* Abraham; it had

separated him from Mesopotamia, and yet left him a stranger in Canaan. From country, kindred, and father's house he, had been withdrawn; but still, in the midst of that land and people to which he had come, he was to be but a pilgrim, dwelling as on the surface of it, in a tent, whatever part of it he might pass through or visit.

This position was very holy. His separation was twofold — separation from pollution, such as he might meet in Canaan; separation from natural alliances, such as he had been born into in Mesopotamia. He was under the call of the God of glory; and such a call made no terms with either the flesh or the world. In somewhat of Levite holiness, he did not know his mother's children; in somewhat of church holiness, he knew no man after the flesh. Nay; beyond even all this, in somewhat of the virtue of his divine Lord, he did not know *himself*. He was the heir of the land where he was a pilgrim. The *promise* of God was his, as surely as the *call*. He knew himself to be destined of divine, unimpeachable purpose, to dignities of a very high order. But to the end he was willing to pass unknown, entirely unknown. He talked of himself to the children of the land only as a stranger and a sojourner. He would pay for the smallest plot of ground which he wanted. He would be nothing and nobody in the midst of them. He never talked of the dignities which he knew, all the time, really attached to him. David, in like spirit, in other days, had the oil of Samuel on him, the consecration of God to the throne of the tribes of Israel; and yet he would be hid, and thank a rich neighbour, in his need, for a piece of bread. These men of God knew not themselves. This was the way of our Abraham; and this was the virtue of Him who, in this same departed, evil world, made Himself of no reputation, though God of heaven and earth.

Blessed virtues of soul under the power of the call of God, through the Holy Ghost! Mesopotamia is left, Canaan is estranged, and self is forgotten and hid! The call of God purposes to do at this day with us what in that day it did with Abraham. It would fain conform us to itself. Its authority is supreme. It is not that country or kindred are, of necessity, defiling. Nature accredits them; and the law of God, in its season, owns and enforces them. But the call of God is supreme, and demands separation of a very high, and fine, and peculiar order. And this was what addressed Abraham when he dwelt in Mesopotamia, the place of his birth, of his kindred, and of his natural associations, and this was what still echoed in his heart all the time of his sojourn in Canaan.

It was not that he was called to assert the harm of such things. Not at all. But they were such things as the call of God left behind; and the harm, or the moral wrong, or the pollution of a thing was no longer his rule, but *inconsistency with the call of God*. He may allow the right and the claim of a thousand things; but it is the voice of the God of glory, to which in faith he had hearkened already, that must lead him and command him. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

He was very true to his call. According to it, at the beginning, he had gone forth, not knowing, as before him, whither he went, and leaving, as behind him, all that even nature itself must accredit, and all but the sovereign pleasure of God sanction. He continued in the power of it, sojourning in tents, unknown and unendowed, a stranger in the world, refusing to take one backward step. And at the end, we find the same power of his call as fresh in his soul as ever — as earnest and as simple in Gen. 24 as it had been in Gen. 12. He charges Eliezer to act upon it to the full, as he himself at the outset had done — that is, he was to keep Isaac in the place of separation at all cost. Let come what may, Isaac was neither to be taken back to Mesopotamia, nor to be allied with Canaan. He was, let circumstances make it difficult as they may, to be maintained in his true place under the call of God.

This has a great character in it. There is another mystery in this exquisite chapter (24), as we

commonly know; but I do not notice it here. I rather design to trace the earnest, simple path, which faith trod from first to last, in our father Abraham. The voice of the God of glory was *still* heard by him. He was *still* the separated man. He declared plainly that he sought a heavenly country. He might have had opportunity to return. This very journey of Eliezer proved that he had not forgotten the road. But he did not, he would not.

This strangership of our patriarch in the earth has indeed a very fine character. He left Mesopotamia, he sojourned in Canaan, he hid or forgot himself! Abraham left Abraham behind, as well as country, kindred, and father's house. He made himself of no reputation. He spoke of himself as "a stranger and a sojourner," and as that only, in the audience of the children of Heth, though he was, all the while, the one "who had the promises." All this was real, true-hearted strangership in the world. And it was conscious citizenship in heaven that made him, after this manner, a willing stranger here. Because of possessions in prospect, he could do without them in hand. The land of promise was to him but a strange country, because it was but a land of promise and not of possession. He saw Christ's day, and was glad; but he saw it in the distance. Heb. 11: 9-14

And Abraham was all this to the very end — as these closing chapters show us. The character which he took up at the beginning, under the call of God, that character he maintained to the end. He fails in the power of faith along the road, again and again, but he is the same heavenly stranger to the end of his journey.*

*In the mystic history of the earth given to us in Lev. 23 the Church is brought in as the "poor" and the "stranger" gleaning in another man's field, in ver. 22. But as she entered that field so she left it. She was the poor one, and the stranger, and the gleaner in another's field, to the end. The field never becomes her property.

Looked at in the light of this beautiful figure, what is Christendom under God's eye!

And strangership of this order is ours, I am deeply assured. Ours is to be strangership in the earth, because of conscious and well-known citizenship in heaven; separation from the world, because of oneness with an already risen Christ. Nothing can alter this while we are on the earth. We ought so to look in the face of a *rejected* Christ as to maintain this strangership in power. And so we do, as far as Christ is of more value to us than all our circumstances. It is for want of this that we take up with the world as we do. We have not learnt the lesson that Moses learnt — that the reproach of Christ was greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

Hard but blessed. Abraham knew something of it in power. He was the stranger to the end. He might have returned to Mesopotamia. He had not forgotten the road, as we observed before; and the constant respect and friendliness of all his neighbours proved that there was no enemy to hinder the journey. But the call of God had fixed his heart, and he looked only where it led him.*

*The Lord Jesus, in the days of His flesh, acted as the God who, of old, had called Abraham. *For He put in the supreme claims of such an one.* "He that loveth father or mother more than Me," says He, "is not worthy of Me." And again, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead." Who but God can step in between us and such relationships, such obligations and services? Duties and affections like these are more than sanctioned by nature; they are enforced by law — law of God Himself. But the call of God is supreme, and Jesus asserted it in the day of His humiliation here.

Would that the soul held these things in increased power! Little indeed does the heart know of this, if one may speak for others. But they are real — the prized fruit of divine energy in the elect of God.

After all this we find another and distinct matter in the history of Abraham. I mean his marriage with Keturah, and his family by her.

This family by Keturah is, we may surely judge, a distinct mystery. That is, Abraham is here presenting a new feature of the divine wisdom, or illustrating another secret in the ways of the divine dispensations. In these children of the second wife we get (typically) the millennial nations, the nations which shall people the earth in the days of the kingdom, branches of the great family of God in that day, and children of Abraham. They may lie far off, as in the ends of the earth; but they shall have their allotments, and be owned as of the one extended millennial family. "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people," shall be said to them. The ends of the earth shall be Christ's inheritance then, as surely as the Church shall be glorified in Him and with Him in the heavens, and the throne of David, and the inheritance of Israel be His as set up and revived in the land of their fathers. Abraham's children will be all the world over.

For in that day of glory, the King of Israel shall be the God of the whole earth. Christ is the Father of the everlasting age. If Israel be honoured by Him, all the nations shall be blest in Him. He is "the light to lighten the Gentiles," as He is "the glory of His people Israel." Keturah's children, parcelled off in other lands, bespeak this mystery. They will be second to Israel, it is true; but, nevertheless, they will be elect and beloved. As it is here written: And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac But unto the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country. Gen. 25.*

*The same mystery, I doubt not, is presented in the marriage of Moses and the Ethiopian, and in that also of Solomon with Pharaoh's daughter. Moses' second wife stands, in dignity, below his Zipporah, who shines in peculiar glory at the mount of God in Exodus 18; and Pharaoh's daughter, though fully acknowledged by the king at Jerusalem, would not be given a place in the city of David.

This is, I believe, the mystic meaning of this new family of Abraham; and this strange and wondrous article is that which closes his history. But it is another witness of the large and varied testimony which God has borne to His own counsels and secrets in that history. And this is very remarkable. At times *the Father* is seen in Abraham — as, in his desire for children — his making a feast at the weaning of Isaac — his offering up of his son — his sending for a wife for his son; at other times *the Christ* is seen in him, as the one in whom all the families of the earth are to be blest — as the kinsman-redeemer of Israel — as the holder of the headship of the nations — father of the millennial or everlasting age — and then, at other times, *the Church*, or heavenly people, are traced or reflected in this wondrous story; and, at other times, we are on earth, or with *Israel*.

We have the Blessed One, unto whom all His works are known from the beginning of the world, in the details and changeful stories of this life of Abraham, thus showing forth parts of His ways. In the allegories of Sarah and her seed, of Hagar and her seed, of Keturah and her seed, we have the mystery of Jerusalem, "the mother of us all," Israel in bondage as she now is with her children, and the gathering of the nations all the world over, as branches of the one extended millennial family. Mystery after mystery is thus acted in the life of Abraham; and many and various parts of "the manifold wisdom of God" are taught us.

I am quite aware, that living *or personal* types may have been as unconscious of what they were, under God's hand, as *material* types. Hagar, no doubt, was as passive as the gold that overlaid the table of showbread, or as the water which filled the brazen laver. But the lesson to us is not affected by this. I have Christ's royal glory in the state of Solomon, and I have the deeply precious provisions of His grace in the golden plate on Aaron's forehead; and I no more think of enquiring about Solomon

himself in that matter than I do about the gold. The sleeping Adam teaches me about the death of the Christ of God; the waking rapture of Adam, on receiving Eve, teaches me about the satisfaction and joy of the same Christ of God, when He shall see of the travail of His soul; but whether Adam knew what he was doing for me, I do not ask myself. I can learn about the first covenant from an unconscious Hagar, as I can learn about the cleansing of the blood. of Christ from an unconscious altar. So, as to our Abraham, in taking his place in the midst of all these varied and wondrous mysteries, I enquire not curiously the measure of his mind in these things. The wisdom of God can say — the Christ who stood in the eternal counsels can say, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders;" but how far Abraham could speak so, in whatever measure he was himself in the secret he was made to utter, or whether he spoke mysteries as in an unknown tongue, we have not to enquire. "God is His own interpreter."

Our patriarch has now closed his actings and his exercises. We have now to close his eyes, as we read in Gen. 25: 7, 8, "And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people."

He had, we may say, seen the land, but he was not to go over and possess it. He was the Moses of an earlier generation; like him, a *heavenly* man, a man of the wilderness and not of the inheritance — a man of the tent — a child of resurrection. He was gathered to his people, ere the land was entered by the Israel of God according to promise. As in the glass of God's purpose, and by the light of faith, he sees the land; but he goes not over to possess it. He dies as on Mount Pisgah, on the wilderness-side of the Jordan, destined, with Enoch before him and with Moses after him, to shine on the top of the hill in the heavenly glory of the Son of man.

We have now closed the third section of the Book of Genesis; and, with it, the scenes and circumstances of the life of Abraham.

In the midst of these fragments, thus gathered and treasured up for us by the Holy Ghost, we have seen faith getting its victories, knowing its rights and pleading its titles, practising its generosity, enjoying its fellowships, making its surrenders, and obtaining its consolations and promises. But we have seen also its *intelligence*, and learnt it to be such a thing as walks in the light, or according to the judgment, of the mind of Christ.

There is something very beautiful in such a sight as this. We do not commonly witness this fine combination — the *intelligence* of faith, and the moral power of faith. In some saints, there is the earnest, urgent power of faith, which goes on right truthfully and honestly, but with many a mistake as to the dispensational wisdom of God. In others, there is a mind nicely taught, endowed with much priestly, spiritual skill, in following the wisdom of God in ages and dispensations, but with lack of power in all that service which a simpler and more earnest faith would be constantly pursuing. But in Abraham we see these things combined.

In our walk with God, the light of the knowledge of His mind should be seen, as well as our hearts be ever found open to His presence and joy, and our consciences alive to His claims and His will. The life of faith is a very incomplete thing, if we know not, as Abraham knew, the times as signified of God, when to fight, as it were, and when to be still; when to be silent under the wrongs of an Abimelech, and when to resent them; when to raise the altar of a sojourning stranger, and when to call on the name of the everlasting God. In other words, we ought to know what the Lord is about, according to His own eternal purpose, and what He is leading onward to its consummation, in His varied and fruitful wisdom.

Such is the nature of all obedience; for the conduct of the saint is ever to be according to the dispensed wisdom of God at the time, or in the given age.

But, let me add, the highest point of moral dignity in Abraham was this: that he was *a stranger in the earth*.

This, I may say, outshines all. It was this that made God not *ashamed* to be called his God. God can *morally* own the soul that advisedly refuses citizenship in this revolted, corrupted world.

This was the highest point in moral dignity in Abraham.

God loveth the stranger. Deut. 10: 18. He loves the *poor, unfriended* stranger, with the love of pity and of grace, and provides for him. But with the *separated* stranger, who has turned his back on this polluted scene, God links His name and His honour, and morally owns such without shame. Heb. 11: 13-16.

How finely he started on his journey at the beginning! The Lord and His promises were all he had. He left, as we have seen, his *natural* home behind him, but he did not expect to find *another* home in the place he was going to. He knew that he was to be a stranger and sojourner with God in the earth. Mesopotamia was left, but Canaan was not taken up in the stead of it. Accordingly, from all the people there, he was a separated man all his days, or during his sojourn among them of about one hundred years. Canaan was the *world* to that heavenly man, and he had as little to do with it or to say to it as he might, though all the while in it. When circumstances demanded it, or as far as business involved him, he dealt with it. He would traffic with the people of the land, if need were (to be sure he would), but his sympathies were not with them. He needed a burying-place, and he purchased it of the children of Heth. He would not think of hesitating to treat with them about a necessary matter of bargain and sale; but he would rather buy than *receive*. He was loth to be debtor to them, or to be enriched by them — nor were they his *companions*. This we observe throughout. If Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre — it may be morally attracted by what they saw in him — seek confederacy with him, he will not refuse their alliance on a given occasion of the common interest, when such interest the God who had called him would sanction or commend. But still the Canaanites were not his company. His wife was his company, his household, his flocks and his herds, and his fellow-saint, Lot, his brother's son, who had come out of Mesopotamia with him — as long, at least, as such an one walked as a separated man in Canaan. But even *he*, when undistinguished from the people of the land, is a stranger to him as well and as fully as they.

All this has surely a voice in our ears. Angels were Abraham's company at times, and so the Lord of angels — and at all times, his altar and his tent were with him, and the mysteries or truths of God, as they were made known to him. But the people of the land, the men of the world, did not acquire his tastes or sympathies, or share his confidence. He was among them but not of them — and rather would he have had his house unbuilt, and Isaac be without a wife, than that such wife should be a daughter of Canaan.

To some of us, beloved, this breaking up of natural things is terrible. But if Jesus were loved more, all this would be the easier reckoned on. If His value for us *within the veil* were more pondered in our hearts and treasured up there, we should go to Him *without the camp* with firmer, surer step. "I have learnt," said one of the martyrs, "that there is no freedom like that of the heart that has given up all for Christ — no wisdom like that learnt at His feet — no poetry like the calm foreseeing of the glory that shall be."

Of our Abraham and his companions in this life of faith, confessing that they were strangers and

pilgrims on the earth, it is written, "They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country — and truly if they had been mindful of that from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned, but now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city."

Beloved, we are called to be these strangers — strangers such as God can thus morally own. If the world were not Abraham's object, we ought to feel, even on higher sanctions, that it cannot be ours. The call of the God of glory made Abraham a stranger here — the cross of Christ, in addition to that, may still more make us strangers. As we sometimes sing

"Before His cross we now are left,

As strangers in the land."

"Ye are dead," says the apostle, "and your life is hid with Christ in God." That is strangership of the highest order — the strangership of the Son of God Himself. "The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not."

In the strength of this strangership in the world, may we have grace to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul"! and in the strength of our conscious citizenship in heaven may "we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."