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ABRAHAM

NEW YORK



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ABRAHAM.

Abraham:

SUGGESTIVE THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS.

"I called him alone,
And blessed him,
And increased him."—Isaiah li. 2.

BY

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ABRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE CALL.—GEN. xii.



WHEN God converts, the change is real. A few short sentences suffice to give us Abram's early history. We find him dwelling on the other side of the flood, serving "other gods"; Ur, of the Chaldeans, was his home, and he knew no interests beyond the limits of Mesopotamia. But there "the God of Glory" appeared unto him; his whole life is changed, and, like the Thessalonians, he "turned to God from idols." In neither case was it a turning from idols to God; they did not first give up their idols and then seek God, but the

true God revealed Himself, and the effect of such a revelation could not fail to turn the heart from all that was false.

We are not told in Gen. xii., nor yet in Acts vii., much respecting the manner of the revelation to Abram, but merely the grand fact—that to this idol-worshipper the God of Glory appeared. By this sight the halo of fancied glory that had hovered round his idol was fairly eclipsed, for now and henceforth the dazzling brightness of the Lord filled his vision, so that the eyes of his understanding were blinded to all beside.

It was an experience somewhat like this that Saul of Tarsus had in New Testament times, when, at midday, “a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun” shone round about him, and the glorified Christ was “seen” of him. This Jesus, whom he thought to be the most base and vile, he now learnt, as by a sudden flash from heaven, was living, and living was glorified at the right hand of God. We know how this revelation characterised the whole after-history of the Apostle. He then had his call.

This was the power of their conversion, the one in Mesopotamia, the other on the high road to Damascus. Neither could for a moment stop to question

or hesitate. *Not* to have been converted would have been a greater marvel than *to be*—it was impossible that it should be otherwise, for “*the God of Glory*” appeared. Saul could no longer go about seeking to establish his own righteousness. No, he at once owns the despised Nazarene as his glorified Lord.

And we shall see that whether in the case of Paul or of Abram, that which was the power to draw their hearts from former ways was, in as true a sense, *the power for future walk and life*. A bright ray of that excelling glory lit up the pathway alike, whether it led through fields of verdure or through trackless howling deserts. So that Abram and Paul could say in days of trial, “Jehovah-jireh,” the Lord will provide (Gen. xxii. 14); and again, “Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18).

Mark also that the appearance of the God of Glory at the outset was *the power of their service* for Him; it seemed to nerve them for every act of

devotion, and for every word of testimony. The light that shone *upon* them had also penetrated *into* them, and wherever they went it shone forth *from* them; they became light-bearers for God. The appearing of the God of Glory was also the *power of their worship*; it was to Him Abram erected the altar on entering Canaan, in spite of awe-stricken or mocking heathen; and the New Testament book of worship, Hebrews, opens by a presentation of Him who is "the brightness" of the Father's glory, and "the express image of His person."

The Holy Ghost would ever direct our minds to Him who is made higher than the heavens, that our spiritual gaze may be fixed on Jesus continually. Has God revealed Himself to us in the person of His Son? Have we seen Him by faith? Have we seen Him on the cross with our sins laid upon Him, smitten of God, that we might be spared? And if we have seen Him thus, has our faith followed Him from the cross to the tomb in Joseph's garden, and then rising from among the dead, without our sins, for our justification? Has our eye followed Him on through the heavens, opened to receive Him, and not Him alone, but all His with Him? Alone He passed by angels when He

came into this world and stooped so low, humbling Himself, "the Word" made flesh, tabernacling amongst us; alone He hung upon the cross, alone He died for our sins; but "the corn of wheat" that abode alone, now in resurrection splendour, is alone no longer, for we who believe are quickened together with Him and raised up together, and made to sit together with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. ii.). The place which He has in glory is the place He shares with all who are His own, be their spiritual attainment what it may. All who believe in Him have right to come after Him—and they shall come.

The Spirit of God would never leave us gazing upon a dead Christ, but would point upwards to the throne, and display to our wondering hearts Him who once tasted death for every man now crowned with glory and honour, that in truth we may be able to say, "We see Jesus" (Heb. ii. 9). What effect has this heavenly sight upon us? Do we gladly forsake all that held our hearts in chains before?

"The cords that bound my heart to earth
Are loosed by Jesus' hand;
Before His cross I now am left
A stranger in the land."

Since conversion, have we so been "looking off

unto Jesus," that the knowledge of Him up in the glory has given a tone and character to our daily life, both in the sight of God and before men? If so, this must have given an impetus to our service, for just in proportion as we are occupied with Christ glorified, so there will be a freedom, an elasticity and a joy in our service, and also an insatiable eagerness in seeking His pleasure and His praise. And if the revelation of the God of Glory to Abram was the power of his worship, even in those dim twilight days of old, what shall the bright shining be to us now? Shall it not call forth from our hearts everlasting thanksgiving? Our lives going up to the throne as one song, "Hallelujah" the sum and expression of our life's history. Let us catch the spirit of the hallelujahs of the throne, and antedate that scene where, night and day in ceaseless praise, they ascribe all glory to the Lamb.

From the moment God revealed Himself to Abram he became a changed man. He was changed in his relation to all that had before engrossed his attention, and he was changed to the very scene in which he lived. He could henceforth verily say, "Old things are passed away, and behold, all things are become new, and all things are of

God." It only remained for God to speak to him, and he would obey. And so God spoke, and Abram went forth. He knew not whither he went (Heb. xi. 8). But God's word was enough for him, and as prophesied of his descendants, so he could say, "What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard Him and observed Him" (Hosea xiv. 8).

Thus, without a sigh he could go out from his country and from his kindred, and from his father's house, for a limitless sea of blessing had been opened up to his view, which could only be bounded by the infinitude of God, and which blazed in the bright reflection of the God of Glory.

"I have heard Him and observed Him,"
 Seen His beauty rich and rare,
 Seen His majesty and glory,
 And His bliss beyond compare.

"What have I to do with idols,"
 When such visions fill mine eye?
 How be occupied with *shadows*,
 While the *substance* passes by?

Shine the moon's fair beams at noontide?
 Can the stars be seen by day?
 Nay, beside excelling glories,
 Lesser beauties fade away.

CHAPTER II.

HESITATION.



UT there was a check in his onward progress, as is so often the case in the experience of God's children. It may not have been remarked by some casual readers that in the first verse of this twelfth chapter it is stated that the Lord had spoken to Abram to get out of his country and from his kindred, no doubt explanatory of the previous chapter, where we are told that he had started to obey the Lord, but his old father Terah travelled with him. For some cause or other they never arrived at the borders of Canaan so long as Terah lived ; either the journey was too much for the old man, or he liked Mesopotamia so well, or he did not approve of going into this strange country, turning his back on the inheritance of his forefathers. But, no matter what the reason was, they pitched their tents in Haran and dwelt there. This was still in Mesopotamia.

There is an important difference between following the Lord at a distance and following *fully*, and so, too, between obeying and obeying with *the whole heart*. It is this latter that our heavenly Father expects from His children. David speaks in Psalm cxix. of *running* in the way of His commands. But Abram did not hasten. It is well for us to inquire why was this sad failure in this eminent man of God.

If it was a question between Terah and God in Abram's mind, which ought to guide his course and control his actions, the preference, alas! was certainly given to his father. How often in our history is the same scene enacted! God has marked out for us one course, there is no mistake concerning it, and we begin to obey the voice that calls, but immediately another voice is heard bidding us stay, and we are delayed in the Lord's path. This path may be the path of trial, but it is that of obedience and, consequently, of blessing; for blessing always follows obedience. But we halt, and for a time are satisfied with a half-way house at Haran instead of at once marching on for Canaan.

As Terah's presence hindered Abram's progress, so is it now; "the carnal mind is not subject to

the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7), for "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. v. 17). Many and many a time have we realised this when we would obey the Lord's voice; this hateful self has rudely intruded its unsought presence where only Christ should be. Then have we cried out, well nigh broken-hearted, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 25). Often have we purposed and endeavoured to do right, but in spite of all our struggling and effort we have found ourselves hindered, until we have experimentally learnt the truth, "that our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed." Then as we realise this, by His grace we make the grand discovery that "he that is dead is freed from sin." And as we see that in the person of Christ *we* have been crucified and have died, we perceive that the old carnal life that sin controlled and commanded has judicially been executed by God at Calvary, and entering into God's mind about it we reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (Rom. vi.). And it is our responsibility to allow "the old man" no place, but when it shows itself

and would demand a hearing, to put our foot upon the neck of it, as it were, and keep it down.

When Terah died then Abram proceeded ; the clog was no longer on the wheel, the impediment was now overcome ; but how long they had dwelt at Haran we are not informed, we know not how much time which should have been spent in Canaan, and how many sweet communings with the Lord were thus for ever lost to Abram. May God speak to all our hearts by this, that there may be no lagging behind in our obedience, but rather let us delight in His commands ; esteeming that to be an enemy of God and of our souls, whatever it may be, that bids us halt when God says go on !

When once the hindrance is removed Abram fully obeys, and we read, " They went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came." We find he does not stay his journeyings until he has " passed through the land unto the place Sichem, unto the plain Moreh " (verse 6). God, faithful to His own promise, shows him the land. How God delights to be trusted ! Alas, that this confident trust is so rare ! It is in God's eyes as a bright gem, which sparkles more than all the professions of lip-praise,

therefore it is that God singles it out as the chief characteristic of His servant. But trust cannot be divorced from obedience.

We now have before us an example of a trustful obedient child following the Lord fully, and we are therefore not surprised to read in verse 7, "The Lord appeared unto Abram." This is in perfect harmony with the Lord's words in John xiv. 21 and 23, spoken more than two thousand years after to the eleven disciples, who soon should see His face no more. As they mourned to think how they should miss His companionship, He tells them of a way by which their communion might still be uninterrupted: "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."

Many Christians are saying, "Why does the Lord not shine upon me? Others enjoy His sweet manifestations, but I walk in darkness." In this history of Abram we never read that the Lord appeared to him from the first time in Ur, till he was fairly in the land to which God had called him. Thus we see that it is not till the first commands are obeyed that we must expect further

manifestations of the Lord's presence with us : "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them," to such an one "I will manifest Myself."

Do we wonder that the Lord does not commune with us for days, it may be, alas! for months? What is the reason? The secret and the blame are not with the Lord, but with us. Having His commands we have not obeyed, or having His words we have not kept them. Let us make no mistake about this. It is to the obedient child the Lord appears, and to such as trustfully follow Him His goodness exceeds all their expectations.

As when the God of Glory first revealed Himself in Mesopotamia, Abram was so strengthened as to turn his back on all and follow God, so now in Canaan, after the Lord appears to him, we find him strengthened to testify before the ungodly, "for the Canaanite was then in the land." Some religious people of the present day would have told Abram that he ought to be moderate, and that he must take care how he offended people, that to erect an altar in the midst of an idol-worshipping nation was not wise or expedient. But Abram's eye was only open to God. The God of Glory had appeared to him, and he boldly and unflinchingly testifies to the living and true God. He shows

by his altar at which he worshipped his link with God, and by his tent in which he sojourned the small account he takes of this world. The God of Glory had taken the place of his idols and infinitely more, therefore he erects his altar and calls upon Him. And his eye was upon the city that hath foundations, whose builder is God, and therefore he is satisfied with only a tent down here.

My Saviour, I would own Thee
Amid the world's proud scorn,
The world that mock'd and crown'd Thee
With diadem of thorn ;
The world that now rejects Thee,
Makes nothing of Thy love,
Counts not the grace and pity
That brought Thee from above.

My Lord, my Master, help me
To walk apart with Thee,
Outside the camp, where only
Thy beauty I may see.
Far from the world's loud turmoil,
Far from its busy din,
Far from its praise and honour,
Its unbelief and sin.

Oh, keep my heart at leisure
From all the world beside,
In close communion ever
Thus with Thee to abide.

So 'all Thy *whispered* breathings
Of love and truth to hear,
And hail Thee with rejoicing,
When Thou shalt soon appear.

The place where God would have us to bear witness for Him is just where we are ; and the time when we should not be ashamed to show that we are on the Lord's side is always *now*. It is comparatively easy to confess that we are Christians when surrounded by our brethren ; but if at any time it becomes a question whether to own Christ thus or in the home circle, where perhaps we stand alone, let us always choose the latter. If we can only let our light shine in one place, let that place be where the darkness makes the need the greater.

One of the popular mistakes of this age is the endeavour to worship God by those who have never seen Him by faith ; such must of necessity worship an unknown God, and they try to serve one whose blessings they have never opened their hearts to receive. It is certain we can only give out in praise to God and in testimony for Him, when He has first given to us ; otherwise all must be from ourselves, corruption, death, and sin. It is like pumping at a well that is dry ; but let the

connection be laid on between it and the spring, and the clear sparkling water will flow freely enough.

We must not, however, close our eyes to a sad chapter in Abram's history. God is the historian, and He gives a faithful record of triumph and failure alike. Here is a man who could forsake the home and inheritance of his forefathers and trust God for all the land of Canaan, but when the testing-time of famine arises, he knows not where he shall get to-morrow's meal, and without seeking counsel or aid from God he goes down to sojourn in Egypt. God had told him to go into Canaan, and when there had stamped with His divine approval the obedience of His servant by appearing to him. But God never told him to go into Egypt, and therefore we need not be surprised at what followed this false step. One wrong action leads to another. Going down to Egypt suggests to Abram's mind to tell a lie and act a course of deception wickedly unbecoming a man of faith.

We shall learn an important lesson if we contrast the cloudy days of Abram in Egypt with those bright and balmy ones just spent in Canaan. In Canaan each day was lit up with the smile of God, the very light of heaven shone on his path. No fears or doubts ever flitted across his horizon.

What had he to fear? God was with him all the time, and the rage of heathen around was hushed by the sense of Jehovah's presence. See this back-sliding servant of God now in Egypt; his mind is filled with fears, dreading lest the Egyptians should kill him, and though he does become immensely rich there, yet these very riches prove by-and-by the source of one of his bitterest trials in causing the separation between him and Lot. During all his stay in Egypt we never read of his altar or his tent; all this time was lost to Abram and lost to God. And finally he is reprov'd, humbled, and driven out of Egypt by its ungodly prince.

What Egypt was to Abram, that the world and worldly-mindedness are to us. How many days has each Christian had to weep over similar folly! We have been too ready to turn from the heavenly manna, and say with Israel, "Our soul loatheth this light bread" (Num. xxi. 5); and in heart at least we have returned to the fleshpots of Egypt. We have failed to enjoy the rich provision of spiritual pleasures prepared by our heavenly Father, and our souls have craved for something. Instead of at once flying to Him and saying, "My soul, wait thou *only* upon God," we have run to the world and sought in its empty show to find

some satisfying portion. If we have Christ alone we shall find He not only saves but satisfies ; but when we try to enjoy the world and Christ together our hearts will still be craving. Christ will not share our hearts with anything. He must have all or none. Oh ! who is so miserable as a cold, backsliding Christian ? He can neither enjoy the world nor Christ. The experience of such has been that its tinsel is not gold, and that its husks are not wheat. Like shipwrecked mariners, we have sought to slake our thirst with the briny ocean, and have but proved again the truth of Christ's words to the woman of Samaria, " Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again."

CHAPTER III.

THE INHERITANCE OF THE LAND.—GEN. xiii.



IN chapter xiii. 1, we read, "Abram went up out of Egypt," and then once again in Canaan we find him as a worshipper and a pilgrim with his altar and his tent. He is back now at the place whence he first started—at Bethel, the house of God. Abram's testimony for God has to recommence where he formerly lived, as if all the intermediate days went for nothing. We have here, no doubt, the same teaching as in the case of the Nazarite (Num. vi.). The outward sign of his consecration was that the locks of his hair grew uncut; but if his vow of separation were broken, his hair was shaved off and burned, and the days of his consecration had to begin once again; the period even during which he had been faithful was of no account. The same is practically true of us. A Christian may have been living a consistent life for five or six years when he is drawn aside by

some worldly folly or some fleshly sin ; his testimony is at once gone ; and when restored again to communion with the Lord, his testimony must commence as it did in the day of his conversion years before. It was realising the solemn truth of this which made Paul keep his body under and bring it into subjection ; and on account of this he studied to have a conscience void of offence before God and man.

But when we have backslidden for a moment like Abram, let us not listen to the enemy who would keep us still from Christ ; but, afraid to live a day without God, may we run back at once with words of confession to Him whose arms are open to receive us, and who delights to welcome, pardon, and cleanse without one word of reproach ; ever assured that "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," for "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i.).

Once more Abram is settled in the land again, testifying to the heathen by his altar that God was alone worthy of his worship, and by his tent showing the estimate he put on the world. Scarcely had he done so than distressing scenes are

witnessed by these same Canaanite and Perizzite heathen. The cattle drivers of Abram quarrel with Lot's herdsmen ; each were seeking and fighting for the richest pastures, in which to feed their droves, regardless of the interests of the other, and forgetting, alas ! the sorry spectacle they presented to the lookers-on. Oh ! that we oftener remembered the words, "Sirs, ye are brethren" ; that dissension and quarrelling might not be heard among us, but rather that the unbelieving world might learn the true character of *our* Master by this—"See how these Christians love one another."

The result of this strife is, that the uncle and nephew must separate. The uncle of course had, on two grounds, a right to have the first choice as to what part of the country he would settle in : both his natural right as the elder, and his divine right as inheritor of all ; but Abram is walking with God, and he has the promise God made to him before he went down into Egypt still fresh in his mind. He can therefore well afford to let Lot choose.

So we read, "Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan." We do not see the bended knee, or the eye turned upward for direction ; indeed, God does not seem to have been thought of in the

choice. But Lot's avaricious eyes gloated on the fruitful plain : he saw it was " well watered everywhere, . . . even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt." He thought more of the prosperity of his flocks and herds than he did of the welfare of his soul. He took not into his reckoning the principle of the divine and yet unanswered question, " What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul ? " He thought not of the terrible influence the surrounding evil would exert over his children and his wife ; and he had not the foresight to imagine that the day would come when all he took into Sodom would be left there for destruction save two wicked daughters ; even the very flocks and herds that tempted him into these fat pastures would all be swept away by the rain of fire and brimstone.

We are not surprised at the worldling thinking more of his body and the gratification of the present than of his soul's eternal interests ; but how strange is this conduct of Lot, when we remember that he was a righteous man ! (2 Peter ii. 8). Yet, alas ! might not the same history be recorded of many a Christian now ? And it is strange indeed that there are few of God's children who are willing in everything to let God choose

for them. When you see the man who would rather trust God than himself, mark that man. He that resigns all into the hands of God must surely have seen that the secret counsels of the heart of God are full of purposes of love towards him. To be willing to let God choose for me in everything, and not to seek my own way in anything, I must be firmly convinced not only that He knows better than I, but also that He loves me more than I love myself. Now it is here that we often find the difficulty ; we acknowledge the truth of this in words, but the first occasion for testing us shows that practically we think we care more for ourselves than our heavenly Father cares for us.

Abram, however, can witness with David, " Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wondrous works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward ; they cannot be reckoned up in order, . . . they are more than can be numbered " (Ps. xl. 5). And again in Psalm cxxxix. 17, " How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God ! how great is the sum of them ! " It is because of the consciousness of this that Abram is willing, yea, glad, to let God choose for him. He can fully rely upon One whose thoughts towards

him are beyond enumeration. "And the Lord said unto Abram . . . lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward and westward ; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." Here was a promise !

Lot chose as much as he could get, but at most his portion was very circumscribed ; but this man, who lets God decide for him, is given *all* the land. According to the largeness of God's heart, so are His gifts ; and according to the eternity of the Giver, so is the inheritance—"for ever." Every time God makes promise to Abram He enlarges and increases it beyond what He had said before. Thus we find the additional promise of verse 16, besides the words "all" and "for ever" in verse 15.

With this promise from God, it only remains for Abram, in obedience, to "arise and walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it." Then he immediately moves his tent, and pitches it in the plain of Mamre, which is Hebron, where he built an altar unto the Lord. Ah ! striking contrast between Sodom, the abode of Lot, and Hebron, the home of Abram. This was a favourite dwelling-place of Abram's, and

no wonder when we understand that the name Hebron means "communion." It was to this place he was led in his obedience in walking through the land. This chapter begins with Bethel and closes with Hebron. Two good places of abode—God's house, and communion. How naturally there seems to occur to our mind that word of the Apostle's, in writing to the saints at Ephesus (Eph. i. 3), He "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"! This is true as a present reality. It is not merely that we shall be by-and-by thus blessed, but already this is our portion. Have we the faith concerning this rich inheritance of "all spiritual blessings" that Abram had concerning Canaan? If so, we shall do spiritually as he did literally, we shall walk through the length and breadth of it. Only mark this difference. As the one is spiritual and the other was natural, he might come to the boundary limits of his portion, but we can never, for we have in Christ all that God can give.

The Christian should never have a want unsatisfied, he should never have a sorrow without a sympathiser, he should never have a care not cast upon Him who loves him. In walking through the land, Abram could not go astray; so "we

cannot lose ourselves where all is home." And all is ours. "Hath . . . all" is the word; nothing is wanting, and "all" is for the present. It is certain we never shall have a time when we shall more need the blessings than now. Then, grasp them by the firm hand of faith; be not afraid to claim what God has freely given; live on them, enjoy them. Act not as if you were a spiritual pauper when all is yours; live up to your privilege, live as a son enriched by the Lord God Almighty out of His own treasury in glory by Christ Jesus. Thus did Abram, and he was blessed.

CHAPTER IV.

GOD HIS INHERITANCE.—GEN. XIV. AND XV. 1.

ENESIS XIV. gives us an account of a great war, in which several kings were engaged, which resulted in the utter defeat of the King of Sodom and of those who were with him, including Lot. We read that the conquering army "took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way; and they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed." What a contrast as to its durability between a possession chosen by a man for himself and one chosen by God! Lot was eager for Sodom's wealth, and he got it; but he was forced to see that such riches take to themselves wings and flee away. He spent his money for that which was not bread, and his labour for that which did not satisfy; whilst Abram, hearkening to the Lord, ate that which was good, and let his soul "delight itself in fatness" (Is. lv. 2).

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Lot's riches evidently made him an attractive object of spoil to the King Chedorlaomer. How he must have wished, when he found himself a poor, humbled captive, that he had never entered the environs of Sodom ! but he had to learn this lesson : that the *security* of the possession is to be judged of by the *giver* of it. He who gives also secures. Lot gave to himself the well-watered plains of Jordan, and, having no power to retain them, in one day lost all the accumulated wealth of years. Abram, on the other hand, had learnt practically to say :

“ Why should I ever careful be,
Since such a God is mine ?
He watches o'er me night and day,
And tells me ‘ Mine is thine,’ ”

and he knew that if God gave all the land of Canaan to him He could maintain him in it in undisputed right, according to His own word, “ for ever.”

But God is very pitiful. So, in spite of Lot's waywardness and worldliness, He will not allow him to remain in the hands of the enemy ; though living away from God, out of communion, yet he is His own child still, and he must be brought back. Oh ! the tender compassion and longsuffering of

our God, who is the Father of mercies, and the God of all patience. The means employed by God for reclaiming this captive are such as He often uses now when any of His people are caught and entangled by the enemy of our souls. He sends a servant of His who is living in communion with Him, that in His name, and backed by His power, he may prevail against the spoiler. Abram, with his three hundred and eighteen trained servants, pursues the enemy, overtakes him, and smites him, and returns with liberated Lot and all his goods, the women also, and the people.

Abram is now in the hey-day of victory; that which was upon his heart he has attained. But the hour of success is the time of greatest danger, for then it is invariably that Satan most subtly tempts. Resting in the *conquest*, rather than in the *strength of Him* through whom we have triumphed, we thereby lay ourselves open to a fresh attack of the enemy in perhaps an unsuspected form.

Asa, King of Judah, a man who "did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God," had cried unto the Lord in his trouble. The Ethiopians, with a host of a thousand thousand and three hundred chariots, had gathered

themselves against him. "Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power : help us, O Lord our God ; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God ; let not man prevail against Thee" (2 Chronicles, xiv. 11). The Lord saw His servant humbled before Him, therefore, with a strong hand and a stretched-out arm, He delivered His people. Not only were the Ethiopians overthrown so that they could not recover themselves, but their cities were destroyed, and Asa returns to Jerusalem with a very great spoil. Asa is at this moment in greater danger from an unseen foe than he had been from the hosts of Ethiopia. It was easy in his distress to look to the Lord for help, but now in the flush of conquest will he not become proud, ambitious, and self-reliant? But the Lord's eye is upon him, and His messenger is sent forth with the word of warning : "Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin ; the Lord is with you while ye be with Him ; and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you ; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you."

If the Lord has eminently used us in preaching the Gospel so that many have professed the name

of Christ through our instrumentality, we are apt to take some share of the glory, and almost unconsciously we begin to be puffed up with pride ; or, if in other service we have been very successful, the tempter makes us measure ourselves against others who are being less used. Perhaps we have so dealt with an erring brother that it has led to his restoration ; then we think that *we* have done something, that our tact and skill have brought about what others failed to accomplish. Or some sin in ourselves that used to gain the mastery over us we have now by grace been enabled to overcome ; we at once begin to think that we are strong, and forget the injunction, " Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Oh, how deceitful are these hearts, how ready to be flattered by Satan, and to believe his lies !

Abram is on his triumphal march, and two kings come out to meet him—the King of Sodom and the King of Salem ; the one is as the prince of this world, the other is Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God. The patronage and favour of the former, poor Lot, a man out of communion with God, greatly coveted, whilst Abram despised it. The two kings each spread out before the eyes

of the victorious Abram what they have to offer. There are the riches and goods of Sodom in all their glitter, and there is the simple bread and wine to stay the heart of God's child, that in the strength of this feast he may turn his back on Sodom's goods.

The servant of God does not waver : he does not hesitate a moment ; his mind is already made up, and satisfied with Melchizedek's feast he refuses everything, even the threads and shoelatchets of Sodom. It is these little threads and shoelatchets of worldliness that do such incalculable harm to the soul of the Christian. They are like the little foxes that spoil the tender grapes of Solomon's vineyards.

Abram will not be enriched from such a source. God shall enrich him, or no one. He knows the most high God to be the possessor of heaven and earth ; and what are the possessions of Sodom's prince to these ? He could on a previous occasion let Lot choose the fruitful plain and its cities, and so he can now say, as Daniel did to the King of Babylon, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another." If our enriching is in the hands of God, and He sees fit to withhold anything, we may rest assured it is because He knows that we are richer without it. Abram is a

man living by faith in God. He has the consciousness and confidence, yea, the perfect certainty, that what he possesses is far superior to anything man can give him. God has blessed him and given unto him—he wants no more.

There is an exquisite grandeur and dignity about this that we do well to notice, for it is in the same spirit we are called to act daily. This beautiful scene is but a picture of what is enacted many and many a time; the spiritual eye discerns, and the spiritual heart is conscious of its daily repetition in the experience of each child of God. Two princes are ever waiting upon us. The prince of this world holds out to us the advantages of serving him and receiving his fancied treasures. The bauble of pride and the bubble of pleasure are very attractive to the natural mind, and the dross of sin even is gilded over. The dazzling brightness of time's fleeting joys, and the vain glory of this world, with its riches and honours, pleasures, distinctions, and sins, make up "the wine of Sodom," and we find ourselves sore pressed by the enemy of our souls. Yes, Satan is a real, a powerful, and a subtle foe. He knows just what will suit the taste of each one of us, and just at what moment to present his attractions.

He showed to the Lord Himself all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and offered to give them to Him if He would fall down and worship him. But He looked at the giver rather than the gift, and He would not take the gift from Satan, even though it should save Him from going to the cross. He looked for the same gift as a redeemed gift from the hand of the Lord God, His Father.

No wonder, then, that the devil spreads his charms before us ; but, blessed be God, we are not left alone to stand against his wily enchantments, for as sure as he thus besets us, another prince, our great High Priest, is with us to help and succour. He is unfailing. There is never a time when Satan tempts us but the Lord Jesus is immediately at our side. He sees the evil one coming, and He knows how weak we are, and therefore at once He comes to our aid.

It was so in the case of Peter. Christ tells that disciple, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." It is as if Christ had seen the accuser of the brethren go up before God and ask for the disciples, that he might put them in his sieve : and as He saw the petition

lodged before the throne, He hastened to intercede on Peter's behalf, that his faith might not fail. What joy it is to know that we have such "a great High Priest"; One whose name is Jesus (linking Him with us), and yet who is the "Son of God," having right to the throne! (Heb. iv. 14). Gracious Intercessor! He ever liveth for this purpose. And mark how blessedly He ministers to us in the hour of trial! Our divine Melchizedek brings forth His bread and His wine, that our souls may be stayed with that which is of God's providing.

This is the first record of God feasting one of His own. Melchizedek was God's representative, and, knowing God's mind, provides the simple fare of bread and wine. It was simple, but it was divine. The bread told the tale of bruising, crushing, and grinding; the corn had passed under the heavy stroke of the flail, the grain had gone between the upper and the nether millstone, and the flour had been kneaded and then baked in the scorching oven. The wine, too, was the result of the grape having been gathered, squeezed, and pressed till its blood-red juice filled the flagon.

This simple feast was rich as the Possessor of heaven and earth could make it; and to our hearts it is full of meaning, as it is the reminder of Him

who was wounded for our transgressions, and was bruised for our iniquities; it brings before our souls Him who, when He took the bread, could say, "This is My body which is broken for you," and on taking the cup, "This cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you."

It reminds us, too, of His words in John vi. : "The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world"; and again, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life." Here the Lord tells us how spiritual life is to be obtained, namely, by receiving and appropriating Him, "the bread of life," to ourselves for our own need, as a starving man would do with literal bread. He goes on then to teach us further how this new life is to be sustained in its vigour and strength, where He says, "My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood dwelleth in Me and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me even he shall live by Me." In this statement Christ does not refer to the mere symbols in the Lord's Supper,

but to the real spiritual communion of the soul with Himself. Let me be feeding on Christ, contemplating the cross, realising what He who loved us passed through for my sake, and I cannot cast a glance at Sodom's riches, nor for one moment desire the tempter's gifts. It is the remembrance of that cross and suffering which, above all else, can keep the heart of the believer in the hour of trial and temptation.

Of Christ it was said, "Butter and honey shall He eat, that He may know how to refuse the evil and choose the good." And this is a divine principle for us also. Eat the fat and let your soul delight itself in the sweets of God's truth, and so you shall be enabled to refuse the evil of the Sodom of this world.

"Oh! worldly pomp and glory, your charms are spread in vain,

I've heard a sweeter story—I've found a truer gain."

May the exceeding worth of what Christ gives, together with the strength He imparts, enable us to refuse the gifts of the spiritual King of Sodom!

We cannot but fear that Lot would greedily have grasped the opportunity of fancied gain, and would have amazingly enriched himself in the world's estimation. No doubt he pitied the

narrowmindedness and want of common sense which he thought Abram exhibited. He would have argued that he had a claim to these possessions, and that he should not lose this golden opportunity of taking from the world that which he might use for God, as the King of Sodom certainly would not use it. But Abram, taking his stand with the priest-king, looks upon these things as "dross and dung" (Phil. iii. 8): they were to him as the sheep and oxen of the Amalekites were to Samuel (1 Sam. xv.), no matter what value Saul, a man walking after the flesh, might put upon them. And surely this victory of Abram's over the King of Sodom was greater by far than that which he had gained over the Kings of the Valley.

We may be inclined to ask ourselves, What did Abram lose by all this? Ah! he who was on God's side, entering into God's thoughts, could not lose. He played a game that could only win. Listen to the opening words of chap. xv.: "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.'" "After these things," that is, after Abram's sword had been sheathed in the hearts of his enemies, after the two kings had met him, after he had been feasted by

Melchizedek, after he had turned his back on Sodom's king and Sodom's goods. Then we hear for the first time in the Bible these oft-repeated words of peace and assurance, "Fear not."

Immediately we are told what it is that sustains this word of confidence: "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." What dart of the enemy, however fiery and sharp, could pierce such a shield or reach one thus sheltered? To have the Lord for our shield is better than Saul's coat of mail or the shield carried by Goliath's armour-bearer. Abram knew this. Are we so sure of its truth that we hide ourselves behind our shield until we are quite hid?

If this were his protection and defence, what was the positive gain that was so exceeding great? It was the Lord Himself! Here was his richest, noblest portion; here was his reward. What possession could the King of Sodom offer like this? Had he given himself to Abram, what would it have been? No wonder Abram was a satisfied man—he had God.

We saw in chap. xiii. that "all the land" was given him, but here is something as far exceeding the land for inheritance as the giver exceeds the gift in worth. And Abram knew the Giver Himself

to be his. He had before been rejoicing in the blessings of the Lord, but now he can call the Blessor Himself his portion. Abram can say, "Not Canaan merely is my inheritance, but the Giver of Canaan is mine; the Possessor of heaven and earth deigns to say, 'I am thy exceeding great reward.'"

Mark, when Abram was willing to let Lot choose the plains of Jordan, then the Lord gives him all the land for ever as his inheritance; now, a step further, when he renounces the King of Sodom's offer, the Lord makes *Himself* over to His faithful servant. Truly, Abram could exclaim, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage," for "the Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot" (Ps. xvi.).

CHAPTER V.

ACCOUNTED RIGHTEOUS.—GEN. xv. 2, ETC.



POSSESSED of the confidence that makes the believer as bold as a lion, because assured of the resources as well as the love of Him with whom he is dealing, Abram forthwith makes request of God. This is the first, though not the last, time that it is recorded that Abram asked anything of the Lord. In the preceding verse it is as if the Lord had said to him, "All that I have is thine, I Myself am thine, ask of Me whatsoever thou wilt." It sweetly reminds us of the words of Christ: "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you" (John xv. 7); also, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened" (Luke xi. 9).

Though our heavenly Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings, yet He has not done so in order to make us independent of Himself. It is

not like a man setting his son up in business—well stocking his shop with goods, and then leaving him to get on for himself, telling him he has done all he can for him. No, our Father has indeed given us all things, but He has reserved the keeping of these blessings in His own hands, and doubly well is it for us that it is so; for when blessings were put into man's keeping at the beginning, he let them slip through his fingers on the first opportunity. Not only are they now in safer care, but also for our souls' communion it is good that if we want blessing we must go to God for it. Our Father *will* be inquired of by us for these things.

And what an access we have into His presence! With what boldness we may ask of Him! Dr. Guthrie has said, "It is easy to know the knock of a beggar at one's door. Low, timid, hesitating, it seems to say: 'I have no claim on the kindness of this house; I may be told I come too often; I may be treated as a troublesome and unworthy mendicant, the door may be flung in my face by a surly servant.' How different on his return from school, the loud knocking and bounding step, the joyous rush of the child into his father's presence, and as he climbs on his knee, and flings his arms

round his neck, the bold face and ready tongue with which he reminds his father of some promised favour ! ”

May we so realise the divine love of our heavenly Father, and the place of children which that love has given us (1 John iii. 1), that we may be bold and constant in our asking ! Oh, that our knocks at God’s treasury may be so frequent and so loud that the sound thereof may become a familiar thing in the ears of Heaven !

God has said to Abram, “ Fear not,” and Abram therefore shrinks not from asking for all that is in his heart. He knows perfectly well that the One to whom he addresses his petition *can do anything* that is good for him. He prays, “ Lord God, what wilt Thou give me ? ” He does not dictate to One who he is sure knows far better what to give than he knows what to ask. His action is like Hezekiah’s on another occasion, and in very different circumstances : when the blaspheming letter was brought him from the King of Assyria, he went up into the house of the Lord and simply spread it before the Lord (2 Kings xix.).

Notice, in the fifth verse of this chapter in Genesis, how far the answer exceeds the request—
“ Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if

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thou be able to number them'; and He said unto him, 'So shall thy seed be.'" The Lord had before told Abram that He would make his seed as the dust of the earth: "so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" (chap. xiii. 16). This promise was given when Abram allowed Lot to take the plains of Jordan, and was content to let God choose his inheritance. Now we find this further promise drawing his attention from the dust to the stars, from earth to heaven, made to him after he had renounced the riches and gifts of Sodom, and had been feasted at Melchizedek's table. The one symbol may perhaps have some reference to the earthly people of God, who, according to the flesh, are of the seed of Abraham, whereas the stars may represent those who are in a spiritual sense called the children of Abraham (Galatians iii. 7, and Romans iv. 16).

Such a promise as this would easily have staggered one weak in faith, had he for an instant looked at himself: for Abram was then childless. But we read of him that "against hope he believed in hope . . . and being not weak in faith he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the

deadness of Sarah's womb ; he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God ; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform."

We do not wonder, therefore, that it is recorded in Genesis concerning him, that "he believed in the Lord ; and He counted it to him for righteousness."

It is on this same principle that in all times God imputes righteousness. So far as good works (speaking according to the estimate of man) were concerned, Abram had none to boast of, or in which he could stand before God as righteous ; but claiming nothing on the ground of merit, he believed God. In the same way God speaks to us about that which seems to the flesh to be impossible, namely, that "He hath raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" ; and He says, "if we believe Him" who did so, our faith also shall be imputed to us for righteousness. Saul of Tarsus, for many years, and in many ways, sought to establish his own righteousness, and, by so doing, he set aside God's righteousness ; the standard was his own fixing, the means were those

of his own planning, and the power the strength of his own exertions. So long as he pursued this course he would not submit to God's righteousness; but when, in the light of the glory that shone about him on the Damascus road, he discovered that his own righteousness was only filthy rags, then he was willing to let all that was of himself go to the winds, and he would account himself vile, that God might be pleased graciously to account him righteous by his believing in Christ.

Those who justify themselves God condemns, but those who condemn themselves God justifies.

“Thy righteousness, O God!
Alone can cover me;
No righteousness avails
Save that which is of Thee.
To whom, save Thee,
Who could alone
For sin atone,
Lord, shall we flee?”

There is a story told of two men who listened to the same gospel-preaching in a heathen country, the one a religious European, and the other a poor Indian. They were both awakened to deep concern about their souls, and a few weeks after the European met the Indian, looking bright and happy. He eagerly inquired what had wrought

the change so speedily in him, as he himself was still full of doubt and fear. The Indian replied, "It is like this : a rich prince comes along and offers you a costly robe ; you look at your own coat, and say, ' Ah ! mine is pretty good still ; I will make the best of it for a while ' ; but the prince meets me, and offers this poor Indian the beautiful robe. I say, ' This old blanket no good, ' and fling it away, and I put on at once the robe he gives." Alas ! it is with many as with this European in their religion and their morality : they still cling to something of themselves. " Abram believed God ; and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FURNACE AND THE LAMP.—GEN. XV.



THE Lord tells Abram that He brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees on purpose to give him the land to inherit it, upon which he asks, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" It does not seem that there was any doubt or unbelief lingering in the patriarch's mind concerning the fulfilment of God's promise ; but he merely desires a token.

This gives occasion for God to teach His servant that the groundwork of every blessing, and the security of every promise, must be sacrifice and blood-shedding. The heifer, the she-goat, and the ram, besides the turtle dove and pigeon, must be killed—a variety of offerings from which we learn the fulness of the sacrifice of Christ. He takes all these, and does according to the word of the Lord. But very soon the lasting efficacy of the sacrifice is contested : who is to have its value—God or the

fowls of the air? for we read "the fowls came down upon the carcases." In the parable of the sower, Christ represents, by the fowls, Satan and his host: he is called "the prince of the power of the air"; and in this scene we are unquestionably reminded of how his one object is to rob us of the sacrifice of Christ. Oh, how artfully and mightily does he contest its worth! He would take away its divinity by the Unitarianism which denies that Christ is God; he would destroy its value by telling us that the punishment that it delivers from is not eternal; and by proud Arminianism he proclaims that the death of Christ in its solitary majesty is not sufficient to save the soul. All Satan's attacks, in every age, have openly or secretly this one aim: to undermine the value of the cross of Christ. But that cross is God's great centre of past, present, and future blessing, whether for the Jews, Gentiles, or the Church of God, Abram drove away the fowls: may we by grace be enabled thus earnestly to contend!

Standing beside the sacrifice, Abram is called to look through a long vista stretching over more than four hundred years; and to learn by this vision that the promise of God may appear to the

natural man to have failed, yea, even to die ; but that to spiritual eyesight, to faith, it has a glorious resurrection. Though all nature bears the funeral pall of winter, there is prospect of a fair spring-time.

“The leaf may fall and perish,
Not less the spring will come.”

If we have not learnt death and resurrection, we have not advanced far in the school of God. The disciples trusted that Jesus of Nazareth, as He lived amongst them, was the long-promised Messiah ; and when He died they were thrown into utter grief, in spite of His oft-repeated words to them concerning His death and resurrection. “We trusted,” they say, “that it should have been He that should have redeemed Israel” (Luke xxiv. 21). But this redemption could only come through death. David, in the sixty-sixth Psalm, speaks of the same experience : how they went through fire and through water, that the Lord might bring them into a wealthy place.

God’s time for salvation to a lost, perishing sinner is always *now*, so long as the Gospel invitation is proclaimed. But sinners put off and delay, and, alas ! their procrastination is, in a multitude of cases, their destruction. On the other hand, God’s

people often are impetuous, and, through want of understanding His dealings, do not bear the fruit of patience; they would, in their haste, have things at once, for which their heavenly Father, in His wisdom, sees fit to keep them waiting. The spirit of such is too much that of the world, whose saying is, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush"; but the Christian in communion with God knows that it is better to lack in the present time the portion that the world covets, that in the eternal future he may possess that which shall never pass away. The Spirit of God solemnly calls Esau a profane person, because, by selling his birthright for a mess of pottage, he showed that he esteemed a morsel of meat in the present worth more than the inheritance of God, with its promised blessing, in the future. There are many who follow Esau's example nowadays; and we do well to ask ourselves, Have the glorious realities of eternity so laid hold of my soul that, compared with them, all beside is insignificant? If God gave me my choice to-day of an earthly inheritance or heavenly, which should I choose?

If some of us had been in Abram's place, we should not have liked to wait four hundred years

before the promise was fulfilled ; nor to hear that for all those centuries the land that was given should be possessed by the enemy, and his children meanwhile be afflicted by the stranger in a land that was not theirs. But Abram is not distressed, nor is his mind perturbed. He knows that He who gave him the land can secure it to him ; and as he can believe in Him to give him children to possess it, he can also trust God to take care of those children.

There was a tunnel, dark and long, which must be passed through, and which would sorely try flesh and blood, and bring faith to be greatly exercised ; but at the end of it shone the clear and bright promise of God as a star of hope. The man who looked at and was occupied with the darkness and gloom would go mourning all his days ; but he who lifted his eye, and gazed at the light that shone before him would have a ray of brightness to illumine his path.

God Himself gives an illustration of this which is very beautiful. We read in verse 17, " When the sun went down, and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces." The smoking furnace was like the affliction of the house of bondage in

Egypt, as we have in the prophet Isaiah, "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." But the Lord never allows His saints to feel the fire without at the same time displaying to them His lamp; so if Abram does hear that which might make his flesh cringe, he also hears, "that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterwards shall they come out with great substance." This was the burning lamp.

There is not one of God's children exempt from the smoking furnace, therefore it is well for us to be rejoicing in the illumination of the burning lamp. The difference between two Christians in trouble is this: the one feels the sorrow just as keenly as the other, but is cheered by the faithful promise of the Lord—it is his support and comfort; whilst the other is so occupied with his affliction that he heeds not the Lord's voice.

Men of the world make troubles for themselves, and, having with them no promise from God, they groan beneath the burden. Haman, the highest in the court of Persia, second only to Ahasuerus in the kingdom, can boast to his wife and friends of his riches and honours, and yet add that they all avail him nothing, simply because a Jew will not bow to him in the gate (Esther v. 10, 14). Ahab,

the great King of Israel, throws himself on his bed and cries like a spoilt child, because in the corner of his dominion is a little vineyard which he does not possess (1 Kings xxi.). What a contrast are those servants of God who, having been shamefully beaten in the public market-place, are now spending their night with their feet in the stocks of the lowest dungeon of Philippi!—there they pray and sing praises (Acts xvi.). What makes the difference? Surely the right which the children of the Lord have to claim the promise of Isaiah xliii. : “When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego learnt the truth of this ; they were cast into the furnace at Babylon : but had they not the lamp? did it ever burn more brightly to them, was the Lord ever more near them, than at that time?

Many years ago, as a doctor in Germany called to visit his patient, he discovered too plainly that medicine was not what the poor man required, but food. There was no fire in the grate, and no loaf

in the cupboard, and the man was weak and exhausted from sheer starvation. Upon the table lay a paper which he had just finished writing ; the ink was scarcely dry, which the doctor seeing, requested permission to take it home. Paul Gerhardt willingly consented, and there were found such words of confidence and joy as these :

“ Is God for me? I fear not.
Though all against me rise ;
When I call on Christ my Saviour,
The host of evil flies.
My Friend, the Lord Almighty,
And He who loves me, God,
What enemy can harm me,
Though coming like a flood? ”

And again :

“ The world may pass and perish,
Thou God wilt not remove ;
No hatred of all devils
Can part me from Thy love ;
No hungering nor thirsting,
No poverty nor care,
No wrath of mighty princes
Can reach my shelter there.

“ My heart with joy uleapeth,
Grief cannot linger there,
She singeth high in glory,
Amidst the sunshine fair.

The sun that shines upon me
Is Jesus and His love,
The fountain of my singing
Is deep in heaven above."

Before the day closed the Lord had inclined the hearts of many, in answer to this happy Christian's faith, to send him food and fuel far beyond his actual requirements. The Apostle could say, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh . . . for which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. iv.).

This is precisely the principle: if we as Christians look at the things which are seen we shall be in all manner of trouble and gloom; instead of a *smoking* furnace we shall speak of it as a *burning*

furnace, and instead of a *burning* lamp we shall see a *smoking* lamp. It will be just reversed from God's beautiful and divine order ; the trial will be felt so cruelly sharp, and the promise of God will be dim and obscure. When we take things as God would have us take them, we have "songs in the night."

CHAPTER VII.

THE COVENANT.—GEN. xvii.

GAIN the Lord appears to His servant, giving him a further revelation of Himself, and, consequently, further injunctions for his life and walk. The more the Lord unfolds to us of His own character and ways, the more He looks to see the same reproduced in us. Yet we need never be oppressed with the burden of responsibility: the strength imparted is always adequate.

The God of Glory first attracted, and now “the Almighty God” bids the drawn soul to walk before Him and be perfect. Here we have Almighty power. No excesses of weakness in Abram, or difficulties of opposing circumstances, can be allowed for an instant to stand in the way, for it is not his own power that is his strength for anything, but the power of God Almighty. If the Lord says, “Walk before Me, and be thou perfect,” and His child says, “I am not able,” the ready answer is,

“I am the Almighty God, and I never bid my people do what I will not also enable them to perform.” The Christian has to learn that the smallest thing for God is an impossibility for the flesh to accomplish, and therefore requires divine power as really as the greatest thing : the first step we take into the wide ocean of service for God, we find ourselves out of our natural depth, and we need God with us, or we sink.

The Almighty God is going to make a covenant with Abram. The mere announcement of this makes Abram fall on his face and worship. We cannot fail to be struck with the contrast between his action here and that of his descendants at Sinai. Here we see the man of faith on his face, worshipping ; there we read of a boastful people saying in the pride of their presumptuous hearts, “All that the Lord hath spoken will we do” (Exodus xxiv.). The one is so occupied with the Lord’s condescending grace that he forgets self, whilst the others are engrossed with their own ability and strength. Hence their quick failure, for ere the covenant is fully given the golden calf is set up and they are dancing round it.

We read in the latter part of Hebrews vi. that the Lord swore by Himself because He could swear

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by no greater, saying, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thee." But was this blessing in making Abram "the father of many nations" to come in the natural order of events? In other words, was it to be by the strength of the flesh, or was it to be simply and solely on the ground of the promise of the Almighty God? It was most assuredly to be only of the latter, but Abram had yet to learn this. As it was not by right of inheritance from his father, Terah, that Canaan became his, nor yet by force of arms or conquest, but only by the gift of God, so also as to a seed to inherit the good land, and to possess it as their own for ever, this too must be God's special gift. Here it is, then, that God changes his name from "Abram," which signifies "high father," to "Abraham," meaning "father of a great multitude." The man with whom God makes a covenant has a *new* name: and the name is very important, for it denoted, not merely a change of character, but also a change of expectation.

We find even as late as the eighteenth verse of this chapter that Abraham still clings to the hope of Ishmael, that he may be the one through whom the great multitude shall come. Abraham would

have been satisfied with this, but God would not ; indeed, He had something far better than Ishmael, the child of the bondwoman, in store for Abraham. Abraham's very name even was to remind him that the fulfilment of the promise of God was not to come through the natural channel, but that everything depended on God's faithfulness and God's power—the Almighty God. Whenever he heard God speak his name—his new name—it would be as a reassurance that yet it should come to pass : “I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.”

Not only was the name to be changed, but this covenant was to have a sign—the sign or seal of circumcision. Notice how closely circumcision and the new name are connected. The reason is evident, for Abraham is now looked upon by God as a man entirely separated from the flesh, and the hope of good coming from the flesh ; and God would have him view himself in this new light. He is to have neither confidence in nor expectation from the flesh. Happy it is for that man who has so learnt the meaning of Philippians iii. 1-3, and of Colossians ii. 11-13, not merely as giving us a doctrinal statement of our standing in Christ, but as setting

before us practically the intense power of the truth that "circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit." Such an one has learnt not to trust in himself, nor to expect good from the flesh, but with him it is God or nothing. So Abraham was now by circumcision evidencing that he was as much separated from the flesh as he had before been from the world. He had previously been taught in his call from Mesopotamia that he was to expect nothing in the way of inheritance from the world, but to take all anew from the hand of God ; and now he learns, likewise, for an heir to this inheritance he is to expect nothing from the flesh. It is alike all from God in the one case, and all from God in the other.

We have before seen Abraham as a man who knows justification ; but here is sanctification—that is, separation. Oh, the relief of being sanctified ! to be outside everything and shut in to God. It would be a matter too insignificant to disturb Abraham's spirit if Abimelech and other kings of Canaan told him his hope was false, that the land should never be his ; nor would his mind be distracted even if Sarah in unbelief should laugh at the idea of an heir to this inheritance. He looks around, and mountainous impossibilities are as a

plain ; he looks within, and regards not himself, for he looks up and sees God above all. To trust the world, to get from it, to trust the flesh, to get from it, will not suit a man who is separated to God. And this is the holy ground of his communion at Mamre, which the eighteenth chapter gives us in such beautiful detail.

“Confidence in the flesh, no longer mine ;
Repose and perfect peace in Him I love
Throw into gloom all that this world can give,
And loose all ties that are not bound above.
To commune with my Christ henceforth my aim ;
Forgetting all behind, and pressing on
To that which is before—one thing I do—
One aim I have—one object—only one.”

CHAPTER VIII.

COMMUNION.—GEN. xviii.



BRAHAM was ready for the Lord. As in the heat of the day he sat at his tent door, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him. He knows one of the three is the Lord thus appearing to him, but there is neither fear nor shame in his demeanour. There is the happy confidence of a man to whom such an appearance is no uncommon event, and yet at the same time all the reverence and respect of a man who knows in whose presence he is; for whilst "he ran to meet them," he yet "bowed himself toward the ground."

What a contrast we have between Abraham here and Adam, when the voice of the Lord God was heard as He walked in Eden in the cool of the day! Adam's accusing conscience made him in fear run from the Lord, and in shame hide himself, whereas Abraham, like an obedient, trustful child springing

into the arms of a loving father, hastens to meet Him. He feels that there is nothing between him and his Lord; he has no consciousness of guilt upon his soul, or of anything that would prevent his saying, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24).

In the present day there are two dangers against which we have to be much on our guard. The one is that of hard legal thoughts of God, which always put Him a great way off from us, as if, being so mighty and so high above us, He scarcely would allow us to draw near to His footstool. Instead of addressing Him as Father, and knowing that He bids us approach with boldness the throne, people speak of Him as "the Creator," or "the Almighty," or "Providence." The spirit that prompts such cold reserve and distance is not such as is pleasing and gratifying to Him who has shed His precious life's blood to bring us nigh (Eph. ii. 13). As we read in Romans viii.: "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father." (See also 2 Timothy i. 7.)

The other danger is that to which persons are exposed who, having been delivered from legal bondage, have learnt something of grace ; but, alas ! they have so learnt grace and rejoiced in it, that they have well nigh forgotten *whose* grace it is ; the gift has been so much thought of, that it has almost shut out from the eyes of the receiver the divine Giver. To be at perfect peace, and at our ease in the presence of One whose love to us is supreme, is just what that love desires ; but this may be, and too often is, turned into an occasion of boasting and self-exaltation on account of being so favoured, and thus we soon forget the bowing attitude of Abraham. How deep is our need in all our assemblies to have the eye-salve anointing our eyes (Rev. iii. 18), that we may perceive Who is in our midst ! Oh, that we might ever recognise that He who invites us to meet Him, though His love is infinite and His grace illimitable, is yet Himself the thrice holy Jehovah ; and though with boldness we approach the throne, yet we must and shall ever come as worshippers !

Abraham's longing cry is, "My Lord, pass not away from Thy servant." He has but lately known what it was for God's High Priest to serve him with bread and wine, and now has come *his*

opportunity of feasting his Lord, "for therefore," adds he, "are ye come to your servant." Yet he makes little of his feast, merely calling it "a morsel of bread," whilst the Holy Ghost is pleased to give us three verses furnishing us with the details, telling us repeatedly of his godly haste, the spirit of which was caught both by his wife and his servant. The butter and milk, the tender calf dressed, and the cakes of fine meal are set before his heavenly visitors, and he stood by them in attendance whilst they did eat.

There is a hallowed calm pervading this scene upon which our souls do well to muse. I ask myself, Does my Lord visit me? Assuredly He does. Though I may see Him not with these natural eyes, as Abraham did, yet His presence is a great reality to faith. I ask myself again, Am I ready for Him thus, and glad of His company, so that my soul runs to meet Him, bowing before Him? If so, may I indeed entertain my Lord, and give refreshment and comfort to Him who has given all to me? Yes, He needs but the invitation of a ready heart. "Let my Beloved come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits," and forthwith will come the response, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have

gathered my myrrh with my spice ; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey ; I have drunk my wine with my milk ” (Song of Solomon iv. 16, and v. 1.)

Even in these days of growing wickedness, when, as in Abraham’s time, there is many a Lot buried in Sodom, the Lord’s word of grace still is, “If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me” (Rev. iii. 20). Blessed promise ! better is this even than what Abraham enjoyed. When He says, “Children, have ye any meat?” may we never have to answer Him “No” (John xxi. 5), for that which He feeds on is the fruit of His own Spirit in us—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. v. 22, 23).

The way has thus been paved for the disclosing of the most intimate secrets ; “and the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” Peculiarly on this occasion is Abraham seen as the friend of God : “Abraham, My friend,” the Lord calls him in Isaiah xli. And it is when speaking of us as “friends” that Christ says, in John xv., “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."

The Lord then tells him that the cry of Sodom is great and the sin very grievous ; and Abraham, standing before the Lord, makes his pleading intercession in six earnest prayers, in every one of which his petition is most graciously answered, yet he ceases to make request before the Lord has ceased to listen. We read that the next morning Abraham gat up early to the place where the previous evening he had stood before the Lord, "and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace" (chap. xix. 27, 28). How different the quiet shade of the tree on the plains of Mamre yesterday at noontide from the smoking furnace of the plains of Jordan upon which the eyes of Abraham looked to-day! And truly thankful must he have felt that, before the awful judgment had fallen, he had been so earnest in his efforts for the salvation of the city. How terribly real and how soon may be the execution of judgment upon this poor world! And yet how asleep are Christians to the danger of the unsaved! A servant of God, when spoken to about

the apparent stagnation of the Lord's work in a certain town, said, "Do the Christians believe in the reality of heaven and hell?" Such a question might, alas! often be asked.

But there are other contrasts which our souls do well to ponder. Abraham at his tent door, Lot at the gate of Sodom; the one a stranger and pilgrim outside the city, the other the man of influence and importance, who would "needs be a judge." Notice also the readiness of the Lord to receive Abraham's hospitality, whereas even His messengers can scarce be prevailed upon to enter the house of Lot; as if, whilst they sought in mercy to save him from Sodom, yet they would not countenance his worldly position there.

Again notice how Abraham, who has stood aloof from the affairs of the world, can just at the right moment bring an unseen but almighty power to bear upon the world by prayer, which Lot, the worldly-minded child of God, with all his fancied influence, utterly fails to do. The same thing is repeated daily. Christians mix up with the world, and join hand in hand in many a concern with those who do not take their stand on the Lord's side; they do so for expediency or for influence: but of what use is their influence? When the

time to put it forth arises, those over whom they had hoped to exercise it refuse to listen ; it was so with Lot and the men of Sodom, even though he calls them "brethren." And oh! Christian parents, mark this solemn lesson—his warning coupled with his entreaty is powerless to move his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters. "Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city!" such is his urgent cry to them, "but he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." They might well have answered him: "Your past conduct belies your words. In spite of God's previous warning in your being taken captive when in league with the King of Sodom, you have now settled down more comfortably than ever inside the city walls; your home, your wealth, and all your interests are here, and yet you say to us, 'Get you out.' No, no; do not mock us so; we believe in deeds rather than words." But of faithful Abraham, the Lord says, in chapter xviii. 19, "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."

A lady coming over to England from America, accompanied by her three children, was in the

disastrous accident in which the "Ville du Havre" went down in mid-ocean. Her life was saved, and on reaching Liverpool, knowing the anxiety of her husband, she telegraphed to him two words—two words only, but, oh, how full of meaning!—"Saved—alone." The first told him the good news of her safety, but, alas! for the overwhelming sorrow as he learnt by the second that by one blow they were bereft of all their children. Who amongst *us* shall have to say, on the eternal shores, "Saved—alone"?

Once again. Abraham has learnt so much of God's grace that he is greatly humbled, and in his prayer speaks of himself as "but dust and ashes," and this is what he really felt himself to be in the Lord's presence, whereas Lot in his prayer can unblushingly call himself "Thy servant"; but what an indifferent servant he was is too evident to need comment.

Thus with these two men we have striking contrasts as regards their communion with the Lord, their testimony for Him, and their humility in His presence. Two courses so different even in Christians lead to great divergence in their end, so that before this chapter closes we see Abraham in peace and security, looking out upon the sad desolations

beneath him, whilst Lot, though saved, is full of trembling and fear, and in sorrow and shame he ends his days.

A Christian not living in communion with his heavenly Father is the saddest object to be seen to-day ; for he not only himself stumbles through walking in darkness, but others stumble over him. True love to our brethren can only be manifested by our abiding in the light, for then "there is none occasion of stumbling" in us (1 John ii. 10). Let us see to it then, for the sake of the Lord's glory, that communion with Him has its pre-eminent place, and that compared therewith everything else sinks into insignificance.

CHAPTER IX.

TRIAL.—GEN. xxii.



FIRST the blade, then the ear ; after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately He putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." A picture that the Lord Jesus gives us of the kingdom of God, but true also of each individual who is a child of that kingdom, and strikingly exemplified in Abraham's life. No father can fail to have his tenderest emotions touched as he reads the twenty-second chapter of Genesis. But we may well inquire what has led up to this ripe fruit that God gets from His servant in the wonderful scene here described. First there was the call of God, which found its response in Abraham's faith, and was instantly obeyed ; then there was the inheritance given, which faith unwaveringly accepted ; and then, communion with the Giver, which the man walking by faith deeply enjoyed. All this has been

preparing him for a trial of faith, unthought of in the past.

God never puts a trial on any of His people that they are unable to bear—"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13). He not only suits the trial to us, but He also fits us for the trial. Not that we in ourselves are any different at the end of our course from what we were at the beginning, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit" (John iii. 6). But by years of walking with God, and learning His faithfulness and goodness, we become practised to trust Him. This is the "experience" of Romans v., which worketh the "hope" that maketh not ashamed. It is this *trusting* that He longs for from His children; and it was because Abraham was a man who had such simple faith that God found such pleasure in him. And yet this faith, which is so rare amongst us, is not a thing to be looked upon as extremely wonderful, but rather, when we consider in whom the faith rests, let us marvel at the unbelief that is

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so prevalent. To say to a friend, "I wish I could trust you," would surely be to cast great reproach upon him; what then must it be to God, if, in spite of the crowd of witnesses who testify to His faithfulness (Heb. xi. and xii.), we in mock humility say, "I wish I could trust Thee"!

Sometimes trials are sent us by God because we are naughty and disobedient children, as in the case of David, recorded in 2 Samuel xii., and Jonah, who was made to cry out of the belly of hell; and by chastisements He makes us heed our ways and listen to His voice. And sometimes trials come upon us that through them we may learn to know God and to know ourselves, as in the history of Job, who, after all his trials, was brought to say, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself." But the case of trial in this chapter is neither the one nor the other. It is a confident Father testing the trustfulness and love of His child, and thus displaying to the eyes of others what was already manifest to His eye. A parent who is certain of the confidence existing between him and his child may safely bid that child spring into his arms or trust him in some other way, even in the presence of

bystanders, without fear of the child shrinking back and causing him shame. So it is in the narrative before us.

Gold is put in the furnace, not because it is of no value, but because of its exceeding worth. The precious metal loses nothing by the fire, any more than the Christian loses by trial; if genuine, it will stand the flame that would destroy tinsel, and comes out robbed of nothing but the dross. "By these things men live" said Hezekiah (Isaiah xxxviii. 16)—a word which was beautifully exemplified in the burning of the bands by the fiery furnace which could not singe the hair of those who were kept by the power of God. Abraham's faith was more precious to God than gold that perisheth, and the trial of it *much* more so, even though the gold were tried with fire; for He intended the trial of the faith to be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (See 1 Peter i. 7.)

None of us like trials naturally, but if we walk with God we must meet with them; for He dealeth with us as sons, and not as bastards (Heb. xii). But let us inquire of our hearts, How do we bear trial; what effect does it have upon us? Trials act upon saved and unsaved according to a divine

principle. They do not leave us in the same spiritual condition in which they found us. They accomplish one of two things : they either draw us to Christ to find solace and comfort in Him, or they drive us away from Him to the world to seek in vain for relief there. We have a picture of this in the woman of Samaria, whose life is described in two words—sorrow and sin. She had sought to smother up the sorrow and bitter disappointment of losing husband after husband (probably five brothers, according to the Jewish law) by betaking herself to a life of open shame. How often is this the case ; but how futile ! Alas ! that God's children should even seem as if they knew nothing better : so that Jehovah's complaint of them is, " My people have committed two evils : they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water " (Jeremiah ii. 13). They surely ought rather to say, " Thou art my hiding-place ; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble ; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance " (Ps. xxxii. 7). Sometimes, with the unsaved, when all down here seems an utter blank, the heart turns at once to Christ ; oh, how blessed the result, then, of trial ! And this may be the

experience of every tried Christian. Such can sing—

“We thank Thee, Lord, for weary days,
When desert springs were dry,
And first we knew what depths of need
Thy love could satisfy.”

A famine in Canaan had once driven Abraham down to Egypt for succour, but another famine drove the prodigal back to the Father's house, where there was bread enough and to spare. (Comp. Gen. xii. with Luke xv.) So now with Abraham, as we shall see in the chapter before us. There we read in the first verse, “God did tempt Abraham,” which means that He *tried* him. It was like the smith, who knows the quality of his weapon, putting it to the test, that the excellences may appear to all; or like the ropemaker, who will strain the cable to its utmost to exhibit its enduring powers. But for this twenty-second chapter of Genesis we should never have known so fully the unswerving faith of God's child. Month by month, year by year, he had been learning the gracious heart and the almighty arm of his God, and now, come what may, or ask what He will, Abraham can rest with the quiet confidence of a little child.

There are two ways in which God deals with those who trust Him in the time of trial. Sometimes He allows them to pass *through* the trial without deliverance, and in such cases His presence is an unfailing support; of this, the furnace and the lions' den in Babylon both afford an illustration, as well as the martyrdom of Stephen and the lonely exile of the aged John. But not unfrequently will the Lord bring His people right up to a trial, abreast with it as it were, and suddenly and unexpectedly, in answer to their unquestioning faith, cut asunder the waters of the Red Sea, or, as with Abraham, stay the hand that was uplifted to slay his son. The same principle is true dispensationally, as we see in the godly remnant of Israel being brought through the great tribulation, whilst the Church, the body of Christ, is caught up before that great and terrible day. Noah and Enoch give us this in picture. Enoch "was not, for God took him" before the flood came, whilst Noah was brought through the waters in the ark of safety.

The first word from God is "Abraham," the very name that speaks of covenant and promised blessing. And Abraham's ready response is, "Behold me." Little did he think what was to

follow, but he could say with One whose day he saw in the far future, "The Lord God hath opened mine ear and I was not rebellious" (Is. 1. 5).

Where is there a child of God that has not experienced something of the same? We cry out for stronger faith, and He tries the faith we have; we long for holiness, and He puts us into the fire; we desire closer communion with Himself, and He fits us for walking with Him in the light (1 John i.).

"Soon the Lord fulfilled my prayer to know
 The power of His cross—'twas death below.
 I asked contrition—and He sent me pain;
 For purity—but anguish came again;
 I asked I might be meek—He broke my heart;
 I asked—I knew not what—the better part.
 I asked to know what death was to the world,
 And quickly all my living hopes were spoiled;
 I asked to be like Him—His image bear;
 He placed me in a furnace, sitting there
 Like one refining silver, till He see
 The reflect of His image bright in me.
 I asked that I the daily cross might bear,
 It lacerated me—the wounds I wear;
 I blindly prayed, not knowing how—nor what,
 He took me at my word—it mattered not.

"Then I began to shrink from following near,
 And well nigh prayed Him to depart, through fear;
 To suffer was not pleasing to the flesh,
 I feared to pray, lest suffering came afresh.

But I had gone too far—*on I must go—*
 The virtues of His cross had pierced me through.
 In me His promise now fulfilled must be—
 ‘I, lifted up, will draw all men to Me.’

“Ah! I had only heard of love—but now
 I feel it—oh! I feel its living glow.
 He fastened on me *such* a look of love,
 Withering to self—tender, all words above;
 Follow I must, whatever may betide;
 I love the cross—I shelter in His side—
 That riven side, from which the glory beams—
 Whence life and healing flow in living streams.”

The command of verse 2 was, as it were, a furnace heated seven times. “Take now thy son,” the asked-for and longed-for child; “thine only son,” there was no other to take his place, for Ishmael was not acknowledged; “Isaac,” the promised seed, the promised heir, “In *Isaac* shall thy seed be called”; “whom thou lovest”—surely this reminder was the fiercest flame; “and get thee into the land of Moriah”—who can tell the anguish of that protracted journey? “and offer him there for a burnt-offering”—the father’s hand lifted against his child—“upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of”—of all the mountains that Abraham’s feet ever trod, was any so steep and rugged or so hard to climb as this?

A man not living near to God might easily have

been staggered at the demand; but the man of faith wavers not, nor does he hesitate until he has perfected his obedience. Hence in the next verse we find his seven-fold response, every minute particular of which was precious in the sight of the Lord—the rising early, the saddling of the ass, the cleaving of the wood, &c., nothing is too trifling for God's record.

Nor are they without significance to us. "Abraham rose up *early in the morning*;" he did not quiet his conscience by a mere intention to obey the Lord, but he made haste, and delayed not to keep His commandments (Ps. cxix. 60). For three days they travel on, three long weary days, every hour of which brought them nearer to the place of sacrifice. Why could he not slay Isaac impetuously at the tent door in Beersheba? Why these three days for calm deliberation? For this reason, no doubt—that God will have from us intelligent obedience, the result, not of sudden impulse, but of thoughtful meditation. Probably there were sighs and tears, but Abraham's tears were precious, for God does not want us to be stoics, unmoved by suffering. The exhortation of Heb. xii. is, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked

of Him." It speaks to us as children ; on the one hand not to ignore the Lord's chastening, on the other hand not to be crushed by it. Abraham's tears were put into God's bottle (Ps. lvi. 8) ; though he intensely felt the trial, he did not faint under it.

At length the foot of Mount Moriah is reached, and beyond that point the servants must not go. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy" (Prov. xiv. 10). The Christian upon whom God has laid His hand can only be understood by those who, being in communion with their Father, can enter into their Father's ways.

"I and the lad," said Abraham, "will go yonder and worship, and *come again to you.*" Here was the language of the faith which the Spirit of God reminds us of in Heb. xi. 19.

As they wend their way up the hill-side, the young man inquires of his father, "Behold the fire and the wood ; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" Probing to its very depths was this question to a loving father's tender heart. Abraham might tremble, but his faith remains firm. "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering."

But still God hangs a mist before his eyes, and

he has no relief but in God, and he wants no other. Oh! the whisperings of Satan, what wicked insinuations against God's love; how many a time during those three days did the enemy attack, and seek by diabolical doubts to turn aside God's servant from the path that led straight up to the top of the mount! But "they came to the place which God had told him of." Once, when the God of Glory had called him into a land of blessing, Abraham had stopped on his way; but now, in the path of trial, he does not stay till he reaches the place which God had appointed.

"Abraham built an altar there." The rough unhewn stones were piled together, the wood was laid in order, and Isaac his son bound and laid on the altar upon the wood. What a moment for the father! His all was upon the altar; for according to God's word, this was his only son, "his only begotten" (ver. 12, and Heb. xi. 17). God expects, and has a right to, our *all*. Christ gave His all, Himself, *for* us, and now gives all, even Himself, *to* us; and shall we refuse to give our all, even ourselves, to Him? "My son, give Me thine heart" (Prov. xxiii. 26), is the word the Lord speaks to His own children; and without our hearts, though we give our money, and perhaps our

lives, it is only as a tinkling cymbal and sounding brass.

In the days of the war between the Northern and Southern States of America a certain council was being held, in which both sides were represented by leading men. For some hours they deliberated on the expediency of separating the South from the North, and finally referred to President Lincoln for his decision. Raising his finger, and pointing on the map to the Northern States, he emphatically said, "This Government must have it all." The enemy of our peace and of God's glory would fain whisper to us, "Divide the child in two; give half your heart to Christ, and half to me." But no, Christ must have the first place, the supreme, the only place in our affections, so that every thought is brought into captivity to His obedience (2 Cor. x. 5). He who reigns amongst the angelic legions of heaven will not accept the footstool, and if we want Him at all we must give Him the throne. The whole heart for Jesus. When you have found a more worthy occupant, a more loving and wise Lord, then surrender to that one, but not till then.

It is not for naught that the Holy Ghost has left it on record that the widow's farthing was

composed of two coins (Mark xii. 41-44). It is as much as to tell us that if she had had a mind to do so she might have kept half for her own necessities, and even then to drop into the treasury the other half would have been a very large proportion to give to God's house. But no, the Master tells His disciples, "all that she had, even all her living," she casts in—all, all for God, and that which is given to God is not lost. Here was a self-sacrificing disinterestedness which is not *always* to be found lying underneath the professions of a "widow's mite."

"Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." The knife had been sharpened, and the keen edge prepared for Isaac's breast; another moment and it would be plunged to the hilt, and bathed in his blood. But the old man did not ask God to relax His demand nor to mitigate the suffering. It was the remark of an afflicted saint, "The file is rough, and the application of it harrowing to the soul; but all the more bright and lustrous will be the diamond, when at length, thoroughly polished, it shines forth in the royal crown of Emmanuel."

Many a Christian is inclined to shrink back when thinking of trouble in the future, forgetting

that the promise is, "*as thy days so shall thy strength be*" (Deut. xxxiii. 25). God does not give a stock of strength, but

" Day by day the manna fell,
Oh! to learn the lesson well."

Food for the day, strength for the day, grace sufficient, this is what the child of God may count upon. On the eve of their martyrdom an aged disciple and a young believer were reading the Bible together by the light of a candle in their prison-cell. As they talked of the ordeal that awaited them on the morrow, of the stake and of the fire, the younger held his finger to the flame of the candle, and, immediately flinching, assured his companion that he would not be able to endure the burning. "Ah!" said the old man, "God has not given you grace to-day needlessly to burn your finger, but He will give you grace to-morrow to witness a good confession for Him in the flames."

We cannot fail to see in Isaac a very striking type of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is twice stated that Abraham and Isaac "went both of them together" (verses 6 and 8); and we know how it is recorded "that the Father sent the Son, the

Saviour of the world." And of the Son it could be said, "He gave Himself for us" (1 John iv. 14, and Eph. v. 2). There was unity of purpose and closest fellowship between God the Father and God the Son in the work of the Cross. Romans viii. tells us that God "spared not His own Son," but that He was the One who "delivered Him up for us all," or, as we read in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, He was "smitten of *God*"; "the *Lord* laid on Him the iniquity of us all"; "it pleased the *Lord* to bruise Him, *He* hath put Him to grief." So it was Abraham's hand that carried the fire and the knife; it was Abraham that built the altar, and that bound his son and laid him on it.

Further, Isaac was reckoned among the dead, from whence also he was received in a figure; foreshadowing Him who is known by us as the One who liveth and was dead, and, behold, He is alive for evermore. Who can tell the depths of eternal love stirred in the heart of God by that "Abba, Father," that ascended on the midnight air of Gethsemane, followed immediately by the "nevertheless" of the subject will? It is with unshod feet and bowed head that alone we can learn the hidden mysteries of love which caused

the Father to give up His only begotten, and not to deliver Him from the power of the dog (Ps. xxii.). A whole burnt-offering indeed—a sacrifice well pleasing to God, of a sweet-smelling savour—perfect in its excellence and acceptability, was the Lord Jesus Christ.

With Isaac bound and the knife uplifted, to the natural mind all hope was gone. But to him who considered not circumstances the God of circumstances remained unchanged. Some Christians talk about their want of faith or their weak faith, but where faith is real and simple it forgets itself and all else but God. It needed such faith to be in lively exercise in order that Abraham might discover the silver lining to a cloud so black and gloomy. Only faith can see “the bright light which is in the clouds” (Job xxxvii. 21). That bright light is to be found in the fruit that follows. “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous ; nevertheless, *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. xii. 11). Peter also, writing to the scattered strangers, prays for them that *after* they had suffered a while, they might be perfected, stablished, strengthened, settled (1 Pet. v. 10). How blessed to have the

heart stayed on Him who setteth the poor on high *after* affliction (Ps. cvii. 41, see marg.); and possessing the heavenly wisdom which observes these things thus to understand the loving-kindness of the Lord!

The wind that blows through the autumn trees removes from their branches the sere and withered leaves; so may the dealings of the Spirit of God rid us of all that savours of decay and death.

To pass through trial with any other result is to miss the purpose of God, and is an incalculable loss to our own souls. An old writer has said, "It is a terrible thing to come cankered out of the furnace."

"Begone, each earth-born tie and bond,
 Begone affection, deep and fond,
 That Christ does not partake.
 Have I a box of alabaster
 Which is not broken for the Master,
 To which my heart still clings the faster?
 Help me my box to break.

"Oh! break whatever it may be
 That holdeth back my heart from Thee,
 Who died my heart to win.
 All other love, however dear,
 However old, or strong, or near,
 Of which Thou art not theme and sphere,
 Is only polished sin.

H

“ All other love would cease to flow—
But Thine no change nor chill can know,
In spite of ill return.
The source of Thine is not in me—
In what I am, or I can be—
The deep, deep spring is found in Thee—
It cannot cease to burn.

“ Upon my callous heart impress
The depth and height of all Thy grace,
That I may love Thee more.
That Thou canst call a worm Thy treasure—
That Thou canst find in me Thy pleasure—
Tells of a love which none can measure,
But worship and adore.”

CHAPTER X.

JEHOVAH-JIREH.



HE mysterious trial through which Abraham passed was necessary for the unfolding of what is perhaps the most precious of all the titles ascribed to Jehovah in the Old Testament. Man's extremity is God's opportunity—in one word, that is, Jehovah-Jireh, the meaning of which, according to the margin, is, "The Lord will see or provide." Who has not known the trials of a sick wife, a dying child, impaired health, or loss of fortune—hopes dearly cherished, blighted and dashed to the ground? but it needs the trial to learn deeply the meaning of Jehovah-Jireh.

"In *the desert* God shall teach thee
What the God that thou hast found,
Patient, gracious, powerful, holy ;
All His grace shall *there* abound."

This is the first of the affixes to Jehovah's name ; and surely there is a significance in this

fact. It is as much as to say, Whatever may follow, this at least is certain : we start with, "The Lord will provide." So in the opening verse of the Psalm of the Shepherd King we read, "I shall not want." We might very well write the one over against the other.

Commencing with Jehovah-Jireh, how beautifully the other names succeed in order ! Jehovah-Jireh : "The Lord will provide" (Gen. xxii.). "The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want" (Ps. xxiii.).

Jehovah-Rophi : "The Lord that healeth thee" (Ex. xv. 26. The Hebrew word not given in our English version). Corresponding with the word, "He restoreth my soul."

Jehovah-Nissi : "The Lord my banner" (Ex. xvii.). Answering to this we read, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

Jehovah-Shalom : "The Lord send peace" (Judges vi.). "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ; He leadeth me beside the waters of quietness." (See margin of Ps. xxiii.).

Jehovah-Tsidkenu : "The Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah xxiii. 6). "He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

Jehovah - Shammah : "The Lord is there" (Ezekiel xlvi. 35, margin). "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Abraham's faith in God had led him to answer Isaac's searching question with the words, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb." Thus even ascending the mountain he could say Jehovah-Jireh ; before his eyes had witnessed the Lord's deliverance, his faith foresaw it. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." It turns shadows into realities, and promises into living substance. This makes him calm in a scene that would naturally terrify and distract, although it is not until the last moment that the angel of the Lord stays the already uplifted hand by the cry, "Abraham, Abraham." When demanding the sacrifice God had called "Abraham" but once (v. 1) ; now, as if in haste to deliver, He repeats the name. We are reminded that He esteems it more blessed to give than to receive, and that He always takes the most blessed place Himself.

"'Tis His great delight to bless us,
Oh, how He loves !"

"Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and

behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns." He had often seen the same thing before as he walked amongst his flocks in the plains of Mamre, but the touch of God's hand surrounds the commonest objects with a halo of glory, and to Abraham this ram was what no other ever had been.

It was close at hand : he needed but to lift up his eyes and see it ; yet it told of complete deliverance. God does not generally work miracles in providing for His people, though He may do so. "What is that *in thine hand?*" he said to Moses of his shepherd's staff (Ex. iv. 2) ; and this was the chosen instrument to turn the rivers into blood, and to divide the waters of the Red Sea. "What hast thou in the house?" was Elisha's word to the troubled widow (2 Kings iv. 2) ; and the pot of oil becomes a treasury of wealth to her. Again, the Master Himself inquires, "How many loaves have ye?" and though the answer is "Seven, and a few little fishes," yet it is of *them* that He is pleased to provide the repast that should more than satisfy four thousand men, beside women and children (Matt. xv.). And so we find continually the Lord's ways of delivering are very simple

and very unexpected. Still, whether in great things or small, whether by special intervention or by ordinary means, Jehovah-Jireh is that which we delight to see written upon everything.

Each fresh discovery of how God is for us is intended to shed a ray of light upon the pathway we are about to tread, and to give us a firm step, and to put a song of confidence and hope into our lips, though the clouds may gather and the skies be dark. Paul wrote to the Corinthians of the trouble which came to him in Asia, and adds, "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead ; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver : in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us" (2 Cor. i. 9, 10). The past and present salvations, though not exempting him from future trial, prepared him to meet it. The same spirit is to be found in the oft-repeated song of the old negress :

"And this be the token,
No word He hath spoken
Was ever yet broken,
The Lord will provide.
Then we'll trust in the Lord,
And He will provide."

Or as John Newton has taught us to sing :

“ His love in times past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink ;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite
through.”

The scene of Isaac's deliverance did not lose its interest in after years, but became the most sacred spot in all the world in the history of Israel. It was here on Mount Moriah that the threshing-floor of Araunah (or Ornan) the Jebusite stood ; the very place where the destroying angel was stretching out his hand upon Jerusalem, to destroy it, when the Lord, whose mercies are great, repented Him of the evil and said to him, “ It is enough ; stay now thine hand.” Here, where more than eight hundred years before Abraham had built his altar to Jehovah-Jireh, David builds his, and offers burnt-offerings and peace-offerings (2 Sam. xxiv.), Nor was this all ; what more fitting place could have been prepared for Solomon, when he “ determined to build a house for the name of the Lord ” ? So we read in 2 Chronicles iii. : “ Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had

prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite."

As year by year the tribes assembled at Jerusalem, and witnessed the court of the temple deluged with the blood of their offerings, the memory of their father Abraham lived amongst them, and it was commonly believed that the brazen altar stood upon the very site of the pile of rough stones on which the patriarch bound his son. Many a godly Israelite by this might learn the wondrous truth of substitution, as he considered that in the person of Isaac he too was bound, and that Isaac's liberation was his own.

And what a liberation it was for Isaac! The uplifted hand had been stayed, it is true, but God must not be robbed of His offering. This, however, was to be of God's own providing—Jehovah-Jireh! As Abraham's eyes light upon the ram, all doubt is at an end, and he hesitates not to offer him up "in the stead of his son."

An hour of joy indeed was that to Isaac, as, standing by his father, saved and free, he sees the blood of the ram flow down the altar-sides, whilst the fire of God's acceptance with upleaping flame consumes the victim. He knows there is no knife, no flame for him. We can easily imagine he might

have said, "Father, I was upon that altar but a few moments ago, and you held the knife that was to slay me ; but, father, that knife has found another victim, and can never again be lifted against me ; that ram is my substitute." With hearts made glad, having learnt the true meaning of Jehovah-Jireh, they wended their way down the hill-side to the spot where they had left the two servants and the ass. One theme of conversation would be often on their lips ; and when at their journey's end Isaac threw himself into his mother's arms, as, at the tent door, she waited to welcome them back to Beersheba, he would exclaim, "Mother, I'm saved ; God provided and accepted a ram as my substitute."

There are many in the present day who profess to go up to God's house to worship, and who yet have never learnt the only true basis of worship—substitution. We are as really doomed to the sword of God's judgment as Isaac was to Abraham's knife. But Jehovah-Jireh is our resource as it was his. God has once again provided Himself a lamb ; and to this Abraham's prophecy in verse 8 no doubt refers, whether he understood it in its fullest divine sense or not. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29).

The popular thought amongst religious people is, that they must bring something to God of their own finding. God is looked upon as a hard master, demanding and exacting from them what they never can bring Him : hence the fruitless toil of prayers and religious exercises which give no divine peace, but only added weariness and pain. How blessed to know God in His true character ! for He gives before He takes, and asks of us nothing but what He first puts into our hands. But if we pass by in the indifference of unbelief what God has provided for our salvation, how can we expect Him to accept what we may put in its place?

Have we known the imminent danger that we all are in by nature—a danger so terrible, that neither morality, amiability, benevolence, nor education, creed nor profession, can shelter us from it—and then have we looked away to Him who at Calvary was the sinner's Substitute? "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter iii. 18). Happy is it for every man who has put himself in that category of the unjust, and, accepting the righteous condemnation of God as due to him, has learnt that He who was essentially the Just took his place of

punishment before God. Such can look up adoringly to the Lord Jesus and say—He loved me and gave Himself for me. He was wounded for my transgressions.

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah specially unfolds to us the truth of substitution: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way"; here, indeed, were the thorns and briars of our sins; "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all"; here, blessed be God, is the One of whom the ram caught in the thicket was a type. That Holy One willingly put Himself down into the entanglement of our guilt that He might, by bearing its condemnation, free us for ever from its consequences. Isaac had nothing to do with his salvation, but to behold a work done outside himself and realising God's acceptance of it forthwith to worship. So it is with us. Instead of looking within to scrutinise the work in our own hearts, let us look out and up and believe in an accomplished fact of which the Gospel is the record; namely, that the great sin question is for ever settled before God, for Christ hath once appeared in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. ix. 26).

“ All thy sins were laid upon Him,
Jesus bore them on the tree ;
God who knew them laid them on Him,
And believing, thou art free.”

During the late Franco-Prussian war, and shortly after the summons to all Germans residing in England to take their place with the troops before Paris, a gentleman was walking along the streets of London, when he met a German friend. Surprised to see him there, he stopped him, asking how it was he was not in France. “ Oh, I am dead ! ” was his answer. “ Dead ! tell me what you mean,” said his friend. “ I will explain it to you,” the German replied. “ My name was called among others, and I thought I should have to leave England ; but I had no wish to do so, and I set to work to find some way of escape. The command was stringent, so that it was impossible to evade it ; but at length I found a substitute, willing for a sum of money to take my place. I gladly paid the sum down, and saw him off, thankful to know that I was free. He had not, however, been many days with our army, when a French shell burst close to where he was standing and he was killed. He was there for me ; his death was counted as mine ; so I am dead, and

the German nation has no further claim upon me.”

But God's redemption is not the only truth taught us by Jehovah-Jireh, though by it we must first learn the meaning of that sweet name. The knowledge of salvation is not the *fruit* of years of growing in grace, but lies at the *root* of the tree. Nor is it a thing only to be grasped with assurance on a death-bed ; it is what our heavenly Father desires every believer in His Son, even the weakest, to be conscious of (1 John v. 13).

If we want to see after what fashion the Lord will provide for our every need of daily grace and strength in the wilderness warfare, we have but to look at the Cross, which has become the measure and pledge of all that is to follow. “ 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 ? ” (Rom. viii. 32). Every step of our history, from our conversion right on to glory, has been already thought of, planned, and provided for by God. There are heights to be climbed and depths to be fathomed, for Jehovah-Jireh unlocks to us all the treasures of heaven.

Who can tell what this name has been to the saints in all ages ? It has been to them the name

of the Lord into which, as a strong tower, they have fled for refuge. It has been the balm to the weary and rest to the tempest-tossed soul. The remembrance of Jehovah-Jireh has nerved the fainting Christian and put strength into the feeble knees.

Jehovah-Jireh marks the third stage in Abraham's experience of God. The God of Glory had appeared to him, and he gladly forsook all that held him before. The Almighty God gave him power to walk before Him and be perfect. But now Jehovah-Jireh covers all need of every circumstance whether of fulness or want.

We have the same Jehovah for temporal as for spiritual things, and, if we can trust Him for the eternal, it is a small matter to leave our daily necessities in His hand. We have not two Gods to deal with, one for heaven, the other for earth; but only one, our all-sufficient God and Father, the Jehovah-Jireh of this twenty-second of Genesis. "Are not ye of more value than many sparrows?" therefore, "Be careful for nothing"; for "My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 19).

CHAPTER XI.

CLOSING SCENES.



ABRAHAM dies ; and Abraham stands up from before his dead and declares himself "a stranger and a sojourner." This is the patriarch's estimate of himself in his day of mourning, though the sons of Heth proclaim him "a mighty prince" among them.

Death is a wholesome reminder to us not to build our hopes in this passing world where all is change and decay, but to fix them beyond where immortality for ever reigns. Abraham feels, blessed as Canaan is, he could not stay there always, for death is there. It is well for us when, our very native air being the life of God, we can with truth say we are strangers in a land of death. This world to Christians is "the valley of the shadow of death," we are merely sojourners passing through it, and the scene is as uncongenial to us as the Arctic snows to the exotic.

“ Could we stay where death is hov’ring ?
Could we rest on such a shore ?
No ; the awful truth discov’ring,
We could linger there no more.
We forsake it,
Leaving all we loved before.”

Now was a time of intense solitariness to Abraham. She who had known the home of his childhood in the land of the Chaldees, and who for over sixty years had shared his wanderings in Canaan, is taken from his side : he cannot restrain himself from giving expression to the true feelings of his heart : “ I am a stranger and sojourner.” If any man ever had a right to a possession it was this man, to whom God had given the whole land of Canaan. He wanders through the country, and knows by God’s word that it is all his, though he owns not so much as a burying-place, that he may bury his dead out of his sight. But he has God’s promise and God’s presence ; and, blessed as these made that land flowing with milk and honey, yet *they* were what caused him to look beyond Canaan, and to declare plainly that he sought a better country, that is a heavenly, and to wait for a city that had foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. xi. 10, 14-16). And Abraham’s hope was not vain, he shall have it all.

The Christian is only a stranger and sojourner in this world. A scene like this is not, nay, cannot, be his home. God has made us His children ; we are partakers of the divine nature, and we need a home where everything shall correspond with that nature. Here sin abounds, and death—sin's wages—is paid out on every hand. He who is our Lord and Master found not so much as where to lay His head, when, for three-and-thirty years, this earth was favoured with His presence. Where He now is is our home, our Father is there, and there the hopes and interests inspired in our breasts by the Holy Spirit all centre. We are countrymen of a clime foreign to this world ; we are citizens of a city whose politics are not recognised here ; and members of a royal household, the decrees of which fall unheeded on the ears of men. We are like children at school, away from home, but soon, very soon, the home-coming will arrive.

Because we are strangers, therefore of necessity we are only sojourners. If we were of the world, our duty would be to mind the affairs of the world ; but because we are not of the world, but chosen out of the world, therefore the world hateth us (John xv.). Now, one thing or other is certain, and both cannot be true ; we are either of the

world, or we are not of the world. Is it so that these treacherous hearts of ours would seek both to be citizens of heaven (Phil. iii.) and of this world? May the Holy Ghost so teach us that we are but sojourners here that we may have grace to set our mind on things above! (Col. iii. 2, marg.).

“This world is a wilderness wide!
I have nothing to seek or to choose;
I've no thought in the waste to abide,
I've naught to regret or to lose.

“The Lord is Himself gone before;
He has mark'd 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 mark'd as His own;
And I follow in diligent haste,
To the seats where He's put on His crown.

“For the path where my Saviour is gone
Has led up to His Father and God,
To the place where He's now on the throne,
And His strength shall be mine on the road.

“'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 fulness I'll know.”

So could Abraham in spirit say near four thousand years ago, and so may we now say even far

more fully in these days of the clear shining of the light of God's truth. Then, "dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter ii. 11).

Before Abraham can close his eyes in peace one more matter claims his thoughtful attention. It furnishes us with the beautiful twenty-fourth chapter, and gives us a passing insight into his character as father and master. God's glory is linked with his son's future, and Isaac must not be permitted to intermarry with the nations God has cursed: a needed lesson for Christian parents now.

Besides this, every stage of the servant's journey into Mesopotamia unfolds his relationships with his master. Verse 5, the desire to know Abraham's exact wishes; then verses 9 and 10, the ready obedience; verse 12, his prayerful desire for success for his master's sake; verse 33, the diligence which compels him to tell his errand before he has eaten or drunk; and pre-eminently all through the honour in which that master is held by him, leading him so constantly to speak of him that we have eighteen times in one chapter the words "my master."

There surely has been much behind the scenes here. He of whom the Lord spoke so confidently that he would command his children and his household after him has been true to his trust. The faithfulness and integrity of the servant which we so much admire are the result of the wise and considerate training of the master. A good master goes far to make a good servant ; the two act and react upon each other ; and therefore we find them always connected in the closing chapters of the Epistles.

The vessel that had weathered so many storms enters the harbour with all sail set. The sun that had risen upon Abraham when the God of Glory appeared to him in Ur is shining still, and faith in the God of the promise is yet in lively exercise, though he be dying without so much as a foot of the inheritance, save the burying-field of Machpelah. Even now, by faith, he can take the place of "the mighty prince," and almost his last act is to give gifts.

And then we read : "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 ; and was gathered to his people.

And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife" (Gen. xxv.). With these words the Holy Ghost closes the record of this memorable life, so full of lessons and examples for us who, having the same faith, are the children of, and blessed with, faithful Abraham (Gal. iii. 7, 9).

In glancing back over more than a century of this man's life since the day the God of Glory appeared to him, we find, with but few exceptions, a steady growth in the divine life, and a fixed determination to obey God rather than follow the dictates of his own heart. At length it can be said of him that he was "full," like a well-ripened shock of corn. How often, alas! is it far otherwise with the people of God. As a river with the breezes playing upon the surface of its waters, and driving its ripples the contrary way to the current, or as a sluggish stream which seems motionless as we stand upon the bridge to watch it, so is it with many who should rather be as the swift-flowing river, resting not till it finds its home in the ocean. "The path of the just is as the shining light that

shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18).

The word of the prophet Habakkuk : "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. ii. 4), fittingly describes the history of Abraham. Paul three times quotes this in his Epistles, in each case laying the emphasis on a different word. In Romans, where Abraham's justification is given us as an example of God justifying ungodly sinners, we read (Rom. i. 17) : "The *just* shall live by faith." In Galatians, where law and faith are contrasted (Gal. iii. 11), "The just shall live by *faith*." And in Hebrews, where we have in the eleventh chapter an epitome of the patriarch's life, we find (Heb. x. 38) : "The just shall *live* by faith." The first gives us justification, the second the principle on which we are justified, and the third shows us that a continuance of the same constitutes Christian life. How large and how comprehensive are God's words !

Hand in hand with Abraham's godly progress, we find the trial that tells of the Lord's favour. The trial of turning his back on country, kindred, and home ; a country to which, had he been mindful of it, he might have had opportunity to have returned. Closely upon this followed the

separation from Lot; and what can be more sad to a Christian walking in communion with God than for his brethren to separate themselves from him.

Lot's choice of Sodom led to the next trial, which was the tempting offer of the king. And this again was succeeded by the vision of hope deferred, the illustration of which was given by God Himself in the smoking furnace and the burning lamp.

With chapter xxi. comes God's command to cast out the bondwoman and her son (the emblematic teaching of which Paul gives us in Galatians iv.). The presence of Hagar, the Egyptian, must constantly have reminded Abraham of his backsliding in going down into Egypt in the days of famine, for there, no doubt, in Pharaoh's palaces, she first waited upon Sarah. Though she had more than once proved a troubler in his household, yet the bread and the bottle of water tell of the lingering tenderness which made the thing very grievous in Abraham's sight. For his sake the Lord substituted a well of water for the spent bottle, though Hagar never returned to the tents of Abraham. With Ishmael cast out, he who was accounted his only begotten son was now to be offered up. This was the severest test of all.

We are constrained to say, What a life of trial was Abraham's!—but this was necessary to a life of faith. Some may shrink back, fearing to venture on such a path because of the suffering it involves. Could we ask Abraham, "Would you dispense with your faith so as to avoid the trial?" he would at once answer—"Nay, the blessings of such a life far outweigh all beside."

Seven distinct times it is recorded that God blessed Abraham, and on each occasion the blessing exceeds the previous one in fulness and extent. First, the promise to bless him and *show* him the land (chap. xii. 1). Then, when he had forsaken his own country comes the promise, "unto thy seed will I *give* this land" (chap. xii. 7). Having turned his back on the well-watered plains of Jordan, upon which Lot had lifted up his eyes in his self-willed choice, "The Lord said unto Abraham . . . lift up now *thine* eyes," and then follows a greatly enlarged blessing—"all the land" and "for ever," and his seed "as the dust of the earth" (chap. xiii. 14).

The fourth blessing comes upon the refusal of the goods of the King of Sodom, and mentions for the first time the heavenly seed in connection with the son of promise (chap. xv. 5). The end of

the same chapter gives the extent of the inheritance yet to be possessed by Israel in the days of the millennial kingdom. In the day of circumcision the Almighty God makes and establishes His covenant with Abraham, assuring it to him with seven "I will's" (chap. xvii.). Finally, after the offering up of Isaac, the Lord confirms the whole by an oath that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, Abraham might have a strong consolation.

Thus "the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things"; and who would not rather have the blessing with the suffering than be exempt from both?

"When we stand with Christ in glory,
Looking o'er life's finished story,"

what a different estimate we shall put upon all things to that we put upon them now! "In Thy light shall we see light." But the same principle is true to-day, for in proportion as we walk with God shall we judge of all things as He does. David's experience outside the sanctuary was too painful for him, but when he entered within he could say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.

My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever” (Psalm lxxiii.).

Oh! so to know God that we not only obey His call in conversion, but that we go on with Him day by day, putting our trust under the shadow of His wings, and with the same childlike simplicity and confidence receiving trial and blessing from Him. The Christian can afford to let the world slip through his fingers and feel as though he lost nothing. Those who are thus satisfied with God and content to hold loosely by earthly things have a present portion of communion and joy, and are laying up richest treasures in heaven.

Abraham’s faith was great, but a life of yet greater faith has been exhibited in this world, and that under less favourable circumstances and in scenes of fiercer trial. Only once has the world seen faith perfected, and that in the Lord Jesus Christ. He who was a greater than Solomon in wisdom and glory was as truly a greater than Abraham in faith. Abraham when he trusted was delivered, but the dependent Son of God cried out of the depths, “My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” and His faith failed not. Learning the lessons, then, that Abraham’s life can teach us, we

look off from him unto Jesus, the beginner and finisher of faith, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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