

ABRAHAM AND THE LIFE OF FAITH

by Clarence E. Lunden

Lunden's biographical study of Abraham as a model of the life of faith, tracing his journey from God's call to leave Ur through the great tests and triumphs of his pilgrimage. He draws practical lessons for modern believers from the patriarch's radical obedience and trust in God's promises.

8 Chapters

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00.3. Foreword

Foreword The counsels of God called not only for the putting away of sin from His presence forever, but that He might have heaven filled with children and have a bride for Christ.

Also, the earth was to be inhabited forever and there was to be sweet communion between the heavenly and earthly redeemed ones. In preparing His people for this destiny where love prevails, there must be a work done within each believer.

It is through the exercise of faith by the Spirit of God, that the one who knows his sins forgiven is taught the priceless lessons which form his permanent character. The following article shows how Abraham was the model and father of this faith for all who believe, exhibited in connection with the seven appearances of God to him.

"There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: The lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it" (Job 28:7-8).

01. The Call of God

The Call of God

Following the flood which covered the earth, the children of Noah were scattered. In sovereignty God blessed Noah's son Shem, from whose family line Abram came. The country of Abram's nativity was Persia (the present-day Iran), the land of Eber, who was a son of Shem. (See Jos 24:3).

Very few of Abram's progenitors feared God. His father Terah and his grandfather Nachor served other gods, which were demons, unknown before the flood. Terah moved his family across the great river Euphrates into the city of Ur of the Chaldees where Abram's spiritual history began. It was this royal city of antiquity, located near Babylon in Mesopotamia, spoken of as Abram's country, from which Abram was called.

"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of 'thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee" (Acts 7:2-3).

Wealth from fertile valleys and fruitful fields - a literal paradise - which yielded every form of tropical fruit and palatable food, left little to be desired for Abram and Sarai his wife. Living in ease, luxury, and splendor beside the gently-flowing Euphrates River, they apparently had no thought of God or His claims. They had the very best of civilization with its worship of the moon-god, as they dwelt within the sacred burial city of Ur of the Chaldees. Surely, as myriads today living in prosperity with their own form of worship, these had fallen, snared in the mirage of life. Harbored within Ur were indulgence, impurity, and license, usually produced when pleasure is sought without God.

Out of this great social morass of mere nature God called Abram. He had brought him to Ur in order that He might call him out to simply follow the Word of God out of all visible supply, out of nature at its best. God was to be his Guide in this heavenly path of faith in which there was no predecessor on the new earth.

Abram little knew for what great dignities he had been chosen. Virtue was as yet untested in the fire. The command of God was not merely from idolatry, but it was a heavenly voice from the God of glory, out of nature and the earth which were destined for destruction.

"Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:1-3).

Endowment to few brings blessing to many. This was election of the highest order, a call out of nature to follow only the Word of God by faith to a city with foundations.

Such, also, is our call, with increased light for our path and with a clearer revealed destiny. The revelation of the Father and the Father's house enhances our call beyond description.

God had said to Abram, "Get out." Abram must act or he would have no more light. He could not have been the father of faith in the city of Ur. The authority of the Word of God is immediate.

If God is left out of the life, carnal lust will control man. It may take varied forms such as base pleasures or talents, but it is still the flesh and ends in the second death. New creation-life brings a complete moral revolution of the soul. There is no remedy for man's sin except faith in Christ and His finished work on the cross. A man will follow either violence and corruption downward or start the path which brightens to the perfect day. Abram chose the latter. He lost everything in this world in exchange for the Word of God. He might well have used the language of one of a later day, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2Ti 1:12). His path was to be the exhibition of the life of faith in dependence, obedience, and in concert with God's thoughts.

Obedience to the unmistakable summons, the first call, "Get thee out," not only meant a new life for Abram, but, greater, a new birth for mankind and the dawn of destiny for Abram. The young man in the tenth chapter of Mark's gospel came running to Jesus but went away sorrowful, not willing to exchange present gain for a large destiny. (See Mark 10:17-22.) The path which Abram began was faith at its outset, something new on the earth. He was to be the rootstock, the father of all who believe.

Into this new life of faith, formed by communion, he entered in beautiful simplicity and deep earnestness. He took God for his security, both for body and soul, portraying moral greatness more than any of his day.

"So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen 12:4-6). At the heavenly summons Abram left Ur and country and with Sarai his wife, Lot his nephew, and Terah his father, moved on to Haran. He stayed in Haran until his father's death. Abram was then seventy-five years old.

Kindred who do not value the call of God must sooner or later remain behind.

Soon after, he moved on to the land that God would show him. There could be no new revelation to his soul until he obeyed the first. Across the Syrian desert they went, Abram, Sarai, Lot, servants, substance, and souls acquired in Haran, never to see Ur again. They were prisoners of hope.

Arriving in Canaan, they stopped first at Sichem (Shechem), now called Nabalos, in the plain of Moreh. The subsequent history of Shechem carries the highest overtones of promise. (See John 4:1-54.)

02. Stranger in Canaan

Stranger in Canaan As a shell holds a kernel, so a command, a promise. Having obeyed the first summons, the Lord appeared to Abram the second time, bringing new light for growth and encouragement.

"And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD" (Gen 12:7-8).

Abram built an altar unto the Lord Who appeared unto him; thus he became a worshipper.

Abram's call carried with it no command to till the earth or govern the nations. He was a pilgrim with a heavenly call. He moved to a mountain where he pitched his tent between Bethel on the west and Hai on the east. Bethel means "house of God," Hai, "heaps and ruins." This was a constant reminder of what grace had wrought for him: deliverance from a scene of judgment, on to the house of God, a city that has foundations whose Builder and Maker is God. He looked for this city and, its Maker Who was soon to be known as his Friend.

Abram exchanged the royal city of Ur, with its present gain, for a pilgrim life with its tent and altar so that he might gain a permanent city. The symptoms of a pilgrim life are surrender, self-denial, loneliness, simplicity in all phases of life, and independence from man, accompanied by an apprehension of God's counsels, purposes, revelations, and promises.

What golden hours were spent at the altar, in a communion with God completely unknown in Ur of the Chaldees! What simplicity, rest of heart and spirit, intense devotion, and deepest fellowship were now his portion!

"He shall hide me in his pavilion" (Psa 27:5).

Abram learned to be the friend of God, known only in obedience, and for a time he may have been the only one on the earth with this privilege. Is it a wonder that he bears the name of "The Father of Faith"? Conscious citizenship in heaven made him a stranger here.

"And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land... And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had" (Gen 12:9-10; Gen 12:17-20).

Israel took a circuitous route on their journey to Canaan. So God may allow us to take a wayward path so that our apprehension of His grace may keep pace with our growing self-knowledge, for we learn to know God in the measure that we discover ourselves and our need.

Such a route took Abram to Egypt's civilization because of famine in the land of Canaan. For the moment the conditions in Egypt were easier for the flesh than in Canaan, but God had never called him into Egypt. There was no altar in Egypt, no promises, no spiritual fruit for God, no fellowship when walking in disobedience. When faith is weak we mix with the herd. Only the Lord Jesus could say, "I am altogether what I say unto you." What a Savior!

Responsibility for sustenance of a family, servants, and cattle was no small matter when famine prevailed, but if the God of glory called, would He not be able to provide? Who allowed the famine? David tells us that God is able.

"Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou host" (1Sa 25:6).

"In the days of famine they shall be satisfied" (Psa 37:19).

There never was a day when men were so insistent upon security as today, but do we dare trust such a broken reed as Egypt, a type of the world independent of God? She might boast of her river as her own, her Sphinx, pyramids, dynasty, and mummies in a word, the glory of the world. The natural heart is empty, moved by tradition with only the past to occupy it.

How could I take myself out of the hand of Him Who has called me and place my trust in the world and man?

"Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of" (Isa 2:22)?

Those who cling to material things never know the promises of God.

Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn, not yet having learned the lesson of complete dependence upon God. With worldly riches surrounding him, he was as a bird out of her nest. Personal friendship with God which he had cherished at Bethel and Hai was missing, and he became restless with a wretched sense of wrong.

"He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul" (Pro 8:36). This world is a changing stage of disappointment and death, yet man will never be awakened unless a God-given revelation is offered and pressed home by the Holy Spirit. Soon everything that can be shaken will be shaken, and a city with foundations will be left.

If reasonings supplant Scripture, even the best of men, the most spiritual, will be untruthful under stress. When Abram was in Canaan he was a man of God, but in Egypt he behaved as a man of the world. He denied his wife, and, stricken with fear, he lied to Pharaoh.

Abram's spirit knew the difference between civilization and the quiet presence of God in Canaan in separation from mere nature and the earth, but it took the rebuke of Pharaoh to bring him to his senses in order to command his own soul. Hence he returned to Bethel and Hai, to the place of his beginning in the land, to the altar and its golden hours. Grief had closed his heart; but with the

consciousness of what God was to him, godly repentance soon opened it to joy again.

"Surely after that I was turned, I repented" (Jer 31:19). The believer begins his path with sorrow and death to the flesh, as God reveals to the heart what is inside, but he ends his path with resurrection-life in heaven. The unbeliever begins his life with pleasure, which is only for a season, and he ends it in the second death in separation from God in conscious regret forever.

Abram's season of sorrow to repentance in the presence of God ended with the enrichments of joy which grace brings to the heart and mind. Growth, fellowship, promises, counsels, and, indeed, new revelations were his part anew.

How precious this restoration of soul is -restoration to God to Whom we were first brought. Sorrow alone cannot accomplish it, for that would not bring me into the presence of God, but sorrow according to God works repentance in our hearts, and it is the goodness of God that leads to it. Only God can effect restoration of soul.

Yet it remains that Abram could not escape the harm and bitterness for others and for himself, later, resulting from his expedition into Egypt.

"He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Psa 106:15).

"Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom 13:14).

Abram later regretted having taken an Egyptian maidservant; further, he led his nephew Lot into the world, a source of deep grief, as the subsequent history proves.

Since he was a pilgrim, wealth itself did not directly affect him. What use had he for silver but to buy a field for a hundred shekels in which to bury his dead? It was there that Sarah was later buried. With Lot it was different one glimpse of the land of Egypt caused him to fall. When his servants quarreled with Abram's servants over the matter of sufficient area to graze their cattle, he responded to Abram's urgent admonition, "Let there be no strife... separate thyself from me." Make your own choice. Abram forfeited first place and well he might, because it was all his by promise.

It is significant that the Spirit of God adds, "And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land." What a sad commentary -for them to witness a quarrel between those who took such a high position as Abram and Lot!

"And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other" (Gen 13:10-11).

Lot looked down from the mountain heights into the pleasant plains of Sodom and the surrounding country, and his natural heart was moved by what he saw. A heart filled with lust for gain, without an inquiry from God, led him to pitch his tent toward Sodom. The enchanted valley, because of wickedness of the lowest character, was soon to sound out its own death knell.

Without an altar and Lot had none how can a righteous man walk safely through this world? We hear of no call of God to the cities of the plain. Lot's choice was of earth and nature, not the breathings of a heavenly man. It was what the eye saw and the heart desired. (See Ecc 2:10 and

Psa 119:37.) This reckless action on the part of Lot, we observe, is as one who would cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple from the lofty plateau where the heavenly man dwelt for the angels to catch. Still, God will preserve His own, though wayward.

There was no understanding with Lot. He knew not what he was about and had no discernment as to the end of his course. Where would he find strength for a walk different from that of any worldly man led about by his lusts? There seemed to be no thought of his family or their future, only well-watered plains. The subtle wiles of the devil could easily entrap one who neglected the altar. Take heed, my soul, or you, too, may fall. Had not Lot followed Abram without apparent exercise of soul, but only as an echo of his uncle, spiritually? Where do we read of an altar, promises, revelations, and the like?

Fallen human nature provides the soil for spiritual barrenness.

Lot was for the moment in the enjoyment of the pleasures of this life outwardly, but he had not the knowledge of what lay ahead for the world in which he had become so firmly entrenched. Gone was his tent; he dwelt in a house. He did not know that his feathered nest was due for quick destruction and that he would lose all of his life's efforts and their fruits. Whoever is linked to the world must suffer its adversities. As for Abram, there was no strife or retaliation. The happy hours at his altar had so impressed upon his soul the excellence of the promises of God that any thought of covetousness was removed. There must be full separation from his kindred who did not value the call of God.

Thus Abram was free, being entirely separated. It was difficult to part from Lot, but God had said, "kindred," so Abram obeyed. In the heavenly city to which he was going, natural relationships will be a thing of the past. What will you have, then, if not Christ? A believer is a child of God and loved, even if walking in the world. The issues of the kingdom of God were paramount for Abram; Lot must leave. To be alone walking with God is better than to compromise principles!

03. Communion

Communion The Word of God came to Abram after he was parted from Lot as both a reward and a preparation. Upon this Word of assurance, with new light breaking in as to the land in which he was a pilgrim, Abram mounted up to Mamre at Hebron. Hebron means "communion," Mamre, "fatness." The higher he climbed, the more he saw.

Abram communed with God as to the promises and counsels. His heart was free to expand in the growing knowledge of his heavenly portion and companionship with his Friend, his Creator-God. When faith is strong and the life and spirit are free, we cut our moorings and launch forth. Had not God said, "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee"? At the first appearing God had said, "Into the land which I shall skew thee;" during the second appearing, "Unto thy seed will I give this land;" in this, the third visitation, after Abram's separation from Lot, God said, "For I will give it unto thee." Abram had learned his lessons well, although there was much more to learn, especially patience. He had been taken away from all natural resources, and with impediments removed, he was free to enjoy his portion fully, as well as to be a help to others as occasion might arise. With a good conscience and full dependence upon God, he was given moral power in an ungodly world.

Acquaintance with the life of Abram and its connections proves of great value in giving clues to doctrines found in the New Testament. Almost every unchangeable principle of life is found in the early part of Scripture. vSODOM.

"And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.... And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram. And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people" (Gen 14:1-2; Gen 14:13-16).

Since social corruption is the harbinger of political overthrow, Chedorlaomer, the king of Persia, today Iran, was used of God to afflict Sodom because of her base wickedness.

Lot found himself in the midst of the overthrow, without resource, with an aching heart and a wrecked happiness, his paradise having come to a sudden fearful end. How could it be that a righteous man would be found in such a plight? Was it because of worldliness? or lust for gain? or living without an altar? Yes, and added to this outward calamity, even worse, a bad conscience. Not many years had passed since coming out of Egypt. It was the time now to call upon God for

deliverance, but God did not seem to be in all of his thoughts.

Abram, living in the place of safety and friendship with God, and with a good conscience, had nothing personally to do with Chedorlaomer. What would the king of Persia want with a few nomadic herdsmen dwelling in their tents? He was probably not even aware that there was such a person as Abram. But he was soon to learn in a sudden bloody defeat that Abram and Abram's God were near.

Why did Abram become involved in the battle with Chedorlaomer? Word came to him that his nephew Lot had been taken captive. The warm affection for his brother caused Abram to arm his trained servants and, with his confederates, to fall upon Chedorlaomer by night and rout the enemy. This seasonable action, full of wisdom and resource, saved Lot and his substance. At this time, Abram's life consisted of a tent and an altar, worship, and revelations from God. At Mamre he learned to apprehend these revelations with increasing clarity and accuracy, such being the case with one with a single eye. He remained in the place of his calling, in the highest part of it. The revelations from God to him were rich, sweet, and holy. His knowledge of God was intimate and deep. Abram's personal life was simple and happy, for he walked with God just as he hoped to do in the city for which he was looking. vTHE VALLEY OF SHAVEH.

"And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of shaveh, which is the king's dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all" (Gen 14:17-20).

What a vista is spread before our souls in the broad level plain called the king's dale in the valley of Shaveh! It teems with spiritual fruits, principles of righteousness and peace, and typical utterances which speak of later unfoldings of the full mind of God in the New Testament. As the king of Sodom made his way toward the place where Abram and his confederates were in possession of all the souls and spoils resulting from the victory over the four kings, there appeared another visitor. The Lord had sent Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God, the king of Salem, to meet Abram upon his return from the battle.

How vast the truth, in broad outlines, enclosed in the simple setting with the sudden brief appearance of a character hitherto entirely unknown! In this seasonable visit, Melchizedek brought forth bread and wine and said, "Blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he (Abram) gave him tithes of all (spoils)." The title, "Most High," is millennial. The coming millennial reign was set forth here in type by Melchizedek, King of righteousness, King of peace, Who will rule in righteousness while He dispenses blessing. (See Heb 7:1-28.) Abram was blessed of the greater.

Mysteries, revelations, and visions of truth flooded over Abram's soul. He it was who looked for a city with foundations whose Builder and Maker is God. The special representative of that city had now come to meet with Abram in the valley of Shaveh, bringing with him bread and wine.

What kind of armor was this that was brought to Abram? for armor it was, for a battle yet to be won, not against Chedorlaomer. No, he was already vanquished. This was against the wiles of

Satan himself.

Nothing would do to prepare Abram for this complete victory over the world except bread (perpetual strength and sustenance) and wine (continual joy) in the consciousness that the God Who was his Friend was the Possessor of heaven and earth. This proposes life and joy through a Mediator. Is it too much to say that Abram's vision was lifted far above the battlefield and the trophies which lay at his feet? In spirit was he not now reveling in the city that has foundations whose Builder and Maker is God?

"And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself" (Gen 14:21).

Melchizedek might disappear as mysteriously and quickly as he came, but not the effects of his words or his presence. How could Abram's soul leave those lofty heights to stoop to wages of iniquity! Communion with heaven colored everything with its proper hue. The temptation had vanished when Melchizedek had left the scene. Abram had been forewarned by God, so forearmed. Only grace will do in the paths of righteousness. When Satan comes with his wiles, our Melchizedek has already fortified us with the Word of God and visions of righteousness and peace, yea, its bread and wine, announcing the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth. We are dependent for divine guidance in everything.

"I will bless the LORD, who path given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons" (Psa 16:7).

"For thou past possessed my reins" (Psa 139:13). In the case before us, Abram's thoughts were right inasmuch as God possessed his reins. Besides, a man of God, a pilgrim, did not desire the spoils of war.

"Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth" (Isa 45:9). The Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, had already, long ago, blessed Abram and promised him that all was his earthly possession, but now he had the bread and wine. Abram alone rose above his calling.

Notice the elevation surrounding his answer to the king of Sodom: "And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me,... let them take their portion" (Gen 14:22-24).

Abram refused to be a conscience for others.

Dignity flows from communion, and liberty and elevation result from a personal waiting upon God for the next step of faith, with the ear tuned to hear His Words. A pilgrim, a heavenly stranger, fresh from the table of bread and wine, with Melchizedek presiding, was morally preserved in the path of righteousness.

"He that is of a merry heart bath a continual feast" (Pro 15:15).

Abram kept a good conscience (a merry heart). Communion is the feast. As a result of the meeting with Melchizedek Abram came forth with power over the world.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1Jn 5:4).

04. Shield and Exceeding Great Reward

Shield and Exceeding Great Reward

"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen 15:1).

There must have remained a certain uneasiness as to whether or not Chedorlaomer might return with vengeance. To dispel the least suspicion of this, God said, "I am thy shield." Because all spoils of victory were forfeited, God said, "I am thy... reward."

Continued communion gives constant comfort. This fellowship with God brings simplicity and rest of heart; one is not afraid of "sudden fear." The soul turns to occupation with heavenly things.

Immediately Abram answered, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?... lo, one born in my house is mine heir" (Gen 15:2-3).

He had no territory, no child, no heir only God, his Shield and exceeding great Reward.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which bath great recompence of reward" (heavenly) (Heb 10:35).

How wonderful to have any portion with God. To be so close to Him as to read His mind is in itself grace of a highest character. "What wilt thou give me?" Abram had servants many, but no son, no one to call him "father." Heaven is full of servants to do God's bidding; angels are at His beck and call. If He desired more, He would create more. But sons! He has one Son Who is His full delight, but He would like heaven to be full of children to call Him "Father." This Abram had spelled out in the query, "What wilt thou give me?"

There was no child to fill the home with joy; consequently, there was no heir. What would become of the promises? Divine affection drew the heart in a path in which there could not have been rest short of its object. Our heavenly home will not be a house of bondage.

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

What joy will fill heaven when we, with our Jesus Redeemer, enter with His introduction to the Father, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." (Heb 2:13).

Abram in communion was asking exactly what was in God's mind. He was quickly reminded that no servant would be his heir.

"But he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir... Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars,... So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it" (Gen 15:4-7).

These words were the oath of God to Abram.

Tremendous are the dimensions of God's providence; God cannot be debtor to anyone. Joy and peace are found in believing, not in seeing or doing.

Abram said, "Whereby shall I know?" Do not wonder at Abram when he asked, "Whereby shall I know?" but rather adore the love that bears with these frailties of ours. To have God is to have all; to be destitute of God is to be destitute indeed.

Why the delay in giving Abram a son? Why the delays in our lives? in the raising of Lazarus or Jairus' daughter? Because of the rich destiny in view! It is winter before spring, hunger before a feast.

What a tremendous work done in the soul of Abram! The art of educating man's spirit to the finest temper lies only with the "Father of spirits" (Heb 12:9), "God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num 16:22; Num 27:16). In human relationships, when the heart has found its rest in another, it can bear the test of delay and distance; how much more when a sense of trust lies between God and man.

Abram waxed strong in spirit; fully assured, he staggered not.

"Now faith is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For in the power of this the elders have obtained testimony" (Heb 11:1, N.T.). vSOMBER WARP, SILVER WOOF

"And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen 15:9-16).

Abram was to have his answer for the surety of his inheritance by oath and by blood. And God said, "Take me an heifer,... and a she goat,... and a ram,... and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." All except the birds were divided in the midst, one piece against another, with a path between those pieces leading to the city with foundations. "When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him." He went through the terror of death and its shadow in anticipation of the groans of God's people down through the ages. He defied the powers of darkness (fowls) in view of the sacrifice before him.

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmon ites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites" (Gen 15:17-21). When the sun went down, and it was dark, he

beheld a smoking furnace of affliction and a burning lamp giving light across the desert to the promised land. The same day the covenant assured Abram of his seed and the border of the inheritance. The sacrifice together with the oath made the covenant sure.

Abram watched with God. No explanation was needed, just trust. Can we trust God so? Do you know for sure that in that day your heart shall be satisfied, and fully so? "Could ye not watch with me one hour," hours that build spirit life? Do we have to be told this?

Time passed no answer. Abram drove away the vultures, symbolic of wicked spirits which would rob us of our confidence and joy. vHAGAR

"And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.... And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram" (Gen 16:3; Gen 16:15-16).

Ten years passed. The trip into Egypt had left its evil fruit which was the maidservant Hagar's child. Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. Natural resources had been resorted to, and now darkness covered Abram's soul because of his fall. Moral evil is not the subject here but rather substituting the flesh for God's power. Abram had lost, for a time, the truth of the all-sufficiency of God.

After this experience he was brought into reality with God with the depths of his soul probed, but since he was walking in the light he was given the sense of forgiveness. Although he was again brought into communion, there lingered a mixture of sadness and joy while the consciousness of truth deepened.

All of the saints' history is an exhibition of the hidden eternal counsels of the divine bosom, to be revealed later. Grace molds each act of the believer into that which will form his own character and will result in praise in that eternal day.

Thirteen more years passed; Abram was ninety-nine years old. We hear of no appearing on the part of God in the interval, while Abram was brought face to face with reality, feeling the full weight of what it is to walk by faith alone, fully trusting God for everything, not just saying so. These thirteen pensive years prepared Abram's and Sarai's hearts for the full, rich outpouring of all that prompted their hopes and expectations. The long patient life of faith was near its climax.

05. The Almighty God

The Almighty God

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.... This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.... And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.... And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him" (Gen 17:10;Gen 17:15-16;Gen 17:27;Gen 17:1-5). The Lord appeared to him for the fifth time saying, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." All of his resources were now in God. His name Abram, meaning "father of elevation," was changed to Abraham, "father of a great multitude," or "father of many nations," implying the fulfilling of God's promise to Abraham's seed. As Sarai, "my princess," was to be a mother of nations, she became Sarah, or "Princess." Abraham was entering more fully into the enjoyment of faith's maturity and had learned that it was the barren woman who was to be the mother of thousands, for God had said, "Sarah shall have a son." A new name means a new beginning.

"In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him" (Gen 17:26-27).

Circumcision (no confidence in the flesh), which included the entire family, followed before the judgment of the world (Gen 19:1-38).

06. A Formal Conference of God, Men and Angels

A Formal Conference of God, Men and Angels

"And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground" (Gen 18:1-2). This we believe to be the highest point in the experience of the pilgrim Abraham in his path of faith with its accompanying blessings. Here he shone brightly as the friend of God. The time of high noon indicated the brightest event to make up the ultimate of faith's journey to the city that has foundations. He at last reached the summit where, unbelief having dropped off, faith opened as a flower to the sun. It was maturity in purpose and obedience. The Lord appeared, not in vision, but as a Man walking among men. Abraham sat in his tent door; his wife was within. Where will the Lord find me when He comes; where will He find you? Hope deferred had made Abraham's heart sick, but the time of this was well nigh over; tears of joy would soon flow freely in sure hope of the promised destiny.

Three men stood nearby. Abraham ran to meet them and bowed himself. He said, "Pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant" (Gen 18:3-5). And they said, "Pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your heart; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant" (Gen 18:3-5) And they said, "So do, as thou hast said" (Gen 18:5).

What mutual confidence and joy! Were we to experience such a visitation, would it quicken our steps in loving service to our Lord? Would our tasks of faith gather an air of liberty and joy to be able to spread a feast of a pilgrim character for Him?

Apparently there was no outward indication of which one of the three was the Lord, but Abraham waited with propriety for the Lord to reveal His identity, and there was no fear, though Abraham knew which one was the Lord. Years of communion had brought clarity of spiritual vision and confidence.

"Perfect love casteth out fear: because fear path torment" (1Jn 4:18).

Naive hospitality was afforded this heavenly company beyond all of man's civilization and works religious or otherwise.

Most surely God valued Abraham's friendship. No great works seemed evident, yet Abraham's life as one of faith in its broad outlines has gone down in history through the ages for men to witness. Would it be easier for God to call a world into existence than to form an Abraham? This bespeaks God's greater works, more than physical creation.

"And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetch a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hosted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat" (Gen 18:6-8). The number three speaks of completeness in God's ways and purposes on the earth, fine meal speaks of Christ in His perfection in His service to His Father unto death, the calf sets forth communion on the ground of the death of Christ, and butter (cheese) and milk are pilgrims' fare.

Abraham stood by them under the tree while they did eat. All was completely acceptable and refreshing. "They did eat." These were heavenly guests at formal conference in an informal, pastoral, natural setting.

Abraham did not soon forget that visit. The great spreading oak to shadow them from the heat of noonday sun speaks of the cross, our protection from the coming wrath, removing the bitterness from life's pathway. The children of Israel murmured because the waters of Marah were bitter, but the tree cast into the waters made them sweet. (See Exo 15:1-27.) Christ on the cross took all of the bitterness. The ways of God are strange, yet rich. This was a taste of heaven on earth. Is not heaven the Person of Jesus and wherever He is? Was not this the city that Abraham looked for? The Lord's words must have burned within the hearts of Abraham and Sarah as He spake to them by the way. Such are felt, enjoyed, and cherished in the heart but cannot be told out.

Precious fellowship, heaven coming down to earth for a visit with a friend, confirmed and comforted Abraham's heart, practically, a display depicting happier days for both earth and heaven when all of God's works are finished. Then there will be communion between the heavenly and earthly inhabitants. The Lord asked, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent." (See Gen 18:9.)

"And he said,... Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.... Sarah laughed within herself... And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for the LORD" (Gen 18:10;Gen 18:14)?

Unbelief characterizes the natural heart and must be rebuked.

"Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh" (Gen 18:15).

Lying also must be rebuked. vTHE LAST NIGHT OF SODOM.

"Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do" (Gen 18:17)?

While Abraham's blessing was forthcoming, Lot was about to lose all. His enchanted ground was to be his ruin, a bitter end to a noble beginning. To sacrifice integrity for career is fatal, and to make an idol of talents is eternal loss.

Two angels went toward Sodom while Abraham stood yet before the Lord from the heights of Mamre and Hebron, pleading for Lot and any righteous in the city. Weakness lays the strongest claims to God. Abraham asked no blessing for himself, but, on a higher plane, interceded for

others. There were not ten righteous left in Sodom.

Abraham had led Lot down into Egypt. Sodom's valley appeared as the garden of the Lord to him, but ripened iniquity was to bring its judgment from heaven. Lot and Sodom had been warned previously, but they did not repent, and Lot himself sat in the gate of the city after being rescued during the battle with the kings. The city of base iniquity was still peaceful on the night before destruction. In the morning the angels hastened Lot saying, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain" (Gen 19:17).

"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them... and they shall not escape" (1Th 5:3). The destruction of Sodom was complete, picturing the fall of Christendom.

Charity would veil the remainder of Lot's life.

07. To the South Country

To the South Country

"And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife" (Gen 20:1-3).

There was no apparent reason for Abraham to go south from Hebron. What we do not at first understand often proves to be a worthy lesson for our souls.

There was lurking in the bosoms of Abraham and Sarah something that was evil and older than their knowledge of God. It must be brought to light and judged in its roots before they could have their son Isaac. In order to rightly know our God, we must discover something of ourselves. Only God knows the deep secrets of the heart, and man cannot understand his own way, let alone the depth of his own heart. Evil lies dormant in the bosom, even of a man of faith, yea, the father of faith. We shrink from the admission of this truth, but all must come out.

"There is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested" (Mark 4:22). An evil not judged at the roots must reappear to be judged, if not privately in the presence of God, then publicly. God used the heathen king Abimelech for this necessary work in Abraham's and Sarah's souls. Yes, Abraham must go down to the south country; only in that place was the right setting for it.

Abraham had said unto Abimelech that Sarah was his sister. Abimelech was reproved by God in a dream for taking Sarah into his own house.

"Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (Psa 105:15).

"Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me. He is my brother. And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee" (Gen 20:8-15).

Abimelech called Abraham and spoke to him, resulting in a full confession of his sin of untruth and its roots. It had been harbored for over sixty years, but now a full confession so humbling before the world was called for. This deceitful arrangement, built upon fear, had been carried with the couple day by day during the entire journey. It had been used before in Egypt but not judged.

Inward corruption never changes, but by the energy of a new life we mortify the deeds of the members which are upon the earth. There is, within, a nature which can never be changed and we will carry it until the Lord comes for us. By continual self-judgment we will be preserved from the old nature's acting in the way we observe in Abraham and Sarah. God did not need fleshly assistance to bear Abraham to his destiny.

Sarah was rebuked as well.

"And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: Behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved" (Gen 20:16).

"Thy brother" was a stinging rebuke. Is that not what she had said he was? "The thousand pieces of silver" shows the grace in which the restoration is accomplished. Faith may fail, but it never loses; it always gains in the end. vISAAC IS BORN.

'And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him" (Gen 21:1-2).

Abraham was one hundred years old when Isaac was born. Isaac was circumcised the eighth day.

"And Sarah said, God path made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me" (Gen 21:6).

What joy the sovereignty of God brings to man and to God Himself, especially when it is God's own heart that is to be satisfied with a Son in resurrection life; this we see here in type.

"And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen 21:9-12).

Abraham made a great feast the same day Isaac was weaned, and on this occasion Sarah saw Ishmael mocking. Here Sarah's faith and consciousness of election shone out. She said, "Cast out the bondwoman (Hagar) with her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." Isaac had a place in Abraham's house because he was the heir, Ishmael, only as long as he was obedient grace, and law with its ordinances typified. (See Gal 4:1-31.)

Hagar had been back in Abraham's house for thirteen years, but there had been no quarrels until Isaac was weaned. The flesh is incorrigible; flesh and spirit are incompatible. There could be no peace until the bondwoman and her son were cast out. The Jew is an outcast today as was Ishmael. "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Mat 19:30).

Subsequently the Gentile kings came to seek Abraham. He reproved them and made a covenant with them at Beersheba. vEVERLASTING GOD.

Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba and called upon the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. This last appearing of God to Abraham brought the supreme test of faith.

"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering.... And Abraham rose" (Gen 22:2-3).

God's voice was now too familiar to be mistaken. All of the learned virtues gathered in the path of faith were immediately marshalled in the mind of Abraham. This was to be a test of fidelity to the God of glory Who had called him; in finality, the maturity and practice of faith were now to coalesce. Did Abraham love his only son Isaac, in whom all of the long awaited promises rested, more than God Who had made all of the promises to him? Abraham well knew from wilderness experience that there would be no fulfilling of the promises in a world of sin. All must be found in resurrection.

Abraham had come a long way. The varied visions, communications, and appearings taught him in a way that few have ever discovered. To Abraham God was a God of resurrection; otherwise how would the promises be fulfilled? If it were not so, he would not have been given Isaac in the first place. Confidence and rest filled Abraham's bosom as he contemplated God's command. God never makes our way impossible.

Abraham obeyed. Isaac in type lay dead three days and three nights in the Father's purposes, although Isaac was personally spared. (See Heb 11:17-19.) We are given a dual picture: resurrection with substitution. God's own thoughts of His Son permeated the entire scene of death and resurrection. This mighty final work of redemption, in figure, the work that fills all things, brought glory to God in a new way. It was fulfilling this desire for children in His presence and providing a bride for Christ. It also laid the basis for the full restoration of Israel and the saved nations. This fulfilled the promise and the divine fiat that God created this world to be inhabited forever, and He will not forego His purpose. The present act of obedience on the part of Abraham, though heart-rending, was doing God's will to the extreme. The wound in the oyster had produced pearls.

"And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" (Gen 23:1-2).

Soon after, Sarah died, and the scene changed. It is one thing to do God's will, quite another to suffer it. Such tears brighten the rainbow of covenant blessings. There are no regrets in the path of faith. Abraham had proven himself to be the father of faith by unparalleled obedience and dependence in daily practice undergoing the most extreme tests.

Machpelah was a burial place for the dead out of Abraham's sight until resurrection. He took not another acre of ground, only enough to bury the dead. Later, all would belong to Abraham, not by promise only but by actual possession.

Abraham having left Ur, a stranger in the land of Canaan, made no terms with the Canaanite or the Perizzite, the flesh or the world. He found himself a total stranger to the sons of Heth. The call

of the God of glory was supreme. It demanded separation of the highest order. He left all of earth with no visible footprints, except for faith, yet he knew by promise, which had been verified by oath and blood by God, that resurrection would prove the results. His was intelligence with moral power, prudence in its fullest light. He knew what he was about. Virtue had been tested.

Abraham's companions in his pilgrimage were the Lord, angels, his tent, and his altar, also the mysteries and the counsels of God.

He was destined for dignities of noble purpose.

He was a type of the Kinsman-Redeemer of Israel and the father of faith for all people. Sarah and her children represent Israel. Keturah and her children form the image of Gentiles to people the millennial earth. To Christ all of His works were known from the beginning of the world, exhibited in the changeful incidents found in the life of Abraham.

Abraham shall live within the walls of the city that has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. There is no liberty like that of the heart which has given up all for Christ.

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