

Abram: The Friend of God

by William Kelly

Abram's call marks a change in God's dealings with man from a secret principle of grace to a public promise, and it is significant because it shows the principle of the call, which is separation to God, not just individual faith.

Scripture: Genesis 14:18, Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 5:5, Hebrews 7:1, Hebrews 7:11

Topics: "Faith And Grace", "Christ's Priesthood"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher delves into the remarkable account of Abram and Melchizedek in Genesis 14, highlighting the significance of Abram's call to be a public witness for God and the mysterious appearance of Melchizedek as a royal priest. The preacher emphasizes the importance of faith, dependence on God, and the power of grace in Abram's actions, contrasting them with Lot's self-seeking decisions. The sermon explores the prophetic type of Melchizedek pointing to the greater priesthood of Jesus Christ, who is both King of Righteousness and King of Peace. The preacher also discusses the unique priesthood of Melchizedek, the superiority of Christ's priesthood over Aaron's, and the eternal nature of Christ's priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.

Transcript

What we see in the word of God before this remarkable account of the call of Abram, though profitable surely for us, is also humbling; and none the less the more we think of it, and see what God has told us of man's sin and ruin, not merely as bringing on the flood, but as following it. What was to be done now? For God had hung out a sign in the very heavens that He would no longer visit the iniquity of the race as He had done in the deluge. There had been a secret principle of grace with God that He always acted on; but now this principle was to be brought out manifestly. What had made the difference in the case of Abel, of Enoch, or even Noah? It was grace that had flowed to them and wrought in them whatever was good and holy and true. But there is a new thing that comes out in the history now before us. It was to be no longer the favour of God in its hidden dealings.

Promise was to be thenceforth a public ground of action on the part of God. Is not this a most weighty and instructive change? God was no longer content that He should act after a secret sort. If He had Himself called souls without any one knowing it outside, now He would make the call distinct and plain, drawing to it the attention of friends and enemies: and this so definitely that it has been the invariable starting-point with God from that day to this. It was the call of God, no more secret but evident to all.

So we are told in this place: "Now Jehovah had said to 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." We are apt to pass over such a statement of the ways of God because of the tendency to confound what is a secret of grace with what is manifest. But Abram was called by God to a place of separation, so as to be manifest. This is the express point with which the chapter opens, and the great principle that God would have us now to weigh with all seriousness, as we read His word.

By Israel at Sinai the ground of law was taken. Yet God had called His people by grace out of Egypt; but they were, as most know, put (or put themselves) under the law. The consequence was that, however divine the principle was, it fell through in the case of the chosen nation. So again, God has now applied the self-same principle to the call of the church. There it is not (one need not say) a body put under law, but the very contrary, dealt with in sovereign grace. It is not merely mercy towards the soul, for this has always been true; but God has a body publicly called in this world, composed of such as are meant to be witnesses of His grace in Christ on high, just as much as Israel ought to have represented the law graven on stones and manifested it before the whole earth.

This will show, then, how early and wide the principle is. But the Lord begins, as you can easily understand, first of all with an individual; and there was great wisdom and much force in this. Long centuries after, it was the resource of the prophet Isaiah, impressed upon his heart by God when Israel was passing into a desperately low condition, and with the prophecy of still greater ruin at hand. How does he seek to comfort the people? With the fact that God called Abraham alone. He falls back upon what was the salient principle of God's dealing at this very time. It was as good as saying, "Be things as they may, count on the Lord. Impossible to be lower than that with which Israel began; for when God called and blessed at first, it was Abraham alone."

To what end was this? Not only that he himself should be blessed, but to be a blessing: and this not only to his own seed, but to others far and wide. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

In the earth and with men, as they are, such is the sole possible way of blessing. In the line of His call God brings out His promises, and there it is that His blessing is found and maintained. Man may, no doubt (not to say that he must, when put on the ground of law), end in more manifest ruin than ever; but the principle of His call is not only sound but invariably true. If there is to be blessing at all in a world that is ruined, it must be on the ground of one who comes out obedient to the call of God, not staying where he is, nor attempting to reform the evil in the midst of which he may be. God made it particularly manifest at this time; for it was now that the world for the first time had seen nations and families and tongues, all arranged in the elements of that which is in our day approaching its finally developed form. The world was no more as it had been before the flood; it was separated into its distinct nationalities. Government also had now been instituted. This was of course an outward mercy for the world. Wickedness was not to go on unpunished, iniquity must be restrained by the judge. God had accordingly given responsible charge on the earth to man who was thenceforth to curb evil in the world. He had authority for it from God. (Gen. 9)

But now that idolatry had entered (Joshua 24: 2), separation to God, the true God, comes in as the recognised place. Instead of having souls to walk individually with Him, although seeking to please Him by faith, God, from that day to this, takes up what was then a wholly new thing for man, that, if He is to be pleased or magnified, if His will is really to govern, it must be as separate to Himself, and not merely by our looking to Him individually where we are, and in the midst of all our national associations. God looks for more now; He calls out. Hence the force of the word here, "Get thee out," etc.

It is not simply "believe;" this was not at all the question put. The great object of faith was not brought out, though we find a type of the way of faith in Gen. 15 where Abram's faith is seen exercised on the word of promise that God gave him; but still it is not a question here of the gospel being sent out, nor of Christ being presented personally. It is God who separates to Himself, at His own word, a man who was in the midst of all that is evil -- his own family worshipping false gods like the rest. For although God had already marked off a certain part of the sons of Noah as preserved for blessing, and Shem particularly so -- that it might be proved it was in no way an after-thought, but God's purpose in all steadfastness and not depending on a certain part of mankind as in themselves better than others (though in fact piety was there); yet here too was the solemn fact that the family of Shem had gone into idolatry no less than others. In spite of the predicted purpose of God, Shem's sons had proved faithless. What next could be done? Was there no way of securing God's honour? This was the way: the call of God goes out in sovereign grace, separating to Himself a man no better than his fellows but avowedly involved in the idolatries of his fathers. "Get thee out of thy country . . . unto a land that I will show thee."

Now the first thing I would press is that faith is shown, not so much by following what others have received before, but in believing what God brings home now to one's own soul and for one's own path. For God has a will about each successive stage in all the varying phases of life, as evil itself grows and works in the world. Satan does not limit himself to the same snares of falsehood and sin, but becomes more and more subtle and determined in his plans. God looks for faith in His word accordingly. So in this case (I refer now to Shem's line) the very family that had whatever there was to hope for were fatally involved in his meshes just like other men. But God has a way, a blessed and worthy way, of vindicating Himself; and this is a way which, giving all the glory to Himself, faith at once feels is just what it ought to be. The call comes without the slightest ground for it in Abram himself. This we see to be perfectly consistent with the dealings of God. He meant the blessing to be in that line; He meant to take up this man and make him the father of the faithful; but he was evidently a child of the unfaithful, and no doubt an unfaithful child himself. The calling was, accordingly, of grace: God Himself called; and God, at the same time, was fitting this man for the place of blessing; and God had, before Abram was fitted for it, pronounced what it was in His heart to give him, so that it might be, not of Abram who deserved it, but of God that called him. It was grace. "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great."

The whole principle of the blessing as flowing out of the call of God had been manifested in a man distinctly separated to Him, and (I would add) called out without disturbing the arrangements of the world. There was no setting him up with a mightier sword in his hand to put down the workers of iniquity. The world was left, after having been arranged under the providence of God in separate families, nations, and tongues, but not till government by man was sanctioned by God. But there God's honour being completely set aside, and false gods worshipped, He separates under His promise of blessing the man who comes out at his call to the land He would show him.

This then is God's own blessed way -- one most effectual, as it is also peculiar to Himself; and on it in fact God has acted in our own call, whether to Himself or into the church. It is on my heart to dwell a little on the general truth of the call of Abram, so as to illustrate the way in which God connects the principle of the call with the promises and with the whole place of faith here below. It was much for God to say, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great." But there was another word, and this was especially dear to the heart of one so blessed himself. "Thou shalt be a blessing." This was to make him not only the object of grace, but the instrument of it. It was to give him communion with God Himself in the activity of His own goodness. "Thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless

thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (of course, on the earthly side); "and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

Abram then acts on the word of the Lord. "He departed, as Jehovah had spoken unto him." But there was more than one drawback. Lot his nephew went with him and we shall see the consequence of that. Further, Abram not only took Lot, "his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran," but in the chapter before we have a remarkable intimation not brought before us here. It was not that Abram took Terah, but that "Terah took Abram." This was not merely a hindrance, it was a false position as long as it lasted. It acted as an interference with the call of God; for although the call might seem to nature harsh, and that which no doubt man would have been quick to condemn, the word of God was plain -- "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." Abram does get out of his country, though hardly from his kindred; but instead of getting "out of his father's house," his father takes him. There was clearly an influence at work that was inconsistent with the call of God. It was not merely that Terah was with him; the Spirit of God has not put it so, and of course it was incompatible with due relationship that a man should or could be said to take his father. It was "Terah took Abram."

Here then was that which positively hindered the accomplishment of the will of God as long as Terah lived. The call of God should be paramount; but the honour due to a father who was not in it must oppose. "Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees." The simple fact is stated in Genesis 11; and one can see that the reason why it is stated there is this. It was purely a question of Abram acting from his own judgment, from himself, and not from the call of God, who therefore does not make it a part of Genesis 12. No doubt, the move was after the call of God spoken of in chapter 12, but inasmuch as it was not the accomplishment of His will, God puts it in the chapter of nature and providence (that is, Gen. 11) and not in that of grace and promise, Gen. 12. We have in chapter 11 simply a list of fathers and sons from the flood, and among the rest Abram and Nahor. Sarai is seen there with no child. This was nature; and had it simply been a question of nature, so it would always have been -- Sarai always barren. When grace begins to act, we find the dawning of hope in the heart of Abram (at any rate what we can now well understand to point in that direction); finally God gives the distinct word that Sarah shall have a child. But this was after grace begins to be developed. At first there is nothing of the sort, and it is here therefore we have the account of Terah taking his son Abram and coming as far as Haran, and dwelling there. Accordingly there also we have the days of Terah shown us, and Terah's death.

But now there is another side so distinct that, although the same facts are alluded to, God begins an entirely new unfolding of His mind. In chapter 12. He is not speaking of the family as viewed in nature but of His call. Although Abram believed in God, yet nature was at work and had its way. Accordingly God takes no notice of it here. Thus we see that what looks a great difficulty in the two chapters -- a thing which people have often put one against another -- is perfectly solved the moment we come to see that the one chapter is the story of the family in nature, the other is the secret of grace now made manifest.

"Now Jehovah had said to Abram, Get thee out." Note that so He "said to Abram," not to Terah. As long as Terah was there, he was the acting person, as indeed he had the claim of father; and if (not God but) you bring a father on to the ground of faith, what is the effect? If he is not in the call of God and you are, what must result from allowing your father's authority to have its way there? It swamps you. It is not that you raise him into the higher regions of faith, but that he drags you down into the quagmire of nature. This is what we may see in these two chapters; so that, spite of the blessed call of God, we have the fact brought

before us that Abram remains at Haran and fails to reach Canaan.

At length however "Terah died in Haran;" and what follows? We are told next (ver. 5) that "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." Now what a different tale! Not that everything was according to God, for there is no perfection save in One; but still Abram could now act and not before. Lot was his nephew only, and did not bar the way as his father had done. While he was alive along with him, Abram must needs be subject, but henceforth he was free. Lot might act selfishly and be an encumbrance; but his father, if there at all, must have a father's authority; and so it was. He found himself in a sort of half-way ground, and this was what compromise leads to. It is certainly no longer Ur of the Chaldees, but yet only Haran, and not Canaan. The fact brought before us in the previous chapter explains how it is he can get no farther. Terah, who was not in the call of God, was nevertheless the one who "took Abram" thus far, and Terah acted so positively as a hindrance, that, as long as he lived, Abram could never get on; but the moment that Terah is taken away, as we read, Abram took Sarai, etc., "and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came."

There is no failure, so far, in the accomplishment of the purpose of God. When they reach Canaan, what is it that God sets before us? "The Canaanite was then in the land" (ver. 6). Things were not yet according to God. It was not only that Abram's faith shows the weakness of man, but further, the state of Canaan was altogether opposed to that which befits the nature and proper purpose of God. It was not only that the world already left behind by the man of faith was still pursuing its idolatries; but if there were men on earth peculiarly under the curse of God, it was the very race that Satan planted in Canaan. "Cursed is Canaan." What a solemn thing, the meeting of the blessed one, about to be a blessing, with the cursed ones, that God would surely deal with in the day that was coming (and so accordingly we find)! Satan's object by it was no doubt to thwart the purpose of God: but it only gave Him the opportunity of carrying it more thoroughly and gloriously to the enemy's shame and everlasting contempt.

We never understand the importance of our walk here below, unless these two things are distinctly and stedfastly before us, not merely that we are objects of God's tender mercy and personal interest, but that we are called out to Himself, as well as to "the better country" that He has shown us. But He has told us too who has meanwhile usurped possession of it. The heavens are now opened, and we see by the Holy Ghost sent down thence Him who is on the throne of God, interceding for us as cleansed by His blood, and gone to prepare a place for us. The heavens were opened not merely for Him to enter as the victorious Saviour, but they are open still where He is exalted. This is the way in which He is now revealed to us. They will be open until the Lord has brought us there. I do not say that they will be closed after that, but that judgments will fall thence. In grace they are open for us to look now into. He whose blood opened them for us is the One on whom they opened, not for judgment, as we read once in Ezekiel 1, but, as in the very beginning of the New Testament (Matt. 3: 16), that God might express His delight in Him, His Son, the perfect man withal here below.

Let us remember then that we too are identified with God's great starting-point for Abram; we are called out, and blessed, to inherit and to be a blessing. Does the grace of it (and it is not the richest part of our blessing) fill our hearts at all times? Take for instance our ways as members of Christ's body, the church, etc. It is not merely that we come together to acknowledge His mercy to us, which of course we do. Thankfulness should be the first thought of the heart that has been opened by the grace of God. Who are we that now speak to God, looking up and singing praises? Sinners brought out from guiltier evil than that

out of which Abram was called. I can understand those who never had sin celebrating His praise, where sense of personal delivering grace is not the special character of their thank-offering before God. But who can understand a soul that is redeemed presuming to begin with anything but hearty thanksgiving for the mercy that has plucked him from destruction, and put him so that he can look up to God and magnify his Saviour? But whatever we begin with should not be the end for us. It is very right that we should feel evermore what it is to be the object of the tender mercy of God, in awakening our hearts and lips to thank Him; but we should go on to praise Him for what He is as well as own all He has done. For now we see how worthy He is, and can delight in what He is even apart from ourselves. The heart can thus go out in adoration of another and a higher character, in praise and blessing as well as thanksgiving.

But I was going to dwell upon another point. It is not only that we are blessed, and that the spring of thanksgiving is touched, and that praise flows forth from those that are blessed; but there is more than this, an activity of love that looks around according to the goodness we have learnt in Him, as well as love breaking out in praises as we look on high and see Him who in our midst praised and taught us to praise before He went there. So we see here: "Thou shalt be a blessing," and "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Take the occupation of the Lord's day. That which calls forth our hearts, is it only when we gather round the Lord at His supper? Has not such grace and truth as His furnished special occupation all through the day? I should say that its entire course has its calls and place no less than the assemblage at His table, and I say it the more because there is a danger of a little reaction. Time was when men used to think the chief thing worth hearing was a gospel sermon, and when they used often to bear a great deal that tried them to get what was not even a good sermon, longing to hear something that might help, comfort, and strengthen their souls. There are many Christians in that state still. Are we in the enjoyment of better blessings from God? Have we the sense of what His grace has done for us in heavenly places? But do we, as well, keep up the activity of His love in our souls? or are we settling down, content simply to give thanks for the blessing that we possess as children of God ?

Do you suppose that a person can be at the spring of blessing without also knowing more or less of joy in the power of its active going forth? Depend upon it that this is of great importance to the Christian as such and to the assembly; for it will always be found true, that if we are not going forth in the power of blessing, the world in its power of evil steals in upon us. There will be a withering influence that will show itself under perhaps fair forms. Do you say, why should I go and listen to the gospel? What have I to do with the message to the unconverted? You have, you ought to have, a great deal to do with it. You may not be a preacher; but is there no such thing as fellow-working? or even loving interest if not positive help? Are there no hearts that go forth with every word that is said by the evangelist, none to pray with him for every soul that listens, and especially for those awakened by the Spirit? I do say that we are called on, not to be as we once were, with our heads down and our eyes anxiously looking out, if haply we might get something to satisfy our starving souls. By grace we now know God to be no hard master, and we can in our measure see and enjoy the rich provision of His glory. We of all men then should not appear like the bold beggar that having got his morsel goes off therewith content. Can it be that this is what it has come to with any of us? Or that any soul would sanction such selfishness? Take care that we never seem to come short in this respect. Let us look to it that we put far from us every semblance of heeding only our own things but the things of Jesus Christ as to sinners as well as saints. If we value the things of our Lord in the church, so also let us not be slack in the gospel. Let us have this simply and fully before our hearts, to remember that we too have Abram's portion, not only as objects but as instruments and channels of blessing. For indeed it is meant that we should draw from the very spring of grace that is ever flowing, whether for the help of those who are already Christ's, or for those in that darkness out of which we have

been delivered by infinite mercy.

There is a fresh point I should point out. "Jehovah appeared unto Abram" -- He not only spoke but "appeared," language to me not casual, but intentional. "Jehovah appeared to Abram and said." How it was done, we do not know; but we do know what is written. All that we read the first time is that "Jehovah had said," but now we find "Jehovah appeared to Abram and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land." There is nothing vague any longer, but precise. It is not "a land that I will show thee," but "unto thy seed will I give this land." What is the consequence? There "he builded an altar unto Jehovah," and not this merely, but "unto Jehovah who appeared unto him." It is quite evident therefore to my mind that in this was the needful preliminary to worship, which necessarily awaits the manifestation of the Lord. Worship follows, when He has appeared, and the heart knows Him as He has made Himself known. So Abram, when Jehovah has not merely spoken but also appeared, builds an altar to Him.

Do we know how blessedly true this is in our Lord Jesus Christ? This is precisely what He was showing, but what the disciples were so dull to take in. You remember Philip saying, "Lord, show us the Father," when the Lord Jesus had been showing them the Father in His own self all the while here below. It is what the Holy Ghost soon after made real, not when Jesus was there, but after He had gone, that it might be completely a matter of faith, and that we who never saw but believe might have the joy no less. Need I say, that what the word of God gives us of our Lord Jesus Christ is incomparably more to us than if we had but seen Him ever so long with our bodily eyes? I hope we all really understand this; for it is of no slight moment. We can easily imagine what a wonderful thing it was to have looked on Him and to have heard Him; but no intelligent believer need hesitate to say that we have far more of Himself in and by the word than if we had seen and heard Him all through His life and ministry on earth without that word. Do we not appreciate this? If we believe it, let us give God thanks now as we shall for ever.

I will explain why this is so. Are your eyes and your ears as good as those of God? The word is not merely Peter's or Matthew's or John's impressions of the Lord, but God's truth, though no doubt He employed them to write it. Then think of the advantage we possess in having it not only perfectly but permanently, not left to the shifting sands of memory under the ebbs and flows of the heart, still less to anything before the eye for a passing moment. Here we have God's mind about Jesus faultlessly, completely, and imperishably, in the word of God.

And now is sent down the Spirit that we might see the Father in One who alone could make known the Father. What is the consequence? Wherever the heart surrenders itself to God as He manifests Himself, there is an altar built. This is by grace the way and the effect. It is not therefore the fact, observe, that we had the worship all at once. Not the least trace of it appears till now. Possibly Abram may have built altars on his pathway from Ur of the Chaldees to and in Haran; but this I do say that, if so, God makes nothing of it at all. The only altar up to this He mentions is now in Canaan after He had appeared to Abram. It may well be, in point of fact, the first altar that he ever erected; but of this we must be sure, that it was the first that God thought worth naming to us. What a lesson for our souls !

Abram was now in what answered to the heavenly land, and there the Lord gave a fresh manifestation of Himself. It is when the soul has reached this in faith, when (not merely His word and His work, but) the Lord Himself is personally known to us brought nigh to Him (for this is the point that it sets before us as a principle), that one truly worships. If He has brought me near Him and shown Himself to me in Christ, what can I do but use the altar built for His worship? For "we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle" -- they who prefer Jewish forms and shadows to Christ, now that He is come

and has wrought redemption and placed us as children before His God and Father.

But there is more than this. Abram "removed from thence;" but if he pitches his tent elsewhere, he none the less worships. Move or not, Abram has his altar, wherever he finds himself in the land of Canaan. "There he builded an altar to Jehovah, and called upon the name of Jehovah."

Alas! a new scene opens to us. "There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there." Did he ask Jehovah before going there? Did he spread the circumstances of the land before Him? Not a word is said implying it; and I think there is the strongest reason to gather from the silence of scripture that He did not. For its silence, if we are familiar with it, speaks to us no less than what it utters. God brings before us now the sad slip into Egypt of the man who, once called out in the face of difficulty and spite of hindrances which his own unbelief had brought in or allowed, had at last found himself in the place of blessing with God; but, there getting into trial, he goes unbidden into the place of the world's plenty. "There was famine in the land." Why did he not then lay all before Jehovah? Undoubtedly Canaan was not yet as it should be according to God; but had He not called him there? and could not He keep him there? Abram goes down to Egypt to sojourn in it without a word of guidance from Jehovah. It was the direction of common sense, "for the famine was grievous in the land." God states the fact without reserve; He never withholds the truth, albeit to the shame of those He loves.

"And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know thou art a fair woman to look upon; therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife; and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister." How solemn it is when a saint takes and perseveres in the downward path! It is not only now that he departs from the land that Jehovah had shown him, and given to his seed; that he is distressed just like a Gentile by the famine, and bound for a country (Egypt, figure of the world, as Canaan of heaven) where there was abundance without a word from God; but now, further, having put himself into these circumstances of nature, he falls even from its proprieties.

Indeed, I may ask, do you ever find a child of God taking the ground of nature without going below it? When the Christian deserts Christ to stand on character, wonder not if his character utterly fails. Is God with him in it? A Christian is called to be a witness not merely of justice and right but of Christ. Do you look for no more than honesty in a Christian? Where then is his testimony to the grace and truth of Christ? He is content to give up Christ if he is content to be only an honest man. "He does not want to be always praying and singing, preaching and bringing in his religion." To slight Christ thus is a solemn thing. I did not ask for his religion, but that he should manifest Christ. Is he ashamed of Him? Is his conduct such, his bearing such, that it would not do for Christ to be named by him? Is it not to be feared so? He does not like to name Christ, lest persons should ask, Who is this that talks so about Christ? He who by faith behaves in a way which becomes that excellent name does not shrink from speaking of Him. But the unfaithful Christian is content to be known among his own class as an honest man. Will this last since God is not with him? God upholds those who humbly confess Christ. To speak of Christ is to sound the silver trumpet of the Lord, who thereon will own and be with you; but you who do not sound His name, have you the Lord to protect you? Assuredly you will fail.

So it was with Abram at this time. He goes down without Jehovah directing his way, as he seems not to have called on His name: and in Egypt, sad to say, the father of the faithful is guilty of equivocation, with no purpose higher than that of protecting himself at the expense of his wife: not a noble place for a husband, nor a worthy use to make of his wife. But so it is, when one who ought to have been walking in

faith falls back on the slippery paths of his own fears and the world's favours.

See another result. Everything now flourishes outwardly. Abram had never been so rich. Had he ever been prospered before as now? Was it not the marked blessing of the Lord? "He had sheep and oxen, and he-asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she-asses and camels." We do not read of this in past times. But how was it all gained? Oh, if Abram had only now got before the Lord, if Abram had but placed himself before Him that appeared to him, not a single acquisition but would have been a wound in his heart, and the keener too as it was through the denial of his wife. Was this to live Christ?

The Lord nevertheless dealt in His own marvellous way; for He did not smite Abram, or even Abram's servants to thin them down, but "he plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues." How striking are the ways of the Lord, and how full of instruction for us! The righteous government of God was at work: for Pharaoh knew well enough that he had no right to take the woman, even if she were Abram's sister. He was taking advantage of his position to claim what did not belong to him. The issue is that, struck by the evident hand of God, Pharaoh calls Abram and finds out the truth. Now it was Abram's turn to feel. If Pharaoh was plagued, Abram was put to the blush: what a humiliation for him! The very world reproaches Abram. And what can he say? He came without God and he went without honour.

Abram quits Egypt. Pharaoh had learnt somewhat of God's righteous ways: what could he think of Abram? Were his riches to his credit? He had gravely compromised himself, and been rebuked by a heathen; but at least he is on the right road again. "He went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south," and afterwards goes to Bethel "unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first, and there Abram called on the name of Jehovah" (Gen. 13: 4).

Yet surely, brethren, that passage in Abram's life had not been in vain. Did not grace then as now cause all things to work for good to those who love God? No slight work was that which went on in Abram's soul. He had been compelled to review his conduct, and we see clearly that it was the Lord who brought him back to the point whence he ought never to have departed. Repenting before His sight he returns, and in due time and place is found again a worshipper. But it is in Canaan, not in Egypt, where scripture hints not a word at either tent or altar.

Lot now comes before us. If I do not dwell more on him now, let me remark at this juncture how nobly Abram comes out. There was a strife among their respective herdsmen; and what does Abram do? Lot was the nephew, he the uncle. To Abram, not to Lot, all had been promised; nevertheless, when dispute arises, he stands up for no rights of his. He had learned too well his wrongs. He had been down before the Lord, and is as far as possible from taking a high place, even with one who ought to have been subject.

But mark the blessedness of bowing before the Lord and of refusing to fight for our rights, however natural to the heart. The moment that Abram gives up to Lot, Jehovah appears again; and never was a gift in such distinct and large terms to man as that which He now gives to Abram. Lot "lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan," and chose the best of it. Now Jehovah says to Abram "after that Lot was separated from him, [that is, after he had taken possession of his ill-gotten gains,] Lift up now thine eyes" -- how blessed are the words of the Lord! -- "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."

How sweet for Abram to have trusted in the Lord, leaving all the question, though apparently with Lot, really with Jehovah! When shall we learn to be thus simple and confiding? Assuredly we shall also learn at

the same time that there never is a giving up of self that is not answered by the Lord, in His grace and in the sweet assurance of it to our souls, by a better gift still through Jesus Christ our Lord!

GENESIS 14.

I have contented myself now with reading the remarkable scene with which the Spirit of God closes the public history of Abram. We may, if permitted, look a little by and by at the beginning of that which is of a more private and personal nature; but we must now follow up the close of Abram's call with its consequences. It was intended to be of the most public nature in its effects, if not in the fact itself. As already shown, it was not that the secret choice of God was a new principle, -- He had always acted on the ground of election in His own mind; but Abram was a person chosen and called out to be a publicly separated witness. This helps us a little more to see the force of that often misunderstood chapter, Romans 11, where we have the figure of the olive tree introduced. Its root is the divine call of Abram into a separate place of privilege, and consequently of testimony on earth -- testimony that might be of an outward character simply, as in the case of the children of Israel, or rise to a higher object as Christians are responsible for now. But the Jews were what the chapter describes as the natural branches of the olive tree. Nevertheless it is plain that God's glory was for the time being connected with that very testimony; and our Lord Jesus Himself was pleased to go into it as minister of the circumcision, and we ourselves now form a part of it, grafted in there by the grace of God. It must be remembered that this is not at all the highest part of our testimony; and it is only referred to now for the purpose of illustrating the difference between what we have had, and what we may have in what follows.

From the beginning of Genesis 12 to the end of chapter 14 is the more public part of Abram's history, which illustrates the dealings of God, not so much with his soul, as bringing him out into a place of testimony for the glory of God here below. He is here seen therefore soon put to the proof; for this is a discipline from which no person escapes here below. It will presently be shown how this bears on the chapter just before us. But I mention it in order to remark, the more definitely, the difference between what we have had already, ending with chapter 14, and what begins in chapter 15.

Here the results soon appear of that which had already come out in the respective ways of Abram and Lot. What took place in the land of Canaan might seem to have not the smallest connection with the struggles of these powers of the earth. But a witness for God, let me remind my brethren, is a very important thing, both to Him who raised it up on the one hand, and to the enemy on the Other. Now we are slow to learn this. The first great lesson of a soul -- and that which our hearts feel most (at our starting-point at least) -- is when the mercy of God arrests us in the path of our folly, awakens us to our excessive danger, brings us to Himself through our Lord Jesus, and gives us then in peace to enjoy the grace wherein we stand. And there, practically, many of the children of God stop. But there is much more than this, and indeed this is not the first thing that comes out. For the main lesson we have here is very different from what we might have anticipated. If we had had to do with the history of Abram, I do not hesitate to say that we should have begun with Genesis 15. Ourselves believers, we might have thought first of his soul's need, and so of bringing him out distinctly as one quickened and then justified by faith. But God shows us here another thought. It is not as if all this and more is not all-important, and the gospel now makes it quite plain. But here God is pleased to give us first of all a general sketch of the public place of Abram. By "public" I mean what Abram was called out to be as a witness for God.

Now Lot, as we know, had chosen for himself. He coveted what seemed to be, and what I suppose really was, the fairest in the land. For as a single eye is very quick to discern that which concerns the glory of

Christ, a covetous one is sharp enough to see its own interest. But there is a truth, beloved friends, that some of us have to learn, deeply it may be, that it is better to trust the Lord's eyes than our own; and that although, no doubt, in the world shrewdness may discern much, yet the world at its best is but vanity and assuredly deceives those who love it most. Nor is it only true that God will expose its folly and evil in the day that is coming; for one of the precious lessons we have learnt from the word is, that now is the time when God deals with us in the way of government, just because we belong to Himself; and being in the public place of testimony for God brings us peculiarly under it. Hence, to illustrate practically what affects ourselves in connection with this, God has been pleased in His grace to put us who believe in His Son in a place not merely to gather blessing for our souls, now that by faith we are enjoying His salvation, but in our little measure to be identified with the glory of Christ in the world. Do we know what it is to be in the place of testimony for the truth of Christ? What is the consequence of it? That things which might once seem little become great, as the great have dwindled wonderfully. Thus the old definitions of great and little well-nigh disappear. And no wonder, as we find while God brings us, little as we are, into connection with His greatest things, on the other hand our little things (or that which flesh, when it wants its own way, would call the least) become of importance because they concern Christ and represent Him either truly or falsely.

Now it must have seemed to Lot a very natural thing to choose what would suit himself, as Abram appeared wholly indifferent where he went. At any rate thus he may have reasoned. Evidently there was not a thought of testimony for God or of faith in this. Abram shows in general one who walked in dependence on God. There was this difference in their character: not that there was not faith and practical righteousness in Lot, nor that there was not failure sometimes in Abram, for we see how clearly scripture has laid both before us: but for all that there was generally this marked difference, that in Lot we see one who profits by his opportunities, wherever he may be, while Abram shows us one who went out, as it is said, "not knowing whither he went." Would Lot have done this? I cannot conceive it. Lot, on the contrary, took good care where he was going, first with whom, and next, when alone, he looked well out for what would be useful to his cattle, that is, to himself. As Abram did not seem to be so very particular, Lot thought he would be; so he chose the best he could see. After all he made but a bad calculation, as men always do in such cases; just because they have come into the place of the testimony of God. Lot never thought of this. It did not enter his account; but God had Lot before Him, and He does not forget it.

And allow me to remind you, brethren, that we too are there. No doubt there are some that understand the truth better than others, having a graver sense of the conflict, and a more solemn feeling of responsibility to the Lord: but whether we have thought of it or not, whether we have weighed it passingly or gravely, there we are. And what is more, the world feels it, and, one may add further, Christians feel it; and therefore they are concerned and occupy themselves with all who are testifying to Christ in a way altogether disproportionate to their apparent importance. It might be a very simple soul, and perhaps ever so young, occupied with work of the humblest kind; but they feel all of them, that here is a person distinctly and avowedly identified with Christ before God and man. Consequently what might pass with others, and produce no remark or feeling at all, draws out at once the judgment of those that see and hear him. So we find in this very case: only here it is a more solemn thing, for in this chapter we have God marking, by what He brought about, and by what seemed altogether remote from what is before us, His decision about the matter.

This comes in, it may be observed, very abruptly. God leaves us to form a spiritual judgment as to the connection of it with what we have had before. For it is always by the Spirit of God, simply following His

guidance, that we are enabled to form a distinct and (in the measure of our faith) an assured judgment as to the lesson that God is showing us. Be this as it may, it came to pass in these days that there was war between the kings named. War doubtless was no such uncommon matter; but there was something very unusual in the results of this battle. God indeed ordered things so as to draw unmistakeably the attention of all to Himself. There was a lesson thereby shown to the world, as there was a lesson now taught to Lot, that ought not to be forgotten. I do not say that Lot did not fail afterwards; for he did. But there was a lesson in this which, if Lot overlooked it afterwards, God has preserved for our instruction now.

These kings then came to a conflict, which raged not at all in the far distant east of some of those engaged in the strife. God's witting hand brought it close to the spot where His witness walked. We see them in the vale of Sodom. There things came to an issue that seemed final, as it is said, "the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled and fell there, and they that remained fled to the mountain. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their victuals, and went their way." Now comes the connection with our story in verse 12. "And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son." Here we find no particular stress laid on, nor express reference to, any part of Lot's previous life. Why so? Because God looks for a spiritual understanding in His people. He has not told us the previous tale of chapter 13 in vain. He looks for our understanding why it was, without further explanation. Yet we may ask here why not Abram? Why Lot? "They took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods and departed." This might seem natural enough; but we shall see whether all could be merely natural before we have done with the chapter.

I do wish to impress it strongly as on my own mind, so on yours, my brethren: never forget that we as believers have to do with what is supernatural every day. In no case allow yourselves to be beaten out of the true groundwork of faith for yourselves, nor permit men of the world to drag you down from God's word to what they call "good common sense" -- an excellent thing for the world, but wholly short and misleading for the Christian in that which concerns God. And the simple reason is, that we are bound to walk by faith. It is our call. We are entitled to confide in God and His word. What to a man looks so foolish as that? If God is still "the unknown God" to the world, His ear is open to us.

There is a word the apostle uses which perhaps you may never have weighed well, never have had it so before you as to make an impression on your mind; and that is where scripture tells us that "every creature of God is sanctified to us by the word of God and prayer." ???????? is not the ordinary word for "prayer." There is a reason for that; because in 1 Timothy 4 it is not the expression of mere want. This indeed is not the idea at all. Ordinary prayer is the drawing near to God, and asking Him for what we have not got; but in this case it is clearly not that, because it is supposed we may have the thing in our possession. But is there therefore to be no going out of heart to God about it? Suppose now it is what we have actually in the house. Common sense would say, "You cannot ask God for what you have got."

The fact is, it is the expression of a heart open, not only for God to speak to us, which was always true, but for us to draw near to God. It is intercourse with God that is the point, and not only the expression of want: free, simple, happy, communication with God -- such is the idea. And this should be our thought and feeling and way in partaking of anything that God's mercy grants to us, whether we have it at the present moment or not. If we have it not before our eyes, it is before His eyes. He loves us, and cares for us -- why should we trouble? Does He really hear us as we speak to Him? We have only to bethink ourselves for a moment in order to rebuke our unbelief. But suppose we have the things needed: are we to be independent? God forbid. If there be no wants to present to God now, have you no wish to speak to God now? -- no sense of the blessing of God upon you? Do you not want to tell Him how greatly He loves you,

how truly He is caring for you? This is what is specified here; and in this sense to us every creature of God is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

The word translated "prayer" here, you may not have perceived, is the opening of this intercourse with God by which we can speak to Him about anything and everything -- even the commonest matters which concern us day by day. I refer to it because all this is very intimately connected with the strength of our testimony. Abram knew its principle well; but now God has revealed Himself incomparably more fully than in the days of Abram, and our familiarity with God ought to be in the measure of His communications to us. As it is said, "every creature of God is sanctified by the word of God." It must begin with Him. It is first He who speaks to us; then we speak to Him; and the consequence of His so speaking to us is that we freely speak to Him. It was just the want of simplicity and vigour, if not reality, the want of living thus before God, that enfeebled the testimony of Lot. Assuredly power of public testimony depends, after all, on faith in what is unseen, and the resulting intercourse that goes on between God and our souls.

Here it comes out plainly. God reminds us that Lot dwelt in Sodom.. This would at once disclose or recall what Lot's behaviour and unbelief had been; how little his soul could taste in daily life of "the word of God and prayer." Was there not the very reverse? It was not Lot standing only for God, but striving to care for himself. The consequence is, when the strife and turmoil of the battle between the powers of the world take place, there is an end of Lot's settling down for the present. But that which was no small rebuke to Lot was the occasion for Abram to come out as one who walked with God confiding in Him, and who shows us, too, that power of grace which rises above whatever had been personally wrong. There was no doubt about Lot's failure in testimony. But Abram thought nothing about his faults now. What he looked at was a righteous man (for no doubt Lot, spite of all, was righteous) swept away by the contending potsherds of the earth. This drew out his feelings of loving desire for Lot's rescue. "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."

We must not misuse such a fact as this. No doubt we do find, in the history not only of Abram but of Daniel and others, that which could be no kind of direction for the Christian now. Most of us know that to use the superior mind or the strong arm to deal with the world would be anything but suitable for a Christian; but then we must carefully remember that there are things which, though right enough morally, would be quite wrong for the Christian because he is brought into heavenly associations in Christ. This I hold to be a very important consideration for practice, as it is a grave principle to understand in scripture; because otherwise we get either into capricious laxity or into undue severity of judgment. We may begin to reason and conclude that this was a wrong thing on the part of Abram, because it does not become a Christian. If a line of action is clearly outside the path of Christ, does not this decide for us? What were the ways of our Lord when He was here, and what suits Him now (for it is with Him as He is that we are united) is the question for us. We have thus to use the light of Christ to see what is becoming for a Christian now; but it would be altogether a wrong measure to judge Abram by. God had not yet brought in any such unfolding of His mind as we have. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ; it was not fully uttered before. The true light had not shone, before which darkness fades away. Hence there are ways that not only were not wrong in Abram, but that God Himself was pleased to bless him in, regarded in those early days without even a sign of disapprobation; and no doubt this was one of them. I see no ground whatever to suppose that Abram had made any mistake, or acted wrongly, in employing these three hundred and more trained servants that were born in his house, with whom he pursued the retreating kings to 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." Have we not a very marked fruit of Abram's testimony here? Just as Lot had come to nothing, which was the end of his lending himself to his own thoughts, and of his desires unjudged; so on the other hand here was the power and honour of God with Abram. It was, I need not say, far from being a natural affair. Here were victorious kings marching home with their armies; and a private individual,? pilgrim and a stranger, was so led and strengthened of God, that the victors are vanquished in their turn and the faulty believer rescued.

But this gives the occasion now for a closing scene of the deepest possible interest in another way, and for one of our grandest types of that which will be displayed in our Lord Jesus at the end of the age. The New Testament makes grave and interesting use of it. "And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter . . . and Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God." It will be observed, there is an intentional abruptness in the introduction of the royal priest. It is with distinct design that the Holy Spirit introduces him without the slightest previous mention. He comes forward and he disappears from the scene in a like mysterious way. What are we to gather from this? That Melchizedek was an angel? That Melchizedek was an apparition of the Son of God? No more than it is Shem under a new name. There is no hint of such a disguise here or in any part of the scripture. Melchizedek was a priest, as he was also a king; scripture says so. But there is no ground to suppose that the peculiar manner in which he is here named indicates that there was more than a real and royal and priestly personage in Melchizedek himself. It is the way in which he is introduced by the hand of the Spirit of God that is so remarkable. There is no hint of anything angelic or divine in his person. And one whose ancestry or descendants are expressly hidden stands in full contrast with Shem. Again, he who met Moses on his coming out of Egypt, and who, under very important circumstances, counselled him in the wilderness, was both a priest and king. It was therefore in early days, by no means so uncommon a combination. Prophecy shows that it will be so again in our Lord Jesus, when He reigns over the earth. We may see the principle of it at any rate in David when he wears the linen ephod and dances before Jehovah. This was of course short of the reality; but it showed that even in the days of his throne in Israel, the glory of Jehovah was dearer to him in that which concerned the sanctuary than anything which touched his own person, about which Michal showed jealousy of unbelief fatal to herself. All these might be shadows; but the great and abiding reality is coming for the world, and the Lord Jesus is the One who alone will display it unfailingly. But still, as a matter of fact, there were men who were both kings and priests in those days of yore, and Melchizedek is one. Further, I see no reason to doubt that he was then living, a real king and priest, at this very time, and in this very quarter; but the Spirit of God introduces him in a way that becomes typically most striking, appearing on the scene and vanishing from it after a singular sort.

All this combination of facts was ordered of God for the purpose of making him so much the better a shadow of the glory of the Lord Jesus as the sole royal priest. The very meaning of the word is "king of righteousness," as the apostle Paul insists in Hebrews 7 and after that "king of peace," referring to his place of reign. The person, of course, was before the place. The name of the person was Melchizedek, that is, "king of righteousness," and his relation to the place was king of Salem, which means "peace." These facts the Spirit of God, by the apostle Paul, uses beautifully as a prefiguration of the glory of our Lord. It is true of His person, of that which is come and seen now; and this was particularly telling to a Jew, because the story is introduced in that part of scripture which every Jew acknowledged to be divine. If there was indeed any part which to his mind had supreme place in point of authority, it was the five books

of Moses; and here in the first of them, in the earliest section of the word of God, stands out this marvellous intervention of a person who appears after the stirring scenes of the defeated kings, and blesses returned and victorious Abram. Now the father of the faithful was no small personage in a Jew's estimation; he had naturally and rightly a very great place; but here comes one who, suddenly and strangely appearing, occupies an incontestably greater. To him Abram pays tithes, as he also confers blessing on Abram; and, beyond controversy, the sacred homage from the one and the blessing from the other alike imply the stranger's superiority over the patriarch.

The bearing of this can scarcely be exaggerated. It is a prophetic type. In that land there will be a mighty conflict at the end of this age; and in it the guilty people of the Lord will be involved; and when the victory seems to be won that sweeps them away, the mighty power of God by a greater than Abram will interfere. Then that blessed One whom we await, not merely for our own joy and glory in the heavens, but for changing the face of the earth and all things on it, will answer both to the victorious Abram and to the blessing Melchizedek. It is our Lord Jesus at His coming again, and this at the issue of the world's conflicts when all will be reversed to the glory of God.

This closes, we may see, the public testimony. Then will be another scene not so much of testimony as of the application of God's kingdom in power. For the Lord will bring in the kingdom when He comes in His glory. What is going on now unseen, to be then displayed in the kingdom, is proclaimed in testimony. It may be well to say so much here, as often the thoughts of many a child of God are not distinct about the place of Christ as the true Melchizedek.

It is plain that the priesthood in question is altogether peculiar, for Melchizedek offers no sacrifice, nor is there anything of intercession. He brings out bread and wine for man, without a word of sprinkling blood before God. And it is remarkable that, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which refers to Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, the moment we come to the exercise of the priesthood of Christ, Melchizedek is dropped, and Aaron is brought forward, and this is what makes the difficulty, though not to a spiritual mind. First of all our Lord is brought before us as the true priest. This is done as early as the end of Hebrews 2. In Hebrews 3 it is still pursued. Our Lord is evidently alluded to as answering to the type of both Moses and Aaron. In the end of chapter iv. Moses entirely disappears, and Aaron remains a type of Christ. But the point there is not at all what Melchizedek was doing, but intercession grounded upon sacrifice. It will be noticed that in this scene of Abram and Melchizedek there is neither one nor other of these things. Melchizedek does not offer up a sacrifice, whatever the ignorance of Fathers or Romanists may dream; it would have been entirely inappropriate here. Nor is there any such thing as intercession in a sanctuary. It is all public. We have seen throughout that the testimony had been public, and so here the action of the royal priest is of this character; whereas the very point of propitiation is that it goes up to God, and the efficacy of it simply to Him, though it may be for man here; and intercession is that which proceeds within the veil in the presence of God. Neither of these had any place in the scene before us.

But let us pursue for a little moment what we find in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to profit by this instance of the beautiful interlacings of the truth, seeing the way in which Old Testament facts are handled by the Holy Ghost in the New.

Aaron beyond doubt is prominently before the mind as the type of our Lord's priesthood in Hebrews 5. This closes with a digression, which goes through Hebrews 6, and then in Hebrews 7 Aaron is dropped, and Melchizedek introduced. What is the reason of so remarkable a break in the chain? It seems to me plain. The apostle wants to show the incontestable superiority of the priesthood of Christ to that of Aaron,

although Aaron might be the great high-priestly type of Christ. This he proves by the fact that of old a royal priest came out to Abram who gave him tithes of all and received his blessing. The head of a family like Abram was superior to his descendants by the common acknowledgment that a father is above his sons; so the fact that Aaron was only a branch of Levi, as Levi was of Abram, and that it was Abram himself who paid tithes, showed therefore his subjection to a greater than himself. Nay further, not only did Abram pay tithes to Melchizedek, but more than that, Melchizedek blessed him; and, as we are told, "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." The person that confers a blessing is greater than the person that receives it; and so it was that Abram did not pretend to bless Melchizedek. There was an act on Abram's part which implied subjection to Melchizedek, and an act on Melchizedek's part which implied superiority to Abram, giving a double illustration and witness of surpassing dignity.

Such is the argument in Hebrews 7 and nothing can be more complete in its place as against those who cried up the Aaronic priesthood to deny Christ. For now the apostle shows that Melchizedek was not merely a conspicuous personage of old, of the highest authority and with evident glory attached to him, a king and a priest; but, further, he is introduced by Moses in a most striking manner. As far as scripture tells about him, he has "neither beginning of days nor end of life." Not that he was not born, nor that he did not die, but that scripture says not a word about either; never alluding to children, any more than to his father or mother. So far as the history goes there is a blank as to all this. Scripture treats it with absolute silence in order to make him a type of the One, who, as Son of God, clearly had no father or mother, though He might, as born of the Virgin Mary, still be Son of God, as in fact He was; yet He would not have been Son of God, as born of Mary, if independently of this He had not been so in His own divine right and being. And thus it is evident that there was a deeper glory in the person of the Son of God, on which all the glory that was seen in this world hung, that this glory was eternal, and that it belonged to Him in the title of His own divine nature and person from eternity to eternity.

But the royal Psalmist also takes up the same truth hundreds of years after this scene of Abram and Melchizedek was over. Psalm 110. speaks of a certain person in quite as extraordinary a way; a man, David's son, whom nevertheless his inspired father, to the contradiction of mere human nature, owns as Lord, and calls Lord. And He whom David thus calls his Lord, though (as our Lord reminds the Jews) really his son, (the great and insuperable difficulty to unbelief,) takes a place quite peculiar to Himself on the throne of Jehovah.

And He is not merely there on the throne of God, but acknowledged to be priest. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." He is a priest like Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron: a truth of all-importance to rightly understand the Epistle to the Hebrews. I purposely dwell a little on this, because it is so extremely momentous that we should have simple faith in it, and due understanding of what is meant by it. The meaning is clearly this: -- in Aaron's case there was a succession, for his was a priesthood of dying men following each other; the clean opposite of what is said of Melchizedek, (viz. "that he liveth,")

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