÷**00 Abram: The Friend of God**

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Genesis 12, 13

Genesis 14

Genesis 15

Genesis 16

Genesis 17

Genesis 18

Genesis 19

Genesis 20

Genesis 21

Genesis 22

Genesis 23

Genesis 24

Genesis 25

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÷Genesis 12, 13.

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. (Genesis 9)

But now that idolatry had entered (*Jos 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 Genesis 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 stedfastness 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, Genesis 11) and not in that of grace and promise, Genesis 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 (*Mat 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 I 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 net smite Abram, or even Abram's servants to thin them down, but "he plagued Pharaoh and his house with greet 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 tine 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 withGenesis 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."  Ἔντευξις 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 Gad 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 beforeHis 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 Psalms 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 inHebrews 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. Psalms 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,") not a word being said in Genesis or elsewhere of his death. The apostle uses this as a type of One that ever lives in the fullest sense. Hence Melchizedek is brought before us as a suited type of Christ, who is for ever after that order, instead of dying like Aaron and his sons. Christ stands alone an undying Melchizedek and so needs no successor, the sole and sufficient priest, as the Christian knows.

Melchizedek is, however, soon dropped again. We have him introduced simply to show the glory of his person, and his superiority to Aaron, whether in life, not dying, or consequently alone, as needing no transfer of his functions to successors. But the moment we come to the actual unfolding of priesthood in application to the believer, the apostle takes up Aaron again, and drops Melchizedek. Why is this? The reason is obvious. Though He is the great Melchizedek, He is not acting in that quality yet. What is He doing now? He is interceding in the heavenly sanctuary before God, and this grounded on the propitiation once for all offered for our sins. What has this to do with Melchizedek? Nothing.

Thus you see how perfectly the truth hangs together, and how God uses the person for His own purposes, and then takes up an exercise wholly different. The truth is that the application of Melchizedek, not to the person of the Son in His superiority to Aaron, but to what He will do as Melchizedek, will be at the end of the age, and not before. The force of his bringing out bread and wine to Abram has nothing at all in common with our eating and drinking wine in the Lord's Supper; and it is extremely important to carry this in our minds distinctly and to understand the ground of it. Popery, being blind, has an immense hand in thus leading the blind into this ditch. One of the chief errors of the catholic system of old was applying things to the church which were promised to Israel, and so antedating the dealings of God. It is on this ground that Popery now claims to put down and rule the governments of the world. There is a time coming when the Lord will do so, reigning in Zion, but it will be when Christ takes the reins. The church is incompetent to do it in its present state, as it is also wholly foreign to the grace which is characteristic of the Christian. To suffer with the rejected Christ, while espoused as a chaste virgin to Him who is on high, and looking to reign with Him at His coming, alone suits the heavenly character of the church of God while on earth.

But when our Lord Jesus appears as Melchizedek by-and-by, then will be the day for our glory with Him; and the various traits here prefigured will coalesce in Him, not merely the sole dignity of the priest but the exercise of the priesthood in its character of blessing. Then will be the answer to Abram's putting down of the victorious powers of the world, the deliverance of the poor though faulty people of the Lord (shown by Lot), and finally the bringing out the symbol of what God gives not only for the sustenance of His people but for their joy — the bread and the wine of that day. So it is that the Lord will then act; for this will be one of the wonderful differences between the Lord Jesus as the priest on His throne and all others that have ever governed in this world. It is the sorrowful necessity of those that govern now that they must take the means of maintaining their dignity and grandeur from the people whom they govern; that even the poorest contribute to that which the world owns as greatness and majesty. It must be so; it is the necessity of earthly glory which never can rise above its source; for the haughtiest monarchy of the world is after all founded, whatever the sovereign gift and ordinance of God, on the least contributions of the least people on earth. But when creation is arranged according to the mind of God, and when His kingdom comes in its proper power and majesty, how different! It will be His prerogative to supply all. The instinctive sense of this was what made the people wish the Lord Jesus to be king when He was here below. When He miraculously fed the multitudes with bread, they as it were said, This is the kind of king we want — a king that will give us plenty of food without our working for it.

And doubtless the day is coming when the kingdom will be so ordered. That which the corrupt heart of man would like very well now, to avoid toiling in the sweat of his face, the Lord will give, according to His own goodness, when man is bowed down as well as broken and the riches of God's grace are no longer made the cloak of man's selfishness to His dishonour. This is one of the great distinctive features of that future kingdom, and Melchizedek shows it here. It is not only that there is food for the hungry, but he brings out bread and wine for the conquerors. That is, it is not merely the meeting of the necessities of man, but God acting after the victory is won according to His bounty and as is due to His own glory. And so it is that in the great day of the coming kingdom God will do these wonderful things on man for the earth. But mark His wise and righteous way — not before the cross, that is, the mighty work of the Son, is a fact; not before the Spirit of God has wrought to bring the souls of those very men into the acknowledgment of Him that wrought it, and into the appreciation of the value of that atonement which was accomplished on the cross. God will have wrought this work in the remnant of His people whom He will make a strong nation, when the day arrives for the Lord Jesus to manifest Himself in the exercise of His Melchizedek priesthood — not merely to be the anti-typical Melchizedek, for this He is now.

At present He is not yet bestowing His Melchizedek favours; but when that day comes, it will be, I repeat, for the exercise of the priesthood, and not merely the glory of that one sole priest. The need of man too will be secured in that day. The people will be prepared for blessing. If there will be power and glory, it will be the portion of a people poor in spirit, confessedly contrite and broken down, sensible of the mercy that God had shown their souls, and made honest enough by grace to confess their sins, a people in short that will have found all their boast in that Saviour whom they once despised and in that which was their abhorrence. Then it will not be a base and selfish seeking of what merely suits themselves and allows them to vegetate in idleness. Not so; but it is the day for the King to lavish what He has Himself wrought, and for God to manifest what was ever in His heart. For God has always longed to bless men; but He awaits the day when He can righteously as well as freely bless them. Alas! man has never yet been in the state wherein he can be blessed. For to bless him when his heart is at enmity to God, where would be the good of it for man, not to speak of God? Would it not be, on the contrary, the grossest mockery to pour out blessing on man who, being unrenewed and unrepentant, must after all be cast into hell? Such is the state of every man naturally; no showers of blessing from above, if this were all, could change the soil. In his natural state he is not fit for heaven, nor even for the earth under the reign of our Lord Jesus, but only to be cast into the place that is prepared for the devil and his angels. But in the day that is coming the Lord will have a people born of God, washed every whit clean, and rescued out of the hand of the spoiler, by His own redeeming grace and power; and then we see the Lord Jesus bringing out all that will manifest the goodness of God and glory of God, making the heart of man to rejoice before Him, and his face glad for ever. Then shall man know what is the God he has to do with, when he sees reversed and set aside and rooted out every vestige of Satan's old lie that God does not take pleasure in goodness and in lavishing the fruits of it on man here below.

This then is the scene that is soon to open, surpassing fable indeed, and yet true. Mark too how all confirms it in the context. Christ is the antitype of Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and afterwards of peace. Then will be the day of peace founded on righteousness. But further He is the "priest of the most high God." Glorious title! It is not merely "Jehovah," nor merely "Almighty." The almightiness of God comes out in protecting His poor pilgrims; and His character of Jehovah, as of old in judgment when the people were under the first covenant, so under the second, particularly when He shows Himself the unchangeable God, who cleaves to His purpose of blessing a people that were alas! changeable more than all others on the earth. But "the most high God " — what is its force? Just this. When all other oracles are dumb, when every false god becomes, like Dagon, a fallen and dishonoured stump before the true ark and Him whose glory dwells there, then and then for the first time, since Satan foisted idol-worship into the world, shall every idol vanish out of it, and their worshippers be ashamed before the only true God. Then shall God have His place as "the most high God."

Yet He is not only this, but "the possessor of heaven and earth." When will that be, and what will display His possession of heaven and earth? We all know He is so now in real title; but when is the due testimony to it on the earth? Where the power that enforces it? As far as one sees, man is the possessor of the earth now; and if one bows to scripture, who can deny that the devil is the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air? It is only faith can say that God is really so; but in that day it will be evident to all. His possession of heaven and earth will be manifest when the Lord Jesus comes. For whence does He come? Not from Bethlehem then, but from heaven. He will come from God's right hand and put down all contrary powers here below, and the heavens and earth, long severed, will be manifestly at one. The mind of heaven will be no longer as now in contrast with the mind of the earth. Then will come the reconciler, the blessed One who will unite, for God's glory and under His own sway, "all things, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth" — even in Him "in whom we have obtained an inheritance."

This then is the evident meaning of the glorious foreshadowing brought before us in this divine tale of Melchizedek.

I need dwell no more on the history, except to point out one moral feature, the beautiful manner in which Abram, thus blessed, and deeply affected by both God's dealings on the one hand and this remarkable confirmation of his faith on the other, answers the king of Sodom, who, feeling all thankfulness for the mighty intervention of divine power through Abram, offers unsought to give Abram the goods. But Abram at once shows us that faith is more generous still, knowing what it is to be rich toward God, and refusing to tarnish His testimony by anything that would enable the king of Sodom to say, "I have made Abram rich." At the same time he pleads for the others. Whatever may be the self-renouncing grace of Abram, he in the largeness of his heart forgets not what is due to those who had not his faith. He asks for Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, who had helped him. It was only and quite right that they should participate in the spoil.

I need not spend many words in exploding the petty and nauseous hypothesis which regards the whole chapter, the battle of the kings and the interview of Melchizedek and Abram, as a traditional patch worked in at this point. Certainly there is a discriminating use of the divine names in the different portions of Genesis as everywhere in Scripture even to the Revelation of John in the New Testament; but only the credulity of an infidel could have thence been induced to believe that Genesis, any more than the Revelation, is a compilation of distinct documents by differing writers.

A rationalist may be learned; but he is necessarily ignorant of God's mind in Scripture, as his false principle leads him to deny it, and hence not even to seek it, as the believer does who sees in the word of God the Spirit's testimony to Christ.

÷Genesis 15.

There is a sensible difference between the portion we are entering on now, as compared with the chapters we have had before us. They have given not only a distinct, but also, as it appears to me, within their own line, a complete view of that side of the truth which it was in the mind of the Spirit of God to convey. In this way chapters 12, 13 and 14 form a whole; and, as we have already seen, the great thing there before God was the call of Abram, and its consequences from first to last, the public step that He was Himself taking in His own ways, in having a man, not only walking by faith, as others had done before, but set apart openly to Himself as none had ever been before. I do not mean merely separate spiritually now, for no doubt Abel was so, to begin at the beginning. No one can doubt that, before the difference between him and Cain, or the terrible issue came out into view, the moral distance between the first brothers had been existing, and was felt, not only by themselves, but by every one else. It is plain that Cain's own spirit found it intolerable; and it was just this conviction which he resented, and which carried him to lift up, first his hand in violence against his brother, then his voice in irreverence and rebellion against God, as his heart had been a stranger to Him all through.

Here is another thing. For the first time we see the efficacious principle of a separate witness, to whom God conveyed a promise, and a promise too that had to do not only with what was unseen but with what all could see, after coming out at God's word. The latter was indeed the earlier of the two; for Hebrews 11 shows us that, first of all, Abram was actuated by faith in leaving the country to which he belonged, and when he came into the land that God promised to give him,then his eyes were lifted higher still. Thus does the Spirit of God show us the introduction of the great principle which God has never given up since, but has always been carrying out. He set it publicly before Israel in an earthly way, and now He is giving it effect after a heavenly sort. This seems to be the subject of chapters 12, 13, 14. That it is concluded there is manifest from this, that we have a scene which brings distinctly before us the last great conflict — the battle between the kings of the earth, and the victory which the man of faith enjoys by the power of God, even over the powers previously victorious. In short, it is there we have the type of the great "Priest upon his throne" in Melchizedek, active toward God as well as man, blessing man in the name of the "most high God," and blessing the "most high God" on the part of man. All this will assuredly find its due place and season when Christ appears in glory.

To this I have referred in a brief summary, to show you that there is a complete whole in these chapters, starting with the call, and ending with the glory; so that we have the general public picture of the life of faith, with its worship, its drawbacks, failure, and recovery; the disclosure of the earthly mind too, its covetousness, and its disasters; faith's triumph over the world it had left behind, and the sudden appearing of Him who will display the glory of God in the blessing of man, and the harmony of heaven and earth; all brought before us within the compass of these three chapters.

But what follows seems rather to come back again, and make a new start. That this is true is most evident from Genesis 15, as compared with those before it, and indeed it relieves one of no little difficulty when seen to be so intended by the Spirit. For if it be viewed simply as a continuance of the former chapters, would it not be very extraordinary to hear how Abram is justified by faith? There is naturally, therefore, a fresh beginning. Of course, it is not denied for a moment that what took place at this time did literally occur after the scene with Melchizedek; but we are now speaking of the ulterior and deeper aim which the Spirit of God had in recording these matters. It is a question not only of facts, but of God's mind in His word; and we are seeking to regard it as a divinely given source of profit for ourselves, and of gathering from the Lord why it is; for we may with reverence inquire, and indeed are bound to inquire, seeing this is the way in which we grow in the knowledge of the mind of God.

Why then, we ask, does the Spirit of God introduce the theme at this particular place? It appears to me that here we have a fresh start, and another course of divine lessons for our souls, in looking at the new dealing with God with His servant. And it will be shown further that there is a series, as it is not merely an isolated fact; but! just as we saw in what went before, a chain of circumstances all connected one with another, and completing the subject as a whole. A similar principle governs here as there. There is this remarkable difference, that here we come to what is far more personal, as one may call it. We have no longer public testimony. What we have had bears this character right through from first to last. But here another thing is impressed on us, and very important in its place — that we are not merely witnesses. Here, accordingly, personal faith comes first before us.

Some of us must be more or less aware of the danger to the soul from being so occupied with that which is public as to neglect what is personal. Take, for instance, the gathering together of the saints to the Lord's name — our assembling around His table. Who does not know that, however precious the privilege, however closely bound up with the Lord's glory, however full of comfort, and blessing, and growth to our souls, if used aright, there remains much which is not a question of testimony, but of the exercise of faith individually, carrying one more into God's presence, and intercourse between Him and our souls?

Here, at any rate, in the wonderful book before us, begins a new series of instruction: God is showing His own dealings with the soul of Abram, not viewing him so much as a witness for Him before others. He is looked at alone as in his house, but, above all, with God. Every one could see when Abram had left his country, and set out for a promised land; they could see too that he sometimes failed for a season to accomplish what was before him. And it is all most instructive. Then, again, his pitching his tent, or rearing an altar, was all visible, and meant to be so. So, further, the victory over the powers of the world was that which men generally could not only hear of but feel: it was a real and public testimony. But had this been all, it would not have met what God meant to give, and what He loves to give, for the blessing of the soul. There is such a thing as living too much in the public walk and activity of a saint, to the neglect of that which is more personal. This seems precisely what the Spirit of God enters into here from chapter 15 — the dealings of God with the soul individually, beginning with its wants, but leading on to a far deeper communion with Himself.

The first thing to notice by the way is, "After these things." This is the usual way of marking off a new division or a fresh subject. You will find a similar expression at another and similar section inGenesis 22. There clearly begins a line of things quite distinct from what preceded. So it is here. "After these things the word of Jehovah came unto Abram." We have not had. this expression before, although we have had "Jehovah said to Abram." What makes it more remarkable is, that in the counterpart of it in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 7), we are told that "the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham" at that very time. Thus it is the more striking, because, although He did appear, it is not so said in Genesis 12. It was according to the mind of God only to speak of His speaking to Abram. Of course it remains perfectly true that He did appear, but not a word of it is mentioned in the history, which adds indeed to the point of it, by the seventh verse of the same chapter, where it is distinctly declared that God appeared to him; and worship is thus grounded on it, that is, on the positive revelation of God to his soul, and not merely on a revelation from God. Such, too, is the form in which God presents that which has come out now in Christ our Lord. There the Father was. showing Himself in Him. We are called to the knowledge of the Father and the Son, and truly our fellowship is with both, the Holy Ghost being the power that gives the enjoyment of it. Thus it is not merely His words we have, but the showing of Himself. So one of the disciples said, "Show us the Father," though this indeed He was ever doing, but they were dull to see it. An hour was coming, however, when they should see it. This was the hour for christian worship, which is the answer of the heart, the precious and spontaneous effect of the revelation of God to the soul.

Here then, as one sees, is a new form we have not had before. It is not merely that Jehovah "said," still less that Jehovah "appeared," but, suitably to the fresh lesson of the Spirit of God, "After these things the word of Jehovah came unto Abram." What "the word" calls for is faith. There we discern at once the reason of it; and faith is the groundwork of all dealings between the soul and God. As, on the one hand, it is "the word of Jehovah" that came to Abram; so on the other, faith answers to His word; and this is the point of truth illustrated here.

But there is another trait noticeable, the wisdom of God in not always putting — indeed we may say never — the highest truth first. He thinks of the soul's need. This is of great moral interest. Even if it were the Lord Jesus from heaven speaking to Saul of Tarsus, still after all He is dealing first with his conscience, though by the light of the glory in Himself. There might be that which Saul, afterwards pondering, enters into far more deeply than when he was converted; but the thing that was blessed to his soul was a divine person, yet a man in heaven, judging all, but in perfect grace, and not something that supplied merely a wonder for the mind to be occupied with. This was not the point. He was made nothing of before the Lord. No flesh may glory. One can glory, but only in the Lord. And so I find here. This scene may not be at all so deep, high, or large in its character as what follows, but it just marks the way of the Lord in dealing with the soul to justify it.

The truth is, when the "word of Jehovah" comes to a man, it not only finds wants but awakens them. Such is its just fruit. It is not merely that we are needy. The present case of Abram was not that of one disturbed and anxious about its condition. Abram long ago had been quickened of God, and indeed had walked in His ways, as we know, for many years before this; but God was pleased to make the chapter that comes before us the first of a new series for the opening of His truth in the more hidden and personal life of His servant. The first thing seen here is that He sets him in perfect confidence in Himself.

"Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." No doubt there was a beautiful suitability in this revelation after what had just passed. Abram had refused what the world had to give, and God graciously owns this with complacency, and announces Himself his sufficient reward. If God were his shield, Abram need not fear the jealousy of the Canaanite, nor even the hostile reprisals of the kings he had defeated, nor yet from any other quarter. "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." God would be true to His own word. Here was a bulwark of protection, and source of supply, at once secured to His servant. But mark the effect. It awakens the sense of wants, and draws out too the expression of those wants. If Abram had long felt in secret any such desire, there is no reason to suppose that he had ever told it out to God before. Now he does. God had given him the land of promise, but with this he was not content, and God meant that he should have more. His unfolding Himself to him in this new way leads Abram to breathe out what he had perhaps never defined to himself before. He was not content with the general terms God had hitherto used to him. He says, "Lord Jehovah, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" Where was the value of God's being ever so great a reward, if after all he was childless, "and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" What matter the lands he might have, if all was to go to his servant?

Now I do not say that this is by any means the highest point of Abram's faith; on the contrary, it seems to me far from what we see not long after. But still there was reality, and this is assuredly one point of moment for us here — that God would always have us in the truth of our state, whatever this may be. Suppose a person is not at ease about his sins, let him not gloss it over. If God is dealing with his soul, He brings it clearly out If to be fully blessed, the person is made as unhappy as he can be, and in fact the same grace which gives to the soul the assurance that God blots out and forgives also brings the soul to look at its own sins to the very depth. So again, yet more, supposing a person is clear enough about his forgiveness, still he may be troubled about the sin that dwells in him. This is another exercise for souls. But, whatever the occasion, God will always have reality; and though He encourages in grace, that He begins with it is what we find in His dealing with Abram now. He sounds Abram's wishes and thoughts, and He brings out from his lips what was at the bottom of his heart. He who had the promises was not satisfied, because he had not a son to inherit all that God had given him. And so he takes this place — "Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir."

Soon the word of Jehovah comes to him again. "This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." And then he is taken abroad, and bid to "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them; and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in Jehovah, and he counted it to him for righteousness" — that very fruitful scripture, which the New Testament uses over and over again for the most important purposes. In all these, however, it will be observed, that the object is to meet the soul at the starting-point individually, which is exactly what I am showing in the account of Abram, though in fact the thing occurred in Abram's history after he had been a believer some time. Still, even the New Testament shows that life is not justification, so that the truth abides substantially alike everywhere. But even though quickened, a person cannot go on stedfastly, or enter into the mind of God fully, until he is clear as to the grave point of righteousness. This too gives us an instructive lesson for ourselves in having to do with others. It makes us feel the incomparable mercy that God has shown us in this respect; for if there is one thing that He has been pleased to bring out into distinctness, and to give the simplest soul to enjoy through faith in Christ and His work, it is that personal freedom, and deliverance from every question, which it is our privilege now to enjoy; and I believe that a greater mercy there cannot possibly be for the believer individually.

Very likely what first arrested one was something quite different. It may have been with us as it was with Abram. Many of those called out in our day were brought into and occupied at first with the public ways of God. What we had understood as the church was learnt to be a mere ruin. We had received from God truth as to His own will and counsels about us, as Abram had; but God wrought, and powerfully too, in another way. Not of course that any one could assume in such a state to have more than a very partial insight into God's mind in that respect. But this one may say, that unless a soul be at one time or another — perhaps not always at the start — brought into clearance, into thorough enjoyment of its own place by grace through faith, the public walk of faith in testimony and worship will not always possess its charm, still less will the soul always hold it in power for the Lord's glory. The real reason, one will find, why souls (and not infrequently, grievous to say) slip out of the place of witness to Christ, is that they have never been thoroughly broken down as individuals. They have never really been brought into that which would make the preciousness of Christ alone, and liberty by and in Him, enjoyed by their souls. They have slurred over the great matter of personal clearance with God. The public life, in short, has been not only that on which the soul first entered but where it abides, and this entails an unconscious escaping from the question of finding and getting the answer to our wants personally with God.

Now this seems to me of no small moment, not only for ourselves, but also in dealing with the persons we meet from day to day. Were it only a question of what is public, it would not bear the stamp of the truth of God. It might be true, but still there would be something wanting for spirituality of soul.

I believe it, therefore, to be a matter of profound thankfulness to our God that He has not only brought out from His word the path of faith in worship and public walk, and given some few to enter into it more or less, but He has brought the same souls into the liberty with which Christ makes free. Doubtless there are differences of apprehension, and there must be so among the people of God; we are not all equally spiritual or simple. But it remains true that God has of late wrought so that we should by grace enjoy both these aspects of the truth, the public and the personal, and that the very same testimony which on one side of it has made clear to us what is publicly for the glory of the name of the Lord Jesus, has brought the word of God unto our souls to establish us in His righteousness more clearly, and with greater power, than we ever knew before we trod that public place of testimony. Can I not appeal to the souls that read these words for the truth of them?

But as some despise what is public in desire for the supply of personal need, so others may merge all in what is public. There is danger, therefore, on either side. The general testimony may expose to the danger of neglecting the more personal part of the truth. As we see, it was not so with Abram; and it is of great consequence that we should look to this for ourselves, if we are not in perfect peace, and for souls generally.

Never assume that those who bear the Lord's name in Christendom are personally clear before God. If they are in thorough departure from the mind of God ecclesiastically, they are just as ignorant and unestablished as to the soul. It is a good thing to bring them out of all that hinders them; but seek far more than that. Do not fail to probe the soul as to the consciousness of its place with God. Do not be content that they should hear a little of what is meant by the assembly; that they should see the importance of what it is to worship the Father in spirit and in truth. This is well, and also most important; but there is a nearer want, which may never have been fully faced and met. Can the person take the place now of standing before God in calm and constant confidence, without spot or stain? Does he know what it is (for that is the form the truth takes for us) to be not only justified by faith, but dead to sin, and crucified to the world? Sometimes, through unwillingness to offend, or assumption that a believer must know, we are apt to slur over these matters, just as if, because they have taken a public stand, all the rest must be settled. Often it has never been so; and very generally, if not always, it will turn out that those who have slipped aside from the testimony are men that never enjoyed the individual clearance of their souls. "That day" may show that all who have departed from what is due to the name of the Lord Jesus were weak personally. Indeed, if we ourselves come to search, looking back, and weigh that which they have talked, or (it may be) preached, do we not see ground enough to infer that there had always been a lack there? No wonder that the public walk failed, if the personal faith was never according to the just measure of the truth of God.

This then is the prominent point here; and you will observe that in this chapter Abram does not rise above the answer to his wants. Let none slight what is so needful and important in its season. It is no use to be asking for great things, if there be an unsatisfied want that is near the heart; and this was the case with Abram. Undoubtedly God meant all through to have given him a son; nevertheless He would have Abram's heart thoroughly searched, and sends His word purposely to bring out what was there, meets him where he is, answers the faith that was exercised, and gives him further enlargement, with a token by which he should know that he should inherit the land. Thus his heart is first drawn out about a son, and if a son, then an heir. The inheritance follows, though after intervening sorrow and trial.

"And he said unto him, I am Jehovah that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord Jehovah, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? 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 turtle-dove, 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 carcase Abram drove them away" (vers. 7-11). It was of course no question of expiation here, but of confirming the divine grant of the inheritance; and in the character and variety of the animals slain God (as it seems to me) took into account the weakness of faith that asked the sign. He does not decline to give Abram the bond that he asked, or to make all sure by death. (Compare *Jer 34:18-19*) But it was not to be made good without tribulation as well as patience on the part of the seed. "And when the sun was going down," more followed for his discipline and our instruction, which was very appropriate as a sign of this: "a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a horror of great darkness fell upon him." You see it is not one that stands in the light of God, but one that lingered in the region of his own wants, and of all the sorrow that belongs to wants connected with such a world and such a state.

"And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, 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 (vers. 13-16).

Ultimately we find the land of promise secured to Abram as punctually as in a map. "When the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (ver. 17). Jehovah knew what was in Abram's mind, and so He enters into this covenant — "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 Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites" (vers. 18-21).

Throughout the chapter, then, it is what man wanted, and this made it a suited scene for illustrating justification. It was not God appearing, but the word that came, and Abram believed, and his faith was counted to him for righteousness. Jehovah had adapted His word to bring this about by saying, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Then Abram asks and has the promise of a son and heir out of his own bowels, his seed to be as the stars for number. The pledge follows whereby he should know his inheritance of Canaan. It is sealed by a sacrifice; and the horror of great darkness which fell on sleeping Abram seems to be in keeping with the prophecy of affliction for his seed in a strange land, however surely Jehovah would judge the nation they should serve, and they in due time come again to Canaan when the iniquity of the Amorites was ripe for divine vengeance. So it was in fact as we all know.

A smoking furnace and a lamp of fire passing between the pieces point to this too, while the same day Jehovah covenants with Abram, marking the limits of the land and the devoted races of Canaan. Throughout it is the wants of man on the earth, and God securing the answer, in His grace, by sacrificial death. It is the earthly people to be delivered by judgment on their enemies in and out of the land. Those who fall under the judicial dealings of the Lord are met in grace with definite pledges for their tried faith; and the prophetic word, excellent as it is for all, casts its light as from a lamp on the dreary scene of man's lawlessness where the sword of the Lord clears the way for the sceptre according to His mind. In none of these passages do we see the counsels of grace for heavenly glory. It is first the individual justified by faith; and next the people to pass through tribulation, but to be saved at the end of God's allotted time.

÷Genesis 16.

But Abram did not know how to wait; and Sarai takes no happy part in the action of this chapter. It is first "that which is natural," though we can also add, "afterward that which is spiritual." Flesh is impatient, and seeks at once the accomplishment in its own way. She proposes her Egyptian bondrnaid, Hagar, and, Abram hearkening instead of walking by faith, the maid conceives, and her mistress is despised. The Epistle to the Galatians gives the certain clue to what we else might never have understood. It is the covenant of Sinai which she represents, answering to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. The law works not peace but wrath, not the accomplishment of the promise but fleshly pride, and a child born in sorrow who cannot be heir. What a contrast to blessing and praise through the royal priest in chapter 14, or the altars of chapters 12, 13! If the justified man take up the law (save to convict others), no wonder if the issue be disappointment on all hands. Such is the solemn admonition of our chapter. The law is good if one use it lawfully; but it is not applied rightly to righteous persons, but to lawless. The believer has no more to do with it for himself now, than Abram then should have taken Hagar. It is interesting to observe that as Hagar was really of Egypt and a slave, so she typically is mount Sinai in Arabia, the covenant that genders to bondage (Galatians 4). The flesh, the world, and the law work together, and the gospel delivers the believer from all by the death of Christ, as unbelief exposes to mischief from them all.

÷Genesis 17.

But now we come to another scene of a wholly different nature. "When Abram was ninety years old and nine, Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be thou perfect." What a change! We see here that it is no longer Abram bringing out what was concealed in his own heart, but God unfolding Himself with a greater fulness than He had ever been pleased to do before with Abram or indeed any one else. Here is the then characteristic revelation of Himself, and farther than this none of the patriarchs ever advanced. El Shaddai (God Almighty) is the substance of the distinctive truth on which the fathers flourished. Here was that which especially became their joy and their source of strength. This they learned in the face of all difficulties and of every foe. "I am the Almighty God."

We must not look at these words merely from the blessedness into which we are brought. It were well to reflect how such a revelation must have told on Abram. He had just before this been proving how feeble he was, and how little he could see before him. He had experienced the danger of listening to his own wife. What ill-feeling followed as the immediate consequence and what trouble there was likely to be in store! Now we have God revealing Himself, though of course in a grace suitable to those He was blessing. Still it is not in view of man's wants on earth, as in chapter 15. There, as we have seen, Abram had been faithful, he had not only conquered the enemy's power but refused the world's honour in his jealousy for the Lord; who thereon speaks to him, and, if one may so say, rewards him. Abram accordingly asks according to his own measure. He thinks of what would be sweet and comforting for him then, but it was connected with himself; and so, again, what the Lord shows him is a vista, bright in the end, connected with his seed and with the land which was to be their own. It was all consequently of a comparatively narrow character, gliding into prophecy as to Israel and the land. Not so here, and for the simple reason that now there is a still deeper lesson to be taught and learnt.

It is not failure by the way; this we have had in chapter 16. It is not merely want supplied, most true and important in its place, and useless to be slurred over. How vain to ignore what we do lack, and talk of things we do not feel! Abram brought out what he felt, and God met him there most abundantly.

But now there is far more than this; not what Abram feels or wants, but what God wanted for him and loved to give him. God therefore imparts the richest revelation ever made known up to that time. "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." What was the consequence? No horror of deep darkness follows now, no deep sleep falls on him here. "Abram fell on his face;" nor was this all: "God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations." Those enumerated in the end of chapter 15 were the enemies, the races that had usurped the land and were to be subdued; but now a far higher range of things opens. Abram should have a child, and be the father "of many nations." It is evident therefore that the circle is immensely enlarged, and all in pure grace. Abram has not asked a word; nor does he seek any pledge or token.

It is not Abram now that presents what God had, as it were, suggested and drawn out of him, what was then in his heart, and what was of importance to be forced out because it was there. Far other things are here. Abram had been humbled, feeling his weakness and his foolishness, and Sarai's too. Accordingly God now, out of nothing but His own grace, unveils Himself in this special manner: "I am the Almighty God: walk before me and be thou perfect." If He was the Almighty God, it was not merely a question of enemies now. Not a single word is said about them. It would have been unsuitable at this time to have talked of putting down this or that people. They do not require God's almightiness to deal with them; and Abram had already counted on His power upon this fresh revelation of Himself; and surely not in vain. But He needed to be the Almighty God to bung about the blessedness He is here speaking of. The connection of El Shaddai, I repeat, is not with putting down foes, but, wonderful to say, with Abram's walk before Him! "Be thou perfect."

What an introduction of Abram to new privileges! What a groundwork to go on! There he was, a stranger, surrounded by those who wished him evil, and after having just proved his own weakness. No matter what all else might be: "I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect; and I will make my covenant between me and thee." Is it not intensely personal too? All the questions that could rise up as a matter of trial, all thoughts of disappointment, have now disappeared. God had already met his wants as a man; and if these had not been perfectly met, would there have been the same suitability in this fresh vision? But they were: the void for his heart would be filled; nothing in this respect could trouble more. The one thing that remained lacking for Abram's present comfort, a son and heir, God would take in hand. His wife's expedient had only brought sorrow on them all by her haste. He had everything else. But now he leaves all in the hands of God, who here speaks after a wonderful way.

After God has brought in Himself in His almightiness before Abram, He speaks of the land for ever given to him and to his seed. But not a word of this in the first instance. It was of all importance to Abram that there should not be a word about his prospects till after the revelation of God Himself. God does not even say, "I am thy God." He does not connect Himself with Abram in any such way. The first word here was the simple revelation, "I am the Almighty God." On this Abram's heart rests. It is not Abram seeking it of himself with God, but God unfolding Himself to Abram. Such is the great thought, and this as "the Almighty." "I will make a covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." How it was to be He does not yet explain; but it follows in due time.

Then see the effect on Abram. He never felt so overwhelmed in the presence of God, just because he had never been so near Him in spirit before. "He fell upon his face, and God talked with him." Yes, Abram is in the dust before Him. It is not worship at the altar, nor a sacrifice to secure a promised gift, but communion: God deigns to talk with Abram. His falling on his face is not conviction of sin, or darkness of soul, but lowliness before God. He is really far nearer God practically than in Genesis 15, and can confide more simply in His word. Then he had unsettled questions: then too a horror of darkness; and failure ensued in chapter 16. But here is the blessing of Abram personally, the establishment of an everlasting covenant between himself and his seed, and the promise of many nations and kings.

Notice further the expression of communion. "God talked with him." It is so put purposely by the Spirit of God; for He had nowhere else used this language before. It serves, I have no doubt, expressly to show nearness of intercourse; and a very weighty thing it is. Such is the force we see in 1 Timothy 4, where we are told of the wondrous place into which we are brought, far beyond that of Abram (though the scene we have before us may be viewed as a kind of premonition and shadow of it), that "every creature of God is good," — "for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer," that is, by free intercourse with God in His grace.

Here in Abram's history we have it. If the "word of God" comes in Genesis 15 and in the chapter which follows, as we have seen, now we have this familiar intercourse with God in chapter 17. The word "prayer" in *1Ti 4:5*, as is well known, is not the ordinary expression of wants. It is not the word for supplication; which has its own place and a very important one too. However blessed we may be, we never get out of that need here below. Were any one to assume now that, because we have intimacy of fellowship in Christ, we cease to be in the place of need, and no longer are called to persevere in prayer as the expression of our dependence on God, need one say what a dishonour to Him is done, and what a downfall must be at hand? But still there is something more than prayer; there is the enjoyment of intercourse; and where souls do not enter into this, where they cannot get near enough to God, so to speak, and do not habituate their souls to His talking to them in His word, and their free pleading before Him, which is what the Christian is entitled to now (I am not speaking of formally kneeling down and presenting our needs, but of being able to draw near to God and speak about everything), there is a great lack in the private personal life of the Christian.

It is well to note that the intercourse in the scene before us is the fruit of God's revealing Himself more perfectly to the soul. Thus all was founded, not on a fresh start taken by man, but on His gracious ways with the soul. It is far from the vain idea of a self-consecration, or the higher life that men prate about, however one may share their protest against the habit of others to go on sinning with a measure of contentment, or at least with a sense of necessity that so it must be. The reverse is seen here; even God's unfolding Himself by a fuller revelation of His name. He was making Himself known in a way that never was heard of before. It is one thing for man to summon up from his own mind what he would say to God; quite another what God says about Himself as the suited revelation for the blessing of a man's soul. Here there can be no doubt about its character. He appears to Abram, and says "I am the Almighty God." He does not even say He is the Almighty God to him. It was not called for.

When a soul is young in the ways of grace, God links Himself with him, vouchsafing various helps to the soul that yet knows Him feebly, unable to enjoy Him unless He stretches out His hand to. help the struggling sinking soul. But it is not so here. Abram did not want it at present. He had learned both about himself and about God, and he shows the profit of it here. Now that God says "I am the Almighty God," it is enough for Abram. No doubt He adds, "I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly," but the way in which He reveals Himself is not so much what He was to Abram, but what He is in Himself. When justified by faith, we are entitled to enjoy this. We can joy in God (not only in the blessing but in the Blesser) through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore it is that, though in the first dealings of God with our souls there is no one that has not found it an immense thing to know Him as Father — the "babes" (*1Jn 2:13*) being distinguished by this very thing, they "know the Father," and there being no Christian who does not enjoy Him as such, DO matter how long he may be in the ways of the Lord — yet I am persuaded that when a soul advances in the knowledge of divine things, there comes out, not merely the cleaving to Him as Father, but the ability to "joy in God."

But if one has to do with worldly men, they do not know what you mean when one speaks of God as his Father, save as the Father of everybody. They use this which is true to deny His special relationship to the Christian. It is then no small thing for the soul to know that "God is my Father," in the Spirit to cry, Abba Father; but it is another thing, where all questions are settled, and we are able peacefully to enjoy Him as God. This is assuredly of great moment and will be found to be true in the ways of God with our own souls. It is evident that our Lord Jesus meant that we should find and enjoy it; for if we refer to the message on the resurrection day, He says, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father" — but this is not all — "and to my God and your God." I do not believe it is possible to enjoy "His God and our God" until we have known what it is to look up with perfect rest in Christ and in conscious relation to God as "His Father and our Father." In short all true real believing enjoyment of God as such follows the enjoyment of the Father.

As long as there remains a single question unsettled, there will always be a shrinking from God as such. Note the calmness of Abram here. He can enter, without anything to come between, into what God is in Himself as "the Almighty God." But further, it is said, "God talked with him;" not "the Almighty" nor "Jehovah," but "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 I have made thee."

Not merely has the patriarch a new name given him, but mark how everything rises now. It is not only the land where the Kenites and others dwelt, but "I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee; and I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant." It is not then alone that there is such an immensely greater sphere opened out for the hopes of Abraham, but the time also is unlimited. It is an "everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger." God had not forgotten the lesser gift in presence of greater things — "all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

Observe too another thing that goes along with this. No longer now does Abraham ask for a token whereby he should know that he is to inherit the land. Not a word of the kind is dropped. But God speaks of the seal of circumcision. It is not now something outside him, as we saw in the dead animals of chapter 15, but "Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations. 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." What does it mean? Flesh mortified before God; the sentence of death put on man in His sight, and this in Abram's own person as well as in his seed afterwards.

Circumcision here accordingly is not introduced in a legal way, any more than the sabbath inGenesis 2. It is really the answer in man to the grace of God. It is that which God has made the Christian's portion in our Lord Jesus, that "circumcision without hands," which God has given us in Him, for in Him we are circumcised. It is not the death of a victim now, but every child of Abraham takes the place of death by this sign, which typically sets forth our death with Christ, the perfect deliverance of the individual as dead with Him. Until one knows what it is to be thus dead, there is no possibility of enjoying what it is to be free unto God. What a precious thing it is that this is precisely what God has made true in an incomparably better way to us now, bringing us into the calm and peaceful enjoyment of Himself, with the certainty that everything that is offensive to God — our very nature as children of Adam has the sentence of death on it, not only pronounced but executed! This is what one knows now as a Christian. It is no longer a sign, precious as this was to Abraham (and I pretend not to say how far he entered into it), but we are entitled to understand its truth; it is a part of the wonderful blessing in Christ that God has given us. It is not merely His meeting our wants; for I do not believe when it is a question simply of wants, that a soul ever enters into the sense of personal liberty and deliverance. But after having Christ for all our need and wretchedness, there is the further blessing that He is bringing us into, living intercourse with Himself now. We require a sound and solid basis for this; and God has given it to us in our death with Christ.

But this also you may observe: it is not our asking for a token. Who would have looked for such a thing as to be dead with Christ, or risen with Christ? Never did such a thought enter the heart of man. It is all God's grace, His own perfect wisdom and goodness to our souls. Yet is it all the fruit of the work of Christ Jesus our Lord. It is not merely a man risen; persons had been raised from the dead: but what was this to Christ being raised? They would all have to die again. But now we have got to the knowledge of resurrection in a wholly different and far superior way to this, for Christ rose, breaking the power of death for us, and we shall experience it soon as the consequence of that which He has done already. As dead and risen with Christ, we are waiting for a resurrection like His from among the dead, or a change, which is the same thing practically — when we shall be with Him, and be like Him, endued with the same incorruptness and glory according to the power of His resurrection.

But he that had obtained such favour was moved for the child of the bondwoman and said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee!" If Sarai was to be thenceforward Sarah, to become nations, and kings to be of her, though he and she were no better than dead, why should not Ishmael share the covenant? But nay: the child of promise and of the free-woman is the one with whom God establishes His covenant, though Ishmael for Abraham's sake goes not without His blessing, begets twelve princes, and becomes a great nation. And the selfsame day Abraham is circumcised, Ishmael and every male born in his house or bought with his money (vers. 25-27). Thus fall the reasonings of a saint, and God's will alone stands, even in blessing outside the covenant of promise. Even there no flesh shall glory in His presence. In no case is it improved but passes under sentence of death.

May the Lord, then, give our own souls to enter into these wondrous lessons of God, whether they be the public ones for a life of testimony, or the individual ones for personal intercourse with God!

÷Genesis 18.

The portion read now is founded a good deal upon the previous chapter, and the general train runs on to the end of Genesis 21. We can see at a glance that Genesis 22 introduces a series of truths altogether new. The distinctive mark already mentioned, "After these things," makes a decided break, a fresh start in thought; and you will observe how completely this is the fact, because there it is not only an altogether new train of communications from God, but also of a different character. The death and resurrection of the promised son are brought before us in a figure, and all the other dealings of God that are founded on this grave fact; as for instance the passing away for the time of the covenant of grace with Israel in Sarah, and the call of the bride in Genesis 24.

Of course I do not mean to enter on these subjects just now; but I make the remark in order to help persons to read the scriptures for themselves, that they may have a clearer understanding of the order of these things, and have more fixed in their souls the consciousness that it is the word of God, and not the thoughts of ingenious men, really a matter of divine truth, and altogether independent of anybody's fancies. This I hold to be a capital point for the children of God, particularly in these days; that they may have a distinct ground to go on, not only for their own souls, but also in case of being challenged by others. For there are those who, not knowing the truth, are the more ready to doubt the reality of the blessing which they do not themselves enjoy. They have the miserable desire to spoil the happiness to which they are themselves strangers. Hence we cannot be too simple. Besides this, we do well to seek to be thoroughly established in the truth that we receive — to see how it is all bound up with the personal work of Christ, as well as revealed in the word of God, foreshadowed in the Old Testament and clearly set out in the New.

In this case then the communication is in a measure founded on chapter 17, which we saw introduced an unfolding of God's name in a way that was an advance on all before. But in this case it was not as with Jacob, where he sought to know the name of God, who withheld His name. Indeed the difference is remarkable. With Abraham there was more ease, and God begins to speak out plainly. Not but that Jacob was afterwards brought to hear God unfolding the very same name of "the Almighty God;" but to Abraham it was brought out at once. There was no such thing as the desire — still less was there any "wrestling." Abraham, on the other hand, intercedes with Him; and indeed "wrestling" is not exactly the word that would be suitable to the character of Abraham's intercourse with God. It was both more peaceful and of a higher character. In Jacob's case there was immense activity of nature. I do not mean sin, of course, but nature in its best sense, that is, domestic affection. The love of family was exceedingly strong in Jacob's case: no one of the patriarchs seems more marked by it than Jacob. It is not meant of course that either lacked in this way, for they did not. Witness in Isaac a character remarkable for his home attachments, with a life more equable than Jacob's.

Abraham, however, had this distinguishing feature, that he was a man who very simply went to God about everything as it rose. Consequently God could act more freely and immediately in His dealings with him. There was not so much that required first to be broken down, as we find in Jacob's case: how often he must be made nothing of before God could be revealed! Therefore it was comparatively late in the history of Jacob before God made His name known to him. To Abraham, as we saw, Jehovah appeared, and opened out His name, unasked, as the "Almighty God;" and there followed the making of the covenant, which supposed the death of the flesh, the express figure of that which we now know in its truth and power in Christ; would that so wondrous a weapon of deliverance from all on that score were well wielded by all saints t What a source of trial, difficulty, and perplexity, do the great mass of God's children find through not knowing it! For, as many know, it is not in their case a question so much of the faith that overcomes the world, as it is really doubt about their own personal clearance before God. He that is dead is justified from sin, but this they do not perceive. They are as yet under law. But we have seen that here circumcision is not at all connected with the law, but, on the contrary, with that covenant God made in grace long before it. It is the sign of blessing God was to give in Christ Himself. Circumcision is viewed as the type of the complete setting aside of the flesh before God. This is what we have had in Genesis 17. Now we enter on a further activity of God, and its consequences, which are carried on to chapter 21.

Here again the Lord appears, though we may notice this special feature about it now, that He leaves it to Abraham to find out Who was visiting him. There is no outward token of the majesty of His presence — no special intimation betrays Who was there. It is also to be noticed that on this occasion the Lord personally came, attended by two others, who, no doubt, were outwardly much like Himself. He deigned to take the appearance of a man; as it is said, "He (Abraham) lift up his eyes, and looked, and lo, three men stood by him." We have no reason to suppose that it was in such a manner that God was pleased to appear to His servant oh former occasions. It was a dealing with Abraham, founded on what went immediately before in chapter 17, but having its own distinct character. This is preserved throughout.

"When he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door." He was one of those who, like Lot in the next chapter, had an ungrudging hospitality, which had its reward in this, that, ready as they were to receive those who looked but strangers, they were really entertaining "angels unawares." Nay, more: this present occasion was the most remarkable entertainment ever enjoyed by any on the earth until Jesus came. Some might count it even more wonderful than that; because the Lord Jesus, being pleased by being born of a woman to become a man and to tabernacle amongst us, came down habitually into human circumstances as a man with men. I do not doubt, however, that, in all these manifestations of the Lord in the Old Testament, we are to understand the Son of God was the one manifested. Not only was He pleased to come in the appearance of a man, which may have been the case on other occasions also, as seen in the history of Noah, Gideon, and others; but here it is said there were three men, meaning by this of course what they seemed to the eyes of men. The peculiar privilege here was that God Himself deigned to be the guest of Abraham: yea, and more than that, for He treats him as His intimate, stamping on the patriarch for ever that remarkable designation, "the friend of God," which is founded on this very chapter. Assuredly the circumstances are such, that we do well to look into them with care.

Abraham then "bowed himself toward the ground" — as far as we are told, not knowing at first who the three were. But God is gracious to His people, and leads on step by step. We can see at a glance whose grace it was that put into the heart of Abram the habit of what we might call indiscriminate generosity and kindness; and this readiness is the more to be observed as it was the part of one called out to be separate to the Lord. A grave and important lesson it is for us in this respect, that the man who was most of all separate is the same whose heart went most of all out towards others, and that strangers.

There is nothing in the most complete separateness to the Lord to hinder the largest and most active kindness, not merely to the people of God. but to all men. Abraham did not know at this time who or what his visitors might be; he merely saw three men, and his heart was at once towards them. Not strained nor scanty was the flow of divine goodness; there was a heart ready at once to meet and even seek others, desirous of their blessing. Is it not in the highest sense so with the Lord? Does He not constantly pour blessing into the heart of the man that is intent on the blessing of others? In this case, too, there was a greater honour in store, though the object of it knew it not.

Though we must not suppose that at first Abraham knew the divine dignity of one of "the three men," there is the remarkable fact that he addressed himself to one, and I can hardly doubt to which of the three. However that may be, he says, "My lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant; let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet." He does not confine himself to the one to whom he had at first addressed himself. He is thinking of that which was needful, not only in courtesy but in love. "Rest yourselves under the tree, and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts." We can scarce doubt, I think, that he is treating them according to the appearance in which they stood, though we shall find that it is not long before he learns more. "After that ye shall pass on, for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do as thou hast said."

Abraham accordingly hastens, making Sarah the partner of his kindly toil, and soon after stands by them under the tree as they eat. Then comes their turn before us. They said to him, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" Perhaps it was then that the first word, intimating the divine power of Him who deigned to be there, fell on the attentive ear of Abraham. "I will certainly return unto thee." It does not become man to talk of certainly returning. Was this lost on Abraham? Assuredly not; more particularly when his long-cherished hope is about now to enjoy the promise of a specified, and, I may say, dated accomplishment. "I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." If it appeared vague before, it was henceforth distinct and defined. But the one who was immediately concerned had not the same sense as Abraham of the presence of God. There was not the same preparedness of heart for it. Sarah, no doubt, was an honoured woman, but her state was spiritually different from that of Abraham. We hear of her during this conversation behind the door. I dare say she ought not to have been there, but there she was; and if she was where she ought not to have been, need we wonder that she indulges in feelings that little became her? She laughed in her doubt of the word. Could any of us imagine Abraham behind a door? Was there not a simple dignity in him incapable of hiding and listening behind a door?

We can understand easily an eastern wife's temptation to conceal herself in more modern times, when woman was more of a prisoner, and otherwise degraded; but it is evident that in those early days no such reason operated, and no excuse could thence be for anything of the kind. For we find Rebekah, and others far later, going to the well, without any idea of impropriety. Sarah must no doubt have enjoyed no less a degree of freedom, but would have from her circumstances much more. She, the matron, by no means young now, was under no conceivable custom of keeping out of sight. Wherever such manners as those before us are resorted to, never expect anything good or worthy. It is no light mercy to be delivered from all the darkness and all the pettiness of nature, and to be brought to walk in the light as God is in it. It is sweet to think of it as the Christian's place, but it is what we all want to }earn more of. What else enables one to stand so simply in the presence of man? Not that we begin with man, and then know how to stand before God, but just the other way: God gives us the root of the matter first, and this is where we are brought in virtue of our Lord Jesus Christ. He could not do more, nor would He do less. He has brought us by and in Himself near to God. This is what in its spirit was true of Abraham; and he was one who enjoyed much of the conscious presence of God; and it is this that I am persuaded had its reward now. He had a conviction of who it was that was addressing him in words which could not fail. There was a sort of instinctive feeling, a growing assurance, in Abraham's soul who the guest must be he was entertaining.

It is remarkable, however, that he hears these words quietly. No astonishment is expressed. How happy when the soul is thus kept calm before God! We are not then taken by surprise: we expect good, and not evil. Instead, therefore, of stooping to the ways which let out how mean the flesh is, the sense of His presence preserves, and true dignity is associated with the utmost simplicity. It is not in this case self-possession, nor the pride of being anything, nor the vanity of desiring what we have not; but all is founded in the deep sense that it is God with whom we have to do, and whose voice we hear and obey.

Abraham, then, as I have said, stands in marked contrast with Sarah hiding behind the door, and laughing within herself. But when charged with it, she is ashamed to own the truth, which she felt an ignominy to herself. But He that was on the other side of the door soon shows that such an obstacle could not keep Him from seeing and knowing what passed in the heart of Sarah, as well as where she was. "Jehovah said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?" How surprising it must have been to her, and how sharp the rebuke, though conveyed without a harsh word! "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" How blessed to accustom ourselves, beloved brethren, to this one answer to all difficulties I For this we are called to walk by faith, not by sight. God never had a thought of a Christian, or of His church, being exempted from difficulties. To hinder this is the main effort of man after the flesh.

Directly men look at the church as a human institution, they want to smooth its way, to put it on the ground of natural rules and arrangements, and thus reduce the Christian to a walk of mere prudence and common sense. They forget it is God's habitation through the Spirit, and cease to walk in dependence on the Lord. No doubt morality is quite according to the law of God: I quite admit it. But all that is entirely distinct. Supposing a person were to walk within the letter of the ten commandments every day, he never would behave in a single particular as a Christian ought. The doing of all the commandments would not meet the will of God about the Christian. It would be very proper for a man, and excellent in a Jew; but far from being Jews, now that we are in Christ, we are no longer sons of Adam, but, according to His grace, His children by faith. We are born of God, and brought into a new place by redemption, and are blamed if we are walking as men.

So the Apostle Paul with the saints at Corinth. He reproaches them because they "walked as men," not as bad men, but "as men." It was unworthy of grace that they should be on mere human ground. If a brother offended another, is one to have him up before the law-court? We can understand that the Christian might easily reason about it, and say, "For my part I cannot but feel that a Christian is a great deal worse than a man of the world if he is guilty of a wrong, and therefore I must have him tried and punished by the magistrate." The premise is true; the conclusion, false. For it is not at all a question of wrong or right, but of Christ. I perfectly grant that a Christian may do wrong, and that the assembly should judge it; but to do-right is not enough for a Christian. He is sanctified to the obedience of Christ, to obey God as the Lord did. It is a question, not of doing the law, but of obeying like Christ. This is what is written on us, as the law was on the tables of stone. Israel ought to have represented the law graven upon stones. We have Christ on high, and are called to walk and witness accordingly. This is the point of the apostle's words in the chapter referred to. The Christian is the "epistle of Christ," and nothing short of a manifestation of Christ can satisfy the mind of God as to him.

Here we see Jehovah as man in a beautiful way. So it was, I believe, in this case, although not of course as yet the Word made flesh, yet the nearest approach to it; and just as we shall see in the series that follows (Genesis 22), the resurrection of the Son of God in type, and the dealings of God founded on that great fact, so here we have, as far as it could be, the coming down of God to be among men, and the grace that accompanied His presence here below. Thus I read this very scene; and that is the reason why here, and here alone, the Lord takes the place of a man.

How beautiful to look back, and see how suitable it is that, before the series that introduced thework, there should be the series that introduced the person, in as near an approximation to His taking flesh as was possible to be beforehand! If there be one thing that marks a man with others, it is sitting at the same table in social intercourse. This is what the Lord does here. It is one of the very things in which an unbeliever finds an enormous difficulty: but what is poison to an infidel is the food and joy of faith. Accordingly, where faith receives it, we rejoice in so blessed a thing as God thus deigning to be at Abraham's table, and partaking of his hospitality, with His angels round Him; but this in the guise of men.

After He has thus put Himself along with His servant on familiar terms, He speaks of that which was nearest to the heart of Abraham. He knew that he was surely to have a son; but he had waited long, and wanted to know when the son would come. Now it is fixed; there is a distinct time allotted, and for the first time. God here too shows Himself considerate of Abraham's feelings. As we saw, Sarah was not up to the mark yet; she needed a rebuke. The communication that God makes brought out what was not according to the proprieties of the presence of God. She was not used to it, like her husband, in spirit, day by day; and when the Lord did come, she did not know how to behave herself; but Abraham did, and there is nothing more remarkable than the ease, and calm, and comeliness of Abraham in all this scene. He was in no way thrown off his balance when it begins to dawn upon him Who it was that deigned to talk and eat with him; the wonderful fact that he stood before the true God, the Lord of heaven and earth — the pledge of the incarnation, when He should take flesh and dwell among us.

Jehovah brings all out plainly now. "Is anything too hard for Jehovah? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah laughed in her incredulity and then, convicted, she denied it, saying, "I laughed not" — denied it for the same reason that some of us may have had to reproach ourselves for no less. "She was afraid!" How often these sad departures from the truth arise from nothing but the want of moral courage! What would train up the soul in unflinching and most scrupulous truthfulness is exactly what Abraham cultivated, and what Sarah failed in — habitual acquaintance with the presence of God.

There is no safeguard so efficacious, even supposing we be ever so disposed to exaggerate, uncareful, quick to speak, slow to consider and weigh what is said. There is nothing that would keep and form the soul more simply in truthfulness than this very thing, the constant sense of the presence of God. This it is that characterized Abraham more than most; not that we may not find failure, for Abraham was not Christ. In this particular too, under solemn circumstances, Abraham broke down, and, sad to say, twice about the same thing — once in the earlier part of his career, and once later. For God would give the terrible lesson, that flesh in no way ever improves, and that Abraham needed the presence of God to keep him towards the close of his career, just as much as at the beginning.

Now we see that as the Lord convicts Sarah for her own good, so He blesses Abraham more and more. But though it is sad that a saint of God should fail in truthfulness, it is no small mercy that God should make that untruthfulness felt where the soul has been guilty. I do not know anything worse for any one who has fallen into untruthfulness than that such a one should go without the discovery of it, and without its being painfully brought home to the soul by God Himself. Here we have it. The Lord does not do it in this case as in so many others in the Bible; for one of the remarkable features elsewhere plain is that we have cases of untruthfulness, and other things equally bad, found in God's people, but they are left, either without conviction, or with the fact simply stated. Here it was brought home for Sarah's profit, and we know that she gained it, But we must turn to the Lord's way with Abraham.

This is the very thing that perplexes unbelievers. It is not so to faith. God disciplines and exercises the hearts of His people in judging these things from their acquaintance with His own character, and with His word in general. In this particular case there was a lesson to be taught, and therefore God does not pass it by. He does not permit that Sarah should simply say, "I did not laugh;" so He says, "Nay, but thou didst laugh." The sin is brought home by the unmistakeable voice of God. Oh, what a thought for Sarah afterwards, and how humiliating, not only that she lied, but that she ventured on a lie to God Himself, and that, at her one interview with Him, this she should have to reflect on! It was the last word that passed between her and God Himself.

This, no doubt, is a serious thing for our own souls, worthy of reflection, yet full of comfort also. For what a God we have to do with! What patience, long-suffering, goodness! and this with (not a human being merely, but) a child of His! And His way is to let a word from Him act on her conscience. Never do we hear of any repetition of the evil on Sarah's part. It was a lesson not to he forgotten, yet how gracious!

We read next that "the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom." Here we enter on another part of Jehovah's action at this time. We have had Him coming down in richest grace, and dealing with the utmost possible tenderness, even with such a failure as that of Sarah. But now we have to see the manner in which all this operated spiritually on the heart of Abraham. "And the men rose up, and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them, to bring them on the way." Here is another beautiful feature in Abraham, which also had its reward. His was not a mere hospitality that receives like a patron without going farther. There was nothing of what we may call the

 condescension of a great man in Abraham, which is scarcely to be called true, or at least christian, hospitality. He in whom that is found will, on the contrary, be found filled with the importance of himself, his family, and his position; he scorns to act below the idea he has, and would impress on others, of his own dignity. Who that reflects could call this grace? "This did not Abraham." Genuine humility was there, and yet withal an unmistakeable stamp of dignity in his character, yet none the less of true kindness, of lowly and persevering love. Thus he hangs upon their steps; and no wonder. At this time it was not merely the ready heart for a stranger, but a sense of the glory of his visitors, and among them of One especially. Who can be surprised that Abraham was loth to see them depart, and accompanied their way? But again, let me say that scripture speaks of such a reception of strangers as though it were no unwonted thing for this generous man. I do not suppose that it was the first time for him to bring such forward on their journey after a godly sort, any more than to receive them into his tent, and treat them as he did.

"And Jehovah said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do justice and judgment; that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." What a character! But I would ask myself as well as you, beloved brethren, is that what the Lord can say of you and me? Does He really know this of us? I do not mean that He said it to Abraham, but in His word about him. Now He has written it for us; and for what purpose? That we should merely know what He felt towards Abraham? Nay, but that we should search ourselves, and see whether there are grounds for the Lord to speak so about ourselves and our households. For you generally find that a saint's ways are shown, not merely in his own personal conduct, but even more in the relation of his family all round to the Lord, as the fruit of his faith or the lack of it. This is the reason why (in the New Testament), no matter what gift a man had, no matter how much he might be personally excellent, if his household were unruly and not in subjection, such an one could not be an elder or bishop. How could a person rule the church of God, if he could not rule his own home ~ Because, where moral power would be shown most is, not in a discourse, or in company, or in a visit, but where a man unbends, where he is no longer the teacher or preacher, where he can either familiarly bring in God or habitually leave Him out, where he can have a free and constant circulation of that name, with all its fruitful consequences, in the family, or he proves that his heart is in ease. Show or money for them is really for himself.

The Lord assuredly looks for a reflex in the household of the ways of God with the head of it; because there it is that God should manifestly be owned, and habitually govern; and there it is that the one who stands at the head is responsible to God for showing what his mind and heart value. It may be done with great simplicity, one need not say, with tender attention and care and interest in what goes on with each member of the family. And I do not mean merely the children, though the children have the nearer place; but servants also, supposing there are such in the house, Servants, it is true, are not expressly mentioned in 1 Timothy 3, possibly because some of the elders might be among the poorest, and perhaps servants themselves. Therefore God puts the matter in a general way; but where there are such domestics, just the same thing should be found. For that which sheds blessing among the children secures blessing among the servants. At any rate there should be godly order, even if the children or servants be not yet brought to the knowledge of God. So it most assuredly was at this time, and ordinarily, true of Abraham's house.

"For I know him:" was it ever so said about Lot? It would have had a sorrowful meaning in Lot's case; it has a blessed one in Abraham's. For this is the knowledge of approval, of divine complacency; it is the knowledge that prepared the way for his being the depository of the secrets of Jehovah — the one to whom He could communicate that which no angel knew, save those who had their orders from Him and were just about to be the executioners of His judgment. But the angels in general, I venture to presume, knew little or nothing of it. It was enough for them to learn it when the thing had taken place. Thus it is that they learn about the church, and the wonders that God has shown to us. The church of God is His living lesson-book for the angels (Ephesians 3); it is by the dealings that He carries on with individual Christians, and with the assembly above all, that He is instructing them in His ways; as He did already by our Lord Jesus Christ in the highest degree, when He was here and exalted on high. He was not pleased to tell them of Christ beforehand; whereas one of the most remarkable privileges saints of old had was the revelation, as far as it went, of the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these. And now we know things to come, as well as the things of Christ above. "Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before." This is, or ought to be, one of the cherished privileges of the Christian.

For every child of God now really has, not only a priestly place in the grace of Christ, but what may be called a prophetic one. He is not of course a prophet, in the sense of giving out inspired communications from God. This the prophets did, as part of the foundation of the church, and it might be in what is called prophesying. But all ought to enjoy the reality of seeing, and testifying the things that are not as though they were, according to divine revelation, giving us to enter into the mind of God before His word comes to pass. The whole of the New Testament supposes that a part of what the Holy Ghost is come down here to do is, not only to "take of the things of Christ, and show them to us," but to show us "things to come" (John 16).

In this chapter, and in the fresh scene that I am dwelling on, we have the very pattern of Christ when He was present here; I do not say when the sacrifice of Christ was offered in sign, which comes before us in Genesis 22. But here there is a remarkable anticipation of the presence of Jehovah — of God's presence in Christ, when He tabernacled as a man among men. Hence the wonderful opening out of that which was in His own heart; just as the Lord did in John 15, which may be viewed as the counterpart of what we find here. He had, as we know, been with the disciples in the tenderest love. There, it is true, it is not courteous furnishing of water for His feet, but (wondrous way!) His washing theirs. Supper time was come for Him and them: and He would stoop down and wash their feet, as a witness of His work of love when He should leave them; but, before He goes, He would tell them what was in His mind. He is treating them as friends; so He lets them know what the Holy Ghost is about to do when He Himself is absent on high. "It is expedient for you that I go away, else the Comforter will not come." But He went, and the Holy Ghost came and more than made up for His absence. So we find in measure with Abraham. The angels proceed; Jehovah remains behind with Abraham, who enters into a phase of communion with Him far beyond what he had enjoyed before.

"And Jehovah said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." He is speaking here just after the manner of men. Jehovah adopts the familiar language of common life, and deigns to adapt Himself to that which every one could understand in a man. It is wholly above our comprehension how God knows all things at once, without inquiry or investigation. He condescends here to speak so that Abraham might be thoroughly free in His presence.

"And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before Jehovah. And Abraham drew near, and said." How precious is this access to Him who had thus come down! Abraham shows no shrinking behind the door. He has confidence in God. "Abraham drew near." The Christian can understand it all, now that redemption has been accomplished, and sin has been judged, and we have been left, according to the word of God and the work of Christ, without a single spot or stain to arrest the eye of the Judge. Such is the efficacy of the blood in which we have been washed from our sins, even as we ourselves are a new creation in Christ before Him. But is there always in us, as here in Abraham, a real readiness to draw near and speak to our God? Are we happy in making due use of the: privileges we possess? This is a serious question for our souls. We see how it was with the patriarch.

"He drew near" and says, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Now, mark, it is no longer a question about himself, or about the son. The son was soon to come. All this was settled. He rests upon it, his heart is perfectly free. He has no longer a single want for himself; not one suit remains to be spread before Jehovah. His heart is drawn out in a spirit of grace, which answers to the grace of the Lord towards himself. He entreats Jehovah about others. He does not yet mention the one that no doubt lay heavily on his heart. His nephew was in Sodom; Lot dwelt there. Who was there living that knew the faults of Lot better than Abraham? But Abraham entered, in his measure, into the feelings of God. For if faults, if blots, could have fumed away the love of God, where should we be? Lot had done Abraham no little harm; he had been the cause of considerable trouble. It was a case of risking life itself on one occasion never to be forgotten.

All this, however, made little or no difference to Abraham. But now he could only think in sorrow of Lot as in the very midst of the doomed city. We need not suppose that he had only mourned over Lot for the first time. Could it be an entirely new thought to Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah were nests of wickedness, and utterly unfit for the sojourn of that righteous man, Lot? Why should he "vex his soul" there? It was certainly not God who had called him into it. Was the old man hankering after wealth or honour in town, as once for the well-watered plains of Jordan near it? He had not reamed his lesson, and now a far more serious chastening was at hand. Now he was only going to be saved so as by fire. Soon must he abandon that seat of honour in the gate of Sodom he too dearly loved. Lot must now taste the bitterness of what he had chosen. Whatever is our wrong must in the long run be our chastening.

But look at Abraham. "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" All his heart is moved, now that he has a glimpse of the destruction so swiftly coming on the plains which had beguiled his kinsman. "Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou also destroy, and not spare, the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? Such is his plea with Jehovah. He pleads as one whose heart felt deeply; end when our hearts are engaged, the work is not done badly. That is the real secret of it. We may do things simply — and we cannot be too simple — but we see the mark clearly where the heart feels aright. It was so with Abraham. He intercedes earnestly and with perseverance, giving expression to that sentiment which the New Testament brings forward under the hand of the Apostle Paul — "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Of course He will, and here we have the answer of grace: "Jehovah said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

Then Abraham ventures to take a little more courage, and brings his request down to forty-five, to forty, and to twenty (vers. 27-31). At last he says, "Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once. Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake." Why "this once"? Alas! our faith never reaches up to the grace of God. We weary and fail, not He. We get enough, through His grace, for our blessing, but rarely do we venture into its depths. Sound as we may, we certainly never get to the bottom. It was to be proved so here; for although Jehovah answered to the full all that Abraham's faith and confidence in His grace essayed, His grace far exceeded, for it descended after all to that one person who lay on the heart of Abraham, though he had not the boldness to say so. But Jehovah knew it; and while He surely did not spare that wicked place (and it was according to His righteous government that it should be made an example of divine judgment), none the less did He rescue that righteous soul spite of his faults.

But I refer to this now in order to note the gracious effect on Abraham's spirit of being brought into the knowledge of God's mind about the future. For it issues not merely in prayer, but in intercession for others. It may be well to ask, beloved brethren, whether we are given to similar intercession, who know that the Lord is soon coming to judge the habitable earth? There are few persons in this room who do not know a great deal more of what is coming to pass on the earth than those who have the credit for learning and theology in this day of ours. We know how great are our shortcomings, and how little we know; but still, as a matter of undeniable fact, it is certain that we are accustomed to look into the future, that we are used in spirit, where God has made Christ our all, to enter into that to which He points us on. We have no doubt what is coming on the world, and on the different parts of the world, as clearly as if we saw it on a map — one painted blue, and another black. We know perfectly well that there is a land where the eyes of Jehovah rest, and He will surely magnify His name. On the other hand, we know of other lands that shall be given up to desolation. The revealed future is thus a matter of settled knowledge to us which has its results practically, though of course in different degrees.

But I ask again, what is the present effect of all on our souls? Does it draw us out in intercession? Are we pleading with the Lord? Ought it not to be so, if we really believe what is coming to pass on the flower of Christendom? Has it engaged our hearts in intercession? Are we sufficiently alive to the way in which God's children are at this moment dishonouring Him by unworthy, mistaken, unbelieving thoughts? or to the great danger from this to their souls? Can any of these things be without loss or peril to them? They are deeply injurious, these false expectations, as well as the want of faith in what is before men. They look for the improvement of society and the progress of Christendom. They believe not in a judgment of the living to be executed by our Lord when He comes in His kingdom at, or just before, the end of which He will judge the wicked dead.

This trifling with the word of God, this blotting out from the future of God's warning, have present consequences of the most serious kind; but do they stir our hearts in desire for the saints of God? We know, of course, that nothing can stay the judgments that are coming on the ungodly, and that God will shelter the righteous in that day; but are our hearts going out to Him about His people? We see how Abraham interceded. The Lord give us to be like Him! It supposes hearts at rest in His grace as to all that concerns ourselves before Him. But that very grace gives us confidence in Him for others dear to Him; and their failures, or dangers, should draw out intercession; yet HE is beyond all that we ask or think.

÷Genesis 19.

The connection of the solemn history which now opens before us is one of contrast, especially full of instruction for us who find ourselves on the eve of a judgment of incomparably larger extent. Our Lord Himself pointedly applies it no less than the catastrophe in the days of Noah to present warning. "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." (*Luk 17:26-33*.) It will be a judgment of God, not merely in providence, but directed by the Lord, and as none of the wicked shall understand, so shall none escape. It essentially differs from such scenes as the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, to which the commentators so perversely refer it. The intimation of verse 34 seems expressly added to refute such a notion. Let us turn to the facts, as scripture records them.

"And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them, rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned into him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat." (*Gen 19:1-3*.) Jehovah no longer deigns to accompany His messengers, nor visits Lot, like Abraham. He would have been ashamed to be called the God of Lot, who "sat in the gate of Sodom," instead of running to meet them "from the tent door," like his kinsman pilgrim. Yet was much in common: no less courtesy, perhaps, but a little hospitality. Nevertheless, we see a certain shrinking on the part of the angels, as we have already noticed the absence of Jehovah. Not even He, much less they, said Abraham Nay, or proposed to stay without. To Lot, even though it was, they decline his proffered shelter, and propose to abide in the street all night. At length they yield to his pressure, enter his house, and accept of his unleavened bread.

Their visit gives occasion to the open and unnatural depravity of the inhabitants, "both old and young, all the people from every quarter" (ver. 4). They foam out their shame shamelessly (ver 5). Lot goes forth to plead for his guests, to remonstrate with his fellow-townsmen (alas! he calls them "brethren"), and offer his two daughters (ver. 6 8). For he has lost the simplicity of faith, and, instead of looking only to the Lord in this scene of difficulty and danger and surrounding wickedness, he chooses in worldly wisdom what he conceived the lesser of two evils. Could we expect better from a righteous Lot which "sat in the gate of Sodom?" "And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door" (ver. 9).

How often had Lot flattered and excused himself, as he gradually drew nearer to guilty Sodom, that his was the wise and right course, not like his exclusive uncle, Abraham! What is the use, what the duty, of a good man in the world, if not to improve it? Was there not a haughty and self-righteous stiffness under the lowly guise of Abraham, who kept himself apart from all his neighbours in the land? Separate from the present world, he in his tent declared plainly that he was seeking a better (that is, a heavenly) country. But did not Lot's conscience ever smite him, lest (under his assumption of a more active and benevolent zeal) there might lurk an unjudged unbelief of God's estimate of the present and promise of the future, which left room for the rank growth of covetousness, and the love of ease, honour, wealth, and power? Abraham had not a question as to God's favour and kindness, any more than as to His purpose of blessing and glory by-and-by: as little did he doubt that the world and, above all, the races in the midst of whom he pursued his stranger path, were doomed to divine judgment, though there might be a defined delay in its execution. Lot had no such clearness of vision. He anticipated better things. He had more confidence in human nature, more assurance of the moral influence of a good man like himself. He hears too late the rebuke of his folly from the lips of the most unclean Sodom: "This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge." They felt that a righteous man had no consistent place in their midst; and they were not so blind to his motives as himself. What had Lot gained, with his position, but vexation to his soul, as he saw from day to day their filthy conversation and lawless deeds? Certainly he had not pleased the Lord, whose will and lessons he had despised: how had he fared with the world to which he had held? How different it was with Abraham before the sons of Heth in

Genesis 23!

But the hour of destruction was at hand for the cities of the plain; and when the miscreants came near to break the door, the angels "put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door. And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? Son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place. For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of Jehovah; and Jehovah hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for Jehovah will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law. And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; Jehovah being merciful unto him; and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither (is it not a little one? ) and my soul shall live. And he said unto him, See, 1 have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (vers. 11-26).

Even in the hour of deliverance, it is humiliating to read how Lot "lingered," though he might not, like his wife, "look back," and become the lasting witness of the truth of the warning. No wonder there was no power in such a preacher of righteousness! Dwelling among the men of Sodom is the way neither to glorify God, nor to win their souls to the Saviour. Even the last fatal night "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law," as we have seen what a storm he brought on himself from his townsmen. What a contrast with him of whom Jehovah said, "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do justice and judgment; that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him!" Yet, to worldly philanthropy and wit, did Abraham seem a useless person in his day and generation; to faith he is the man of whom God said, and of whom faith is sure, "Thou shalt be a blessing, and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Just so, there are many Lots; but where are those blessed, and a blessing, with faithful Abraham? If content to be less, we certainly sink below even this sad level, like Abraham's seed, who were not Abraham's children (John 8.). We may, in the pure and sovereign mercy of God, be "delivered" men, like Lot: but are even now, like Abraham, men separate to the Lord, and knowing these things before? (2 Peter 3). Is it enough for us to be snatched, as it were, out of the fire, when the word is, "we will destroy this place; escape for thy life, lest thou also be consumed"? Or do we covet the portion (which indeed it is the Christian's shame not to covet) of being with the Lord before a sign of doom appears, morally far apart from all that cries for divine vengeance, sharing His mind who deigns to open His secrets and treats us as His friends? Are we interceding for others in love, as Abraham in Genesis 18; or deprecating what we dread, as Lot in Genesis 19? "Oh, not so, my Lord; behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life, and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: behold now, this city is near to flee into, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live." So it is always. The saints who live like others in the world share the world's fears. Their prayers savour of its state. Its troubles oppress them, as its successes ensnare them. This did not Abraham. "The mountain," which was the source of fear to Lot, was the scene of communion between Jehovah and Abraham. There he had prayed, with touching importunity for the righteous endangered by the approaching judgment, and not in vain; for God did better than he asked. He did destroy the guilty cities, but He delivered less than ten righteous found there, righteous Lot himself, who was here begging (and not in vain) for the least city of the five.

And, now that the blow is struck, the difference between the heavenly-minded man and the earthly minded is still kept up as strikingly as ever. "Abraham get up early in the morning to the place where he stood before Jehovah: and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt. And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters" (vers. 27-30). Was not Abraham even here, where it could be least looked for, not only blessed but a blessing? Nothing could be done to Sodom and Gomorrah till Lot came to Zoar; but was it not for Abraham's sake? It was even then and there, because "God remembered" not Lot but "Abraham."

This then was the end of the place where Lot had lived and laboured, or at least talked. He was as little in the secret of Jehovah as the men of Sodom, though no doubt he was vexed, or rather (as scripture so pregnantly tells us) the righteous man vexed his righteous soul from day to day. But God never called Lot to Sodom, as He had called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan. Abraham's groans were gracious, and had profitable fruit; Lot's were not without his own fault and torment, groans barren even for himself. Abraham is attracted to the place where he had enjoyed the presence and converse of Jehovah, and looks down on the scene of desolation which attested in its solemn way what it is to hate Jehovah, and what to love Him. And there Lot too goes up out of Zoar: afraid to go at God's bidding when there was no ground for fear there, afraid longer to stay in Zoar, and not afraid to go where and when he had feared most of all, had he been aware into what a snare he was about to be caught by wine and women — alas! his own daughters. Such was the end of him who would needs be a judge in Sodom, but only the beginning of those who should inflict sorrowful results on the children of Abraham throughout their history, till that day come when Sodom's doom finds its antitype, and the Branch out of Jesse's roots shall reign, and Moab, with Edom, shall be the laying on of Israel's hand, and the sons of Ammon their obedience (*Isa 11:14*).

And have saints who now court and cleave to the world, valuing position and honour in it, no reproof to learn?

÷Genesis 20.

Nevertheless a signal time of favour and blessing may precede a great humiliation through unwatchfulness and sin. So it was now with Abraham, as he sojourned in the land of the Philistines. Was it that he too, as well as Lot, feared to abide under the shield of the Almighty in view of the scene of the recent judgments? This were to tempt God, as Israel in the desert when they questioned His presence in their midst and His care. Certain it is that he journeyed from where he once stood before Jehovah in intercession. and a little later in awe-inspiring contemplation of the judged land of the plain whence the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of the furnace. Long-before it the pinch of famine induced him to journey toward the south, even to Egypt, and to sojourn there. Now he dwells between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourns in Gerar; and now as then he denies his true relationship to his wife. "She is my sister" says Abraham of Sarah among the Philistines, as at an early day he told her to say so among the Egyptians (*Gen 12:11-13*; *Gen 20:1-2*). What! the father of the faithful? And this again, after all the times which had passed over him?

Alas! "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of Jehovah bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. Anathema maranatha. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever." No difference in this respect distinguished the first father of Israel. Abraham sinned now, like Adam at the beginning; and he who taught his wife to prevaricate before they entered Egypt falls into the like snare himself in Philistia.

Christ has never denied the church; though I would not weaken the warning that if we deny, He also will deny us; if we are unfaithful, He at least abides faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. But the church in spite of His warnings and His faithful love has denied her true relationship to Him, has denied it because of fear of the world or the world's seed that borders on the heavenly land, utterly failing in faith of His unseen presence and that power which would assuredly arm her where He did not call on her to glorify Him in suffering or death.

But where sin abounded grace super-abounded. For if Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah, God came to him in a dream by night, and said unto him, Behold, thou art a dead man for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is married to a husband. The Philistine king, however, could plead the sincerity of his heart and the innocency of his hands, identifying his people with himself. "Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?" Abraham and Sarah were both guilty of deceit. Yet it is to be noted that, while God allowed the plea, intimating indeed that He had kept the king from actual sin, He maintains the special place, in which Abraham stood. "Now therefore restore the man his wife: for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine. Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid" (vers. 7, 8). This is a principle in God's ways, and as evident in the New Testament as in the Old. Thus the Lord may reprove (however graciously) the Baptist who inquires through his disciples whether He was the Christ, pointing simply to His irrefragable proofs; but He turns round and at once vindicates the place of honour given to John beyond all born of woman. So here it was unquestionable that Abraham was wrong, and that far more grievously now than nearer the commencement of his course. Yet Abimelech must restore him his wife, "for he is a prophet and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live:" otherwise he must die with all his.

"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 women-servants, 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. 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. So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For Jehovah had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah, Abraham's wife" (vers. 9-8). It is a sad picture when the believer has to own his fault as Abraham was now doing not only before Jehovah, but before the power of the world; and when his account of his motives is but the laying bare of unbelieving fears, the more guilty because the deception was planned and agreed on between man and wife. But when does one sin stand alone? and where is sin so ugly as in saints of God? It was an early fear, the root of it was not thoroughly judged in Egypt, and as lack of self-judgment exposed them to it in Gerar, so it was attended with severer abasement the second time than the first.

It is even so with the Christian. It is not that he who is bathed loses the virtue of that divinely given privilege: the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost are not at all the working of man's will, ephemeral as this is, but of God who begets sovereignly by the word of truth. But he does indeed need to wash his feet. Defilements from walking through the world must be removed: else one has no part with Christ. In His incomparable grace He thus keeps clean the cleansed, or removes whatever grieves the Holy Spirit. This Peter had to learn, though reluctant in his haste and folly, first in word, that the Lord should stoop so low for his sake, and then in all the depth of the truth. How little did the disputing apostle anticipate that he would so soon feel his own need and bless his Master for the active constancy of His love! It is grace suited to the saint as necessary as that which the sinner wants (*1Jn 2:1*).

Here Abimelech restores Sarah to Abraham with many a sheep and ox, manservant and maid, and gives him express leave to dwell in the land where it was good in his eyes, yet not without a severe reproof to Sarah and indeed to her husband. The Philistine had paid his reparation price; but what a covering of the eyes had the husband been for the wife to all that were with her and with all others! Is it not humbling when the Gentile can thus justly rebuke the people of God for failure in holding fast their privileges till it end in a breach of common truthfulness? Nevertheless God listened to the prayer of Abraham, and the judgment which had fallen on the house of Abimelech was removed. "When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another, he suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." If He was thus watchful of the children, He cared no less for their father. He would only relieve an Abimelech at the intercession of Abraham; but Abraham must first be put to shame before the Philistine, and make confession of the sin which had exposed him to the censure and rebuke of the uncircumcised. How often has fear of the world been thus a snare, and equivocation on the part of those who should have been a faithful witness (as being elect and called) thrown the portion of faith into the hands of the world to the confusion and danger of all! But God is faithful and knows how to extricate for His own name's sake those who should have walked in separation to Himself.

How holy and wholesome too is that word which God has magnified above all His name! Where spurious holy writings venture on the ground of fact, they cry up their heroes, and hide their faults with diligent care, even when they do not descend to positive fable. Far otherwise does the Spirit of God deal, in the Old Testament, with the conduct of the fathers or the people of Israel, in the New with the sins even of an apostle, with the shame of a whole assembly. So with the portrait of the father of the faithful here, drawn by Moses for the chosen nation, yea by the Holy Spirit for all saints of all times: who but He would have so simply and truthfully set before us Abraham and Sarah on the one hand, or Abimelech the Philistine king on the other?

÷Genesis 21.

The power of God was now accomplishing what His mouth had promised. The child is born of Sarah, the son given to Abraham, type of Him, the Son, whom God sent forth, when the fulness of the time was come, to effect redemption, and be the centre of all His purposes for heaven on earth, and the judge of all He will cast into hell.

"And Jehovah visited Sarah as he had said, and Jehovah 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. And Abraham called the name of his son that was torn unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac, being eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was an hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him. And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age" (vers. 1-7).

Thus was Isaac's birth the occasion of joy in measure, as his very name imports, when Sarah laughed no more in unbelief, as once (*Gen 18:12-15*), but in gladness of heart, as in the fellowship of all that hear of the goodness of the Lord. It is a lovely witness to the power of grace when faith thus gives the victory in what had been one's weakness, and sin, and shame. And so, if Abraham gives the name to his son, Sarah needs no prophet, but explains the mind of God in it for herself, and for ever.

But another sight of the family of faith is next vouchsafed to us. "And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. 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. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed" (vers. 8-13). Of this incident, which our light hearts might quickly pass over, the Holy Ghost makes a great deal in the two Epistles of the New Testament, which either assert or vindicate the fundamental truth of justification by faith.

The first occurs in Galatians 4, where the apostle is convicting the bewitched Galatians of their folly in departing from grace to law. If they desired to be under the law, why not hear the law? The two sons of Abraham should have had a voice to every believer. One was by a slave, the other by a free woman; one born after the flesh, the other by promise, as the mothers answered to the two covenants, Jerusalem that was in bondage with her children, and Jerusalem which is above, the free mother of the free. But this, though much, is not all; for after citing from Isaiah a marvellous testimony to the reckoning of grace during the desolation of Jerusalem, the tale of the child of promise is again used to show (1) that as he that was born after the flesh then persecuted him that was after the Spirit, so it is now; (2) that the sentence of scripture is, Cast out the bondmaid and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. Grace refuses partnership with law or flesh. The child of promise alone inherits.

It is the more instructive and important to note that in this transaction Abraham was weak, and Sarah strong. He did not give glory to God as she did; hence God called on Abraham to hearken to Sarah's voice, whatever might be the natural subjection of wife to husband — a subjection in which the apostle Peter expressly cites this very Sarah as an admirable pattern to christian women generally. But here the weaker vessel was by grace the stronger of the two, and Abraham must not regard Sarah's feeling as the mere affronted pride of the mistress who could not brook the airs of aspiring and mocking Ishmael. She was in the secret of Jehovah more deeply than her husband; while he was allowing unduly the claims of flesh, and was grieved at the proposal of expelling the bondmaid's son from the house. But so it must be according to God. Sarah was right. Her child was of promise, as the word was which declared Jehovah would return at the time appointed and Sarah should have a son.

It was not so with Hagar and Ishmael, though God would make a nation of him because he was Abraham's seed. But there must be liberty in the house for all that are of God, and no entangling with the yoke of bondage. Every remnant of law, world, and flesh must be expelled, and what was of promise alone abide. But it is all ever thus judged till the day of "a great feast." Then comes the decisive moment, and what is of the flesh persecutes what is of the Spirit, and grace gives the Sarahs to speak out, and God will have it heard and acted on, though an Abraham may be grieved: but then, and not till then, is the bondmaid cast out with her son. The Sinai covenant that genders to bondage and her child after the flesh can be no longer tolerated in the household of faith.

The second quotation is in *Rom 9:7*. The apostle is combating the pretension of the Jews to enjoyment of the promises by natural or national descent, so as to exclude Gentiles. This he establishes in the most conclusive way by an appeal to Abraham's own seed, Ishmael. If the promise necessarily falls to the seed of Abraham as such, the Ishmaelites must be let in. As no Jew would allow of this, he must abandon his principle. It is a question of promise, not of fleshly descent but of His own sovereignty who had limited the call to Isaac. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Sovereignty therefore is the only source of hope for Israel, which is reasoned out still more fully in the chapter, and applied to Jacob, to the exclusion of Esau, though of the same mother as well as father, and even twins. But the same sovereignty of God is shown to be the sole resource for Israel at Mount Sinai, when all else had been ruin for the people as a whole by their worship of the golden calf: so completely were they silenced on the score of their own righteousness. Driven thus from the ground of law, as well as of lineal descent, on what could they fall back? On the sovereign mercy of God. This alone did, or could, save a sinner or a sinful people in entire accordance withExodus 33:19; but if they owned this, who were they to dispute that sovereignty calling Gentiles too, as indeed the prophets expressly declare that He would, when Israel became for a season Lo-ammi by their idolatry and their rejection of Messiah ?

Here we go beyond the passage which has given occasion to the apostolic argument. Still, looked at in the narrowest point of view, how fruitful is scripture, and how marvellously does He who wrote in the Old Testament use the facts and words of the New Testament! How self-evidently divine are both! Ishmael, like Israel after the flesh, cannot take the inheritance by law, but are cast out, though preserved of God.

It does not come within my present scope to dwell on God's dealings with Hagar, the comfort He gave her then and afterwards as to Ishmael, or his subsequent history (vers. 14-21); though we may notice in passing that, as the bondmaid mother was an Egyptian, so the wife she took her son was out of the land of Egypt: law, flesh, and world go together.

But in the next section we see Abraham in his true place and dignity. "And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son; but, according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear. And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing; neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but today. And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant. And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? And he said For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me that I have digged this well. Wherefore he called that place Beer-sheba; because there they sware both of them. Thus they made a covenant at Beer-sheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines" (vers. 22-32).

In the beginning of the chapter we saw that the servant abides not in the house for ever: Ishmael and his mother are dismissed. The son abides always: Isaac is there, the heir of all.

Now we see that the Gentile king, who once inspired Abraham with guilty fear and became the occasion of a foul snare, not only seeks favour of the father of the faithful but is himself reproved. The power of the world acknowledged God to be with Abraham, and asks for a covenant between them. (Compare *Zec 8:23*). Earthly righteousness is now asserted, as before we saw heavenly long-suffering, save where a corresponding pledge of the coming kingdom came before us inGenesis 14, which concluded that series, as this concludes the later series. Here therefore the well of the oath is recovered and secured, and a grove or orchard is planted there, for the wilderness shall be glad, and the desert blossom as the lily; yea, there shall break out water and brooks, and there shall walk the redeemed. And Abraham "called there on the name of Jehovah, the everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days" (vers. 33, 34). He is in type no longer the pilgrim, but the head of the nations and heir of the world.

Thus the second division of Abraham's history terminates with the figure of the kingdom in manifested power of glory, when beauty is given for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

÷Genesis 22.

The last chapter closed that series of divine dealings with our patriarch which opened withGenesis 15. We can readily see that it forms a natural conclusion. The long-promised heir is come; the legal covenant and the child of flesh are cast out; the prince of the Gentiles is reproved instead of reproving, and seeks the friendship of the father of the faithful, who plants a grove and calls there on the name of the everlasting God. Thus, as in Genesis 14, we are brought again to a picture of millennial peace and power and blessing.

In Genesis 22 we begin another series of yet deeper character and moment — final too, as far as Abraham and Sarah are concerned.

"And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham; and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, 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 upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." It was the greatest trial to which God had ever put the heart of a saint. It was not tempting with evils any more than God is tempted with them. It was, on the contrary, His own good that was before God, who would make His friend the witness of it, while testing his confidence in Himself and His word to the uttermost. Isaac was loved as only a child so promised, born and reserved for a wondrous destiny, could be — to say nothing of personal qualities that must endear him to his parents. How the father's heart must have pondered on God's covenant with "thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant," and the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; especially after Hagar and Ishmael were expelled, and the word of promise came, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called!" The father was assured therefore that this son, and no other, was that of the promises. God could not lie; but He might and does try, and those most whom He loves best. So with Abraham now. God demands that the father shall offer up his only son for a burnt-offering on Mount Moriah. It was the shadow of His own incomparable and infinite gift, but only the shadow; for Christ really did suffer and die, and God the Father sent Him, in divine love, to be thus a propitiation for our sins.

Abraham was only "tried"; still he was tried most severely, and by grace endured the trial, and was blessed accordingly. There was no delay in giving up his son to God, any more than he had doubted of God's word that he should have a son of Sarah when both were as good as dead.

"And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, as took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (vers. 3-5).

The moment was come when Abraham must challenge his heart for the last time, counting on God to make good his promise, and give him back that very Isaac to be the heir of all assured to himself, and the channel of blessing to all families of the earth. God must raise Isaac assuredly, as his own mind was made up to sacrifice him at God's bidding. "And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering" (vers. 6 8).

Unconscious prophet of a truth too well (too little) known, Abraham anticipates exactly what God has done in the gospel, of which this very scene stands out, in some respects, the most eminent type. Guilty man, in his heart of hearts, thinks all depends on some atonement he is to make, even if he also, in ever so orthodox a manner, confesses our Lord Jesus as a Saviour. But this he confesses for all the world: for himself to get the benefit, he really trusts to a sort of compounding for his sins. He hopes to give up his sins, most of all, and that God will be merciful. Such is the gospel of the largest part of Christendom, where it is not even an avowed confidence in life-giving ordinances, and saving rites and works of goodness. What a contrast with "God will provide himself a lamb!" What grace on God's part! What a call for faith on man's! "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace." Nor could any other way suit either. Sins are thus borne and judged, and forgiven to the believer but yet to God's glory, while His grace reigns to eternal life. Anything else would depreciate God, as it would exalt the sinner, for which certainly Christ did *not*die; but suffered once, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God; and this He has done for every believer cleansed from every sin by His blood.

"So they went both of them together; and they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of Jehovah called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of Jehovah it shall be provided" (vers. 9-14). Thus was Abraham fully tried, and God magnified and honoured by his simple-hearted trust in Himself. Yet not a drop of Isaac's blood was shed. God remains God. He spared not His own Son, but gave Him up freely for us all. In all things Christ has the pre-eminence.

Still Abraham shines brightly in the scene, and God marks His appreciation of it. "And the angel of Jehovah called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (vers. 15-18).

*Gal 3:16* casts fresh light on the blessing here pronounced. The blessing is twofold. In verse 17 it is Jewish, and consists in a countless progeny, which possess the gate of their enemies. In verse 18 no number is attached to "thy seed." This, accordingly, is what the Holy Spirit contrasts as "the seed" of Abraham to which the promises were made. "He saith not, And to seeds as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Thus the Seed with no number or multiplicity annexed to it is shown to be Christ, typified by Isaac, risen again from the dead in figure, who blesses all the Gentiles, as now in the gospel, contra-distinguished from the numerous Jewish seed, who are to subject the nations and rule over them, in the age to come. The Seed risen from the dead has evidently broken the link with life or relationship on earth, and is in a wholly new condition wherein He is able to bless the Gentile as freely as the Jew. This Christ is doing now, as the Epistle proves, wholly apart from law or circumcision which suppose the flesh and the Jew still under the probation of God, and so in effect deny the cross.

We see accordingly how harmonious is the teaching. of *Heb 11:17-19* with Galatians 3. Christ is the true Seed of Abraham, and this not only of promise but, as dead and risen. It is, thus the promises are secured; it is thus also that they open out to all the nations or Gentiles; even as it is written, In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. The Seed dead and risen is as free to bless the Gentile as Jew. Both were lost in rejecting Him; but He is risen from the dead, and God is pleased to bless in Him not only the Jew but all the Gentiles. The Seed of the woman is the Son of Abraham risen from the dead after being offered up. And the blessing is unconditional grace, independent of the law which came in long after the promise and for a wholly different end, as the apostle argues and proves to the bewitched Galatians. Law can only bring a curse on those who take that ground for their souls with God. Blessing is by faith in virtue of Him who died and rose again, and can thus in pure grace reach the believer, spite of flesh, law and world, which ensure only condemnation for sinful man. But Christ is dead and risen, and the blessing is confirmed in Him by God's oath to all the nations. So much the more awful will be the lot of all who despise Him, trusting in themselves, in others, or in aught else!

The rest of the chapter (Gen 22:20-24) calls for no particular notice now. It was meant to prepare the way for Rebekah, by showing her relationship with Abraham's lineage, in view of a still closer tie.

÷Genesis 23.

The death of Sarah follows, and God takes special notice of it, not only for Abraham's sake, but, as it would seem, for its typical bearing, since it comes after the sacrifice and resurrection of the son, and before the call of the bride. In this point of view we must remember that, as Hagar represents the legal covenant of Sinai, Sarah is the shadow of the covenant of promise (Galatians 4). One cannot wonder that her death as a figure is unintelligible to those who regard her as symbolic of our best and characteristic church blessings. But it is not so: scripture is right, theology as usual wrong. Sarah sets forth the covenant of promise presented to the Jew after the cross (but on his unbelieving refusal) passing away to make room for the call of the church to heavenly glory and union with Christ on high. Of all this the reader may find the key in studying the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Compare especially Acts 3, which answers to Sarah, with Acts 9, on the total rejection of this in the death of Stephen, when God begins to send the gospel outside Jerusalem, raising up Paul as minister of the church in its full character.

Certain it is that Abraham's wife is the only woman whose years are carefully noted. To her death and the account of the purchase of a burying place the whole chapter is devoted. "And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" (vers. 1, 2). Faith does not enfeeble affection; it heightens our sense of the havoc sin has wrought. But we sorrow not as others who have no hope, looking for His coming who is the Resurrection and the Life.

Again, we are expressly told in Hebrews 11 that these all (Sarah included) died, not in possession, but in faith. Of this the scripture before us is the most striking witness. Till the burial of Sarah Abraham possessed not so much as to set his foot on. He abides the pilgrim and stranger to the last. He has to buy even for a burying-place. He would have Canaan only under the glory of the Lord, and in the day of resurrection. He is content to wait till then. The time of faith is the time of Christ. While He is hidden, believers are hidden also; when He appears, then shall they also appear along with Him in glory.

There can be no greater mistake than that faith destroys lowliness, or promotes a want of considering others. It really brings God in, and thus is self judged, and love can flow. See the admirable bearing of Abraham with the children of Heth.

"And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead. And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth. And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight; hear me and entreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a burying-place amongst you. And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead. And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land" (vers. 3-12). God had given him the moral respect of his neighbours; but he neither presumes on his favour in their eyes, nor will he take advantage of their feelings. As he rises above the sorrow that pressed on his heart, so he does not accept what cost him nothing for the burial of his dead. If he exceeded the sons of Heth in courtesy, he was none the less careful that the fullest value should be paid in due form, and with adequate witness.

"And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead. And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant."

"And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and al} the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city" (vers. 13-18). Faith never was meant to encourage a careless spirit, as Abraham's conduct in this business exemplifies, at a moment when any one else would have rather availed himself of another's help. Whatever the circumstances, faith makes the believer superior to them all.

"And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying-place by the sons of Heth" (vers. 19, 20). God works, doubtless; but the believer himself is exercised before Him and is delivered from his own will, or from the influence of objects such as the enemy uses to divert from God. So it was here. God gave Abraham such a place in the esteem of his neighbours that there was no difficulty whatever; but Abraham bore himself as one who sought not his own things but the will and pleasure of Him who had called him out by, and to, His promises — promises as yet unfulfilled.

Burial in the land began with Sarah. It was no mere feeling or fancy, sentiment or superstition, but a fruit of faith, in Abraham. He looked to have from God's hand the land wherein he laid her body. The gift of Canaan was far surer than any possession of a burying-place meanwhile. I deny not that he desired a better country, that is, a heavenly, that he looked for the city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. But he rejoiced to see the day of Christ and expected in it the wresting of the earth from the hands of the enemy, and knew that all the land of Canaan would be his for an everlasting possession.

Hence the importance to the patriarchs, while preserving their pilgrim character, of burial in Canaan. So, when Abraham was gathered to his people, his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the same spot, "in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre, the held which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife" (*Gen 25:9-10*). There too was Isaac laid by his sons Esau and Jacob (*Gen 35:27-29*). And so it was with Jacob, though he died in Egypt, for Joseph had him embalmed; "and his sons did unto him according as he commanded them, for his sons carried him into the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a burying-place of Ephron the Hittite before Mamre" (*Gen 50:12-13*). Joseph again (*Gen 50:25-26*) "took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." Hence he too was embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt; but when deliverance came, Moses took the bones of Joseph with him (*Exo 13:19*), which the children of Israel in due time buried, not in the cave of Machpelah but in Shechem, "in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of silver; and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph" *Jos 24:32*).

Very different is the spiritual feeling which the hope of Christ's coming forms in the breast of the Christian. As His presence on high, in the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man, calls one in worship from earth to heaven, and thus makes it no longer a question of Jerusalem any more than of "this mountain," so we look for Christ to come, gather us round him in the air, and present us in the Father's house, as well as to reign with Him after a heavenly sort over the earth. A special resting-place here below vanishes from a mind thus formed and nourished. We look, not for death though we may meanwhile fall asleep, but for Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, and will change us whether we wake or sleep into His glorious image, transforming our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory according to the working of the power which He has, even to subdue all things to Himself. Thus the opening of the heavens for us, consequent on redemption and our Lord's ascension, makes the earth to be of no account for the Christian in any way or for any present purpose.

÷Genesis 24.

It is not my purpose to dwell at length on the call of Bethuel's daughter to be the bride of Isaac, however attractive the subject may be; but I would only point out in passing the striking propriety that here, after the death of Sarah, we should have the introduction of Rebekah. He who is at all instructed in the ways of God recognises in the latter the bride for the risen Son and Heir of all things, and this after the figure of the covenant of promise in Sarah has passed away. Till the Jews had refused the fresh summons of God to own their Messiah, now risen and glorified, there could be fittingly no bringing in of the Gentiles, no formation of a heavenly bride, the body of a heavenly Christ.

Not that the tale of Rebekah opens out the mystery which was reserved hidden in God for the apostle Paul to reveal to us, itself revealed not to the Old Testament writers, but to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This however does not hinder, but rather help, us, now that the secret is revealed, to understand the type of Rebekah as far as it goes; but it may be noticed that it does not set out either of the two great parts of the mystery — first, Christ, the Head of all things, heavenly and earthly; secondly, the church, in which Jewish and Gentile distinctions disappear, united to Him as His body in that universal supremacy, conscious of the relationship even while here on earth by the Holy Ghost sent down from on high. The type fits in with all, but cannot be said to reveal it.

My task now is to say a little of Abraham's part in what is here recorded. "And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and Jehovah had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: and I will make thee swear by Jehovah, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware that thou bring not my son thither again. The Jehovah God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter" (vers. 1-9).

In all this the Father's purpose seems clearly foreshown; a new thing was in progress — a bride to be fetched for His Son. None but the most careless can forbear to see the great and unusual solemnity of the transaction. Thus his trusty Eliezer is employed "that ruled over all he had," who aptly prefigures the place of service which the Holy Spirit is pleased now to take in executing the purpose of God as to the church in this world. In no other case, not of Genesis only but of all the Old Testament, do we find an oath introduced, the purport of which is so urged again and again. The subject of it too is no less to be observed. A wife must on no account be taken for Isaac from the daughters of Canaan. She must be sought from the country and kin out of which the father of the faithful had himself been called. Angels are not called, fallen or unfallen: sovereign grace chooses from the world. But there is another provision no less insisted on — the risen Son must on no account be brought again to the world for calling His bride. It is the Holy Ghost who accomplishes this work, not the Bridegroom. The Spirit is sent down from heaven to preach the gospel, and so to effect the formation of the church. The risen Bridegroom abides exclusively in heaven, while the call proceeds. Most impressively does Abraham admonish us in type of what moment it is to see that Christ has nothing but a heavenly relation to the church, and in absolute separation from the world.

How true this is in Christ for the Christian! "We all with open face beholding [or reflecting] the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord the Spirit." "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." So our Lord Himself said (John 16), the Comforter, on coming, should "convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe on me; of righteousness, because I go away to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." The righteous One was cast out by the unjust and lawless world, but God the Father has accepted and exalted Him at His right hand. This is the righteousness of God in its heavenly aspect; and there we know Him, not as the Messiah reigning on earth, but as the rejected One exalted in heaven. He is in no sense of the world; and Christians are not, even as He is not. Nay, more, "As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the earthy, so shall we also bear the image of the heavenly" (

1 Corinthians 15). The practice depends on the principle: the position of Christ determines the walk, as well as the spirit, of the Christian. Rebekah was to have Isaac in Canaan before her; there only was to think of him. On no account — not even to win his bride — must the bridegroom leave his place, save only to receive her to himself at the end. Isaac stays in Canaan and there only is known, while she is being led from her father's house, across the desert, by trusty Eliezer.

We may notice next the place which prayer receives in the servant, and this, not through pressure of trial as in Jacob, but in giving (as here) character to the walk of faith. "And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water, at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. And he said, O Jehovah God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master" (vers. 10-14).

So it is with the Christian in the world. "We walk by faith, not by sight." "Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Intercourse is established between the believer and God. He knows Whom he has believed. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we seek anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." "And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a tattle water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. And the man wondering at her, held his peace, to wit whether Jehovah had made his journey prosperous or not" (vers. 15-21).

Thus faith is kept in constant happy exercise. It is the work of the Spirit in man, especially now that redemption is known. Conscience is at rest, and the affections are free.

But there is more than prayer which distinguishes the christian and the church. The power of the Spirit finds ground of thanksgiving as well as of prayer and supplication. It is indeed the hour when the true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him, and the figure of this we find here. "And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden ear-ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; and said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. She moreover said unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in. And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped Jehovah. And he said, Blessed be Jehovah God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, Jehovah led me to the house of my master's brethren" (vers. 22-27).

That which came forth from God in guidance goes forth to Him in praise, a still more evident characteristic of the Christian. If we live in the Spirit we should walk, as well as worship, in the Spirit.

Along with this difficulties disappear. As the Lord directs, so He opens the door and blesses. There is the comfort of this — the comfort of knowing that it is His own hand that does all. Whatever may be the hindrances, the mission of the Spirit is accomplished. It stands not in persuasible words of man's wisdom, but in the power of God. No doubt there are gifts which accompany from the first the message of the witness, and array the bride, but the work is eminently one of faith and not of human influence. And hence it looks for, and has, the blessing of the Lord.

"And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother's house these things. And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban; and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. And it came to pass, when he saw the ear-rings and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man: and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. find he said, Come in, thou blessed of Jehovah, wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels. And the man came into the house: and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him. And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on. And he said, I am Abraham's servant. And Jehovah hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great; and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses. And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath. And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; but thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son. And I said unto my master, Peradventure the woman will not follow me. And he said unto me, Jehovah before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house: then shalt thou be clear from this my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give not thee one, thou shalt be clear from my oath. And I came this day unto the well, and said, O Jehovah God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go: behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; and she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: let the same be the woman whom Jehovah hath appointed for my master's son. And before I had done speaking in mine heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the well, and drew water: and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also. And I asked her, and said, Whose daughter art thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the ear-ring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands. And I bowed down my head, and worshipped Jehovah, and blessed Jehovah God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son. And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me: that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from Jehovah: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as Jehovah hath spoken. And it came to pass that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped Jehovah, bowing himself to the earth. And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things" (vers. 28-53).

Lastly it is the work of the Spirit to give, and keep up, and strengthen the desire of being with Christ and of His coming, whatever communion of saints may be enjoyed here. "And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. And her brother and her mother said Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing Jehovah hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. And they said, We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go" (vers. 54-58).

So, in the Revelation, the Spirit and the bride say, Come, when Christ presents Himself as the bright, the morning, star. It is the cry, "Behold the Bridegroom! go ye out to meet him," which awakens the slumbering virgins at midnight. It is this which recalls the saints now to go out, as they were called at the first, to meet the Bridegroom. "And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them. And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahai-roi: for he dwelt in the south country. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: And he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a veil, and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (vers. 59-67).

So will it be with the heavenly bride. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up, together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." The Father's purpose shall not fail of accomplishment, and all heaven shall rejoice and give honour to Him, "for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

÷Genesis 25.

The first part of the chapter, comprehended in these verses, gives us the closing scenes of Abraham's eventful and instructive history. The Jewish tradition which identifies Keturah with Hagar is not only without proof but set aside by verse 6, which speaks of "the sons of the concubines which Abraham had;" and as Hagar was one, so Keturah was the other, not (as I think) to imply that she filled this relation during any part of Sarah's life, but rather to affirm her inferiority of place. Keturah is expressly called Abraham's "concubine" in *1Ch 1:32*; as Hagar, on the other hand, is styled his "wife" in *Gen 16:3*. Nor need we revert to the Gentile difficulty, that sons were begotten of Abraham after Sarah's death, which has induced not a few of old as now\* to believe that Abraham took Keturah during Sarah's life-time, and that the whole paragraph, if not chapter, is placed out of its chronological sequence in order not to break the main narrative. Proof of this is wanting, as the whole paragraph flows naturally, after Rebekah's marriage with Isaac, up to the several portions of the sons, as distinguished from the heir, and the death of the patriarch which was severed from Sarah's by at least thirty-seven years.

One may refer for instance to Mr. E. S. Poole, in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," 2:12.

"Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country" (vers. 1-6).

Here then we see, after the call of the bride, the blessing of nations associated with Abraham. It is a very distinct thing from that which faith receives now; for they which are of faith, the same are the children [sons] of Abraham. It is now a blessing open to all or any of the nations; and they are blessed with faithful Abraham. Through the cross the blessing comes to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith; and as Christ is dead and risen, and thus the accomplisher as well as object and crown of the promises, so there is no Jew nor Greek. Fleshly distinctions disappear. All are one in Christ Jesus. In that which is typified by the concubines' sons to Abraham we see the strongest possible contrast with Isaac. Midian may be there, and Jokshan, with the rest; perhaps Sheba, Dedan and Ephah, the son's sons. All these were Keturah's children.

Still it is written that "Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac." The risen son is the heir of all things; and if we are of Christ, then are we Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise. But unto the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away. They receive gifts, not the inheritance of the promises; and they are sent away, instead of abiding in the house for ever, as does the son.

So it will be in the age to come on earth, when, the church being completed, the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready. Blessing will flow, and the land of the morning will be no longer "the immovable east." I do not speak of Israel, the head of the nations under Christ's reign here below; still less of the glorified saints on high; nor do I mean only those that may then be born of God in every nation or people or tribe under the sun. But all the Gentiles are to rejoice with His people — a principle more deeply true, doubtless, in the present election for heaven from among Jews and Gentiles, but to be far more openly and widely seen in that bright day; and this, too, even in that quarter of the globe where dark superstitions of Christendom grow up rank, and side by side, with the Mahometan imposture and heathenism of every type.

"And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; the field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife" (vers. 7-10).

Thus peacefully passed away the man who, of all in Old Testament story, most strikingly combines the title of "friend of God" with "stranger and sojourner on the earth." Not that others — his son, grandson, and other descendants — did not carry on the blessed line of pilgrims who also walked with God. As a whole, however, what saint of old equalled him in these respects? Still less could any be said to surpass "the father of all them that believe."

Let us not at the same time forget that we have to do, not so much with the promises as he had, but with accomplishment in Christ (Romans 4); and that, whatever promises of God there be, in Christ is the yea, and in Christ the amen, for glory to God by us. We are more than Abraham's seed, being blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (*Eph 1:3*). Sovereign grace alone accounts for a purpose so rich and above the thoughts of men or even the ancient oracles of God. Do we believe it for our own souls and for all that are Christ's? Do we walk and worship accordingly as we wait for Him from heaven?