Genesis - Commentaries by Hamilton Smith

Joseph: Revealer of Secrets & Saviour of the World, Vision of Faith, The

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(Gen. 50:15-26)

The last two scenes in the history of Joseph present a striking contrast between the unbelief of the brethren and the dying faith of Joseph. If the first scene, described in verses 15 to 21, presents a sorrowful picture of unbelief of the brethren, it also brings into display the perfect grace of Joseph. A crisis in the history of the brethren makes manifest that they had no true knowledge of the heart of Joseph and therefore no real confidence in him.

The Past Reviewed

Joseph had saved their lives with a great deliverance (Gen. 45:7); he had put them in possession of "the best of the land" of Egypt, and he had nourished them with bread (47:12). For seventeen years they had been the recipients of Joseph's bounty, and the special objects of his loving care, and yet—when a crisis arises—it becomes manifest that they have no personal knowledge of Joseph. They know something of his greatness and glory; they know the great work he has accomplished, they know that every blessing they enjoy is owing to his position and work, but they had no personal acquaintance with his mind and heart. It is as if they said, "WE know what he has done for us, but we do not know how he feels about us."

And not knowing his mind, when the crisis arises it becomes manifest that they have no confidence in him, with the result that they conclude that he will think and act towards them according to the way they had thought and acted towards him.

The Heart Revealed

They remember that when Joseph was but a lad of seventeen, "they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him," and now they conclude, "Joseph will peradventure hate us." Conscience recalls how wickedly they had acted in regard to Joseph, and now they say, "[He] will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." They judge of his thoughts by their thoughts, of his heart by their hearts, and of his acts by their acts.

The Condition Realized

Alas! are not we Christians today oftentimes like Joseph's brethren of old? We know something of the glory of the Person of Christ, we know something of the efficacy of His work, we enjoy the benefits that flow from His finished work on the cross and His present service in the glory, but when some little crisis arises in our history it becomes manifest how little we know of His heart, and therefore what little confidence we have in Himself. We lack that personal intimate acquaintance with Christ, by which alone His mind is learned in such fashion that we can say not only "I know what He has done for me," but "I know how He feels about me." The result is that in the presence of some special trial we are, like Joseph's brethren, greatly distressed in soul. One has truly said, "Nothing has contributed more to the present distraction of saints than the lack of personal intercourse with the Lord. There has been a great and increased zeal to acquire knowledge of the Scriptures, but personal acquaintance with the Lord has not been correspondingly sought after."

The Knowledge of Scripture

The brethren of Joseph had heard the gracious words of Joseph when alone with him, but, not knowing his heart, they had little entered into the full, deep meaning of his words. So with ourselves it is possible to have great knowledge of the words of Scripture and yet be ignorant of the great truths the words convey. A true understanding can only be obtained by the knowledge of Christ. Hence the apostle prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory, may give unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." The knowledge of the schools—the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew—however useful in its place, will never give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation. Such knowledge may give an understanding of the letter of revelation, but not the spirit of revelation. We must know the mind of Christ to understand the words of Christ.

The Knowledge of Christ

Scripture speaks of external knowledge which a person may acquire by hearsay or sight, and also of conscious knowledge—that personal acquaintance by which we can know a person's mind. It is of this latter knowledge Paul speaks, when he says, "That I may know Him," and it is this knowledge we so often lack. We know and rejoice in the glorious things He has done, but do we know the heart of the One who has done so much for us, in such fashion that we can say, "I know how He feels about me"?

The Lack of Confidence

The lack of true knowledge of Joseph's heart, and the consequent lack of confidence in Joseph is revealed in the message that his brethren sent to him. And worse, they attempt to hide their own unbelief and mistrust of Joseph, by pretending they are only carrying out the dying commands of Joseph's father. It is impossible to believe that Jacob left any such command. In total forgetfulness of Joseph's forgiveness of all their sad past they now pray to be forgiven. In spite of all the manifested grace and love of Joseph their uneasy conscience leads them to harbor the thought that Joseph still has something against them. And even so, if not living in nearness to Christ—if we have not made acquaintance with His heart—we may, through sin, failure, and a careless walk, still think, when conscience begins to work, that Christ is against us for something we have done, and, like Joseph's brethren, ask for forgiveness. And yet however great the failure of a true believer,

Scripture never suggests that he should plead for forgiveness as if that question were not fully and eternally settled, but rather he is exhorted to confess his sin that communion may be restored.

The Brethren Reassured

This lack of confidence, after all the love that had been lavished upon them, broke the heart of Joseph. He "wept when they spake unto him" (v. 17). The saddest thing in all this sad world is unrequited love. But though his tears showed how deeply he felt he utters no word of reproach The very tears would surely be sufficient to wither up their unbelief. But Joseph leads them into personal acquaintance with himself by letting them know there is nothing but love in his heart towards them, though he fully knows the evil of their hearts towards him.

The Fear Removed

"As for you," he can say, "ye thought evil against me," but he can add, "Fear ye not." He says as it were, "I know all the evil of your hearts toward me, but there is nothing to fear, for there is nothing but love in my heart toward you." And thus once again he removes all fear as to the past and all anxiety as to the future, for he adds, "I will nourish you and your little ones." Thus it was "he comforted them and spake to their hearts" (margin). Perfect love casts out all fear.

The Confidence Restored

What a difference this interview must have made to these brethren. After this did any one seek to cast a doubt upon Joseph's love they would surely say, "We have been in his presence, we have made personal acquaintance with himself, we know his mind. We not only know what he has done for us, but we know how he feels towards us.

The Faith Rising

In the final scene between Joseph and his brethren, the faith of Joseph rises above all the glories of this passing world and looks on to a better and brighter world that is yet to come. He thinks and speaks no more of the things that he had suffered, the power he had wielded, or the good he may have done. He forgets the things that are behind and reaches out to the things that are before.

The Things to Come

Isaac, in his day, when he "was old and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see," looked on with faith's clear vision to another world and spake "concerning things to come." Jacob at a later day, when dying, with like faith catches a glimpse of the glories on before, and worships, leaning upon the top of his staff. And now Joseph, about to take the passage through the valley, catches sight of the hills that are beyond, and rising above all passing things, lays hold by faith of the world to come.

The End Reached

And God is not slow to mark His approval of the faith of these dying saints, shining in its greatest strength in the moment of nature's greatest weakness. It is not the great deeds they may have wrought in the course of their active lives, but the faith, shining amid the feebleness of age and the weakness of their dying moments, that has secured them a place in God's list of worthies of other days. The faith of other saints may shine in overcoming the difficulties of the way, in escaping the snares of the enemy, and triumphing over the temptations of the world, but the faith of these three saints is distinguished in that it forgets all seen and passing things, be they good or bad, great or small, and looks on to another world. And this is the more striking in the case of Joseph, seeing he had filled a place of such vast importance before the world in his day and generation. He realizes that all the glory of Egypt ends at last in a coffin in Egypt. He had worthily filled a place of great power and glory in this world, such as no man before or since has ever had, but the end of all Egypt's glory is reached in these significant words, "He was put in a coffin in Egypt."

The Living God

Thus it is he speaks no more of man, and man's small world, but of God—the living God, of the faithfulness of God, of the power of God, and the land of God. "I die," says Joseph. The life of the man who had saved other lives by a great deliverance (Gen. 45:7) is fast slipping away, but if Joseph dies, God lives; if Joseph departs, God remains. And into the hands of the living and unchanging God he commends his brethren. Though he may be taken from them, yet he can say with the utmost assurance of faith, "God will surely visit you." The living God is their unfailing resource in the presence of the dying Joseph.

The Clear Vision

Furthermore, God will act in mighty power on behalf of His people, for, says Joseph, He will "bring you out of this land." Joseph had been long in Egypt; he "saw Ephraim's children of the third generation" (v. 23). They were thoroughly established in the land of Egypt. To nature nothing looked more unlikely than that a time would ever come when they would leave the land of Egypt for a land they had never seen, but faith, rising above things seen, and refusing to reason according to the mind of nature, sees with clear vision that, though the people of God may sojourn for a time in the land of Egypt, yet it is not the land of rest that God has promised for His people. Strangership in the land of Egypt may form part of God's ways with His people, but it has no place in God's purpose for His people.

The Faithful God

Thus the faith of Joseph passes on to the land of promise. As surely as God will visit His people in grace to bring them out of Egypt, so surely He will stretch out His hand in mighty delivering power to bring them into the land of His purpose—"a good land and a large... a land flowing with milk and honey." Moreover this good land, with all its blessing and glory, which is unrolled before the faith of the dying Joseph, is secured by the unconditional promise of God, made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph is dying, but no shadows darken the hour of his passing, for he sees in faith that all blessing to a far future rests upon the faithfulness and power of the living God.

A Death Remembered

So it comes to pass in the power of faith's vision of the living God he gives directions concerning his bones. They are not to be left in Egypt. What a witness to the Israelites must the coffin of Joseph have been through the long centuries, forever reminding them that not even death itself can hinder the living God from fulfilling all His pleasure, and carrying out His purpose for His people. So in accord with the oath made to Joseph, when at last they leave the land of Egypt, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him" (Ex. 13:19), still to be a witness to faith in God, throughout the forty years of wilderness journeyings. And when at last they reach the land of promise, his body is buried in the "parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor" (Josh. 24:32), there to sleep in the dust of the earth until he awakes to everlasting life and stands in his lot at the end of days.

The Savior Risen

Nor is it otherwise with the people of God today. Faith still looks beyond the valley of the shadow of death, to the home of God's eternal purpose. In the presence of death faith, as of old, still rests on the God of resurrection, but with yet clearer vision, for we see Christ risen from among the dead, seated at God's right hand of power, holding in His hand the keys of death and the grave. As our faith looks up to the risen Man in the glory, may the passing glories of this dying world become small in our esteem so that, forgetting the things that are behind, we reach out to the things that are before, while waiting for the moment when the Lord will surely visit His people—when He "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."

Thus while to sight all may seem to end in a coffin in Egypt, faith has in view that glorious moment when we shall be caught up together to be forever with the Lord. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

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Joseph: Revealer of Secrets & Saviour of the World, Glory and Blessing

(Gen 45:25-47:31)

The brethren of Joseph fulfill their mission according to the directions of Joseph. They "came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor of all the land of Egypt" (vv. 25, 26). They witness to a living and exalted Joseph, even as today it is the privilege of the believer to witness to the risen and exalted Savior. A testimony so incredible to the natural mind that it is received with unbelief. Thus it was with Jacob. The exposure of his unbelief was the first result of hearing the good news. Twenty years before these same men had brought a lying report to Jacob with evidences to support their lie. And without a question Jacob believed the lie. "Without doubt," he said, "Joseph is rent in pieces." Now his sons bring a true report of Joseph with evidences to support the truth, and at once Jacob doubts. His "heart fainted, for he believed them not." Ever since Adam gave his ear to the devil's lie it has been natural for fallen man to believe a lie. Only a work of grace enables men to believe the truth. Hence we read that those who believe on the Name of Christ are born "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

The Confession of Faith

Thus with Jacob, grace overcomes his unbelief. His sons repeat "all the words of Joseph, which he said unto them." Moreover, they show Jacob "the wagons which Joseph sent to carry him." The grace and goodness of Joseph breaks down the unbelief of Jacob. When he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive." This is the confession of faith. He believed with his heart and confessed the truth with his lips. Nor is there any other way of blessing for a sinner today. We may indeed at first listen to the good news with unbelief, but as we hear the grace of the words of Christ, and see that all has been done that we might be blessed, our hearts are won-the goodness of God leadeth to repentance-we believe in our hearts. Just as Jacob sees that Joseph has made every provision that he might personally be blessed, so we see that Christ has done a great work that we individually might be saved, and that God is satisfied with that work, for He has raised Christ from the dead. We believe in our hearts and confess Jesus as Lord with our lips, and we are saved (Rom. 10:10).

The Language of Love

It was Jacob—the man so often marked by unbelief and crooked ways-that could not believe the good news; but directly he uses the language of faith, God gives him his new name "Israel." Jacob expressed all that he was by nature, Israel all that he was by grace. But not only is faith kindled in the heart of Jacob, but love goes out in longing to Joseph-"I will go and see him before I die." This is the language of love that is satisfied with nothing less than the one that is loved. The heart that has been won by the grace of Christ will not be satisfied at a distance. The test of love is-does it desire the company of the one that is loved? Are we content to say, "we shall see Him when He comes, or when we die," or do we say "I will go and see Him before I die." Do you know what it is to seek His company, and taste the joy of His presence before we die?

In order to reach Joseph, Israel had to take his journey (46:1). He had to leave the scene of all his natural affections. And so with ourselves, if we are to reach Christ where He is, we must forget the things that are behind. Thus Israel comes into the new land-the land of Goshen, and there meets with his son Joseph, and Joseph "presented himself unto him" (v. 29). If on the one hand Israel longs for the company of his son, Joseph on his side is delighted to present himself to Israel. Are we set for the company of Christ, we shall find that Christ is delighted to reveal Himself to us. Do we seek like the two disciples of John 1 to know Christ in His own dwelling, we shall be welcomed by the gracious words of the Lord, "Come and see" (John 1:38,39).

The Removal of Fear

Then Israel can say, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive" (v. 30). The man who had always been speaking of death and dreading the grave has now no more fear of death because Joseph is alive. It is as we see that Christ is risen, and as we gaze upon His face and learn His love, our souls will be delivered from the fear of death.

The Purposes of God

Thus Israel and all that he had came to Joseph in exaltation. God's purposes as set forth in Joseph's dreams, are brought to pass. What follows will show how Joseph uses his place of universal supremacy for the blessing of those who submit to him.

The Instruments of Grace

It is deeply instructive to trace the hand of God in every step of Joseph's path, from the days of his youth when feeding the flock in Canaan, to the day of his glory when set over all the land of Egypt. The varied characters that crossed his path-the father that loved him, the brethren that hated him, the merchants that carried him to Egypt, the captain that promoted him, the woman that traduced him, the jailer that showed him favor, the butler by whom he was forgotten, and the king by whom he was exalted-all were the unconscious instruments to carry out God's purpose for him.

The Way of Preparation

So, too, the changing scenes of his life-the fields of Dothan, the empty pit, the house of Potiphar, the prison and the palace-were all stages on his way to glory, even as his varied pursuits, as shepherd, slave, overseer of Potiphar's house, and keeper of Pharaoh's prison, prepared him for the use of glory.

The Position of Glory

It is this use of glory-the way he uses his place of supreme power-that comes before us so strikingly in this portion of Joseph's story. We see this mighty power put forth in a threefold way-

First, Joseph uses his position of supremacy to bring everything into absolute subjection to himself. All the wealth of Egypt passes into his hands: "Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan" (vv. 13, 14). Then when the money failed, Joseph claims their cattle. He said, "Give your cattle," and we read, "They brought their cattle unto Joseph" (vv. 15-17). Then, the money spent, the cattle gone, they say there is nothing left but "our bodies and our lands" and so they add "buy us and our land for bread." So we read Joseph "bought all the land of Egypt," and "as for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof" (vv. 19, 20).

The Subjection of the Earth

Thus all passes under the absolute control of Joseph-money, cattle, the land, and finally the people themselves. The words of Pharaoh are literally fulfilled: "Without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt" (41:44). Joseph uses his power to bring all into subjection. Never, before or since, have such claims been made by any earthly king. Apart from its typical teaching, the historical fact is without parallel m the history of the world. Many a potentate has made crushing claims, but not one has ever dared to claim all after the manner of Joseph. Moreover, those who have made large claims upon their subjects have been unable to make good their claims; or in the attempt to do so have provoked rebellion and revolution. Joseph, however, not only makes unheard of claims, but he makes good his claims without a voice being raised in rebellion.

The Sovereignty of the Throne

Furthermore, a second great fact is noticeable, that in claiming all, Joseph does so for Pharaoh. If Joseph gathers up all the money, we read he "brought the money into Pharaoh's house" (v. 14); again, if the land comes under Joseph's sway, we read he "bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh" (v. 20). So, too, of the people Joseph can say, "I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh." Thus Joseph uses his supreme power, not for his own advancement, but for the glory of Pharaoh.

The Satisfaction of the People

Finally, a third striking fact remains to be noticed. If on the one hand Joseph's power is used to subdue all for Pharaoh, on the other hand his universal supremacy is used for the blessing of the people. If Pharaoh's glory is maintained the people's blessing is secured, but only as they unreservedly submit to Joseph.

The Supremacy of Christ

In all this Joseph is a striking type of Christ in exaltation. If we are to be saved from the present power of evil, nothing can be of greater importance than to realize that Christ is in the place of supreme power, and to submit to Him. There are great powers in heaven-angels, principalities and powers; there are great powers in the world-kings and all that are in authority; there are great powers in the lower world-the devil and his angels; but the Lord Jesus is set in a place of absolute supremacy over every power. He is set "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come." But if the Father has glorified the Son, it is that the Son may glorify the Father, as the Lord can say in His great prayer, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son that Thy Son may glorify Thee" (John 17:1). Moreover if the Father is glorified, His people are blessed. So we read, "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." The glory which the Father has given to the Son is used for the glory of the Father and the blessing of His people.

The Day of Power

Nor will it be otherwise in the day to come, when Christ will put forth His subduing power, as King of kings and Lord of lords for the glory of God and the blessing of men under His Millennial reign. And so finally "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be annulled is death." "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." This will introduce the new heavens and the new earth, where God will dwell and

men be blessed.

Whether we think of the present day of grace, the Millennium for which earth waits, or the new heavens and the new earth that stretch far into eternity, all depends upon the supreme glory and power of the One who was once rejected of man.

The Center of Praise

And the One who has secured all for the glory of God and the blessing of man will be the center of heaven's praise. As in the days of old, those who had been blessed by Joseph come to Joseph saying, "Thou hast saved our lives" (47:25). They recognize that they owe everything to Joseph. So, too, the great throng of the redeemed delight to say, "Thou art worthy... for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

The Blessing of Saints

But not only were people saved by Joseph, but they prospered under Joseph. This we see set forth in the history of Israel and his sons. The Lord Jesus does a great deal more for His people than save them from the world's famine. He brings us into a good land, a heavenly country, and blesses us with spiritual blessings, and as we enter into those spiritual blessings we shall grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Trembling, we had hoped for mercy-

Some lone place within the door;

But the crown, the throne, the mansion,

All were ready long before.

And in past and distant ages,

In those courts so bright and fair,

Ere we were, was He rejoicing,

All He won with us to share.

-Mrs. Bevan

Joseph: Revealer of Secrets & Saviour of the World, Service

(Gen. 45:9-24)

Joseph has made himself known to his brethren. He has dispelled their fears, dealt with their past, and secured their future. The love of Joseph has brought his brethren into sweet communion with himself, as we read, "He kissed all his brethren... and after that his brethren talked with him" (v. 15). Now we are to learn that the intimacies of love prepare for the service of love. Those whom Joseph has won for himself he will enlist in his service. His brethren shall become his witnesses.

The Preparation for Service

In like manner the Lord deals with the demoniac of the Gospel story. Clothed, in his right mind, and brought to sit at the feet of Jesus—set free by the Word of the Lord—he is prepared for the service of the Lord by the directions from the Lord, for the Lord can say, "Return to thine own house and show how great things God hath done unto thee" (Luke 8:29,35,39). So too, the Lord deals with His disciples on the evening of the resurrection day. As the true Joseph in the presence of His brethren He makes Himself known to the terrified and affrighted disciples. He speaks to their troubled hearts the word of peace. Then it is He gives them the great commission and speaks of the high privilege of being His witnesses (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8).

The Pattern of Service

As with the brethren of Joseph, the demoniac of a later day, and the disciples of the resurrection day, so with ourselves, preparation for service must precede service. We are oftentimes more anxious to be used than exercised to be "meet for the Master's use, and prepared for every good work." Further, our preparation for service is only gained as we are found alone with Christ learning His mind in communion with Him and in the realization of His love. How touchingly is this prefigured in the fine scene between Joseph and his brethren, when, apart from all others, "he kissed all his brethren... and after that his brethren talked with him" (v. 15). The measure of holy separation to the Lord is the measure of our preparation for His service. They who would serve acceptably must first sit at His feet and hear His Word. There only, in the secret of His presence, can we learn His mind and thus serve under His directions. It was thus with the brethren of Joseph; all their directions as to service came from Joseph. Not one of the brethren suggested service. And when Joseph speaks of service, they do not set one another to serve, nor decide how to serve, to whom they shall go, or where they shall go, or what they shall say. The commission to serve, and every detail of the service, they receive from the lips of Joseph.

The Promptness in Service

First, Joseph presses upon them the urgency of their mission. "Haste ye" is the word with which he sends them forth, and in like manner the exhortation for these days—the last days—is "Proclaim the Word, be urgent in season, and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2).

The Place of Service

Second, not only are they told how to go, but they are instructed where to go. The word is "Go, get you into the land of Canaan" (v. 17). They were to be witnesses for Joseph in the very land where, in the days of his humiliation, Joseph received only evil for good, and hatred for his love: where he had been stripped of his honors, flung into a pit, and sold for twenty pieces of silver. And thus it was in that last parting scene between the risen Lord and His glad disciples. They not only receive a commission to preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations, but they are instructed where to begin. The Lord's word is "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). The witness was to begin in the blackest spot on earth, and amongst the worst of sinners, in the place where the Lord had been sold for thirty pieces of silver, stripped of His robe, mocked with a crown of thorns, and nailed to a cross between two thieves. As an old servant of the Lord had said, it is "As if the Lord had said, 'Tell them though they have gainsaid My doctrine, blasphemed My divinity, taken away My life,... endeavored to murder My reputation, too, by making Me an imposter, go to Jerusalem, and by beginning there, show them such a miracle of goodness and grace that they themselves must confess that nothing can be greater than their sin except this mercy and grace of Mine which where their sin abounded grace does much more abound.... Begin at Jerusalem, and after the saving efficacy of My grace appears there, no one will question the possibility of their salvation.' "

The Plan of Service

Third, they learn from the lips of Joseph to whom they are to carry the message. "Go up to my father" is the direction of Joseph (v. 9). The one they had so grossly deceived, and before whom they had denied all knowledge of Joseph, is the very one before whom they are to bare witness of Joseph. Nor is it otherwise with Christ and His disciples. The woman of Sychar goes back to the men of the city to bear a bright witness for Christ before those who well knew the manner of her life. In the very place of her sin she is to bear witness to the One who has set her free from sin (John 4:28,29). Peter, too, bears witness to Christ before those in whose presence he had once so shamefully denied Christ. Moreover, it is not only to the father that Joseph's brethren are sent, but to the father's children and the children's children, indeed, says Joseph, tell him the good news is for "All that thou hast" (v. 10). And the message is still, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house."

The Persuasion in Service

Fourth, the brethren of Joseph are sent back with a very definite message to be delivered with all the authority of Joseph's word. It was to be introduced with a "Thus saith thy son Joseph" (v. 9). We do well to remember that the power behind the Gospel message is the authority with which it is proclaimed. It goes forth with a "Thus saith the Lord."

The Positiveness in Service

Fifth, the great theme of the message was Joseph and his glory. Tell my father, Joseph can say, that "God hath made me lord of all Egypt" (v. 9). And he adds, "Ye shall tell my father of all my glory, and of all that ye have seen" (v. 13). This is still the message that alone will meet the world's famine. Peter preached it with no uncertain sound in the ears of the Jews when, on the day of Pentecost, he said, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." And again before the Gentiles he can say that Christ "is Lord of all" (Acts 2:36; 10:36). Moreover it is still our privilege to declare the glories of the One who is Lord of all, whether it be His personal glories as the eternal Son, His moral glories as the One who is altogether lovely, or His official glories as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Proclamation in Service

Sixth, the message that Joseph sends to Jacob is "Come down unto me" (v. 9). If Joseph is lord of all with the riches of glory at his disposal for all yet it is only those who "come" who obtain the blessing. If all power is in his hands to bless, all grace is in his heart to attract to himself-the blesser. Joseph says in effect to his father, "I want you," for it is not only "Come," but "Come down unto me."

The Purpose in Service

Seventh, the message speaks of the blessings that await those who "come" (vv. 10, 11). If Joseph will but come the days of his wandering will be past, for, says Joseph, "Thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen"; distance and estrangement will be no more, for "thou shalt be near unto me"; care and want will be banished, for "there will I nourish thee." Still the Lord of glory can say, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The soul that comes to Him will find the days of the wandering feet are over, the loneliness of the desolate heart is ended, and the famine of the distant land is met. In the company of Christ there is rest for the conscience, satisfaction for the heart, and food for the soul.

The Point in Service

Finally, the message carries with it a word of warning. There is untold blessing for those who come, there is imminent danger for those who delay. Hence Joseph's word is "Tarry not... lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty" (vv. 9, 11). How far greater the danger if we trifle with that far greater message that comes from the Lord in glory! Well may the apostle ask, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" And again, "If they escaped not who refused Him who spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven" (Heb. 2:3;12:25). If the message of grace opens up a vista of glory with its rest, and satisfaction, and plenty, it also warns those who reject the message that there is nothing before them but the poverty of hell where there is no God, no Christ, and no hope.

The Platform in Service

Such is the message that Joseph sends to his father foreshadowing the Gospel message which the believer carries to the world from Christ the Lord of all.

It is an urgent message, "Haste ye."

It is a message that proclaims the exaltation and glory of the Lord of all.

It is a message of grace that says, "Come."

It is a message that tells of the blessings for those who "come."

It is a message of warning to those who refuse to come.

The Power for Service

Continuing the story of Joseph we discover further rich instructions for the servant of the Lord. The message is full and clear, but it is not enough to be entrusted with a message, the messenger must be fully equipped to deliver the message. The disciples whom the Lord commissioned to preach had to tarry until endued with power from on high. And again the Lord can say, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me" (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). The power in which they are to serve comes from the Person who gives them their commission, and from the place of exaltation in which this Person is. Is this not foreshadowed in the story of Joseph? For the word is, "Take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come" (v. 19). They were provided with a new power to journey on their way. And the power that took them back to Canaan was the power in which they were to bring their father to Joseph. Thus we read, "Joseph gave them wagons" (v. 21).

The Provision in Service

Further, Joseph can say, "Regard not your stuff," or according to a better translation, "Let not your eye regret your stuff" (v. 20). There are things that belong to us naturally-the eloquence of man, and the wisdom of man, and there are carnal means and methods that appeal to the natural man. But, says the apostle, "my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," and again he can say, "we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 10:3,4). In the service of the Lord that which is merely natural is neither to be regarded nor regretted. The Gospel that we carry is too great and serious for the feebleness of carnal methods and the levity of natural eloquence.

The Provision for Service

Moreover, had the brethren fallen back on their awn "stuff" to support them in their service they would have slighted the provision of Joseph. Their action would have said, "Joseph's provision is not sufficient for Joseph's commission." Joseph, however, can say, "The good of the land of Egypt is yours," and, in accord with this, he "gave them provision for the way" (vv. 20, 21). In carrying out their service for Joseph they were sustained by the good of the land from which they came, received from the hand of the one that sent them. Nor is it otherwise in the service of the Lord in this day of His grace. We have received full provision to carry out His service, and hence to import human methods into this service is to cast a slight upon His provision. By so doing we say the Holy Spirit, and spiritual means, is not sufficient for the service of the Lord. Let us then beware of regarding our "stuff' and neglecting His provision. May we ever remember the words of one who, though in the world's sight an "unlearned and ignorant" man, could say, "His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

The Prohibition in Service

Another lesson we may learn is that, in the service of the Lord, the servant is not only spiritually equipped, but he is dependent upon the Lord for his temporal needs. From the moment Joseph's brethren set forth in their path of service until the day of their return, they were sustained by the provision of Joseph. They were not provided for by the people to whom they were going, but by the person from whom they had come. Apparently they were not to take of Jacob's things to carry out Joseph's work. So in the New Testament we read of those who "for His name's sake... went forth taking nothing of the Gentiles" (3 John 7).

The Privilege of Service

But blessed as all this is, it is not enough for the service of the Lord. If the service is to be effectual the life of the servant must be in harmony with the message that he delivers. This important truth is strikingly set forth in the dealing of Joseph with his brethren. Not only did he give them provision for the way, but we read, "To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment" (v. 22). They were not only to deliver a message concerning the glory of Joseph, but they themselves were to be witnesses of the change that the glory effected. And, as we have seen, not only were the apostles sent forth to preach Christ but they themselves were to be witnesses to Christ-"ye shall be witnesses unto Me." "Having put off the old man with his deeds, and having put on the new, renewed into full knowledge according to the image of Him that has created him," it is our privilege and responsibility to display the change of raiment by expressing the character of Christ in all His lovely traits -compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness and love.

The Peril in Service

Finally, Joseph sends forth his brethren with the warning word, "See that ye fall not out by the way" (v. 24). And in those last words of the upper room, when the Lord is equipping His disciples to be His witnesses, He thrice exhorts them to love one another (John 13:34;15:12,17). Alas! we have fallen out by the way. The Galatians by their legality fell out by the way, for the apostle has to say, "Ye bite and devour one another" (Gal. 5:15). The Corinthians by their carnality fell out by the way, for the apostle writes, "There are contentions among you" (1 Cor. 1:11). And as in the beginning so it has ever been through the long history of that which professes to be a witness for Christ in the earth. Had love prevailed there would have been no room either for legality or carnality to divide the servants of Christ and mar their service to the Lord.

We will love with tender care-

Knowing love to Christ-

Brethren who His image bear-

When there's love to Christ.

"Jesus only" shall we know,

And our love to all shall flow,

In His blood bought church below,

For the love of Christ.

-Wm. E. Reed

Joseph: Revealer of Secrets & Saviour of the World, Years of Famine, The

(Gen. 41:53-42:38)

We have traced Joseph's path to a position of exaltation and power, and we have seen how he used that power during the years of plenty. But "the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. And the seven years of dearth began to come" (vv. 53, 54). How will Joseph act in the years of dearth? His brethren had consigned him to the pit, the Gentiles had flung him into prison. Will Joseph take occasion by the world's extremity, and his brethren's need to use his power in taking vengeance? Nature might act thus, but grace will take another way. Joseph will use his place of supremacy and power for universal blessing. But while showing grace he will maintain righteousness, hence a cry of need will be wrung from the Gentiles and they must submit themselves to Joseph before the blessing is received. So too repentance must precede blessing in the case of the brethren.

Need Awakened

During the days of plenty the world paid little heed to Joseph. Of his brethren we hear nothing, they were wholly indifferent to him. When, however, the dearth set in, need is awakened; "the land of Egypt was famished" (v. 55); and Jacob and his sons are faced with starvation and death (42:1, 2). The need calls forth a cry for bread, and the Gentiles have to learn, and the brethren discover, that none can meet the need save the one that once they scorned and rejected. The Gentiles must "go to Joseph," and the brethren must bow themselves before him with their faces to the earth (41:55; 42:6). The once rejected but now exalted man is alone the resource alike for Gentile nations as for Jacob and his sons.

The One Resource

All this, however, speaks plainly of things to come. There fast approaches "the hour of temptation (i.e., trial) which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10), and for the Jew the time of "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world" (Matt. 24:21). "Alas!" says the prophet Jeremiah, "for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). And in that day of unprecedented trial the one resource will be the exalted Christ, who, in the days of His humiliation, was rejected and crucified by Jew and Gentile.

The Storehouses of Blessing

Both Jew and Gentile will pass through seas of misery in their attempts to bring about prosperity and peace in a world from which God and His Christ are excluded. But not until the Gentile submits to Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, and the Jew at last confesses, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord," will the time of blessing be reached. Then the exalted Christ will, like Joseph of old, open "all the storehouses," of blessing.

Deeper Tribulation

There is, however, in the story of Joseph, a great difference in the treatment meted out to the Gentiles and in his dealings with his brethren. The Gentiles have truly to learn their need and submit to Joseph before the storehouses of blessing are opened. The guilt, however, of the brethren was far greater than the guilt of the Gentiles, and the exercises must be correspondingly deeper that bring them to repentance before they obtain the blessing. And so, too, Scripture makes it abundantly plain that the Jew, with the deeper guilt of having crucified their own Messiah, will pass through far deeper tribulation than the Gentile before obtaining the millennial blessing under Christ.

Deeper Exercises

These deeper exercises of the Jew are foreshadowed in Joseph's dealings with his brethren, as detailed in the chapters that follow. Under the stress of famine Jacob has to say to his sons, "Why do ye look one upon another?" They are in desperate plight, and this much they realize, there is no help in one another. If help is to come it must be from one outside themselves. Hence the ten brethren come to Egypt and present themselves before Joseph.

Changed Circumstances

Time was when Joseph was a weak and helpless youth in the hands of his elder brethren. What could a youth do in the power of ten men? And in those far-off days they were not slow to use their power to gratify the hatred and envy that filled their hearts. Twenty years have rolled by; circumstances have changed; Joseph is exalted; his brethren bow before him—ten helpless, needy men. What can ten strangers do in the presence of the all-powerful governor of Egypt? The day of humiliation is past, the day of power has come. How will Joseph use his power? Will he condemn his brethren to hard bondage even as he had suffered bondage at their hands? Human nature might prompt such a course, vengeance might delight in it, justice might be pleaded for it. On the other hand, nature might suggest a very different course; could not Joseph act with generosity and entirely overlook the sin of his brethren, even as Esau. the man of nature, overlooked his brother's wrong in an earlier day? Nature can often talk in an airy way of letting bygones be bygones and seek to exalt itself by a show of generosity. Joseph, however, will take another way. The conduct that seems so highly commendable in the eyes of the natural man has no attraction for the man that fears God.

Love Directing

This was the secret of Joseph's life. Through all the vicissitudes of his path from youth to old age he was governed, not by the dictates of nature, but by the holy fear of God. Thus it is in the presence of his brethren he can say, "I fear God" (v. 18). This is the secret spring of all his actions. His thoughts, his words, his ways, were governed by the fear of God. Nature leaves God out and thinks only of self-vindication, self-gratification, or self-exaltation. Faith thinks of God and what is pleasing and due to God. Joseph seeks to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28). In the day of his temptation he was kept from the path of evil by the fear of God, for he could say, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" In the day of his exaltation he is kept from taking vengeance on his brethren by the fear of God. No sorrows in the day of his humiliation, no glories in the day of his exaltation are allowed to move his soul from the fear of God. He knew how to be abased, and he knew how to abound. Be the circumstances sad or bright, he ever kept God between himself and his circumstances. Thus walking in God's fear he takes God's way with his brethren, and God's way was a way of love, and yet not the way of mere human love, which is often a feeble and failing thing, even as men say, "Love is blind." Divine love with its clear vision is not blind to the faults in the objects of love, but rather, in full recognition of all that is contrary to itself, it sets to work to remove every blemish, so that at length it can rest with satisfaction in its object.

Love Discerning

Moreover, love is quick to discern. Multitudes from surrounding nations were driven by need to the feet of Joseph, but directly these ten men appear before him love discerns that they are his brethren, as we read, "Joseph saw his brethren." For twenty years he had not seen them, but with love's quick perception he sees in those ten needy men the brethren from whom he had so long been parted. And love "knew them." "Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not" (v. 8). Love knew their past history and the present need that brought them to his feet.

Love Remembering

And love knew, because love "remembered." "Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed of them" (verse 9). The dreams of the past, the anger and scorn with which they had been received by the brethren, the treatment they had meted out to him, all is remembered, but remembered by one that loves them, for, as Joseph speaks with them, "He turned himself about." Time will come when all the pent-up affections of Joseph will flow out without restraint as he weeps before them, but ere that moment comes he has other work to do. Love will set itself to work to win their hearts and set them in perfect ease in the presence of the one against whom they had so greatly sinned. To reach this end love will find a way whereby, in righteousness, every stain on the past can be wiped away, so that with every question entirely settled nothing will remain to hinder its outflow between Joseph and his brethren. There is, however, only one way whereby the heart can be set at perfect ease in the presence of one that has been offended. All must be brought to light and fully confessed. The slumbering conscience must be aroused, the sins recalled, and the sins confessed. It is only through the conscience that the heart can be reached and set at ease. Moved by love, Joseph will set himself to reach their consciences. He "made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them" (v. 7).

Love Alluring

Christ after the same fashion made Himself strange in the day when a Gentile woman was driven by her need into His presence and was met by silence, for we read, "He answered her not a word." And when He does speak, is it not, for the moment, "hard things" that she has to hear? But we know it was the way of perfect love that led to blessing. So too in His future dealings with the Jew, Christ will make Himself strange when according to the prophet He will say, "I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths"; and says the Lord, "I will take away my corn in the time thereof." The Lord will bring famine upon the Jew, in order to bring the Jew into the wilderness, where they have no resources but God. In that wilderness place the Lord can say, "I will speak to her heart" (Hos. 2:6,9,14).

Love Testing

The brethren protest that it is their need that brings them into Egypt. "We have come to buy food" (v. 10). They have indeed come to the right person, but they have come with a wrong plan and with a wrong plea. Their plan is to buy, and their plea, "We are true men" (v. 11). As yet they know neither the love of Joseph's heart, nor the evil of their own hearts. They must learn that Joseph is too rich to sell to his own, and that they have nothing in themselves to plead. Their money shall not buy corn, and of merit they have none whereby to claim it. They must learn that while Joseph is ready to bestow every blessing, he is one upon whom they have forfeited every claim. Love is a giver when worthlessness has nothing to plead. The love of Joseph's heart will shut out all mere barter, and the evil of their hearts exclude all plea of merit. If they think they are true men then Joseph will put them to the test.

Love Teaching

Moreover Joseph's brethren must learn that all their blessing depends upon the man of whom they say "one is not" (verse 13). They say, as it were, "We have not seen him for twenty years; he has entirely passed out of our lives, as far as we are concerned 'He is not.' " So, too, in a day to come the Jew will have to learn that all their blessing depends upon One that they have set at naught. "This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11,12).

Love Convicting

The brethren have condemned themselves out of their own lips. They have protested that they are true men, and in the same breath they say, "one is not," knowing full well that if Joseph has passed out of their existence it is entirely owing to their own wickedness. They stand in the presence of the one that they had rejected with unrepentant hearts, and yet protest they are honest men. Joseph now takes the first step to convict them of their sin, by putting them into prison. The fear of losing their lives had brought them in Egypt, with the result that they lose their liberty. For three days they are left in prison that they may learn in some measure what their sins merit. Joseph had been thrown into prison unjustly, but they are justly brought into the same condemnation. The result is conscience begins to work, for they say, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother" (verse 21). Conscience connects their present trouble with their past sin. The prison has so far done its work. They not only say, "We are verily guilty," but "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." We saw the anguish of his soul, but we hardened our hearts. He besought us but we stopped our ears to all his entreaties, "Therefore is this distress come upon us." They rightly connect their present distress with the past sin of twenty years ago.

Love Weeping

But all this awakening of conscience, while so far good, is only amongst themselves. It must all come out before Joseph if they are ever to be happy in the presence of Joseph. Hence Joseph will keep his hand upon them. Simeon is bound before their eyes, but it is love that binds the cords round Simeon, for even as he does so he turns aside to weep. The cords that bound him were cords of love. Moreover, he commanded that their sacks be filled with corn. He is not unmindful of their needs and thus grants a measure of relief; none the less Simeon is held in bondage. And in the way Joseph meets their needs he is still leading his brethren a further stage in their restoration, for while supplying them with corn he returns every man his money. Had they eyes to see they would learn in this that Joseph was a giver. But in their condition gifts bestowed only arouse deeper fear. Their hearts fail them at the discovery of their money. "What is this that God hath done unto us?" (verse 28). They have recalled their sin, now they see that God is dealing with them. The fear of God is arising in their souls. Not indeed that holy fear that marked Joseph. "They feared because they were offenders; he feared lest he should offend." So again when they had returned to Jacob, and each finds his money in his sack, "they were afraid." The goodness of Joseph should have gladdened their hearts, but they are miserable and afraid in the presence of a goodness that

their guilty consciences tell them they do not deserve.

Love Misunderstood

Jacob is not guilty, like his sons, but his feeble faith can see no trace of the hand of God in all these circumstances. As he hears the story of his sons' experiences he can only say, "All these things are against me." How different the language of faith which can say, "All things work together for good to them that love God." The very things that to sight and nature were against him were the very means that God was taking for his blessing. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away." These are the things that were for him. Joseph lost to his father, rejected and sold, imprisoned and exalted, Simeon held in bondage, Benjamin taken from his father, were all stages in the pathway to blessing, and means used by God to restore Joseph to his father and to bring Jacob and his sons into richer blessing. Yet Jacob is saying to his sons, "Then shall ye bring clown my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." At the very moment when Jacob could see nothing in the future but sorrow and the grave, God was about to bring him into joy and blessing. Had Jacob been able to persist in his thoughts he would have thwarted God in His ways of blessing, for says Jacob, "My son shall not go down."

There is a need-be for each pain,

And He will one day make it plain

That earthly loss is heavenly gain.

Like as a piece of tapestry,

Viewed from the back appears to be

Naught but threads tangled hopelessly.

But in the front a picture fair

Rewards the worker for his care,

Proving his skill and patience rare.

Thou art the workman, I the frame;

Lord, for the glory of Thy name,

Perfect Thine image on the same.

Joseph: Revealer of Secrets & Saviour of the World, Rejected and Sold

(Gen. 37:12-36)

Jacob may have special affection for his son Joseph, nevertheless his other sons have a real place in his affections, and Joseph is to become the witness of the father's love to the brethren. Accordingly Jacob desires that Joseph shall leave the home in the vale of Hebron and journey to distant Shechem, there, as the sent one of the father, to inquire of his brethren's welfare and bring Jacob word again. Joseph on his part is ready to obey, though he has experienced the hatred of his brethren. Jacob's request meets with Joseph's immediate response, "Here am I." So we read Israel "sent him out of the vale of Hebron" and Joseph "came to Shechem."

The Son Responding

In this journey there is a foreshadowing of that far greater journey undertaken by the Son of God when, leaving the Father's home of light and love, He came into this world of death and darkness, well knowing the evil into which He came. And yet He turned not back. Even as at the cross we read, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him went forth" (John 18:4). If the love of the Father would send Him, then the love of the Son is ready to do the Father's bidding. "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." He comes as the sent One of the Father to declare the Father's love.

The Son Rejected

Joseph's touching story foreshadows too what manner of reception the world has given to the sent One of the Father. Having no heart for their father, these men of evil ways have no eyes to discern the sent one of his love. For them Joseph is only a dreamer whose dreams they would fain frustrate by conspiring to slay him Even so of Christ, His people said, "This is the Heir, come let us kill Him." And how eager man is to express his hatred. "When they saw him afar off... they conspired against him to slay him." But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His

ways as our ways. If it is a question of the Son of the Father's love drawing near to men, then indeed He will be rejected while yet afar off. But if it is a question of a sinner being drawn to the Father, then we read while "yet a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him."

The Son Reproached

The evil heart of man is marked by corruption and violence. Not only are the brethren ready to rid themselves of Joseph by violent acts, but they were prepared to cover their violence by corrupt and lying words. "Let us slay him," they say, "and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him." Violence and corruption are the outstanding marks of fallen man who is shameless in his violence and corruption. He is not simply overcome by some sudden temptation; but, as with Joseph's brethren, they can deliberately plan their violent act and corrupt lies. Man had not progressed far on his downward course before "the earth was filled with violence" and "all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." In spite of laws and treaties, moral training and codes of honor, and notwithstanding prisons and reformatories, violence and corruption are rampant in every part of the earth.

The Son Rebuffed

Nothing brings man's evil into evidence like the presence of goodness. It was the presence of Joseph that called forth the violence and corruption of his brethren; even as the presence of perfect goodness in the Person of the Son of God became the occasion at the most furious outburst of man's evil. At His birth the enmity of man is ready to kill the child Jesus, and to cover its murderous intent with lying words (Matt. 2:8,16). But at the cross goodness is displayed as nowhere else only to call forth the greatest expression of man's evil that the world has ever seen. There goodness rises to its supreme height, and evil sinks to unutterable depths. The cross is the display of "hatred against God and good... the truest friend denies, the nearest betrays, the weaker ones who are honest flee; the priests, set to have compassion on ignorant failure, plead furiously against innocence; the judge, washing his hands of condemned innocence; goodness alone, and the world—all men—enmity, universal enmity against it. Perfect light has brought out the darkness; perfect love, jealous hatred."

The Son Revealed

Man vainly imagines that corruption and violence will prosper, even as the brethren of Joseph, having counseled to slay their brother, and designed to cover their act with lying, can with the utmost confidence say, "We shall see what will become of his dreams." They will indeed see. And alas for the rejecters of Christ, they too will see, for is it not written, "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him"?

The Son Reviled

Perfect goodness brings out the universal guilt of men, but though all are guilty, there are different measures of guilt, and of this the Judge of all the earth will take account in due time, rendering to one few stripes, and to another many stripes. Of these different degrees of guilt we have intimations in the story of Joseph. All the brethren were guilty, but not in the same degree. Reuben, though unstable, and morally corrupt as we know from his history (Gen. 35:22;49:3,4), was not necessarily cruel. In common with his brethren he has wronged his father, but all human affection is not extinguished in his heart. He would have spared Joseph's life, and his father's feelings. Judah, too, may be covetous, but he also has some compunction as to laying hands upon his brother. And these differences we see in the way men treat the Christ of God. All verily are guilty, but there are degrees of guilt. Herod, vile and pleasure-loving man that he was, would mock the Lord and set Him at naught, but he finds nothing worthy of death in Him. Pilate will go further than Herod, and yield up Christ to the murderous hatred of the Jews; but he has no personal enmity, and will at least make some feeble effort to preserve from death One that he knows to be innocent. But of the Jews Peter has to say, "Ye delivered (Him) up and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go... and killed the Prince of life" (Acts 3:13-15).

The Son Refused

And still there are the pleasure-lovers, strangers to all religious convictions, who have no good word for Christ and yet will not oppose. But there are others yet more guilty concerning Christ. They profess to admire His moral excellencies. Pilate-like they find no fault in Him; yet to retain their popularity with the world, they stifle their convictions, decide against Christ, and range themselves with that thrice-guilty class whose active enmity never ceases to attack His glorious Person and trample under foot His precious blood. There are the careless and indifferent, there are the fearful and fainthearted, and there are the furious haters-open and avowed enemies of Christ. But all unite in the rejection of Christ.

The Son Repudiated

Thus it was in Joseph's history. His brethren stripped him of his coat of many colors and cast him into the pit. The father had distinguished him by a coat of many colors, the brethren degrade him by stripping him. So on many illustrious occasions when Christ is distinguished above all others by some special display of divine power, wisdom and grace, man will at once strip Him of His coat of many colors and seek to degrade Him to the level of a mere man by asking, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" or "Is not this the carpenter?" As in the case of Joseph, the stripping was only the prelude to the pit, so with Christ, the rejection of every witness to His glory, led man at last with wicked hands to deliver Him to death.

The Son Rescued

There is however a significant difference between the type and the antitype. Isaac in his day very blessedly brings the death of Christ before us. He may be bound upon the altar, Abraham may stretch forth his hand and take the knife to slay his son, but at once the angel is present to stay his hand. Joseph may again take up the story of the cross, as his brethren cast him into the pit, but for him "the pit was empty, there was no water in it." How different the cross of Christ. The same God at whose bidding "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son," can now say, "Awake, O sword, against the Man that is My fellow," and though twelve legions of angels await His commands, yet not one is bidden to hold back the sword of judgment. It is no empty pit into which He must go. He can say, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves" (Psa. 88:6,7).

The Son Rewarded

While the sufferings of Isaac and Joseph both point to the cross, yet each portrays a different aspect of that great mystery. Isaac goes up to the mount to be offered up. Joseph goes down to the pit. And the mount speaks of the glory of the Person offered up. The pit tells of the misery and degradation of those for whom He is offered up. He is the son, and more, the only son, and yet more he is the promised heir, Isaac, and the beloved of his father. But when Joseph goes down to the pit, while it is true his moral excellence cannot be hid, yet it is not his personal glory that is prominent but rather the evil and corruption of those who surround Joseph. If at last his brethren are to be brought into blessing and share in the glory of Joseph, then Joseph must take their place of distance and degradation as set forth in the pit. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission," and "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone."

The Son Revealing

Having cast Joseph into the pit, his brethren "sat down to eat bread." Nor was it otherwise at the cross. The presence of Joseph only serves to reveal the evil of his brethren, just as the cross becomes the occasion to expose the depth of corruption in the heart of man. The leaders of Israel yield up the true Passover Lamb to death, and calmly sit down to eat the passover feast-an evil and adulterous generation, like the adulterous woman of Proverbs, of whom it is written "She eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith I have done no wickedness."

The company of merchant men on their way to Egypt at once suggest to Judah the opportunity of making profit out of their brother. Why not sell Joseph and make a little money? If they are not going to gratify their hatred by killing Joseph, why not gratify their covetousness by selling Joseph? Hence they gave their brother up to the Gentiles, and gave themselves up to money making. And what Judah did a thousand years before Christ came, His descendants have done for nearly two thousand years since His rejection. At the cross the Jews abandoned their Messiah to the Gentiles and ever since they have abandoned themselves to the worship of mammon. "Profit" is the word that governed the actions of Joseph's brethren. Judah asks the question for the covetous heart—not "Is it right?" or "Is it wrong?" but "What profit is it?" And "profit" has governed the policy of the Jew throughout the long centuries since that sad day when their Messiah was sold for thirty pieces of silver.

The Son Removed

Thus Joseph passes into the land of the Gentiles and is "brought" into Egypt. Egypt was a snare to Abraham, and his sojourn in Egypt brought him only sorrow and shame. With Joseph, however, it brought blessing and glory. Why this difference? Is it not that in Abraham's case he "went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (12:10); but Joseph was "brought" into Egypt. One went there in unbelief and self-will. The other was brought there according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

Having practiced a heartless piece of deceit upon their father, which plunges the old man into the deepest sorrow, these hypocrites gather round to comfort him. While none can excuse the wickedness of his sons, yet we cannot but see in this scene that Jacob is only reaping what he had already sown. Thirty years before Jacob had deceived his father with "the skins of the kids of the goats," and now after long years, he himself is deceived by his sons with "a kid of the goats." There may be long years between the sowing and the reaping, but at last the reaping time comes. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.

The Son Resurrected

We need hardly wonder that Jacob "refused to be comforted" by such comforters, but in the presence of, what to him was the actual death of his son, his faith seems to have grown exceeding dim. How different the behavior of David in the presence of the death of his son. Jacob says, "I will go down into the grave unto my son in mourning"; but of David we read he "arose... and came into the house of the Lord and worshipped." Both men are in the presence of the death of a child, but one says, "I will go down into the grave mourning," the other, "I will go up to the house of the Lord and worship." Yet both were true saints, but one looked no further than death and the grave, the other looked beyond death to resurrection, into a scene where there is "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying nor pain."

O bright and blessed scenes, where sin can never come,

Whose sight our longing spirit weans, from earth where yet we roam!

And can we call our home our Father's house on high,

The rest of God our rest to come, our place of liberty?

Yes! in that light unstained, our stainless souls shall live,

Our heart's deep longings more than gained, where God His rest shall give.

His presence there, my soul, its rest, its joy untold,

Shall find when endless ages roll, and time shall ne'er grow old.

- J. N. D.

Joseph: Revealer of Secrets & Saviour of the World, Loved and Hated

(Gen. 37:1-11) Loved

To all who love our Lord Jesus Christ there is an abiding charm in the histories of the Old Testament saints, for therein can be traced bright unfoldings of the glories and excellencies of Christ. Such foreshadowings of things to come are doubtless hidden to the natural man, but plainly discerned by those who, through the Spirit, seek "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Of all Old Testament histories none presents a richer or more distinct picture of Christ than the touching story of Joseph. Other lives may give in greater detail personal experiences and human failure, teaching many a wholesome lesson; but as the story of Joseph is unfolded we feel that the Spirit of God keeps in view the display of the glory of Christ, and all that pertains to the weakness and failure of a man of like passions with ourselves has little or no place. And yet, however rich the picture, we soon recognize that the life of no single saint could adequately set forth the fullness of Christ. In common with Joseph, other saints of God, as Isaac in his day, and David and Solomon in a later day, have their tale to tell concerning the glories of Christ. Moreover, there is no mere repetition, each has some special glory to disclose. Isaac tells of the sufferings and affections of Christ whereby He gains His bride; David of His sufferings and victories whereby He gains His kingdom; Joseph of His suffering and supremacy by which He administers His kingdom. Solomon takes us a step further and unfolds the glories of His kingdom when He is supreme.

His Service

The story opens with Joseph, as a lad of seventeen, feeding the flock with his brethren and "doing service" with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah. He who will yet be supreme must first be a servant. The place of supremacy is only reached by the path of service, according to the word of the Lord: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:26,27). In this the Lord Himself is the perfect example of His own teaching, for He can say, "I am among you as He that serveth" (Luke 22:27). And because He "took upon Him the form of a servant... and became obedient unto... the Cross.... God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name." Thus at once in this history we see that shadowing forth of One that is greater than Joseph.

His Shepherding

But there are other ways in which the opening history of Joseph will speak of Christ. Like Moses and David in a later date, Joseph is a leader of sheep before he becomes a leader of men. For forty years Moses must be content to lead a flock of sheep at the back of the desert before he becomes the leader of God's people through the desert. And of David, is it not written that Jehovah "chose... His servant and took him from the sheepfolds... He brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance" (Psa. 78:70,71)? Thus not only in the fact of service but in the manner of service these saints of old prefigure the great Shepherd of the sheep.

His Separation

Service with his brethren, however, does not necessarily imply fellowship with their evil. As the obedient servant he is very near them; as a man of integrity he is entirely apart from them. His service brought him into the company of others, his character made him a man apart from others, his very presence exposing their wickedness, so that he can but bring to his father "their evil report." And thus it was with Christ the perfect Savior; His grace brought Him very near to us in all our need, His holiness kept Him entirely apart from all our sin. Our desperate needs, and His infinite grace, made Him a Servant moving amidst the needy crowds, and yet our sin and His holiness made Him a lonely Stranger in the land. As the perfect Servant He was accessible to all, as a holy Man He was apart from all. His service of love took Him into many a needy home, His holiness left Him without a home.

His Superiority

If, however, the character of Joseph set him apart from his brethren, the love of his father gave him a distinguished place above his brethren, for we read "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children." Moreover, Israel bears witness to this place of distinction by clothing Joseph with a coat of many colors-a public testimony to the delight of the father in his son. At once our thoughts travel from Joseph to Christ and the unique place He had in the Father's affections, and the Father's pleasure in bearing witness to His delight in His Son. The very chapter that tells us, "God so loved the world," also tells us that "the Father loveth the Son." A measure is given to the love of God for the world, infinite though it be, but no measure is, or can be, given for the Father's love to the Son. The announcement stands in all its majestic dignity. "The Father loveth the Son," and faith delights to accept it. But if the Father can furnish no measure for this love, He can bear witness to His love for the Son. Joseph's coat of many colors, the public testimony of his father's love, has its bright counterpart in the opened heavens of the New Testament. Never are the heavens opened apart from Christ, and when opened they always bear some fresh witness to the Father's delight in the all-varied graces of the Son. No sooner has Christ taken His place on earth as the Servant of Jehovah than at once "the heavens were opened unto Him" that the host of heaven might look down on a Man on earth of whom the Father can say: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 8:16,17). A little later and again the heavens are opened, that a man on earth may look up and bear witness to "the Son of Man" in heaven (Acts 7:55,56). Again, the day is not far distant when the heavens will be opened to let the Son of Man come forth in glory as the victorious "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:11-16). Having come forth as King of kings the heavens will again be opened that ascending and descending angels may bear witness to the Son of Man reigning in glory on the earth (John 1:51). On these bright occasions we see our Lord Jesus invested with the coat of many colors. In other words, we see in the opened heavens the Father's delight in Christ as His beloved Son in humiliation, as the Son of Man in heavenly glory, and as the King of kings and Lord of lords, coming forth to reign on the earth as Son of Man in supreme power and glory.

His Supremacy

Furthermore, the One who is loved by the Father, and marked out as the special object of His delight, is the One who is destined to universal supremacy. This great truth is brought before us in Joseph's dreams, both setting before us the supremacy of Joseph. One dream might have sufficed to foretell the glories of Joseph, but would be wholly inadequate to shadow forth the glories of Christ. For His supremacy will have a twofold character. He will yet be supreme on earth, and many passages tell of this earthly glory. The dream of the sheaves making obeisance to Joseph's sheaf may well speak of this excellent supremacy over all the earth which Christ is destined to wield. Yet this first dream fails to set forth the supremacy of Christ in all its vast extent, for He is destined not only to be supreme on earth, but to hold universal sway over heaven and earth. The Father, according to His good pleasure, has purposed in the fullness of times to head up, "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth" (Eph. 1:9,10). And this second dream speaks of this heavenly supremacy by presenting heavenly bodies—the sun, the moon, and the stars, making obeisance to Joseph. The two dreams thus set forth the supremacy of Christ over things on earth and things in heaven to the remotest bounds of the created universe.

His Sufferings

Thus the Spirit of God delights to exalt Christ by presenting His universal supremacy as the leading thought in the history of Joseph even though it is the path of suffering by which the place of pre-eminence is reached. There are the graces and excellencies of character that the sufferings call forth, as well as the heartlessness of His own and the evil and indifference of the world.

Hated

If Joseph has a unique place in his father's affections, and if he is destined in the counsels of God to the place of supremacy, he will, in the meantime, have to face the hatred of his brethren. This must be so if, in any measure, his story is to shadow forth that far greater hatred which Christ was called to endure at the hands of men. The One whom God has destined to the place of universal dominion is the only one that is hated by every natural heart. Why does the natural heart bear such hatred to Christ? Was there any cause of hatred in Him? Surely not, for in Christ there was an entire absence of the cruelty and violence, the lust and covetousness, the pride and arrogance, the meanness and selfishness, which in other men give such occasion for hatred. In Him there was everything to call forth love. While others went about doing evil, He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Man's mouth may be full of cursing and bitterness, but at least man must bear witness to "the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4:22), and the officers who were sent to take Him said, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46).

Hated Because They Were Evil

And yet in spite of His acts of love, and His words of grace, they rewarded Him evil for good, and hatred for His love (Psa. 109:5). Truly He could say, "They hated me without a cause." Alas! plenty of cause of hatred, but no cause in Him. No cause in man to call forth Christ's love, and no cause in Christ to call forth man's hatred. But why should the evil heart of man hate the One whose whole life was spent in showing love to man? Let Joseph's history supply the answer. Why was Joseph hated by his brethren? Was he not in their company as one that served? Truly, but they were evil and hence, however desirable his service might be, his presence exposed their evil, and called forth their hatred. And for a like cause, and in far deeper measure, the world hated Christ, as He could say, "Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7).

Hated Because They Were Envious

There were other causes for the hatred of Joseph's brethren. When they "saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him." And so with Christ, confessing His unique place with the Father, He can say, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17) Immediately the hatred of the Jews is called forth and "they sought the more to kill Him," and at once the Lord declares that "the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things." The Beloved of the Father is hated by man.

Hated Because of His Dreams

Further, the dreams that speak of Joseph's future supremacy are a fresh motive for the envy and hatred of the brethren. He had been a witness against them of their evil, now he is a witness to them of his future glory. They will have neither one nor the other. Even so when the Lord witnessed against the evil of the world, and bore witness to His coming glories, like Joseph, He drew upon Himself the hatred of the world. Before the assembled leaders of Jerusalem the Lord speaks of His coming glories: "Hereafter," He can say, "shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power," a confession that is followed by a furious outburst of hatred, priests and elders uniting to spit in the face of the Son of God.

Hated Because of His Words

Lastly, the brethren of Joseph hated him for his words. As we read: "They hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words." Nor was it otherwise with the Lord. Men heard the words of Him that spake as never man spake, and some believed; but "many of them said, He bath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye Him?" The hatred could not be hid. So too Christ is still the object of a hatred that men cannot

conceal, try as they will. A constant stream of abuse of His Name, denial of His Person, and refusal of His work, issues from apostate pulpits, and an infidel press, often masquerading under the cloak of religion. It is still His professed brethren that cannot speak peaceably of Him. But let us never forget that behind all the "hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" there are the "ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed." The evil lives of Joseph's brethren were behind the hatred in their hearts, and the evil words of their lips. It is so today, the ungodly deeds in men's lives lead to the "hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 15).

But who Thy path of service,

Thy steps removed from ill,

Thy patient love to serve us,

With human tongue can tell?

Midst sin, and all corruption,

Where hatred did abound,

Thy path of true perfection

Was light on all around.

In scorn, neglect, reviling,

Thy patient grace stood fast;

Man's malice unavailing

To move Thy heart to haste.

O'er all Thy perfect goodness

Rose blessedly divine;

Poor hearts oppressed with sadness,

Found ever rest in Thine.

Love, that made Thee a Mourner

In this sad world of woe,

Made wretched man a scorner

Of grace-that brought Thee low.

Still, in Thee, love's sweet savor

Shone forth in every deed;

And showed God's loving favor

To every soul in need.

-J. N. D.

Abraham: The Friend of God, Genesis 24:1-27: The Call of Rebekah

And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord 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 the Lord, 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 thou that thou bring not my son thither again. The Lord 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. 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 Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew 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 shewed kindness unto my master.

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 little 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 the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not. And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring 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 said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in. And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master’s brethren.

Genesis 24:1-27

In the offering up of Isaac, recorded in chapter 22, we cannot fail to see a striking type of the death and resurrection of Christ. Then, in chapter 23, the death and burial of Sarah typifies the setting aside of Israel—God’s earthly people—that followed upon their rejection of Christ. In this chapter there is a beautiful picture of the calling out of the Church that takes place during the time Israel is set aside.

Three Great Truths

We know that after the death and resurrection of Christ, He ascended to glory and took His place at the right hand of God. Then there followed that great event, the coming of the Holy Spirit—a divine Person—to dwell with and in believers on earth. These three great truths mark the day in which we live: first, that there is a Man in the glory, Christ Jesus; secondly, there is a divine Person on earth, the Holy Spirit; thirdly, the Holy Spirit has come to form the Church, to guide her through this world, and to present her to Christ in the day of His coming glory.

A Comprehensive View

These are the great truths that pass before us in type in Genesis 24. The immense importance of the chapter lies in the fact that it presents in a picture what each divine Person in the Godhead is engaged in during the day in which we live. As we look around we see the increasing wickedness of the world, and the increasing failure and weakness of the people of God. Looking upon all this confusion, we can easily become depressed and cast down. When, however, we look at the picture presented in this chapter, we see in a comprehensive view what God is doing to carry out His own purposes. Other scriptures may bring into prominence the faith as well as the failure of believers for our encouragement and warning. But here comes before us in all its blessedness what God is effecting for the glory of Christ, in spite of every adverse influence, whether in ourselves, in the world, or by the devil.

Seeing what God is doing, and the object that He has before Him, and knowing that all that God has purposed He will assuredly carry out, will keep the soul at rest in the midst of a scene of turmoil. Moreover, it will make us intelligent in the mind of God and save us from disappointment from false expectations. Further, we shall be saved from expending our energies in so many activities that, while they have the benefit of the world in view, are wholly outside the purpose of God.

In the course of the story there comes before us three main subjects: first, the directions of Abraham to his servant (vv. 1-9); secondly, the mission of the servant in Mesopotamia (vv. 10-61); and thirdly, the meeting between Isaac and Rebekah in the land of Canaan (vv. 62-67).

The Father’s Purpose

Abraham’s directions very beautifully set forth the counsels of God the Father concerning the Son, and what God is doing in the world today by the Holy Spirit in carrying out His purposes.

First, we learn that the great object of the servant’s mission was, as Abraham said, to “take a wife unto my son.” The servant was sent to Mesopotamia with this single object in view. Having found the bride and brought her to Isaac, his mission would be accomplished. It was no part of the servant’s work to interfere with the political or social interests of Mesopotamia. The Holy Spirit is not here to improve or reform the world, or bring peace to the nations, or even convert the world. He is not here to right the wrongs of the poor, remove oppression, or relieve man from disease, want, and misery.

There is One that in due time will indeed bring peace and blessing to the world. One who has been here and proved that He had the power and grace to relieve man of every pressure. Alas! we nailed Him to a cross, and He is gone, so the misery of the world remains. Nevertheless, He is coming again to bring in the blessing. But in the meantime Jesus is in heaven and the Holy Spirit is down here to obtain the bride for Christ—a heavenly people—and conduct her to Christ in the gloryland.

Christendom, unfortunately, has so entirely missed the mind of God that it looks at Christianity as merely a religious system for the improvement and uplifting of man, in order to make the world a better and brighter place. If this is all that people see in Christianity, little wonder that they are giving up its profession, for it is evident that after nine teen centuries the world grows worse rather than better, and today it is filled with increasing violence and corruption, and men’s hearts are failing them with fear of things coming upon the earth.

It is true that God in His providence cares for His poor creatures and can, and does, restrain the evil of men. It is also true that where the truth is received it will certainly bring a measure of improvement in temporal circumstances. But with our thoughts directed by the Word of God, we see that the Holy Spirit is here to take a people out of the world for Christ in glory.

The servant was told that the bride for Isaac was not to be of the daughters of the Canaanites. Abraham said she was to be of “my kindred.” The Canaanites were under the curse and devoted to judgment. In the same way, there can be no link between Christ in the glory and a world under judgment. Isaac’s bride was not to be a stranger but one that already belonged to Abraham’s family. So the Church is formed not of unbelievers, nor of a mixture of believers and unbelievers, but wholly of the family of faith.

Further, the servant was warned that in no case was he to bring Isaac back to Mesopotamia. During the time that the servant was in Mesopotamia, Isaac was in Canaan, and there was no link between Isaac and the people of Mesopotamia. So we know today that there is no direct link between Christ in heaven and the world as such. Failing to see this, the efforts of Christendom—as well as of many sincere Christians—are entirely directed to doing the very thing that the servant is twice warned not to do. The attempt is made (in a variety of different forms) to bring Christ back to the world and attach His Name to benevolent schemes for the reformation and improvement of the world. Such efforts are entirely outside the work of the Spirit who is here not to bring Christ back to the world but to take a people out of the world for Christ.

It is true that in due time Christ is coming back to the world, but let us not forget that the last time the world saw Christ, He was on the cross to which they had nailed Him. The next time they see Him will be when He comes “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Finally, the servant was told that God’s angel would go before him. We know that the angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.” Their service always seems to be of a providential and guardian character. The Holy Spirit deals with souls, while the angels seem to act in relation to circumstances. An angel may have directed Philip as to the way he should take, but the Spirit directed him in dealing with a soul (Acts 8:26, 29).

The Servant’s Mission

This part of the story is rich with instruction for us seeing that it typically presents not only the object of the Spirit’s coming but also the way He carries out this object.

The servant came to Mesopotamia well-equipped for his service, for we read, “All the goods of his master were in his hand,” reminding us that the Holy Spirit has come to teach us “all things,” to guide us into “all truth,” and show us “all things that the Father hath” (John 14:26; 16:13-15).

The servant's work in Mesopotamia had a fourfold character: first, he found the bride appointed for Isaac (vv. 10-21); secondly, having found the bride, he distinguished her from all others (v. 22); thirdly, he weaned her heart from Mesopotamia, and attached her affections to Isaac (vv. 23-53); finally, he led her across the desert to her unseen bridegroom (vv. 54-61).

The Bride Found

We learn from the prayer of the servant the great purpose of his mission. He did not pray for the men of the city, or their daughters; he was engrossed with one object—to find the bride appointed for Isaac.

Moreover, we see that the infallible sign of the appointed bride was that she would be marked by grace. The servant prayed, "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" (Gen. 24:14).

The prayer was granted, for when Rebekah arrived at the well and was put to the test, she answered the servant's request, and said, "I will draw for thy camels also." In all this we are reminded of the Spirit working in grace in those who are the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit" (1 Peter 1:2).

The Bride Adorned

Secondly, the servant, having found the appointed bride was not content with a work of grace which only he could see, but he publicly distinguished the bride from all others by adorning her with the golden earrings and the bracelets of gold, which others could see. Not only is the Spirit here to produce a work of grace in the believer, but there is to be seen in the believer the fruits of being sealed by the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and temperance. These precious jewels are a witness to others, and distinguish the believer from the world around.

The Story Told

Thirdly, we see the pains that the servant took to link the affections of Rebekah with Isaac. Again, this sets forth the work of the Spirit by which believers are strengthened in the inner man in order that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith. This part of the servant's work was introduced by the question, "Is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?" Rebekah's answer again went beyond the servant's request. He only asked for "room"; she said that there was "provision" as well as room (v. 25). Laban, too, could say to the servant, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord." So we read, "The man came into the house" (vv. 31- 32). The Holy Spirit has come to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us (Jn. 16:14). But we do well to take home to ourselves this great question, "Is there room? "Are we prepared to put ourselves out to make room for the Holy Spirit? The flesh and the Spirit "are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). We cannot entertain the Spirit if ministering to the flesh. To make room for the Spirit while at the same time to be minding the things of the flesh is impossible. Are we prepared to refuse the indulgence of the flesh in the passing things of time in order to make room for the Spirit to lead us into the deep and eternal things of God? Are we making room and provision for the Spirit? "Room" and "provision" were made in the house of Bethuel for the servant of Abraham with the result that the servant was able to speak of Isaac, to engage the affections of Rebekah with Isaac, and lead her to Isaac.

The Bride Won

Having been warmly welcomed into the house, at once the servant bore witness to Isaac. He revealed the mind of his master concerning Isaac, and in so doing he took of the things of Isaac and showed them to Rebekah. He spoke of the wealth of his master, and showed that all was given to Isaac: "Unto him hath he given all that he hath." So the Lord Himself tells us that "All things that the Father hath are Mine," and that the work of the Spirit will be to take of His things and show them to us (John 16:15).

The Response

Having spoken of Isaac and the purpose of Abraham for the blessing of Isaac, the servant paused to see the effect of his message. Does not the Spirit deal with us in like manner? Does He not wait to see if we respond to His unfoldings of Christ before He makes us a public witness to Christ? In the picture there was a ready response, with the result that at once "the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah." In the same way, if we respond to the unfoldings of the Spirit concerning Christ, He will make us the witnesses of redeeming love—the jewels of silver; the witnesses of divine righteousness—the jewels of gold; and the witnesses of practical sanctification—the raiment.

The Decision Made

Finally, having engaged the affections of Rebekah with Isaac, the servant's one great aim was to lead Rebekah to Isaac. The servant said, "Send me away unto my master." He had come to find the bride, and having accomplished that end, he longed to be away. He had not come to find the bride and settle her in her old home, but to lead her to a new home.

The relatives wanted to detain Rebekah at least ten days. The servant's desire was to be away, and by his report of Isaac, he formed the same mind in Rebekah. If we allow the Holy Spirit to have His way with us—if we hinder Him not—He will form our minds according to His mind, to think as He thinks about Christ, to detach our hearts from the things where Christ is not, and to engage our affections with Christ where He is. Too often we hinder the work of the Spirit by clinging to the world, its politics, its pleasures, and its religion. But the world cannot hold us if our hearts are set on reaching Christ in glory.

Earthly relations may have sought to detain Rebekah, but after all, the decision rested with her. They said, "We will call the damsel and inquire at her mouth." So the great question for Rebekah was, "Wilt thou go with this man?" This is still the question for each one of us. Do we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit, and are we prepared at all cost to follow His leading?

Christendom has almost entirely ignored the presence of the Spirit, with the result that multitudes who take Christ's name have settled down in the world that has rejected Him and from which He is absent. It is a great moment when our hearts are so attached to Christ in heaven that, like Rebekah, we say, "I will go."

A Pathway Followed

The immediate result of her decision was that “they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men.” If we let it be known that we are forgetting the things that are behind and have set our hearts on heavenly things, it will not be simply a question of our giving up the world. The world will give us up; we shall be “sent away.”

Then we read that “Rebekah arose...and followed the man; and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.” Believers, while gladly submitting to God’s way of salvation, often are tempted to go their own way to heaven. Our desire should be to know “His way” and to follow as He leads. To follow the Spirit will not be to follow some inner light, as men speak, but will be to walk according to the Word of God. And the Spirit, using the Word of God, will always gather us to Christ.

Thus Rebekah, following the man, found herself on a wilderness journey. For the moment she had neither the home of Laban nor the home of Isaac. So if we follow the leading of the Spirit, we shall find that “we have neither the earth in which we are, nor heaven to which we are going.” Nevertheless, as Rebekah traveled the four hundred miles of desert journey, she had a bright prospect before her. At the end, Isaac—to whom her heart had been attached—was waiting to receive her.

In like spirit the Apostle Paul can say, “One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I pursue, looking towards the goal for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14, New Trans.).

The Goal Reached

The servant in Mesopotamia throughout his mission always had in view the great day when the bride, having been guided across the desert, would be presented to Isaac. In all these events Isaac had taken no active part, nor had he left the land of Canaan. All was left in the hands of the servant. Nevertheless, Isaac was far from indifferent to the mission of the servant and the coming of the bride. At evening Isaac came from the way of the well Lahai-roi to meet the bride. The significant meaning of the well is said to be “the well of Him that liveth and seeth.” If this is so, it would suggest the undoubted truth that all through our wilderness journey we are under the eye of One who lives and sees. As the Apostle says, “He is able also to save them to the uttermost...seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

The Coming

Further we see that Isaac definitely came to meet the bride, for Rebekah inquired, “What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?” The picture presents Isaac as one who was waiting for, and wanting, his bride. Our desires after Christ may often be feeble, but He longs for the moment when His bride will be presented to Him. Before He went away, He could say to His disciples, “If I go...I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

The Marriage

When at last Rebekah saw Isaac, “she took a veil and covered herself.” Immediately, the marriage followed, for we read, “Isaac... took Rebekah...and she became his wife and he loved her.” So, too, after our wilderness journey, when the great work of the Holy Spirit is accomplished, and for the first time we see the Lord Jesus face to face—when He receives us to Himself—then at last these wonderful words will be fulfilled, “The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.”

When creation was completed, Eve was presented to Adam as his bride, the first type of the great mystery which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, and which tells of God’s eternal purpose to secure a bride for His Son. Through the long centuries, and amidst all changing dispensations, God has kept in view the great day of the marriage of the Lamb.

God’s people may fail and break down, as they have done in every dispensation. The world, increasing in violence and corruption, may tempt and often overcome the people of God. The devil may oppose and set up the false woman who becomes drunk with the blood of saints. Nevertheless, in spite of the failure of God’s people, the efforts of the devil, and the temptations of the world, God never turns aside from His great purpose to secure a bride for His Son.

At the end of God’s Book, we are permitted to see in a vision the great day of the marriage of the Lamb, and at the very close we have a beautiful presentation of Jesus waiting for His bride, and the bride, in her true attitude, as led by the Spirit, looking for the coming of Jesus. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come.” His answer is, “Surely I come quickly,” and the bride responds, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

The Incentive for Us

How much disappointment we would be saved if, in all our service, we had before us the great object that is always before the Spirit of God—the presentation of the Church to Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing on the great day of the marriage of the Lamb. Our view, and our service, is too often narrowed down to a small locality and our little day; then when everything seems to fail locally, we are brokenhearted and disappointed. If, however, our great object is to gather souls to Christ in view of the marriage of the Lamb, we shall not be disappointed, whatever the sorrow and failure by the way. There will be no broken hearts, no regrets, no disappointments when at last we hear the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come.”

Let us then press forward through sorrows, through trials, through weakness, through every kind of opposition, knowing that at the end there is the great day of the marriage of the Lamb.

The typical teaching of these chapters closes with the account of Abraham’s children by Keturah, given in the first six verses of chapter 25. These children, from whom many Eastern nations have their origin, received “gifts,” and thus came in for blessing through their connection with Abraham. Nevertheless, Isaac was placed in striking contrast to the other sons of Abraham. To others he may have given gifts; to Isaac he gave all that he had.

This may set forth in type the great truth that Christ, as risen from the dead, is the Heir of all things, and that after receiving His heavenly bride, He will enter into the earthly inheritance in connection with restored Israel, while the nations of the earth will also receive blessing.

The deeply instructive history of Abraham closes with the brief record of his peaceful end at “a good old age,” and the burial by his sons Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah. Thus in striking contrast to poor Lot, Abraham finished his pilgrim path with the respect and honor due to one who was “the friend of God,” and “the father of all them that believe.”

Abraham: The Friend of God, Genesis 12:4-20: Faith and Unbelief

So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that 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: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram’s wife. And Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.

Genesis 12:4-20

Abraham had been set free from the ties of nature, though at the painful cost of death coming into the family circle. After his father was removed by death, Abraham obeyed the call, as we read, “So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him.”

He took Lot, his nephew, with him, and Lot with his worldly-mindedness would prove an encumbrance to him. In the case of his father, Abraham who was called allowed nature to lead, for “Terah took Abram,” and this became a deadly hindrance. In the case of the nephew, Abraham took the lead, for we read “Abram took...Lot,” and therefore, while this might become a weight, it did not hinder faith answering the call.

When nature took the lead, we read, “They went forth...from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan.” But they never reach the land under the leading of Terah. Now, when faith takes the lead we again read, “They went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came” (v. 5).

A Contrast

Arriving in Canaan, they found “the Canaanite was then in the land.” This is deeply significant. Of Abraham, God had said, “I will bless thee.” Of Canaan, God had said, “Cursed be Canaan.” God brought Abraham—the man of blessing—into the land of promise, but he at once discovered that the devil had already brought into that very land the man of the curse. In this way the devil sought to thwart the purpose of God and hinder the man of faith from entering into possession of the land.

A Comparison

So it is with the Christian. He is called out of the present world, he is a partaker of the heavenly calling, he is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. But, answering to the call and leaving the world, he finds that he is opposed by “spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). The believer that seeks to enter into his spiritual blessings will find there is arrayed against him spiritual wickedness seeking to prevent him from taking the heavenly ground that is the only true portion of the Church.

For Abraham, Ur was in the past; the possession of the land was yet future. In the meantime he had neither the world that he had left, nor the better world to which he was going. This, too, is the position of the Christian who answers the call of God. He has left this present evil world and he has not yet reached the world to come.

What then, we may ask, is the portion of the one who answers the call, and what will sustain him in this place outside the present world order and not yet enjoying the world to come? Here the story of Abraham is rich with instruction and encouragement.

The Obedience of Faith

First note that the great principle on which Abraham acted was the principle of faith. Obviously, if he had left one world, and had not reached the other, he had nothing for natural sight. It is not that he did not see, but, what he saw was by faith. Thus we read, “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed”; and, again; “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise.” He and his own lived by faith, and finally we read, “These all died in faith” (Heb. 11:8-9, 13).

The Path of Faith

Answering the call of God on faith, Abraham and those with him became “strangers and pilgrims.” As the Holy Spirit in the New Testament can say of them, they “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13). This comes before us very strikingly in his history. In Haran, where Abraham was detained for a time, we read, he “dwelt there”; but when he arrived in the land, we read he “pitched his tent” as one that had no certain dwelling place. Moreover, we read that he “passed through the land.” As a stranger he had only a tent in this

world; as a pilgrim he was passing through to another world.

The Portion of Faith

Thirdly, we learn what sustained Abraham in this pilgrim path. We are told, “The Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land.” Mark well these two things. First, the twice repeated statement “the Lord appeared” to him; secondly, the land was set before him as a future possession. He pursued his journey as a stranger and a pilgrim in the light of the glory of the God who had called him, and the blessedness of the land to which he was going. So we read in the New Testament, “He looked for a city which hath foundations,” and again, he looked for “a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Heb. 11:10,16).

Nor is it otherwise with ourselves. It is only as we have Christ Himself before us in His glory and the blessedness of the heavenly home to which we are going that we shall, in any measure, bear the stranger and pilgrim character. It is not enough to know the doctrine of Christ, and that heaven lies before us at the end of the journey, but, like the Apostle, the desire of each heart should be, “That I may know Him,” and “apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:10,12).

Taking a place outside this world order in answer to the call, it is possible to grow in our personal acquaintance with the Lord Himself, for He has said, “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.”

The Response of Faith

After the Lord appeared to Abraham, we immediately read, “There builded he an altar” This surely speaks of worship. In the Epistle to the Hebrews those who “go forth” to Christ outside the camp not only take up their pilgrim character as having no continuing city, but they become worshippers who “offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually” (Heb. 13:13-15).

Abraham not only realized something of the glory of the land in the far future, but he caught a glimpse of the glory of the One that had appeared to him. The gift of the land might well call forth his thanksgiving, but the blessedness of the Giver made him a worshipper. This always happens, for worship is the outflow of a heart that is filled with the glory of the Person we adore.

Resource of Faith

Fifthly, Abraham “called upon the Name of the Lord.” This speaks of dependence on the Lord. Whatever his needs, whatever the privations of his pilgrim journey, whatever opposition he may have to meet, whatever temptations might cross his path, he had an unfailing resource—he could call on the Name of the Lord.

In every day of difficulty the godly find their resource in the Lord. In the day of ruin before the flood there were those who, like Cain, “went out from the presence of the Lord”; but, there were also the godly who “began...to call upon the Name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:16,26). So in the dark days of Malachi the godly found their resource in the Lord, for we read, they “thought upon His Name” (Mal. 3:16). In the early days of the Church, believers were known as those who “called on this Name” (Acts 9:21). In the midst of their persecutions it was to the Lord that they turned. And in the midst of the ruin of these last days, we are assured that there will be still those “that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22).

However striking the faith of Abraham, we are made to realize that he is a man of like passions with ourselves. No one takes the path of faith without being tested. The test is allowed to uncover to us on the one hand our weakness, and on the other the grace and faithfulness of God, “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6).

The Faithlessness of Abraham

In Abraham’s history the test came in the form of a famine. It was a severe test for “the famine was grievous in the land.” If the Lord allowed the famine, the Lord could surely meet the needs of His own in the famine. However, under the pressure of his need, Abraham allowed the circumstances to come between his soul and the Lord. Instead of calling on the Lord, he followed the dictates of mere reason, or common sense, and, for a time, stepped out of the path of faith and “went down into Egypt.” Instead of counting on God to sustain him, he went to the world for help.

Having taken this false step, he found that though his immediate needs were met, he was faced with fresh difficulties occasioned by his false position. He feared that he would be killed in order to satisfy the lusts of Egypt.

Having taken a position in which he could no longer count on God to preserve him, he was left to his own resources to meet this fresh difficulty. He sank below the level of the world and acted a lie. With this equivocation he sought to protect himself at the expense of his wife.

Unbelief, carrying its own judgment, constantly leads into the very evil one seeks to avoid. As it has been said, “The sons of men would build a tower lest they should be scattered abroad, and the Lord scattered them because they built it. Abram, fearing lest Pharaoh should take his wife, says she is his sister (as God would not preserve him), and therefore Pharaoh takes her into his house” (J. N. DARBY). So again, at a later day in similar circumstances, Elimelech left the land of God in order to escape the fear of death by famine, only to find that death awaited him in the land of Moab (Ruth 1:1-5).

By this false step, Abraham found relief from his immediate need, and even acquired riches, but at what a cost. For in Egypt he could pitch no tent and raise no altar, nor call on the Name of the Lord.

The Faithfulness of Abraham’s God

Yet in spite of failure, God is faithful to His own. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. God does not give up His people when they break down. He acts on our behalf, though we have to suffer for our folly. Thus it was that God acted on behalf of his failing servant. We read, “the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram’s wife.”

In result, when the deceit was discovered, Abraham was dismissed by the world, for Pharaoh says, “Behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.” And Pharaoh took care that he did go, for he “commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.” Alas when the world dismisses the people of God, not because of their faithful witness to God, but because of their own shameful conduct! Thus, in the goodness of God, His poor servant Abraham was set free from a false position, but not without reproach and shame.

Abraham: The Friend of God, Genesis 11:31-12:3: The Call of God

And 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 Chaldeans, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran. Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 11:31-12:3

In the first period of Abraham’s life we are introduced to the path of faith and those who walk there in answer to the call of God. We also see the hindrances on the path; the faith that takes the path; and the blessings in the path as well as the failure, temptations, and conflicts found there.

Let us think first of the character of the call by which the Lord began to woo Abraham from Ur to the city of God.

A Divine Call

The first great truth we learn in the opening portion of Abraham’s history is the blessed character of the call of God. From Stephen’s address, recorded in Acts 7, we learn that “The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia.” What distinguishes the call from every other call is this: it comes from God—the God of glory. Human civilization, with its cities and towers reaching up to heaven, has nothing that speaks of God, only that which exalts and displays the glory of man. “The God of glory” speaks of another world in which there is nothing of man’s self-aggrandizement but everything that displays the character of God. This is the God who in wonderful grace appears to a man living in a world estranged from God and steeped in idolatry.

So it is the glory of the One that appears to Abraham that gives such importance to the call, and gives faith its authority and power to answer to that call.

A Separating Call

Secondly, we learn that the call is a separating call. The word to Abraham is, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house.” Abraham is not told to remain in the city of Ur and deal with man’s wickedness, or attempt to improve its social condition, or reform its domestic ways, or attempt to make it a better and a brighter world. He is called to come out of it in every form. He is to leave the political world “thy country;” the social world— “thy kindred,” and the domestic world “thy father’s house.”

The call today is no less definite. The world around us is a world that has the form of godliness without the power—the world of corrupt religion; and the epistle that tells us that we are partakers of the heavenly calling exhorts us to separate from its corruption. We are to “…go forth therefore unto Him [Jesus] without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:13). It is not that we are to despise government—it is still God’s appointment. We are instructed to pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-2), to refrain from speaking evil of dignitaries (2 Peter 2:10; Jude 1, 8), to pay our taxes (Mark 12:17; Rom. 13:6-7), and to obey the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1-5).

Nor can we neglect family ties—they are ordered by God. Nor are we to cease to be courteous, and kind, and do good to all men as we have opportunity. But, as believers we are called from taking part in political activities of the world, the social round, and the whole sphere in which unconverted members of our families find their pleasure without God. We are not asked to reform the world or seek to improve its condition, but to come out from it. The word is still, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

An Assuring Call

Thirdly, if the call of God separated Abraham from this present world, it is in view of bringing into another world “a land,” God said, “that I will show thee.” If the God of glory appeared to Abraham, it was in order to bring Abraham into the glory of God. Thus the wonderful address of Stephen (Acts 7) that commences with the God of glory appearing to a man on earth (v. 2), ends with a Man appearing in the glory of God in heaven (v. 55). In closing his address, Stephen looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he says, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.” Looking at Christ in glory, we see the wonderful purpose that God has in His heart when He calls us out of this present world. He has called us to glory, to be like Christ and with Christ in a scene where everything speaks of God and all that He is in the infinite love of His heart.

God does not say to Abraham, “If you answer to the call, I will immediately give you possession of the land.” But He says, “I will show thee the land.” If we answer His call, God allows us, along with Stephen, to “see the King in His beauty” and the land that is very far off (“of far distances,” Isa. 33:17). We look up and see Christ in glory.

An Advantageous Call

There is great present blessing for the one who answers the call. As separated from this present evil world, God says to Abraham, “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great.” The men of this world seek to make a great name for themselves; they say, “Let us make us a name.” But God says to the separated man, “I will bless thee and make thy name great.”

The tendency of our natural hearts is always to seek to make a name for ourselves, and the flesh will seize on anything, even the things of God, to exalt itself. This tendency was seen even among the disciples of the Lord when they debated among themselves as to which of them should be accounted the greatest.

The scattering of man at Babel, and the divisions of Christendom, as well as every strife among the people of God, can be traced to this one root—the vanity of the flesh seeking to make itself great. “Only by pride cometh contention” (Prov. 13:10).

The lowly mind of the Lord Jesus led Him to make Himself of no reputation. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name.” God has made His Name great (Rev. 15:4), and to the one that has His lowly mind and follows Him outside the camp in answer to the call, God says, “I will make thy name great.” God can make a much greater name for the believer in His world of glory than we can for ourselves in this present evil world.

If honestly confessed, it may well be found that the true motive for some Christians remaining in a soul-deadening religious system is the secret desire to be great. Thus they shrink from the path of obscurity outside the religious world. Can we not see in Scripture, as in daily experience, that those who have been spiritually great among the people of God have been separated—men and women who have answered the call of God; while any departure from the separated path has led to the loss of real influence and true spiritual greatness among the people of God?

A Beneficial Call

God says to Abraham, “Thou shalt be a blessing.” In the path of separation, not only would Abraham himself be blessed, he would be a blessing to others. We do well to mark the import of these words. How often a believer remains in an association which he would admit is not according to the Word of God on the plea that he will be more useful to others than in the outside place of separation. However, God does not say to Abraham, “If you stop in Ur of the Chaldees, or in the halfway house at Haran you will be a blessing,” but, answering to God’s call he is told, “Thou shalt be a blessing.” Perhaps Lot felt he could have influence sitting in the gate of Sodom, but the man who had influence there—who almost spared the city by his intercessions—was the man under the oak at Mamre.

A Preserving Call

Sixthly, Abraham is told that in the outside place he would have the preserving care of God. He may indeed have to face opposition and trial, for it is ever true that “he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey” (Isa. 59:15). But God says to the separated man, “I will...curse him that curseth thee.” The separated man is preserved from many a trial that overtakes the believer who remains in association with the world. The mercy of the Lord saved Lot from the doom of Sodom, but, in that false association he lost everything—wife, family, wealth, and testimony.

An Effective Call

Acting on faith in God’s word, Abraham was told, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” We know the use that the Spirit of God makes of this promise. He says, “The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen [on the principle] of faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8). Abraham did not, and could not foresee the far-reaching effect of the principle of faith on which he acted in answering to the call of God, but God foresaw that it was the one way of blessing for all the families of the earth. So now none but God can foresee the far-reaching effect in blessing for others that may result when we, in simple and wholehearted faith, answer to the call of God.

The Hindrance to Answering the Call of God

We have seen the blessed promises that are connected with the call of God, and we shall learn how faith responds to the call. First, however, in this deeply instructive history, we are permitted to see how often the man of faith may be hindered for a time from answering to the call.

From Stephen’s address, recorded in Acts 7, we learn that the call came to Abraham, “when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran.” In answering to this call he was hindered by the ties of nature. The call came to Abraham, but nature apparently can at times profess great zeal in answering the call, and even take the lead, for we read, “Terah took Abram...and went forth from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan.” Man in his natural state may attempt to tread the path of faith, and, at the start, do the right thing with the best of intentions. But in its self-confidence nature always undertakes to do more than it has the power to accomplish. Thus it came to pass that while Terah left Ur “to go to the land of Canaan,” he never reached the land. Nature stopped halfway at Haran, and there he dwelt to the day of his death.

But what of Abraham, the man of God? For a time he allowed himself to be hindered from fully obeying the call of God. It was not simply that his father was with him; he allowed himself to be led by his father, as we read, “Terah took Abram.” The result being that he stopped short of the land to which he was called. So we read, in Stephen’s address, he came “out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land.”

How many of us have been hindered for a time from taking the separate path, consistent with the call of God, by some beloved relative. The call reaches the believer; he acknowledges the truth, but delays to answer it because some near relative is not prepared for the outside place.

The soul clings to the hope that by waiting a little the relative will be brought to see the call, and then both can act together. Faith, however, cannot lift nature up to its own level, though, alas, nature can drag down and hinder the man of faith. Many pleas can be raised to excuse this halfway halt, but in reality it is putting the claims of nature above the call of God. Then, as in Abraham’s history, God may have to roll death into the family circle and remove the one that we allowed to hinder us in obeying God’s call. Thus it was not until his father was dead that Abraham fully answered to the call of God.

Abraham: The Friend of God, Genesis 11:27-31: On the Other Side of the River

Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Genesis 11:27-30

To understand and profit by the history of Abraham it is necessary to realize the character of the world in which he lived, and from which he was called.

The Background of His Life

The Apostle Peter refers to the time before the flood as "the world that then was." The Apostle Paul speaks of "this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4); and finally, he speaks of "the world to come"— the Millennial world (Heb. 2:5). There is, then, the world that then was, the world that now is, and the world to come.

The world before the flood was ruined at the fall, and became utterly lawless. For sixteen hundred and fifty years God bore with the increasing wickedness of men, until the whole world—having become corrupt before God and filled with violence—reaped the judgment of God and "the world that then was being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Pet. 3:6).

After the flood, the world that now is had its commencement. It was marked by entirely new elements. Government was introduced so that, in the mercy of God, wickedness should not go unpunished. Man was made responsible to curb evil by exercising judgment on the wicked. Noah was told, "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." But as man had failed in innocence and ruined the world before the flood, so man failed in government and ruined the present world.

As ever, when man is set in a place of responsibility, he fails, and that from the outset. Noah, who was set to govern, fails to govern himself. He became drunk and was mocked by his son. In the main, these things unfortunately have marked the government of the world. Those put in authority fail to govern, and those in opposition mock their failure.

Moreover, we see that, as time passed, men misused government to exalt themselves, and acted in independence of God. They say, "Let us build us a city ...and let us make us a name." Finally the world became apostate and fell into idolatry, for we read, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood [the river Euphrates] in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods" (Josh. 24:2).

As a restraint upon man's evil, the world was separated into different families, with distinct nationalities and diverse languages. By this confounding of languages, knowledge was fragmented, thus limiting or delaying the damage that men could do with that knowledge.

Such then, was the commencement, and such is the character of the present evil world which is fast ripening for judgment. A world in which government is constituted by God, but ruined in the hands of men, who act independently of God, exalt themselves, and finally apostatize from God, falling into idolatry.

The Turning Point in Abraham's Life

For over four hundred years, God bore with this world. Then suddenly the God of glory appeared to a man on earth and commenced to act on an entirely new principle—that of the sovereign call of God. It does not set aside the government of the world; it makes no suggestion as to improving or reforming the world, or correcting its evil. It leaves the world just as it is, but it asserts God's paramount claim on an individual, who is elected in sovereign grace, and called out of the world. Abraham's call was to be the instrument of God's blessing to the nations of the world entirely apart from human government. Through his family would come both the written Word and the living Word that would introduce salvation to the whole world.

We cannot help but realize the importance of this great truth, when we see from the New Testament that it is still the principle on which God is acting today. The Church is entirely composed of individuals that are called by grace. The Apostle Paul clearly states that God has not only "saved us" but also "called us"; and that this calling is "an holy calling... according to His own purpose" (2 Tim. 1:9). Again, in his epistle to the Romans we are reminded that believers are "the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). So in writing to the Hebrew believers, the Apostle appeals to them as "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). The Apostle Peter tells us we are "called... out of darkness into His marvelous light," and, he adds, "the God of all grace...hath called us unto His eternal glory" (1 Peter 2:9; 5:10).

It is clear then that believers are not only "saved" but "called." Naturally the first concern of an anxious soul is, like the Philippian jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" Having found salvation through faith in Christ and His finished work, we are too often content to rest in the knowledge that our sins are forgiven, that we are sheltered from judgment and saved from hell. We are slow to see that the same gospel that brings the good news of salvation from judgment proclaims the call of God to the glory of Christ. The Apostle says to the Thessalonian believers that God "...called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

These different passages clearly show that if God calls us it is because He has a purpose in His heart which He desires to gratify. Moreover we learn that we are called out of one world lying in darkness, in ignorance of God, to come into the marvelous light of all that God has purposed for Christ in another world. Further, if we are called to heaven, it is that we may enter into the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The prize of the calling on high is to be with Christ and like Christ.

These are some of the blessed truths connected with the call of God and illustrated in the life of Abraham. The practical importance of the story of Abraham's life lies in the fact that this great truth of the calling of God is brought before us, not by a doctrinal statement, but as exhibited in the life of a man of like passions with ourselves. Thus the patriarch's life gives us a living, breathing portrait of what it means to be a friend of God.

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