

**Genesis 16 - 50**, Section 2 of 2.

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**Genesis 16**

Here we find unbelief casting its dark shadow across the spirit of Abraham, and again turning him aside, for a season, from the path of simple, happy confidence in God. "And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold the Lord hath restrained me from bearing." These words bespeak the usual impatience of unbelief; and Abraham should have treated them accordingly, and waited patiently on the Lord for the accomplishment of His gracious promise. The poor heart naturally prefers anything to the attitude of *waiting*. It will turn to any expedient — any scheme — any resource, rather than be kept in that posture. It is one thing to believe a promise, at the first, and quite another thing to wait quietly for the accomplishment thereof. We can see this distinction constantly, exemplified in a child. If I promise my child anything, he has no idea of doubting my word; but yet, I can detect the greatest possible restlessness and impatience in reference to the time and manner of accomplishment. And cannot the wisest sage find a true mirror in which to see himself reflected, in the conduct of a child? Truly so. Abraham exhibits faith, in Gen. 15 and yet he fails in patience, in Gen. 16. Hence the force and beauty of the apostle's word, in Hebrews 6, "followers of them who through *faith and patience* inherit the promises." God makes a promise, faith believes it; hope anticipates it; patience *waits* quietly for it.

There is such a thing, in the commercial world, as "the present worth" of a bill or promissory note, for if men are called upon to wait for their money, they must be paid for waiting. Now, in faith's world, there is such a thing as the present worth of God's promise; and the scale by which that worth is regulated, is the heart's experimental knowledge of God; for according to my estimate of God, will be my estimate of His promise; and moreover, the subdued and patient spirit finds its rich and full reward in waiting upon Him for the accomplishment of all that He has promised.

However, as to Sarah, the real amount of her word to Abraham is this, "the Lord has failed me; it may be, my Egyptian maid will prove a resource for me." Anything but God for a heart under the influence of unbelief. It is often truly marvellous to observe the trifles to which we will betake ourselves, when once we have lost the sense of God's nearness, His infallible faithfulness, and unfailing sufficiency. We lose that calm and well-balanced condition of soul, so essential to the proper testimony of the man of faith; and, just like other people, betake ourselves to any or every expedient, in order to reach the wished-for end, and call that "a laudable use of means."

But it is a bitter thing to take ourselves out of the place of absolute dependence upon God. The consequences must be disastrous. Had Sarah said, 'Nature has failed me, but God is my resource,' how different it would have been! This would have been her proper ground; for nature really had failed her. But, then, it was nature in one shape, and therefore she wished to try nature in another. She had not learnt to look away from nature in every shape. In the judgement of God, and of faith, nature in Hagar was no better than nature in Sarah. Nature, whether old or young, is alike to God; and, therefore, alike to faith; but, ah! we are only in the power of this truth when we are experimentally finding our living centre in God Himself. When the eye is taken off that Glorious Being, we are ready for the meanest device of unbelief. It is only when we are consciously leaning on the only true, the only wise, the living God, that we are enabled to look away from every creature stream. It is not that we shall despise God's instrumentality. By no means. To do so would be recklessness and not faith. Faith values the instrument, not because of itself, but because of Him who uses it. Unbelief looks only at the instrument,

and judges of the success of a matter by the apparent efficiency thereof, instead of by the sufficiency of Him who, in grace, uses it. Like Saul, who, when he looked at David, and then looked at the Philistine, said, "thou are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for thou art but a youth." Yet the question in David's heart was not as to whether he was able, but whether Jehovah was able.

The path of faith is a very simple and a very narrow one. It neither deifies the means, on the one hand, nor despises it, on the other. It simply values it, so far as it is evidently God's means, and no further. There is a vast difference between God's using the creature to minister to me, and my using it to shut Him out. This difference is not sufficiently attended to. God used the ravens to minister to Elijah, but Elijah did not use them to exclude God. If the heart be really trusting in God, it will not trouble itself about His means. It waits on Him, in the sweet Assurance that by what means soever He pleases, He will bless, He will minister, He will provide.

Now, in the case before us, in this chapter, it is evident that Hagar was not God's instrument for the accomplishment of His promise to Abraham. He had promised a son, no doubt, but He had not said that this son would be Hagar's; and, in point of fact, we find from the narrative, that both Abraham and Sarah "multiplied their sorrow," by having recourse to Hagar; for "when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes." This was but the beginning of those multiplied sorrows, which flowed from hastening after nature's resources. Sarah's dignity was trampled down by an Egyptian bond-woman, and she found herself in the place of weakness and contempt. The only true place of dignity and power is the place of felt weakness and dependence. There is no one so entirely independent of all around, as the man who is really walking by faith, and waiting only upon God; but the moment a child of God makes himself a debtor to nature or the world, he loses his dignity, and will speedily be made to feel his loss. It is no easy task to estimate the loss sustained by diverging, in the smallest measure, from the path of faith. No doubt, all those who walk in that path will find trial and exercise; but one thing is certain, that the blessings and joys which peculiarly belong to them are infinitely more than a counterpoise; whereas, when they turn aside, they have to encounter far deeper trial, and nought but that.

"And Sarai said, My wrong be *upon thee*." When we act wrong, we are, oft-times, prone to lay the blame on some one else. Sarah was only reaping the fruit of her own proposal, and yet she says to Abraham, "My wrong be upon thee;" and then, with Abraham's permission, she seeks to get rid of the trial which her own impatience had brought upon her. "But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarah dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face." This will not do. "The bond-woman" cannot be got rid of by hard treatment. When we make mistakes, and find ourselves called upon to encounter the results thereof, we cannot counteract those results by carrying ourselves with a high hand. We frequently try this method, but we are sure to make matters worse thereby. If we have done wrong, we should humble ourselves and confess the wrong, and wait on God for deliverance. But there was nothing like this manifested in Sarah's case. Quite the reverse. There is no sense of having done wrong; and, so far from waiting on God for deliverance, she seeks to deliver herself in her own way. However, it will always be found that every effort which we make to rectify our errors, previous to the full confession thereof, only tends to render our path more difficult. Thus Hagar had to return, and give birth to her son, which son proved to be not the child of promise at all, but a very great trial to Abraham and his house, as we shall see in the sequel.

Now, we should view all this in a double aspect: first, as teaching us a direct practical principle of much value; and secondly, in a doctrinal point of view. And, first, as to the direct, practical teaching, we may learn that when, through the unbelief of our hearts, we make mistakes, it is not all in a moment, nor yet by our own devices, we can remedy them. Things must take their course. "Whatsoever a man

soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." This is an unalterable principle, meeting us, again and again, on the page of inspiration, and also on the page of our personal history. Grace forgives the sin and restores the soul, but that which is sown must be reaped. Abraham and Sarah had to endure the presence of the bond-woman and her son for a number of years, and, then, get rid of them in God's way. There is peculiar blessedness in leaving ourselves in God's hands. Had Abraham and Sarah done so, on the present occasion, they would never have been troubled with the presence of the bond-woman and her son; but, having made themselves debtors to nature, they had to endure the consequences. But, alas! we are often "like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," when it would be our exceeding comfort to "behave and quiet ourselves as a child that is weaned of his mother." No two figures can be more opposite than a stubborn bullock and a weaned child. The former represents person senselessly struggling under the yoke of circumstances, and rendering his yoke all the more galling by his efforts to get rid of it; the latter represents one meekly bowing his hand to everything, and rendering his portion all the sweeter, by entire subjection of spirit.

And, now, as to the doctrinal view of this chapter. We are authorised to look at Hagar and her son, as figures of the covenant of works, and all who are thereby brought into bondage. (Gal. 4: 22-25) "The flesh" is, in this important passage, contrasted with "promise;" and thus we not only get the divine idea as to what the term "flesh" implies, but also as to Abraham's effort to obtain the seed by means of Hagar, instead of resting in God's "promise." The two covenants are allegorised by Hagar and Sarah, and are diametrically opposite the one to the other. The one gendering to bondage, inasmuch as it raised the question as to man's competency "to do" and "not to do," and made life entirely dependent upon that competency. "The man that doeth these things shall live in them." This was the Hagar-covenant. But the Sarah-covenant reveals God as the God of promise, which promise is entirely independent of man, and founded upon God's willingness and ability to fulfil it. When God makes a promise, there is no "if" attached thereto. He makes it unconditionally, and is resolved to fulfil it; and faith rests in Him, in perfect liberty of heart. It needs no effort of nature to reach the accomplishment of A divine promise. Here was, precisely, where Abraham and Sarah failed. They made an effort of nature to reach a certain end, which end was absolutely secured by a promise of God. This is the grand mistake of unbelief. By its restless activity, it raises a hazy mist around the soul, which hinders the beams of the divine glory from reaching. "He could there do no mighty works, because of their unbelief." One great characteristic virtue of faith is, that it ever leaves the platform clear for God to show Himself; and truly, when He shows Himself, man must take the place of a happy worshipper.

The error into which the Galatians allowed themselves to be drawn, was the addition of something of nature to what Christ had already accomplished for them by the cross. The gospel which had been preached to them, and which they had received, was the simple presentation of God's absolute, unqualified, and unconditional grace. "Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth crucified among them." This was not merely promise divinely made, but promise divinely and most gloriously accomplished. A crucified Christ settled everything, in reference both to God's claims and man's necessities. But the false teachers upset all this, or sought to upset it, by saying, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." This, as the apostle teaches them, was, in reality, "making Christ of none effect." Christ must either be a *whole* Saviour, or no Saviour at all. the moment a man says, "except ye he this or that, ye cannot be saved," he totally subverts Christianity ; for in Christianity I find God coming down to me, *just as I am*, a lost, guilty, self-destroyed sinner; and coming, moreover, with a full remission of all my sins, and a full salvation from my lost estate, all perfectly wrought by Himself on the cross.

Hence, therefore, a man who tells me, "you must be so and so, in order to be saved," robs the cross of all its glory, and robs me of all my peace. If salvation depends upon our being or doing ought, we shall, inevitably, be lost. Thank God, it does not; for the great fundamental principle of the gospel is, that God is ALL — man is NOTHING. It is not a mixture of God and man. It is all of God. The peace of the gospel does not repose, in part, on Christ's work; and, in part, on man's work; it reposes *wholly* on Christ's work, because that work is perfect — perfect for ever; and it renders all who put their trust in it as perfect as itself.

Under the law, God, as it were, stood still to see what man could do; but, in the gospel, God is seen acting, and as for man, he has but to "stand still and see the salvation of God." This being so, the inspired apostle hesitates not to say to the Galatians, "Christ is become of no effect unto you; whosoever of you are justified by law, (*en nomo*.) ye are fallen from grace." If man has anything to do in the matter, God is shut out; and if God is shut out, there can be no salvation, for it is impossible that man can work out a salvation by that which proves him a lost creature; and then if it be a question of *grace*, it must be all grace. It cannot be half grace, half law. The two covenants are perfectly distinct. It cannot be half Sarah and half Hagar. It must be either the one or the other. If it be Hagar, God has nothing to do with it; and if it be Sarah, man has nothing to do with it. Thus it stands throughout. The law addresses man, tests him, sees what he is really worth, proves him a ruin, and puts him under the curse; and not only puts him under it, but keeps him there, so long as he is occupied with it so long as he is alive. "The law hath dominion over a man so long as he liveth;" but when he is dead, its dominion necessarily ceases, so far as he is concerned, though it still remains in full force to curse every *living* man.

The gospel, on the contrary, assuming man to be lost ruined, dead, reveals God as He is — the Saviour of the lost — the Pardoner of the guilty — the Quickener of the dead. It reveals Him, not as exacting ought from man; (for what could be expected from one who has died a bankrupt) but as exhibiting His own independent grace in redemption. This makes a material difference and will account for the extraordinary strength of the language employed in the Epistle to the Galatians: "I marvel" — "Who hath bewitched you" — "I am afraid of you" — "I stand in doubt of you" — "I would they were even cut off that trouble you." This is the language of the Holy Ghost, who knows the value of a full Christ, and a full salvation; and who also knows how essential the knowledge of both is to a lost sinner. We have no such language as this in any other epistle; not even in that to the Corinthians, although there were some of the grossest disorders to be corrected amongst them. all human failure and error can be corrected by bringing in God's grace; but the Galatians, like Abraham in this chapter, were going away from God, and returning to the flesh. What remedy could be devised for this? How can you correct an error which consists in departing from that which alone can correct anything? To fall from grace, is to get back under the law, from which nothing can ever be reaped but "the curse." May the Lord establish our hearts in His own most excellent grace!

### **Genesis 17**

Here we have God's remedy for Abraham's failure set before us." And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said unto him, I am the *Almighty God*: walk before *me*, and be thou *perfect*."\* This is a most comprehensive verse. It is very evident that Abraham had not been walking before the Almighty God when he adopted Sarah's expedient in reference to Hagar. It is faith alone that can enable a man to walk up and down before an Almighty One. Unbelief will ever be thrusting in something of self, something of circumstances, second causes, and the like, and thus the soul is robbed of the joy and hence, the calm elevation, and holy independence, which flow from leaning upon the arm of One who can do everything. I believe we deeply need to ponder

this. God is not such an abiding reality to our souls as He ought to be, or as he would be, were we walking in more simple faith and dependence.

{\*I would here offer a remark as to the word "perfect." When Abraham was called upon to be "perfect," it did not mean perfect in himself; for this he never was, and never could be. It simply, meant that he should be perfect as regards the object before his heart that his hopes and expectations were to be perfectly and undividedly centred in the "Almighty God."

In looking through the New Testament, we find the word "perfect" used in, at least, four distinct senses. In Matt. 5: 48, we read, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Here we learn from the context that the word "perfect" refers to the principle of our walk. At verse 44, we read, "love your enemies,..... that ye may be the sons of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh the sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust" Hence, to be "perfect" in the sense of Matt. 5: 48 is to act on a principle of grace toward all, even toward those who are injurious and hostile. A Christian going to law, and asserting or contending for his rights, is not "perfect as his Father" for his Father is dealing in grace, whereas he is dealing in righteousness.

The question here is not as to the right or wrong of going to law with worldly people, (as to brethren, 1 Cor. 6 is conclusive.) All I contend for is, that a Christian so doing is acting in a character the direct opposite to that of his Father; for assuredly He is not going to law with the world. He is not now on a judgement-seat, but on a mercy-seat — a throne of grace. He showers His blessings upon those who, were He to go to law with them, should be in hell. Wherefore it is plain that a Christian, when he brings a man before the judgement-seat, is not "perfect as his Father which is in heaven is perfect."

At the close of Matt. 18 we have a parable which teaches us that a man who asserts his rights is ignorant of the character and proper effect of grace. The servant was not unrighteous in demanding what was due to him; but he was ungracious. He was totally unlike his master. He had been forgiven ten thousand talents, and yet he could seize his fellow by the throat for a paltry hundred pence. What was the consequence? He was delivered to the tormentors. He lost the happy sense of grace, and was left to reap the bitter fruits of having asserted his rights, while being himself a subject of grace. And, observe further, he was called a wicked servant," not because of having owed "ten thousand talents, "but because of not having forgiven the "hundred pence." The master had ample grace to settle the former, but he had not grace to settle the latter. This parable has a solemn voice for all Christians going to law; for although in the application of it, it is said, "so shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you, from your heart, forgive not every one his brother their trespasses," yet is the principle of general application, that a man acting in righteousness will lose the sense of grace.

In Hebrews 9 we have another sense of the term "Perfect." Here, too, the context settles the import of the word. It is "perfect, as pertaining to the conscience." This is a deeply important use of the term. The worshipper under the law never could have a perfect conscience, for the simplest reason possible, because he never had a perfect sacrifice. The blood of a bullock and a goat did well enough For a time, but it could not do for ever and, therefore, could not give a perfect conscience. Now, however, the weakest believer in Jesus is privileged to have a perfect conscience. Why? Is it because he is a better man than the worshipper under the law Nay; but because he has gotten a better sacrifice. If Christ's sacrifice is perfect for ever, the believer's conscience is perfect for ever. The two things necessarily go together. For the Christian not to have a perfect conscience is a dishonour to the sacrifice of Christ. It is tantamount to saying that His sacrifice is only temporary, and not eternal in its effect;

and what is this but to bring it down to the level of the sacrifices under the Mosaic economy.

It is very needful to distinguish between perfection in the flesh and perfection as to conscience. To pretend to the former, is to exalt self; to refuse the latter, is to dishonour Christ. The babe in Christ should have a perfect conscience; whereas St. Paul had not, nor could have, perfect flesh. The flesh is not presented in the word as a thing which is to be perfected, but as a thing which has been crucified. This makes a wide difference. The Christian has sin in him, but not on him. Why? Because Christ, who had no sin in Him, ever, had sin on Him, when He was nailed to the cross.

Finally, in Phil. 3 we have two other senses of the word "perfect." The apostle says, "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect," and yet a little further on he says, "Let as many as be perfect be thus minded." The former refers to the apostles full and everlasting conformity to Christ in glory. The latter refers to our having Christ as the all-engrossing object before the heart's affections. }

"Walk before *me*." This is true power. To walk thus, implies our having nothing whatever before our hearts save God Himself. If I am founding my expectation upon men and things, I am not walking before God, but before men and things. It is of the utmost importance to ascertain who or what I have before me as an object. To what am I looking? On whom or what am I leaning, at this moment? Does God *entirely* fill my future? Have men or circumstances ought to do therein? Is there any space allotted to the creature? The only way in which to get above the world is to walk by faith, because faith so completely fills the scene with God, that there is no room for the creature, no room for the world. If God fills up my entire range of vision, I can see nothing else; and then I am able to say with the Psalmist, "My soul, wait thou *only* upon God; for my expectation is from him. He *only* is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence, I shall not be moved." (Ps. 62: 5, 6) This word "only" is deeply searching. Nature cannot say this. Not that it will, save when under the direct influence of a daring and blasphemous scepticism, formally shut out God altogether; but it, assuredly, Cannot say, "*He only*."

Now, it is well to see that, as in the matter of salvation, so in all the details of actual life, from day to day, God will not share His glory with the creature. From first to last, it must be "He only;" and this, too, in reality. It will not do to have the language of dependence upon God on our lips, while our hearts are really leaning on some creature resource. God will make all this fully manifest; He will test the heart; He will put faith into the furnace. "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." Thus it is we reach the proper point. When the soul is enabled, by grace, to get rid of all its fondly-cherished creature expectations, then, and only then, it is prepared to let God act; and when He acts all must be well. He will not leave anything undone. He will perfectly settle everything on behalf of those who simply put their trust in Him. When unerring wisdom, omnipotent power, and infinite love combine, the confiding heart may enjoy unruffled repose. Unless we can find some circumstance too big or too little for "the Almighty God," we have no proper base on which to found a single anxious thought. This is an amazing truth, and one eminently calculated to put all who believe it into the blessed position in which we find Abraham in this chapter. When God had, in effect, said to him, "leave *all* to me and I will settle it for you, beyond your utmost desires and expectations; the seed and the inheritance, and everything pertaining thereto, will be fully and everlastingly settled, according to the covenant of the Almighty God" — then "*Abram fell on his face*." Truly blessed attitude! the only proper one for a thoroughly empty, feeble, and unprofitable sinner, to occupy in the presence of the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the possessor of all things, "the Almighty God."

"And God talked with him." It is when man is in the dust, that God can talk to him in grace. Abraham's posture here, is the beautiful expression of entire prostration, in the presence of God, in the

sense of utter weakness and nothingness. and this, be it observed, is the sure precursor of God's revelation of Himself. It is when the creature is laid low that God can show Himself in the unclouded effulgence of what He is. He will not give His glory to another. He can reveal Himself, and allow man to worship in view of that revelation; but until the sinner takes his proper place, there can be no unfolding of the divine character. How different is Abraham's attitude in this and the preceding chapter! There, he had nature before him; here, he has the Almighty God. There, he was an actor; here, he is a worshipper. There, he was betaking himself to his own and Sarah's contrivance; here, he leaves himself and his circumstances, his present and his future, in God's hands, and allows Him to act in him, for him, and through him. Hence, God can say, "I will make" "I will establish" "I will give" "I will bless." In a word, it is all God and His actings; and this is real rest for the poor heart that has learnt anything of itself.

The covenant of circumcision is now introduced. Every member of the household of faith must bear in his body the seal of that covenant. There must be no exception. "He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh, for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people, he hath broken my covenant." We are taught in Romans 4, that circumcision was "a seal of the righteousness of faith." "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Being thus counted righteous, God set His "seal" upon him.

The seal with which the believer is now sealed is not a mark in the flesh, but "that Holy Spirit of promise, whereby he is sealed unto the day of redemption." This is founded upon his everlasting connection with Christ, and his perfect identification with Him, in death and resurrection; as we read, in Colossians, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power. In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ; buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." This is a most glorious passage, unfolding to us the true idea of what circumcision was meant to typify. Every believer belongs to "the circumcision" in virtue of his living association with Him who, by His cross, has for ever abolished everything that stood in the way of His Church's perfect justification. There was not a speck of sin on the conscience, nor a principle of sin in the nature of His people, for which Christ was not judged on the cross; and they are now looked upon as having died with Christ, lain in the grave with Christ, been raised with Christ, perfectly accepted in Him — their sins, their iniquities, their transgressions, their enmity, their uncircumcision, having been entirely put away by the cross. The sentence of death has been written on the flesh; but the believer is in possession of a new life, in union with His risen Head in glory.

The apostle, in the above passage, teaches that the Church was quickened out of the grave of Christ; and moreover, that the forgiveness of all her trespasses is as complete, and as entirely the work of God, as was the raising of Christ from the dead; and this latter, we know, was the result of "God's mighty power," or, as it may be rendered, "according to the energy of the might of his power" (Eph. 1: 19) — a truly wonderful expression, calculated to set forth the magnitude and glory of redemption, as well as the solid basis on which it rests.

What rest — perfect rest — for the heart and conscience is here! What full relief for the burdened spirit! *All* our sins buried in the grave of Christ — not one — even the smallest — left out! God did this for us! All that His searching eye could detect in us, He laid on the head of Christ when He hung upon the cross! He judged Him there and then, instead of judging us, in hell for ever! Precious fruit, this, of

the admirable, the profound, the eternal counsels of redeeming love! And we are "sealed," not with a certain mark cut in our flesh, but with the Holy Ghost. The entire household of faith is sealed thus. Such is the dignity, the value, the changeless efficacy of the blood of Christ, that the Holy Ghost can take up His abode in all those who have put their trust therein.

And, now, what remains for those who know these things, save to "be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Thus may it be, O Lord, through the grace of Thy Holy Spirit.

### **Genesis 18**

This chapter affords a beautiful exemplification of the results of an obedient, separated walk. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3: 20) again, we read, "Jesus answered, and said unto him, If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." (John 14: 23) From these passages, taken in connection with our chapter, we learn that an obedient soul enjoys a character of communion entirely unknown to one who moves in a worldly atmosphere.

This does not touch, in the most remote manner, the question of forgiveness or justification. All believers are clothed in the same spotless robe of righteousness—all stand in one common justification, under the eye of God. The one life flows down from the Head in heaven through all the members on earth. This is plain. The doctrine, in reference to the above important points, is fully established in the word; and has been, again and again, unfolded through the foregoing pages of this volume. But we should remember that justification is one thing, and the fruit thereof quite another. To be a child is one thing, to be an obedient child is quite another. Now, a father loves an obedient child, and will make, such a child more the depository of his thoughts and plans. And is this not true, in reference to our heavenly Father? Unquestionably. John 14 puts this quite beyond dispute; and, moreover, it proves that for one to speak of loving Christ, and not to "keep his words," is hypocrisy. "If a man love me, he will keep my words." Hence, if we are not keeping Christ's words, it is a sure proof we are not walking in the love of His name. Love to Christ is proved by doing the things which He commands, and not by merely saying, "Lord, Lord." It is of very little avail to say, "I go, sir," while the heart has no idea of going.

However, in Abraham we see one who, however he may have failed in detail, was, nevertheless, characterised, in the main, by a close, simple, and elevated walk with God; and in the interesting section of his history now before us, we find him in the enjoyment of three special privileges, namely, providing refreshment *for* the Lord! enjoying full communion *with* the Lord, and interceding for others *before* the Lord. These are high distinctions; and yet are they only such as ever result from an obedient, separated, holy walk. Obedience refreshes the Lord, as being the fruit of His own grace in our hearts. We see in the only perfect man that ever lived, how He constantly refreshed and delighted the Father. Again and again, God bore testimony to Him from heaven, as His "beloved Son; in whom he was well pleased." The path of Christ furnished a continual feast to Heaven. His ways were ever sending up a fragrant incense to the throne of God. From the manger to the cross, He did always the things which pleased His Father. There was no interruption, no variation, no salient point. He was the only perfect One. There only can the Spirit trace a perfect life below. Here and there, as We look along the current of inspiration, we find one and another who occasionally refreshed the mind of Heaven. Thus, in the chapter before us, we find the tent of the stranger at Mamre affording refreshment to the Lord Himself — refreshment lovingly offered, and willingly accepted. (Ver. 1-8)

Then we find Abraham enjoying high communion with the Lord, first, in reference to his own personal interests, (ver. 9-15) and, secondly, in reference to the destinies of Sodom. (Ver. 16, 21) What confirmation to Abraham's heart in the absolute promise (*Sarah shall have a son!*" Yet this promise only elicited a laugh from Sarah, as it had elicited one from Abraham in the preceding chapter.

There are two kinds of laughter spoken of in scripture. There is first, the laughter with which the Lord fills our mouth, when, at some trying crisis, He appears in a signal manner for our relief. "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with *laughter*, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for them; the Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." (Ps. 126: 1, 2)

Again, there is the laughter with which unbelief fills our mouths, when God's promises are too magnificent for our narrow hearts to take in, or the visible agency too small, in our judgement, for the accomplishment of His grand designs. The first of these we are never ashamed or afraid to avow. Zion's sons are not ashamed to say, "then was our mouth filled with laughter." (Ps. 126: 2) When Jehovah makes us to laugh, we may laugh heartily. "But Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid." Unbelief makes us cowards and liars; faith makes us bold and truthful. It enables us to "come boldly," and to "draw near with true hearts."

But, further, Abraham is made the depository of God's thoughts and counsels about Sodom. Though having nothing to do with it personally, yet he was so near the Lord that he was let into His mind in reference to it. The way to know the divine purposes about this present evil world, is not to be mixed up with it, in its schemes and speculations, but to be entirely separated from it. The more closely we walk with God, and the more subject we are to His word, the more we shall know of His mind about everything. I do not need to study the newspaper, in order to know what is going to happen in the world. God's word reveals all I want to know. In its pure and sanctifying pages I learn all about the character, the course, and the destiny of the world; whereas, if I go to the men of the world for news, I may expect that the devil will use them to cast dust in my eyes.

Had Abraham visited Sodom in order to obtain information about its facts, had he applied to some of its leading intelligent men, to know what they thought of Sodom's present condition and future prospects, how would he have been answered? Doubtless, they would have called his attention to their agricultural and architectural schemes, the vast resources of the country; they would have placed before his eyes one vast, mingled scene of buying and selling, building and planting, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Doubtless, too, they would never dream of judgement, and if any one had made mention thereof, their mouths would have been filled with infidel laughter. Hence, then, it is plain, that Sodom was not the place in which to learn about Sodom's end. No; "the place, where Abraham stood before the Lord," afforded the only proper point from whence to take in the whole prospect. There he could stand entirely above the fogs and mists which had gathered upon Sodom's horizon. There, in the clearness and calmness of the divine presence, he could understand it all. And what use did he make of his knowledge and his elevated position? How was he occupied in the Lord's presence? The answer to these inquiries leads us to the third special privilege enjoyed by our patriarch in this chapter, namely, —

Intercession for others *before* the Lord. He was enabled to plead for those, who were mixed up in Sodom's defilement, and in danger of being involved in Sodom's judgement. This was a happy and a holy use to make of his place of nearness to God. Thus it is ever. The soul that can "draw near to God," in the assurance of faith, having the heart and conscience perfectly at rest, being able to repose in God as to the past, the present, and the future — that soul will be able and willing to intercede for others.

The man, who has on "the whole armour of God," will be able to pray for all saints." And, oh I what a view this gives us of the intercession of our Great High Priest, who has passed into the heavens! What infinite repose He enjoys in all the divine counsels! With what conscious acceptance He sits enthroned amid the brightness of the Majesty in the heavens! And with what efficacy He pleads, before that Majesty, for those, who are toiling along, amid the defilement of this present scene! Happy, ineffably happy, they, who are the subjects of such all prevailing intercession! At once happy and secure. Would that we had hearts to enter into all this hearts enlarged by personal communion with God, to take in more of the infinite fullness of His grace, and the suitability of His provision, for all our need.

We see, in this scripture, that, how blessed soever Abraham's intercession might be, yet it was limited, because the intercessor was *but a man*. It did not reach the need. He said, "I will speak *yet but this once*," and there he stopped short, as if afraid of having presented too large a draft at the treasury of infinite grace, or forgetting that faith's cheque was never yet dishonoured at God's bank. It was not that he was straitened in God. By no means. There was abundance of grace and patience in Him to have hearkened to His dear servant, had he proceeded even to three or one. But the servant was limited. He was afraid of overdrawing his account He ceased to ask, and God ceased to give. Not so our blessed Intercessor. Of Him it can be said, "He is able to save *to the uttermost*,..... seeing he ever liveth to make intercession." May our hearts cling to Him, in all our need, our weakness, and our conflict.

Before closing this section, I would offer a remark, which, whether it may be regarded as properly flowing: out of the truth contained therein, or not, is nevertheless worthy of consideration. It is of the utmost importance, in the study of scripture, to distinguish between God's moral government of the world, and the specific hope of the Church. The entire body of Old Testament prophecy, and much of the New, treats of the former, and, in so doing, presents, I need hardly say, a subject of commanding interest to every Christian. It is interesting to know what God is doing, and will do, with all the nations of the earth. Interesting to read God's thoughts about Tyre, Babylon, Nineveh, and Jerusalem; about Egypt, Assyria, and the land of Israel. In short, the entire range of Old Testament prophecy demands the prayerful attention of every true believer. But, let it be remembered, we do not find therein contained the proper hope of the Church. How could we? If we have not therein the Church's existence directly revealed, how could we have the Church's hope? Impossible. It is not that the Church cannot find there a rich harvest of divine moral principles, which she may most happily and profitably use. She undoubtedly can; but this is quite another thing from finding there her proper existence and specific hope. And yet, a large portion of the Old Testament prophecies has been applied to the Church; and this application has involved the whole subject in such mist and confusion, that simple minds are scared away from the study, and, in neglecting the study of prophecy, they have also neglected that which is quite distinct from prophecy, properly so called, even the hope of the Church, which hope, be it well remembered, is not anything which God is going to do with the nations of the earth, but to meet the Lord Jesus in the clouds of heaven, to be for ever with Him, and for ever like Him.

Many may say, I have no *head* for prophecy. Perhaps not, but have you a *heart* for Christ Surely if you love Christ, you will love His appearing, though you may have no capacity for prophetic investigation. An affectionate wife may not have a head to enter into her husband's affairs; but she has a heart for her husband's return. She might not be able to understand his ledger and day-book; but she knows his footstep, and recognises his voice. The most unlettered saint, if only he has affection for the Person of the Lord Jesus, can entertain the most intense desire to see Him; and this is the Church's hope. The apostle could say to the Thessalonians, "ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to *wait for his Son from heaven*." (1 Thess. 1: 9, 10) Now, evidently, those Thessalonian saints could, at the moment of their conversion, have known little, if anything, of prophecy, or the

special subject thereof; and yet they were, at that very moment, put into the full possession and power of the specific hope of the Church — even the coming of the Son. Thus is it throughout the entire New Testament. There, no doubt, we have prophecy—there, too, we have God's moral government; but, at the same time, numberless passages might be adduced in proof of the fact, that the common hope of Christians in apostolic times — the simple, unimpeded, and unencumbered hope was, THE RETURN OF THE BRIDEGROOM. May the Holy Ghost revive "that blessed hope" in the Church — may He gather in the number of the elect, and "make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

### Genesis 19

There are two methods which the Lord graciously adopts, in order to draw the heart away from this present world. The first is, by setting before it the attractiveness and stability of "things above." The second is, by faithfully declaring the evanescent and shakeable nature of "things on the earth." The close of Hebrews 12 furnishes a beautiful example of each of these methods. After stating the truth, that we are come unto mount Zion, with all its attendant joys and privileges, the apostle goes on to say, "see that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven; whose voice then shook the earth, but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once I shake, not only the earth, but also heaven. Now this word Once signifieth the removal of the shakeable things, as of things that are made, that the unshakeable things may remain." Now it is much better to be *drawn* by the joys of heaven, than *driven* by the sorrows of earth.. The believer should not wait to be shaken out of present things. He should not wait for the world to give him up, before he gives up the world. He should give it up in the power of communion with heavenly things. There is no difficulty in giving up the world when we have, by faith, laid hold of Christ; the difficulty would then be to hold it. If a scavenger were left an estate of ten thousand a year, he would not long continue to sweep the streets. Thus, if we are realising our portion amid the unshakeable realities of heaven, we shall find little difficulty in resigning the delusive joys of earth. Let us now look at the solemn section of inspired history here set before us.

In it we find Lot "sitting in the gate of Sodom," the place of authority. He has evidently made progress. He has "got on in the world." Looked at from a worldly point of view, his course has been a successful one. He, at first, "pitched his tent toward Sodom." Then, no doubt, he found his way into it; and now we find him sitting in the gate — a prominent, influential post. How different is all this from the scene with which the preceding chapter opens! But, ah! my reader, the reason is obvious. "*By faith* Abram sojourned in the land of promise, as in a *strange country*, dwelling in tabernacles." We have no such statement, in reference to Lot.\* It could not be said, "By faith Lot sat in the gate of Sodom." Alas! no; he gets no place among the noble army of confessors — the great cloud of witnesses to the power of faith. The world was his snare, present things his bane. He did not "endure as seeing him who is invisible." He looked at "the things which are seen, and temporal:" whereas Abram looked at "the things which are unseen and eternal." There was a most material difference between those two men, who, though they started together on their course, reached a very different goal, so far as their "public testimony was concerned. No doubt Lot was saved, yet it was "So as by fire," for, truly, "his work was burned up." On the other hand, Abraham had "an abundant entrance ministered unto him into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

{\*It would furnish a very searching question for the heart, in reference to every undertaking, were we to ask, "Am I doing this by faith?" "Whatever is not of faith is sin;" and, "Without faith it is impossible to please God.}

Further, we do not find that Lot is permitted to enjoy any of the high distinctions and privileges

with which Abraham was favoured. Instead of refreshing the Lord, Lot gets his righteous soul vexed; instead of enjoying communion *with* the Lord, he is at a lamentable distance *from* the Lord; and, lastly, instead of interceding for others, he finds enough to do to intercede for himself. The Lord remained to commune with Abraham, and merely sent His angels to Sodom; and these angels could, with difficulty, be induced to enter into Lot's house, or partake of his hospitality: "they said, Nay, but we *will abide in the street all night.*" What a rebuke! How different from the willing acceptance of Abraham's invitation, as expressed in the words, "So do as thou hast said."

There is a great deal involved in the act of partaking of any one's hospitality. It expresses, when intelligently looked at, full fellowship with him. "I will come in unto him, and sup *with him*, and *he with me.*" "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide." If they had not so judged her, they would not have accepted her invitation.

Hence, the angels' word to Lot contains a most unqualified condemnation of his position in Sodom. They would rather abide in the street all night, than enter under the roof of one in a wrong position. Indeed, their only object in coming to Sodom seems to have been to deliver Lot, and that, too, because of Abraham; as we read: "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that *God remembered Abraham*, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt." This is strongly marked. It was simply for Abraham's sake that Lot was suffered to escape: the Lord has no sympathy with a worldly mind; and such a mind it was that had led Lot to settle down amid the defilement of that guilty city. Faith never put him there; a spiritual mind never put him there; "his righteous soul" never put him there. It was simple love for this present evil world that led him, first, to "*choose*," then to "pitch his tent toward," and, finally, to "sit in the gate of Sodom." And, oh! what a portion he chose. Truly it was a broken cistern which could hold no water; a broken reed which pierced his hand. It is a bitter thing to seek, in any wise, to manage for ourselves; we are sure to make the most grievous mistakes. It is infinitely better to allow God to order all our ways for us, to commit them all, in the spirit of a little child, to Him, who is so willing and so able to manage for us; to put the pen, as it were, into His blessed hand, and allow Him to sketch out our entire course, according to His own unerring wisdom and infinite love.

No doubt, Lot thought he was doing well for himself and his family, when he moved to Sodom; but the sequel shows how entirely he erred; and it also sounds in our ears a voice of deepest solemnity — a voice telling us to beware how we yield to the incipient workings of a worldly spirit. "Be content with such things as ye have." Why? Is it because you are so well off in the world? Because you have all that your poor rambling hearts would seek after? Because there is not so much as a single chink in your circumstances, through which vain desire might make its escape? Is this to be the ground of our contentment By no means. What then? "For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Blessed portion! Had Lot been content therewith, he never would have sought the well watered plains of Sodom.

And, then, if we need any further ground of inducement to the exercise of a contented spirit, truly we have it in this chapter, What did Lot gain in the way of happiness and contentment Little indeed. The people of Sodom surround his house, and threaten to break into it; he seeks to appease them by a most humiliating proposition, but all in vain. If a man will mingle with the world, for the purpose of self-aggrandisement, he must make up his mind to endure the sad consequences. We cannot profit by the world, and, at the same time, bear effectual testimony against its wickedness. "This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge." This will never do. The true way to judge is to stand apart, in the moral power of grace, not in the supercilious spirit of Pharisaism. To attempt to reprove the world's ways, while we profit by association with it, is vanity; the world will attach very little weight to

such reproof and such testimony. Thus it was, too, with Lot's testimony to his sons-in law;" he seemed as one that mocked." It is vain to speak of approaching judgement, while finding our place, our portion, and our enjoyment, in the very scene which is to be judged.

Abraham was in a far better position to speak of judgement, inasmuch as he was entirely outside of the sphere thereof. The tent of the stranger at Mamre was in no danger, though Sodom were in flames. Oh! that our hearts longed more after the precious fruits of a realised strangership, so that instead of having, like poor Lot, to be dragged, by main force, out of the world, and casting a lingering look behind, we might, with holy alacrity, bound forward, like a racer, towards the goal.

Lot, evidently, longed after the scene which he was forced, by angelic power, to abandon; for not only had the angels to lay hold of him, and hasten him away from the impending judgement, but even when exhorted to escape for *his life*, (which was all he could save from the wreck,) and flee to the mountain, he replies, "Oh! not so, my Lord: behold, now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy which thou hast showed unto me in saving *my life*; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me and I die: behold, now, *this city* is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: oh I let me escape thither, (is it not a little one) and my soul shall live." What a picture! He seems like a drowning man, ready to catch even at a floating feather. Though commanded by the angel to flee to the mountain, he refuses, and still fondly clings to the idea of "a little city," — some little shred of the world. He feared death in the place to which God was mercifully directing him — yea, he feared all manner of evil, and could only hope for safety in some little city, some spot of his own devising. Oh! let me escape *thither, and my soul shall live.*" How sad. There is no casting himself wholly upon God. Alas! he had too long walked at a distance from Him; too long breathed the dense atmosphere of a "city," to be able to appreciate the pure air of the divine presence, or lean on the arm of the Almighty. His soul seemed completely unhinged; his worldly nest had been abruptly broken up, and he was not quite able to nestle himself, by faith, in the bosom of God. He had not been cultivating communion with the invisible world; and, now, the visible was passing away from beneath his feet with tremendous rapidity. The "fire and brimstone from heaven" were about to fall upon that in which all his hopes and all his affections were centred. The thief had broken in upon him, and he seems entirely divested of spiritual nerve and self-possession. He is at his wits' end; but the worldly element, being strong in his heart, prevails, and he seeks his only refuge in "a little city." Yet he is not at ease even there, for he leaves it, and gets up to the mountain. He does, through fear, what he would not do at the command of God's messenger.

And, then, see his end! His own children make him drunk, and in his drunkenness he becomes the instrument of bringing into existence the Ammonites and the Moabites — the determined enemies of the people of God. What a volume of solemn instruction is here Oh! my reader, see here what the world is! see what a fatal thing it is to allow the heart to go out after it! What a commentary is Lot's history upon that brief but comprehensive admonition, "love not the world" This world's Sodoms and its Zoars are all alike. There is no security, no peace, no rest, no solid satisfaction for the heart therein. The judgement of God hangs over the whole scene; and He only holds back the sword, in long-suffering mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Let us, then, seek to pursue a path of holy separation from the world. Let us, while standing outside its entire range, be found cherishing the hope of the Master's return. May its well-watered plains have no charms for our hearts. May its honours, its distinctions, and its riches, be all surveyed by us in the light of the coming glory of Christ. May we be enabled, like the holy patriarch Abraham, to get up into the presence of the Lord, and, from that elevated ground, look forth upon the scene of wide-spread ruin and desolation — to see it all, by faith's anticipative glance, a smoking ruin. *Such it will be.*

"The earth, also, and the things that are therein, shall be burned up." ALL that about which the children of this world are so intensely anxious-after which they are so eagerly grasping-for which they are so fiercely contending — all — all will be burned up. And who can tell how soon? Where is Sodom Where is Gomorrha? Where are the cities of the plain — those cities which were once all life, and stir, and bustle! Where are they now? All gone! swept away by the judgement of God. Consumed by His fire and brimstone. Well, His judgements now hang over this guilty world. The day is at hand; and, while judgements impend, the sweet story of grace is being told out to many an ear. Happy they, who hear and believe that story. Happy they, who fled to the strong mountain of God's salvation! who take refuge behind the cross of the Son of God, and therein and pardon and peace!

God grant that the reader of these lines may know what it is, with a conscience purged from sin, and his heart's affections purged from the defiling influence of the world, to wait for the Son from heaven.

### **Genesis 20**

We have two distinct points in this chapter: first, the moral degradation to which the child of God sometimes subjects himself, in the view of the world; and, secondly, the moral dignity which *always* belongs to him in the view of God. Abraham again exhibits the dread of circumstances, which the heart can so easily understand. He sojourns in Gerar, and fears the men of that place. Judging that God was not there, he forgets that He is always with him. He seems to be more occupied with the men of Gerar than with the One who was stronger than they. Forgetting God's ability to protect his wife, he has recourse to the same stratagem which, years before, he had adopted in Egypt. This is very admonitory. The father of the faithful was carried away, by taking his eye off God. He lost, for a little, his centre in God, and, therefore, gave way. How true it is, that we are only strong as we cling to God in the sense of our perfect weakness. So long as we are in the path of His appointment, nothing can harm us. Had Abraham simply leaned on God, the men of Gerar would not have meddled with him; and it was his privilege to have vindicated God's faithfulness in the midst of the most appalling difficulties. Thus, too, he would have maintained his own dignity, as a man of faith.

It is often a source of sorrow to the heart to mark how the children of God dishonour Him, and, as a consequence, lower themselves before the world, by losing the sense of His sufficiency for every emergency. So long as we live in the realisation of the truth, that all our springs are in God, so long shall we be above the world, in every shape and form. There is nothing so elevating to the whole moral being as faith: it carries one entirely beyond the reach of this world's thoughts; for how can the men of the world, or even worldly minded Christians, understand the life of faith? Impossible: the springs on which it draws lie far away beyond their comprehension. They live on the surface of present things. So long as they can see what they deem a proper foundation for hope and confidence, so long they are hopeful and confident; but the idea of resting solely on the promise of an unseen God, they understand not. But the man of faith is calm in the midst of scenes in which nature can see nothing. Hence it is, that faith ever seems, in the judgement of nature, such a reckless, improvident, visionary thing. None but those, who know God, can ever approve the actings of faith, for none but they really understand the solid and truly reasonable ground of such actings.

In this chapter we find the man of God actually exposing himself to the rebuke and reproach of the men of the world, by reason of his actings, when under the power of unbelief. Thus it must ever be. Nothing but faith can impart true elevation to a man's course and character. We may, it is true, see some, who are naturally upright and honourable in their ways, yet nature's uprightness and honour cannot be trusted: they rest on a bad foundation, and are liable to give way at any moment. It is only

faith which can impart a truly elevated moral tone, because it connects the soul in living power with God, the only source of true morality. And it is a remarkable fact, that, in the case of all those whom God has graciously taken up, we see that, when off the path of faith, they sank even lower than other men. This will account for Abraham's conduct in this part of his history.

But there is another point of much interest and value brought out here. We find that Abraham had harboured an evil thing for a number of years: he had, it seems, started upon his course with a certain reserve in his soul, which reserve was the result of his want of full, unqualified confidence in God. Had he been able fully to trust God in reference to Sarah, there would have been no need of any reserve or subterfuge whatever. God would have fenced her round about from every ill; and who can harm those, who are the happy subjects of His unslumbering guardianship? However, through mercy, Abraham is enabled to bring out the root of the whole matter — to confess and judge it thoroughly, and get rid of it. This is the true way to act. There can be no real blessing and power till every particle of leaven is brought forth into the light and there trampled under foot. God's patience is exhaustless. He can wait. He can bear with us; but He never will conduct a soul to the culminating point of blessing and power, while leaven remains known and unjudged. Thus much as to Abimelech and Abraham. Let us now look at the moral dignity of the latter, in the view of God.

In the history of God's people, whether we look at them as a whole, or as individuals, we are often struck with the amazing difference between what they are in God's view, and what they are in the view of the world. God sees His people in Christ. He looks at them through Christ; and hence He sees them "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." They are as Christ is before God. They are perfected for ever, as to their standing in Christ. "They are not in the flesh but in the spirit."

But, in themselves, they are poor, feeble, imperfect, stumbling, inconsistent creatures; and, inasmuch as it is what they are in themselves, and that alone, that the world takes knowledge of, therefore it is that the difference seems so great between the divine and the human estimate.

Yet it is God's prerogative to set forth the beauty, the dignity, and the perfection of His people. It is His exclusive prerogative, inasmuch as it is He Himself who has bestowed those things. They are only comely through the comeliness which He has put upon them; and it is, therefore, due to Him to declare what that comeliness is; and truly He does it in a manner worthy of Himself, and never more blessedly than when the enemy comes forth to injure, to curse, or accuse. Thus, when Balak seeks to curse the seed of Abraham, Jehovah's word is, "I have not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither have I seen perverseness in Israel." "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel. Again, when Satan stands forth to resist Joshua, the word is, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan,.....is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Thus He ever puts Himself between His people and every tongue that would accuse them. He does not answer the accusation by a reference to what His people are in themselves, or to what they are in the view of the men of this world, but to what He Himself has made them, and where He has set them.

Thus, in Abraham's case, he might lower himself in the view of Abimelech, king of Gerar; and Abimelech might have to rebuke him, yet, when God comes to deal with the case, He says to Abimelech, "Behold, thou art but a dead man;" and of Abraham he says, "He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee." Yes, with all "the integrity of his heart, and the innocency of his hands," the king of Gerar was "but a dead man;" and, moreover, he must be a debtor to the prayers of the erring and inconsistent stranger for the restoration of the health of his household. Such is the manner of God: He may have many a secret controversy with His child, on the ground of his practical ways; but directly the enemy enters a suit against him, Jehovah ever pleads His servant's cause. "Touch not mine anointed,

and do my prophets no harm." "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? No dart of the enemy can penetrate the shield, behind which the Lord has hidden the very feeblest lamb of His blood-bought flock. He hides His people in His pavilion, sets their feet upon the rock of ages, lifts their heads above their enemies round about, and fills their hearts with the everlasting joy of His salvation.

His name be praised for evermore!

## Genesis 21

And the Lord visited Sarah, as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken." Here we have accomplished promise — the blessed fruit of patient waiting upon God. None ever waited in vain. The soul, that takes hold of God's promise by faith, has gotten a stable reality which will never fail him. Thus was it with Abraham; thus was it with all the faithful from age to age; and thus will it be with all those, who are enabled, in any measure, to trust in the living God. Oh! it is a wonderful blessing to have God Himself as our portion and resting-place, amid the unsatisfying shadows of this scene through which we are passing; to have our anchor cast within the veil; to have the word and oath of God, the two immutable things, to lean upon, for the comfort and tranquility of our souls.

When God's promise stood before the soul of Abraham, as an accomplished fact, he might well have learnt the futility of his own effort to reach that accomplishment. Ishmael was of no use, whatever, so far as God's promise was concerned. He might, and did, afford something for nature's affections to entwine themselves around, thus furnishing a more difficult task for Abraham to perform afterwards; but he was in no wise conducive to the development of the purpose of God, or to the establishment of Abraham's faith — quite the reverse. Nature can never do ought for God. The Lord must visit and the Lord must "do," and faith must wait, and nature must be still; yea, must be entirely set aside as a dead, worthless thing, and then the divine glory can shine out, and faith find in that outshining all its rich and sweet reward. "Sarah conceived and bare Abraham a son in his old age, *at the set time* of which God had spoken to him." There is such a thing as God's "set time," His "due season," and for this the faithful must be content to wait. The time may seem long, and hope deferred may make the heart sick; but the spiritual mind will ever find its relief in the assurance, that all is for the ultimate display of God's glory. "For the vision is for an appointed time, but *at the end* it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. . . . but the just shall live by his faith." (Hab. 2: 3, 4) This wondrous faith! It brings into our present all the power of God's future, and feeds upon God's promise as a present reality. By its power the soul is kept hanging upon God, when every outward thing seems to be against it; and, "at the set time," the mouth is filled with laughter. "Abraham was an hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him." Thus nature had nothing to glory in. "Man's extremity was God's opportunity;" and Sarah said, "*God* hath made me to laugh." All is triumph when God is allowed to show Himself.

Now while the birth of Isaac filled Sarah's mouth with laughter, it introduced an entirely new element into Abraham's house. The son of the free-woman very speedily developed the true character of the son of the bond-woman. Indeed, Isaac proved, in principle, to be to the household of Abraham, what the implantation of the new nature is in the soul of a sinner. It was not *Ishmael changed*, but it was *Isaac born*. The son of the bond-woman could never be anything else but that. He might become a great nation, he might dwell in the wilderness, and become an archer, he might become the father of twelve princes, but he was the son of the bond-woman all the while. On the contrary, no matter how weak and despised Isaac might be, he was the son of the free-woman. His position and character, his standing and prospects, were all from the Lord. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which

is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Regeneration is not a change of the old nature, but the introduction of a new; it is the implantation of the nature or life of the Second Adam, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, founded upon the accomplished redemption of Christ, and in full keeping with the sovereign will or counsel of God. The moment a sinner believes in his heart, and confesses with his mouth, the Lord Jesus, he becomes the possessor of a new life, and that life is Christ. He is born of God, is a child of God, is a son of the free-woman. (See Rom. 10: 9; Col. 3: 4; 1 John 3: 1, 2; Gal. 3: 26; Gal. 4: 31)

Nor does the introduction of this new nature alter, in the slightest degree, the true, essential character of the old. This latter continues what it was, and is made, in no respect, better; yea, rather, there is the full display of its evil character in opposition to the new element. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other." There they are in all their distinctness, and the one is only thrown into relief by the other.

I believe this doctrine of the two natures in the believer is not generally understood; and yet, so long as there is ignorance of it, the mind must be utterly at sea, in reference to the true standing and privileges of the child of God. Some there are, who think that regeneration is a certain change which the old nature undergoes; and, moreover, that this change is gradual in its operation, until, at length, the whole man becomes transformed. That this idea is unsound, can be proved by various quotations from the New Testament. For example, "the carnal mind is enmity against God." How can that, which is thus spoken of, ever undergo any improvement? The apostle goes on to say, "it is not subject to the law of God, *neither indeed can be.*" If it *cannot be* subject to the law of God, how can it be improved? How can it undergo any change? Again, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." Do what you will with flesh, and it is flesh all the while. As Solomon says, "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar, among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." (Prov. 27: 22) There is no use in seeking to make foolishness wise: you must introduce heavenly wisdom into the heart that has been heretofore only governed by folly. Again, "ye have put off the old man." (Col. 3: 9) He does not say, Ye have improved, or are seeking to improve, "the old man;" but, Ye have put it off. This gives us a totally different idea. There is a very great difference between seeking to mend an old garment, and casting it aside altogether, and putting on a new one. This is the idea of the last-quoted passage. It is a putting off the old, and a putting on of the new. Nothing can be more distinct or simple.

Passages might easily be multiplied to prove the unsoundness; of the theory, with respect to the gradual improvement of the old nature — to prove that the old nature is dead in sins, and utterly unrenovable and unimprovable; and, moreover, that the only thing we can do with it is, to keep it under our feet in the power of that new life, which we have in union with our risen Head in the heavens.

The birth of Isaac did not improve Ishmael, but only brought out his real opposition to the child of promise. He might have gone on very quietly and orderly till Isaac made his appearance; but then he showed what he was, by persecuting and mocking at the child of resurrection. What then was the remedy? To make Ishmael better? By no means; but, "cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." (8-10) Here was the only remedy. "That which is crooked cannot be made straight;" therefore you have only to get rid of the crooked thing altogether, and occupy yourself with that which is divinely straight. It is labour lost to seek to make a crooked thing straight. Hence all efforts after the improvement of nature, are utterly futile, so far as God is concerned. It may be all very well for men to cultivate and improve that which is of use to themselves; but God has given his children something infinitely better to do, even to cultivate that

which is His own creation, the fruits of which, while they, in no wise, serve to exalt nature, are entirely to His praise and glory.

Now the error into which the Galatian churches fell, was the introduction of that which addressed itself to nature. "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Here salvation was made to depend upon something that man could be, or man could do, or man could keep. This was upsetting the whole glorious fabric of redemption, which, as the believer knows, rests exclusively upon what Christ is, and what He has done. To make salvation dependent, in the most remote manner, upon anything in, or done by, man, is to set it entirely aside. In other words, Ishmael must be entirely cast out, and all Abraham's hopes be made to depend upon what God had done, and given, in the person of Isaac. This, it is needless to say, leaves man nothing to glory in. If present or future blessedness were made to depend upon even a divine change wrought in nature, flesh might glory. Though my nature were improved, it would be something of *me*, and thus God would not have *all* the glory. But when I am introduced into a new creation, I find it is all of God, designed, matured, developed by Himself alone. God is the actor, and I am a worshipper; He is the blesser, and I am the blessed; He is "the better," and I am "the less;" (Heb. 7: 7) He is the giver, and I am the receiver. This is what makes Christianity what it is; and, moreover, distinguishes it from every system of human religion under the sun, whether it be Romanism, Puseyism, or any other ism whatsoever. Human religion gives the creature a place more or less; it keeps the bond-woman and her son in the house; it gives man something to glory in. On the contrary, Christianity excludes the creature from all interference in the work of salvation; casts out the bond-woman and her son, and gives *all* the glory to Him, to whom alone it is due.

But let us inquire who this bond-woman and her son really are, and what they shadow forth. Galatians 4 furnishes ample teaching as to these two points. In a word, then, the bond-woman represents the covenant of the law; and her son represents all, who are "of works of law," or on that principle (*ex ergon nomou*). This is very plain. The bond-woman only genders to bondage, and can never bring forth a free man. How can she? The law never could give liberty, for so long as a man was alive it ruled him. (Rom. 7: 1) I can never be free so long as I am under the dominion of any one. But while I live, the law rules me; and nothing but death can give me deliverance from its dominion. This is the blessed doctrine of Rom. 7. "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that you should be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." This is freedom; for, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8: 36) So, then, brethren, we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free." (Gal. 4: 31)

Now, it is in the power of this freedom that we are enabled to obey the command, cast out this bondwoman and her son." If I am not consciously free, I shall be seeking to attain liberty in the strangest way possible, even by keeping the bond-woman in the house: in other words, I shall be seeking to get life by keeping the law; I shall be establishing my own righteousness. No doubt, it will involve a struggle to cast out this element of bondage, for legalism is natural to our hearts. "The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son." Still, however grievous it may be, it is according to the divine mind that we should abidingly stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (Gal. 5: 1) May we, beloved reader, so fully and experimentally enter into the blessedness of God's provision for us in Christ, that we may be done with all thoughts about the flesh, and all that it can be, do, or produce. There is a fullness in Christ which renders all appeal to nature utterly superfluous and vain.

## Genesis 22

Abraham is now in a fit moral position to have his heart put to a most severe test. The long-cherished reserve being put forth from his heart, in Gen. 20 — the bond-woman and her son being put forth from his house, as in Gen. 21, he now stands forth in the most honoured position in which any soul can be placed, and that is a position of trial from the hand of God Himself. There are various kinds of trial-trial from the hand of Satan; trial from surrounding circumstances; but the highest character of trial is that which comes directly from the hand of God, when He puts His dear child into the furnace for the purpose of testing the reality of his faith. God will do this: He must have reality. It will not do to say "Lord, Lord," or, "I go, sir." The heart must be probed to the very bottom, in order that no element of hypocrisy, or false profession, may be allowed to lodge there. "My son, give me *thine heart*." He does not say, "give me thine head, or thine intellect, or thy talents, or thy tongue, or thy money;" but "give me thine heart:" and in order to prove the sincerity of our response to this gracious command, He will lay His hand upon something very near our hearts. Thus he says to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." This was coming very close to Abraham's heart. It was passing him through a searching crucible indeed. God "requires truth in the inward parts." There may be much truth on the lips, and much in the intellect, but God looks for it in the heart. It is no ordinary proof that will satisfy God, as to the love of our hearts. He Himself did not rest satisfied with giving an ordinary proof. He gave His Son, and we should aim at giving very striking proofs of our love to Him who so loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins.

However, it is well to see that God confers a signal honour upon us when He thus tests our hearts. We never read that "the Lord did tempt Lot." No; Sodom tempted Lot. He never reached a sufficiently high elevation to warrant his being tried by the hand of Jehovah. It was too plainly manifest that there was plenty between his heart and the Lord, and it did not, therefore, require the furnace to bring that out. Sodom would have held out no temptation whatever to Abraham. This was made manifest in his interview with Sodom's king, in chapter 14. God knew well that Abraham loved him far better than Sodom; but He would make it manifest, that He loved him better than any one or anything, by laying his hand upon the nearest and dearest object. "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac." Yes, Isaac, the child of promise; Isaac, the object of long-deferred hope, the object of parental love, and the one in whom all the kindreds of the earth were to be blessed. This Isaac must be offered as a burnt-offering. This, surely, was putting faith to the test, in order that, being more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, it might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory. Had Abraham's whole soul not been stayed simply on the Lord, he never could have yielded unhesitating obedience to such a searching command. But God Himself was the living and abiding support of his heart, and therefore he was prepared to give up all for Him.

The soul that has found *all* its springs in God, can, without any demur, retire from *all* creature streams. We can give up the creature, just in proportion as we have found out, or become experimentally acquainted with, the Creator, and no further. To attempt to give up the visible things in any other way, save in the energy of that faith which lays hold of the invisible, is the most fruitless labour possible. It cannot be done. I withhold fast my Isaac until I have found my all in God. It is when we are enabled, by faith, to say "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble," that we can also add, "therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." (Ps. 46: 1, 2)

"And Abraham rose up early in the morning." There is ready obedience. "I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Faith never stops to look at circumstances, or ponder results; it only looks at God; it expresses itself thus; "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my

mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." (Gal. 1: 1, 5, 16) The moment we confer with flesh and blood, our testimony and service are marred, for flesh and blood can never obey. We must rise early, and carry out, through grace, the divine command. Thus we are blessed, and God is glorified. Having God's own word as the basis of our acting will ever impart strength and stability to our acting. If we merely act from impulse, when the impulse subsides, the acting will subside also.

There are two things needful to a course of steady and consistent action, viz., the Holy Ghost, as the power of action, and the word to give proper direction. To use a familiar illustration: on a railway, we should find motive-power of little use without the iron rails firmly laid down; the former is the power by which we move; and the latter, the direction. It is needless to add that the rails would be of little use without the steam. Now, Abraham was blessed with both. He had the power of action conferred by God; and the command to act given by God also. His devotedness was of a most definite character; and this is deeply important. We frequently find much that looks like devotedness, but which, in reality, is but the desultory activity of a will not brought under the powerful action of the word of God. ALL such apparent devotedness is worthless, and the spirit from which it proceeds will very speedily evaporate. We may lay down the following principle, viz., whenever devotedness passes beyond divinely appointed bounds it is suspicious. If it comes not up to these bounds it is defective; if it flows without them it is erratic. I quite admit that there are extraordinary operations and ways of the Spirit of God, in which He asserts His own sovereignty, and rises above ordinary bounds; but, in such cases, the evidence of divine activity will be sufficiently strong to carry home conviction to every spiritual mind; nor will they, in the slightest degree, interfere with the truth of the principle that true devotedness will ever be founded upon and governed by divine principle. To sacrifice a son might seem to be an act of most extraordinary devotedness; but, be it remembered, that, what gave that act all its value, in God's sight, was the simple fact of its being based upon God's command.

Then, we have another thing connected with true devotedness, and that is a spirit of sonship. "I and the lad will go yonder and worship." The really devoted servant will keep his eye, not on his service, be it ever so great, but on the Master, and this will produce a spirit of worship. If I love my master, according to the flesh, I shall not mind whether I am cleaning his shoes or driving his carriage; but if I am thinking more of myself than of him, I shall rather be a coachman than a shoe black. So is it precisely in the service of the heavenly Master: if I am thinking only of Him, planting churches and making tents will be both alike to me. We may see the same thing in angelic ministry. It matters not to an angel whether he be sent to destroy an army, or to protect the person of some heir of salvation. It is the Master who entirely fills his vision. As some one has remarked, "if two angels were sent from heaven, one to rule an empire, and the other to sweep, the streets, they would not dispute about their respective work." This is most true, and so should it be with us. The servant should ever be combined with the worshipper, and the works of our hands perfumed with the ardent breathings of our spirits. In other words we should go forth to our work in the spirit of those memorable words, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship." This would effectually preserve us from that merely mechanical service into which we are so prone to drop; doing things for doing's sake, and being more occupied with our work than with our Master. ALL must flow from simple faith in God, and obedience to His word.

"BY faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only-begotten." (Heb. 11: 17) It is only as we are walking by faith that we can begin, continue, and end our works in God. Abraham not merely set out to offer his son, but he went on, and reached the spot which God had appointed. "And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife: and they went both of them

together." And further on we read, "And Abraham built an altar there; and laid the wood in order; and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." This was real work, "A work of faith and labour of love," in the highest sense. It was no mere mockery no drawing near with the lips, while the heart was far off — no saying "I go, sir, and went not." It was all deep reality, just such a faith ever delights to produce, and which God delights to accept. It is easy to make a show of devotedness when there is no demand for it. It is easy to say, "though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will never be offended . . . . . though I should die with thee, yet will not deny thee;" but the point is to stand the trial. When Peter was put to the test, he entirely broke down. Faith never talks of what it will do, but does what it can in the strength of the Lord. Nothing can be more thoroughly worthless than a spirit of empty pretension. It is just as worthless as the basis on which it rests. But faith acts "when it is tried;" and till then it is content to be unseen and silent.

Now, it needs hardly to be remarked that God is glorified in those Holy activities of faith. He is the immediate object of them, as He is the spring from whence they emanate. There was not a scene in Abraham's entire history in which God was so much glorified as the scene on Mount Moriah. There it was that he was enabled to bear testimony to the fact that he had found all his fresh springs in God — found them not merely previous to, but after, Isaac's birth. This is a most touching point. It is one thing to rest in God's blessings, and another thing to rest in Himself. It is one thing to trust God when I have before my eyes the channel through which the blessing is to flow; and quite another thing to trust Him when that channel is entirely stopped up. This was what proved the excellency of Abraham's faith. He showed that he could not merely trust God for an innumerable seed while Isaac stood before him in health and vigour; but just as fully if he were a smoking victim on the altar. This was a high order of confidence in God; it was unalloyed confidence; it was not a confidence propped up, in part, by the Creator, and in part by the creature. No it rested on one solid pedestal, viz., God Himself. "He accounted that God was able." He never accounted that Isaac was able. Isaac, without God, was nothing; God, without Isaac, was everything. This is a principle of the very last importance, and one eminently calculated to test the heart most keenly. Does it make any difference to me to see the apparent channel of all my blessings dried up? Am I dwelling sufficiently near the fountain-head to be able, with a worshipping spirit, to behold all the creature streams dried up? This I do feel to be a searching question. Have I such a simple view of God's sufficiency as to be able, as it were, to "stretch forth my hand and take the knife to slay my son." Abraham was enabled to do this, because his eye rested on the God of resurrection. "He accounted that God was able to raise him up even from the dead."

In a word, it was with God he had to do, and that was quite enough. He was not suffered to strike the blow. He had gone to the very utmost bounds; he had come up to the line beyond which God could not suffer him to go. The Blessed One spared the father's heart the pang which He did not spare His own heart, even that of smiting His Son. He, blessed be His name, passed beyond the utmost bounds, for "he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." There was no voice from heaven when, on Calvary, the Father offered up His only-begotten Son. No; it was a perfectly accomplished sacrifice; and, in its accomplishment, our everlasting peace is sealed.

However, Abraham's devotedness was fully proved, and fully accepted. For now "I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." Mark it is "now I know." It had never been proved before. It was there, no doubt, and, if there, God knew it; but the valuable point here, is, that God founds His knowledge of it upon the palpable evidence afforded at the

altar upon Mount Moriah. Faith is always proved by action, and the fear of God by the fruits which flow from it. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son on the altar" (James 2: 21) Who could think of calling his faith in question Take away faith, and Abraham appears on Moriah as a murderer, and a madman. Take faith into account, and he appears as a devoted worshipper — a God-fearing, justified man. But faith must be proved. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man *say* he hath faith, and have not works" (James 2: 14) Will either God or man be satisfied with a powerless and profitless profession? Surely not. God looks for reality and honours it where He sees it; and as for man, he can understand nought save the living and intelligible utterance of a faith that shows itself in acts. We are surrounded by the profession of religion; the phraseology of faith is on every lip; but faith itself is as rare a gem as ever—that faith which will enable a man to push out from the shore of present circumstances, and meet the waves and the winds, and not only meet them, but endure them, even though the Master should seem to be asleep on the pillow.

And here I would remark: the beautiful harmony between James and Paul, on the subject of justification. The intelligent and spiritual reader, who bows to the important truth of the plenary inspiration of holy scripture, knows full well that, on this question it is not with Paul or James we have to do, but with the Holy Ghost, who graciously used each of those honoured men as the pen to write His thoughts, just as I might take up a quill pen or a steel pen to write my thoughts, in which case it would be quite preposterous to speak of a discrepancy between the two pens, inasmuch as the writer is one. Hence it is just as impossible that two divinely-inspired penmen could clash, as that two heavenly bodies, while moving in their divinely appointed orbits, could come into collision.

But, in reality, as might be expected, there is the fullest and most perfect harmony between these two apostles; indeed, on the subject of justification, the one is the counterpart or exponent of the other. Paul gives us the inward principle, James the outward development of that principle; the former presents the hidden life, the latter the manifested life; the former looks at man in relation to God, the latter looks at him in his relation to man. Now we want both: the inward would not do without the outward; and the outward would be valueless and powerless without the inward. "Abraham was justified" when "he believed God;" and "Abraham was justified" when "he offered Isaac his son." In the former case we have his secret standing; in the latter, his public acknowledgement by heaven and earth. It is well to understand this distinction. There was no voice from heaven when "Abraham believed God," though in God's view he was there, then, and that "counted righteous;" but "when he had offered his son upon the altar," God could say, "now I know;" and all the world had a powerful and unanswerable proof of the fact that Abraham was a justified man. Thus will it ever be. Where there is the inward principle, there will be the outward acting; but all the value of the latter springs from its connection with the former. Disconnect, for one moment, Abraham's acting, as set forth by James, from Abraham's faith as set forth by Paul, and that justifying virtue did it possess? None whatever. All its value, all its efficacy, all its virtue, springs from the fact that it was the outward manifestation of that faith, by virtue of which he had been already counted righteous before God. Thus much as to the admirable harmony between Paul and James, or rather, as to the unity of the voice of the Holy Ghost, whether that voice be uttered by Paul or James.

We now return to our chapter. It is deeply interesting to mark here how Abraham's soul is led into a fresh discovery of God's character by the trial of his faith. When we are enabled to bear the testings of God's own hand, it is sure to lead us into some new experience with respect to His character, which makes us to know how valuable the testing is. If Abraham had not stretched out his hand to slay his son, he never would have known the rich and exquisite depths of that title which he here bestows upon God, viz., "Jehovah Jireh." It is only when we are really put to the test that we discover what God is.

Without trial we can be but theorists, and God would not have us such: He would have us entering into the living depths that are in Himself-the divine realities of personal communion with Him. With what different feelings and convictions must Abraham have retraced his steps from Moriah to Beer-sheba ! from the mount of the Lord to the well of the oath! What very different thoughts of God! What different thoughts of Isaac! What different thoughts Of every-thing! Truly we may say, "Happy is the man that endureth trial. It is an honour put upon one by the Lord Himself, and the deep blessedness of the experience to which it leads cannot be easily estimated. It is when men are brought, to use the language of Psalm 107, "to their wits' end," that they discover what God is. Oh! for grace to endure trial, that God's workmanship may appear, and His name be glorified in us.

There is one point which, before closing my remarks on this chapter, I shall notice, and that is the gracious way in which God gives Abraham credit for having done the act which he had showed himself so fully prepared to do. "*By myself have I sworn*, saith the Lord; for *because thou hast done this thing*, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies: and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed: because thou hast obeyed my voice." This beautifully corresponds with the Spirit's notice of Abraham's acting, as put before us in Heb. 11 and also in James 2, in both of which scriptures he is looked upon as having offered Isaac his son upon the altar. The grand principle conveyed in the whole matter is this: Abraham proved that he was prepared to have the scene entirely cleared of all but God; and, moreover, it was this same principle which both constituted and placed him a justified man. Faith can do without every one and everything but God. It has the full sense of His sufficiency, and can, therefore, let go all beside. Hence Abraham could rightly estimate the words, "by myself have I sworn." Yes, this wondrous word, "*myself*," was everything to the man of faith. "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swear by himself..... For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath." The word and oath of the living God should put an end to all the strivings and workings of the human will, and form the immovable anchor of the soul amid all the tossing and tumult of this stormy world.

Now, we must condemn ourselves consistently, because of the little power which the promise of God has in our hearts. There it is, and we profess to believe it; but ah! it is not that deep, abiding, influential reality which it ought ever to be; we do not draw from it that 'strong consolation' which it is calculated to afford. How little prepared are we, in the power of faith, in the promise of God, to slay our Isaac! We need to cry to God that He would be graciously pleased to endow us with a deeper insight into the blessed reality of a life of faith in Himself, that so we may understand better the import of that word of John, "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." We can only overcome the world by faith. Unbelief puts us under the power of present things; in other words, it gives the world the victory over us. A soul that has entered, by the teaching of the Holy ghost, into the sense of God's sufficiency, is entirely independent of things here. Beloved reader, may we know this, for our peace and joy in God, and His glory in us.

### **Genesis 23**

This little section of inspiration furnishes much sweet and profitable instruction to the soul. In it the Holy Spirit sets before us a beautiful exhibition of the mode in which the man of faith should carry himself toward those that are without. While it is true, divinely true, that faith makes a man independent of the men of the world, it is no less true that faith will ever teach him to walk honestly toward them. We are told to "walk honestly toward them that are without;" (1 Thess. 4: 12) "to provide

things honest in the sight of all;" (2 Cor. 8: 21) "to owe no man anything." (Rom. 13: 8) These are weighty precepts — precepts which, even before their distinct enunciation, were duly observed in all ages by the faithful servants of Christ, but which, in modern times, alas! have not been sufficiently attended to.

The 23rd of Genesis, therefore, is worthy of special notice. It opens with the death of Sarah, and introduces Abraham in a new character, viz., that of a mourner. "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." The child of God must meet such things; but he must not meet them as others. The great fact of resurrection comes in to his relief, and imparts a character to his sorrow quite peculiar. (1 Thess. 4: 13, 14) The man of faith can stand at the grave of a brother or sister, in the happy consciousness that it shall not long hold its captive," for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." The redemption of the soul secures the redemption of the body; the former we have, the latter we wait for. (Rom. 8: 23)

Now, I believe that in purchasing Machpelah for a burying-place, Abraham gave expression to his faith in resurrection. "*He stood up from* before his dead." Faith cannot long keep death in view; it has a higher object, blessed be the "living God" who has given it. Resurrection is that which ever fills the vision of faith; and, in the power thereof, it can rise up from before the dead. There is much conveyed in this action of Abraham. We want to understand its meaning much more fully, because we are much too prone to be occupied with death and its consequences. Death is the boundary of Satan's power; but where Satan ends, God begins. Abraham understood this when he rose up and purchased the cave of Machpelah as a sleeping place for Sarah. This was the expression of Abraham's thought in reference to the future. He knew that in the ages to come, God's promise about the land of Canaan would be fulfilled, and he was able to lay the body of Sarah in the tomb, "in sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection."

The sons of Heth knew nothing about this. The thoughts which were filling the patriarch's soul were entirely foreign to the uncircumcised children of Heth. To them it seemed a small matter where he buried his dead, but it was by no means a small matter to him. "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." It might, and manifestly did, appear strange to them to make so much ado about a grave; but, "beloved, the world knoweth us not, even as it knew him not." The finest traits and characteristics of faith are those which are most incomprehensible to the natural man. The Canaanites had no idea of the expectations which were giving character to Abraham's actings on this occasion. They had no idea that he was looking forward to the possession of the land, while he was merely looking for a spot in which, as a dead man, he might wait for God's time, and God's manner, viz., the MORNING OF RESURRECTION. He felt *he* had no controversy with the children of Heth, and hence he was quite prepared to lay his head in the grave, and allow God to act for him, and with him, and by him.

"These all died in (or according to) faith, (*kata pistin*,) not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Heb. 11: 13) This is a truly exquisite feature in the divine life. Those "witnesses," of whom the apostle is speaking in Heb. 11 not merely lived by faith, but even when they arrived at the close of their career, they proved that the promises of God were as real and satisfying to their souls as when they first started. Now, I believe this purchase of a burying place in the land was an exhibition of the power of faith, not only to live, but to die. Why was Abraham so particular about this purchase? Why was he so anxious to make good his claim to the field and cave of Ephron on righteous principles? Why so determined to weigh out the full price "current with the merchant" Faith is the answer. He did it all by faith. He knew the land was his in prospect, and that in

glory his seed should yet possess it, and until then he would be no debtor to those who were yet to be dispossessed.

Thus we may view this beautiful chapter in a twofold light; first, as setting before us a plain, practical principle, as to our dealings with the men of this world; and secondly, as presenting the blessed hope which should ever animate the man of faith. Putting both these points together, we have an example of what the child of God should ever be. The hope set before us in the gospel is a glorious immortality; and this, while it lifts the heart above every influence of nature and the world, furnishes a high and holy principle with which to govern all our intercourse with those who are without. "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." This is our hope. What is the moral effect of this? "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3: 2, 3) If I am to be like Christ by and by, I shall seek to be as like Him now as I can. Hence, the Christian should ever seek to walk in purity, integrity and moral grace in the view of all round.

Thus it was with Abraham, in reference to the sons of Heth. His whole deportment and conduct, as set forth in our chapter, would seem to have been marked with very pure elevation and disinterestedness. He was "a mighty prince among them," and they would fain have done him a favour; but Abraham had learnt to take his favours only from the God of resurrection, and while he would pay *them* for Machpelah he would look to *Him* for Canaan. The sons of Heth knew well the value of "current money with the merchant," and Abraham knew the value of the cave of Machpelah. It was worth much more to him than it was to them. "The land was worth to them "four hundred shekels of silver," but to him it was priceless, as the earnest of an everlasting inheritance, which, because it was an everlasting inheritance, could only be possessed in the power of resurrection. Faith conducts the soul onward into God's future; it looks at things as He looks at them, and estimates them according to the judgement of the sanctuary. Therefore, in the intelligence of faith, Abraham stood up from before his dead, and purchased a burying-place, which significantly set forth his hope of resurrection, and of an inheritance founded thereon.

### **Genesis 24**

The connection of this chapter, with the two which precede it, is worthy of notice. In Gen. 22 the son is offered up; in Gen. 23 Sarah is laid aside; and in Gen. 24 the servant is sent forth to procure a bride for him who had been, as it were, received from the dead in a figure. This connection, in a very striking manner, coincides with the order of events connected with the calling out of the Church. whether this coincidence is to be regarded as of divine origin, will, it may be, raise a question in the minds of some; but it must at least be regarded as not a little remarkable.

When we turn to the New Testament, the grand events which meet our view are, first, the rejection and death of Christ; secondly, the setting aside of Israel after the flesh; and, lastly, the calling out of the Church to occupy the high position of the bride of the Lamb.

Now, all this exactly corresponds with the contents of this and the two preceding chapters. The death of Christ needed to be an accomplished fact, ere the Church, properly so called, could be called out. "The middle wall of partition" needed to be broken down, ere the "*One new man*" could be developed. It is well to understand this in order that we may know the place which the Church occupies in the ways of God. So long as the Jewish economy subsisted there was the most strict separation maintained between Jew and Gentile, and hence the idea of both being united in one new man was far removed from the mind of a Jew. He was led to view himself in a position of entire superiority to that of a gentile, and to view the latter as utterly unclean, to whom it was unlawful to come in. (Acts 10: 28)

If Israel had walked with God according to the truth of the relationship into which He had

graciously brought them, they would have continued in their peculiar place of separation and superiority; but this they did not do; and, therefore, when they had filled up the measure of their iniquity, by crucifying the Lord of life and glory, and rejecting the testimony of the Holy Ghost, we find St. Paul is raised up to be the minister of a new thing, which was held back in the counsels of God, while the testimony to Israel was going on. "For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, *as it is now* revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets (i.e., New Testament prophets, *tois hagiois apostolois autou kai prophetais*) by the Spirit; that the gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." (Eph. 3: 1-6) This is conclusive. The mystery of the Church, composed of Jew and Gentile, baptised by one Spirit into one body, united to the glorious Head in the heavens, had never been revealed until Paul's day. Of this mystery the apostle goes on to say, "I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God, given unto me, by the effectual working of his power." (Ver. 7) The apostles and prophets of the New Testament formed, as it were, the first layer of this glorious building. (See Eph. 2: 20) This being so, it follows, as a consequence, that the building could not have been begun before. If the building had been going on from the days of Abel, downwards, the apostle would then have said, "the foundation of the Old Testament saints." But he has not said so, and therefore we conclude that, whatever be the position assigned to the Old Testament saints, they cannot possibly belong to a body which had no existence, save in the purpose of God, until the death and resurrection of Christ, and the consequent descent of the Holy Ghost. Saved they were, blessed be God; saved by the blood of Christ, and destined to enjoy heavenly glory with the Church; but they could not have formed a part of that which did not exist for hundreds of years after their time.

It were easy to enter upon a more elaborate demonstration of this most important truth, were this the place for so doing; but I shall now go on with our chapter, having merely touched upon a question of commanding interest, because of its being suggested by the position of Genesis 24.

There may be a question, in some minds, as to whether we are to view this deeply-interesting portion of scripture as *a type* of the calling out of the Church by the Holy Ghost. For myself, I feel happier in merely handling it as *an illustration* of that glorious work. We cannot suppose that the Spirit of God would occupy an unusually long chapter with the mere detail of a family compact, were that compact not typical or illustrative of some great truth. "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." This is emphatic. What, therefore, are we to learn from the chapter before us? I believe it furnishes us with a beautiful illustration or foreshadowing of the great mystery of the Church. It is important to see that, while there is no direct revelation of this mystery in the Old Testament, there are, nevertheless, scenes and circumstances which, in a very remarkable manner, shadow it forth; as, for example, the chapter before us. As has been remarked, the son being, in a figure, offered up, and received again from the dead; the original parent stem, as it were, being laid aside, the messenger is sent forth by the father to procure a bride for the son.

Now, in order to the clear and full understanding of the contents of the entire chapter, we may consider the following points, viz., 1, *the oath*; 2, *the testimony*; 3, *the result*. It is beautiful to observe that the call and exaltation of Rebekah were founded upon the oath between Abraham and his servant. She knew nothing of this, though she was, in the purpose of God, so entirely the subject of it all. So is it exactly with the Church of God as a whole and each constituent part. "In thy book were all my members written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them." (Ps. 139: 16) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual

blessings in the heavenlies in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph. 1: 3, 4) "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Rom. 8: 20, 30) These scriptures are all in beautiful harmony with the point immediately before us. The call, the justification, and the glory of the Church, are all founded on the eternal purpose of God — His word and oath, ratified by the death, resurrection, and exaltation of the Son. Far back, beyond the bounds of time, in the deep recesses of God's eternal mind, lay this wondrous purpose respecting the Church, which cannot, by any means, be separated from the divine thought respecting the glory of the Son. The oath between Abraham and the servant had for its object the provision of a partner for the son. It was the father's desire with respect to the son that led to Rebekah's after-dignity. It is happy to see this. Happy to see how the Church's security and blessing stand inseparably connected with Christ and His glory. "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man." (1 Cor. 11: 8, 9) So it is in the beautiful parable of the marriage supper; "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son." (Matt. 22: 2) The Son is the Grand object of all the thoughts and counsels of God: and if any are brought into blessing, or glory, or dignity, it can only be in connection with Him. ALL title to these things, and even to life itself, was forfeited by sin; but Christ met all the penalty due to sin; He made Himself responsible for everything on behalf of His body the Church; He was nailed to the cross as her representative He bore her sins in His own body on the tree, and went down into the grave under the full weight of them. Hence, nothing can be more complete than the Church's deliverance from all that was against her. She is quickened out of the grave of Christ, where all her trespasses were laid. The life which she has is a life taken up at the other side of death, after every possible demand had been met. Hence, this life is connected with, and founded upon, divine righteousness, inasmuch as Christ's title to life is founded upon His having entirely exhausted the Power of death; and He is the Church's life. Thus the Church enjoys divine life; she stands in divine righteousness; and the hope that animates her is the hope of righteousness. (See, amongst many other scriptures, John 3: 16, 36; John 5: 39, 40; John 6: 27, 40, 47, 68; John 11: 25; John 17: 2; Rom. 5: 21; Rom. 6: 23; 1 Tim. 1: 16; 1 John 2: 25; 5: 20; Jude 21; Eph. 2: 1-6, 14, 15; Col. 1: 12-22 Col. 2: 10-15; Rom 1: 17; Rom 3: 21-26; Rom 4: 5, 23-25; 2 Cor. 5: 21; Gal. 5: 5)

These scriptures most fully establish the three points, viz., the life, the righteousness, and the hope of the Church, all of which flow from her being one with Him who was raised from the dead. Now, nothing can be so calculated to assure the heart as the conviction that the Church's existence is essential to the glory of Christ. "The woman is the glory of the man." (1 Cor. 11: 7) And again, the Church is called "the fullness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1: 23) This last is a remarkable expression. The word translated "fullness" means the complement, that which, being added to something else, makes up a whole. Thus it is that Christ the Head, and the Church the body, make up the "one new man." (Eph. 2: 15) Looking at the matter in this point of view, it is no marvel that the Church should have been the object of God's eternal counsels. When we view her as the body, the Bride, the companion, the counterpart, of His only-begotten Son, we feel that there was, through grace, wondrous reason for her being so thought of before the foundation of the world. Rebekah was necessary to Isaac, and therefore, she was the subject of secret counsel while yet in profound ignorance about her high destiny ALL Abraham's thought was about Isaac. "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." Here we see that the all-important point was, "a

wife unto my son." "It is not good that the man should be alone." This opens up a very deep and blessed view of the Church. In the counsels of God she is necessary to Christ; and in the accomplished work of Christ, divine provision has been made for her being called into existence.

While occupied with such a character of truth as this, it is no longer a question as to whether God can save poor sinners; He actually wants to "make a marriage" for his Son," and the Church is the destined bride — she is the object of the Father's purpose, the object of the Son's love, and of the testimony of the Holy Ghost. She is to be the sharer of all the Son's dignity and glory, as she is the sharer of all that love of which He has been the everlasting object. Hear His own words, "And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." (John 17: 22, 23) This settles the whole question. The words just quoted give us the thoughts of Christ's heart in reference to the Church. She is to be as He is, and not only so, but she is so even now, as St. John tells us, "Herein is love perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement: because as he is, so are we in this world." (1 John 4: 17) This gives full confidence to the soul. "We are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." (2 John 5: 20) There is here no ground for uncertainty. Everything is secured for the bride in the bridegroom. ALL that belonged to Isaac became Rebekah's because Isaac was hers; and so all that belongs to Christ is made available to the Church. "ALL things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3: 21-23) Christ is "head over all things to the Church." (Eph. 1: 22) It will be His joy, throughout eternity, to exhibit the Church in all the glory and beauty with which He has endowed her, for her glory and beauty will be but the reflection of His. Angels and principalities shall behold in the Church the marvellous display of the wisdom, power, and grace of God in Christ.

But we shall now look at the second point for consideration, viz., *the testimony*. Abraham's servant carried with him a very distinct testimony. "And he said, I am Abraham's servant. And the Lord hath blessed My master greatly, and he is become great; and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and men servants, and maid servants, and camels, and asses. and Sarah, my master's wife, bare a son to my master when she was old; and unto him hath he given all that he hath." (Ver. 34-36) He reveals the father and the son. Such was his testimony. He speaks of the vast resources of the father, and of the son's being endowed with all these in virtue of his being "the only-begotten," and the object of the father's love. With this testimony he seeks to obtain a bride for the son.

ALL this, I need hardly remark, is strikingly illustrative of the testimony with which the Holy Ghost was sent from heaven upon the day of Pentecost. "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." (John 15: 26) Again, "Howbeit when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine and show it unto you." *All things that the Father hath are mine:* therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you. (John 16: 13-15) The coincidence of these words with the testimony of Abraham's servant is instructive and interesting. It was by telling of Isaac that he sought to attract the heart of Rebekah; and it is, as we know, by telling of Jesus, that the Holy Ghost seeks to draw poor sinners away from a world of sin and folly into the blessed and holy unity of the body of Christ. "He shall take of mine and show it Unto you." The Spirit of God will never lead any one to look at Himself or His work; but only and always at Christ. Hence, the more really spiritual any one is, the more entirely will he be occupied with

Christ.

Some there are who regard it as a great mark of spirituality to be ever looking in at their own hearts, and dwelling upon what they find there, even though that be the work of the Spirit. This is a great mistake. So far from its being a proof of spirituality, it is a proof of the very reverse, for it is expressly declared of the Holy Ghost that "He shall take of mine and show it unto you." Therefore, whenever one is looking inward, and building on the evidences of the Spirit's work there, he may be assured he is not led by the Spirit of God, in so doing. It is by holding up Christ that the Spirit draws souls to God. This is very important. The knowledge of Christ is life eternal; and it is the Father's revelation of Christ, by the Holy Ghost, that constitutes the basis of the Church. When Peter confessed Christ to be the Son of the Living God, Christ's answer was, "blessed art thou, Simon Barjonah; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock *I will build my church*; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16: 17, 18) What rock? Peter? God forbid. "This rock" (*taute te petra*) simply means the Father's revelation of Christ, as the Son of the living God, which is the only means by which any one is introduced into the assembly of Christ. Now this opens to us, very much, the true character of the gospel. It is, pre-eminently and emphatically, a revelation — a revelation not merely of a doctrine, but of a Person — the Person of the Son. This revelation being received by faith, draws the heart to Christ, and becomes the spring of life and power — the ground of membership — the power of fellowship. "When it pleased God.....*to reveal His Son in me,*" &c. Here we have the true principle of "the rock," viz., God revealing His Son. It is thus the superstructure is reared up; and on this solid foundation it reposes, according to God's eternal purpose.

It is therefore peculiarly instructive to find in this 24th of Genesis such a marked and beautiful illustration of the mission and special testimony of the Holy Ghost. Abraham's servant, in seeking to procure a bride for Isaac, sets forth all the dignity and wealth with which he had been endowed by the father; the love of which he was the object; and, in short, all that was calculated to affect the heart, and draw it off from present things. He showed Rebekah an object in the distance, and set before her the blessedness and reality of being made one with that beloved and highly favoured object. ALL that belonged to Isaac would belong to Rebekah too, when she became part of him. Such was his testimony. Such, also, is the testimony of the Holy Ghost. He speaks of Christ, the glory of Christ, the beauty of Christ, the fullness of Christ, the grace of Christ, "the unsearchable riches of Christ," the dignity of His Person, and the perfectness of His work.

Moreover, he sets forth the amazing blessedness of being one with such a Christ, "members of His body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Such is the Spirit's testimony always; and herein we have an excellent touchstone by which to try all sorts of teaching and preaching. The most spiritual teaching will ever be characterised by a full and constant presentation of Christ. He will ever form the burden of such teaching. The Spirit cannot dwell on ought but Jesus. Of Him He delights to speak. He delights in setting forth His attractions and excellencies. Hence, when a man is ministering by the power of the Spirit of God, there will always a be more of Christ than anything else in his ministry. There will be little room in such ministry for human logic and reasoning. Such things may do very well where a man desires to set forth himself; but the Spirit's sole object be it well remembered by all who minister — will ever be to set forth Christ.

Let us now look, in the last place, at *the result* of all this. Truth, and the practical application of truth, are two very different things. It is one thing to speak of the peculiar glories of the Church, and quite another thing to be practically influenced by those glories. In Rebekah's case the effect was most marked and decisive. The testimony of Abraham's servant sank down into her ears, and into her heart,

and entirely detached her heart's affections from the scene of things around her. She was ready to leave all and follow after, in order that she might apprehend that for which she had been apprehended. It was morally impossible that she could believe herself to be the subject of such high destinies, and yet continue amid the circumstances of nature. If the report concerning the future were true, attachment to the present was the worst of folly. If the hope of being Isaac's bride, joint-heir with him of all his dignity and glory, if this were a reality, then to continue to tend Laban's sheep would be practically to despise all that God had, in grace, set before her.

But, no, the prospect was far too bright to be thus lightly given up. True, she had not yet seen Isaac, nor yet the inheritance, but she had believed the report, the testimony of *him*, and had received, as it were, the earnest of it, and these were enough for her heart; and hence she unhesitatingly arises and expresses her readiness to depart in the memorable words, "*I will go.*" "She was fully prepared to enter upon an unknown path in companionship with one who had told her of an object far away, and of a glory connected with him, to which she was about to be raised. "I will go," said she, and "forgetting the things which were behind, and reaching forth toward the things which were before, she pressed toward the mark for the prize of her high calling." Most touching and beautiful illustration this of the Church, under the conduct of the Holy Ghost, going onward to meet her heavenly Bridegroom. This is what the Church should be; but, alas! there is sad failure here. There is little of that holy alacrity in laying aside every weight and every entanglement, in the power of communion with the Holy Guide and Companion of our way, whose office and delight it is to take of the things of Jesus, and show them unto us; just as Abraham's servant took of the things of Isaac, and showed them to Rebekah: and no doubt, too, he found his joy in pouring fresh testimonies concerning the son into her ear, as they moved onward toward the consummation of all her joy and glory. Thus it is, at least with our heavenly guide and companion. He delights to tell of Jesus, "He shall take of mine and show it unto you;" and again, "he shall show you things to come." Now, this is what we really want, this ministry of the Spirit of God, unfolding Christ to our souls, producing earnest longing to see Him, as He is, and be made like Him for ever. Nought but this will ever detach our hearts from earth and nature. What, save the hope of being associated with Isaac, would ever have led Rebekah to say, "I will go," when her "brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at least ten." And so with us: nothing but the hope of seeing Jesus as He is, and being like Him, will ever enable or lead us to purify ourselves, even as He is pure.

## **Genesis 25**

In the opening of this chapter, Abraham's second marriage is set before us, an event not without its interest to the spiritual mind, when viewed in connection with what we have been considering in the preceding chapter. With the light furnished by the prophetic scriptures of the New testament, we understand that after the completion and taking up of the elect bride of Christ, the seed of Abraham will again come into notice. Thus, after the marriage of Isaac, the Holy Ghost takes up the history of Abraham's seed by a new marriage, together with other points in his history, and that of his seed, according to the flesh. I do not press any special interpretation of all this; I merely say that it is not without its interest.

We have already referred to the remark of some one on the book of Genesis, namely, that it is "full of the seeds of things;" and as we pass along its comprehensive pages, we shall find them teaming with all the fundamental principles of truth, which are more elaborately brought out in the New Testament. True, in Genesis these principles are set forth illustratively, and in the New Testament didactically; still, the illustration is deeply interesting, and eminently calculated to bring home the truth with power to the soul.

At the close of this chapter we are presented with some principles of a very solemn and practical nature. Jacob's character and actions which hereafter, if the Lord will, come more fully before us; but I would just notice, ere passing on, the conduct of Esau, in reference to the birthright, and all which it involved. The natural heart places no value on the things of God. To it God's promise is a vague, valueless, powerless thing, simply because God is not known. Hence it is that present things carry such weight and influence in man's estimation. Anything that man can see he values, because he is governed by sight, and not by faith. To him the present is everything; the future is a mere unimportant thing — a matter of the merest uncertainty. Thus it was with Esau. Here his fallacious reasoning, "Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me? What strange reasoning? *The present* is slipping from beneath my-feet, I will therefore despise and entirely let go the *future*? Time is fading from my view, I will therefore abandon all interest in eternity! "Thus Esau despised his birthright." Thus Israel despised the pleasant land; (Ps. 106: 24) thus they despised Christ. (Zech. 11: 13) Thus those who were bidden to the marriage despised the invitation. (Matt. 22: 5) Man has no heart for the things of God. The present is everything to him. a mess of pottage is better than a title to Canaan. Hence, the very reason why Esau made light of the birthright was the reason why he ought to have grasped it with the greater intensity. The more clearly I see the vanity of man's present, the more I shall cleave to God's future. Thus it is in the judgement of faith. "Seeing then that *all these things shall be dissolved*, what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, *according to his promise*, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Peter 3: 11-13) These are the thoughts of God, and, therefore, the thoughts of faith. The things that are seen shall be dissolved. What, then, are we to despise the unseen? By no means. The present is rapidly passing away. What is our resource? "Looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of God." This is the judgement of the renewed mind; and any other judgement is only that of "a profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." (Heb. 12: 16) The Lord keep us judging of things as He judges. This can only be done by faith.

## Genesis 26

The opening verse of this chapter connects itself with Gen. 12. "There was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham." The trials which meet God's people, in their course, are very much like; and they ever tend to make manifest how far the heart has found its *all* in God. It is a difficult matter — a rare attainment, so to walk in sweet communion with God as to be rendered thereby entirely independent of things and people here. The Egyptians and the Gerars which lie on our right hand and on our left present great temptations, either to turn aside out of the right way, or to stop short of our true position as servants of the true and living God.

"And Isaac went unto Abimelech, king of the Philistines, unto Gerar." There is a manifest difference between Egypt and Gerar. Egypt is the expression of the world in its natural resources, and its independence of God. "My river is mine own," is the language of an Egyptian who knew not Jehovah, and thought not of looking to Him for ought. Egypt was, locally, further removed from Canaan than Gerar; and, morally, it expresses a condition of soul further from God. Gerar is thus referred to in Gen. 10 "And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza as thou goest unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha." (Ver. 19) We are informed that "from Gerar to Jerusalem was three days' journey." It was, therefore, as compared with Egypt, an advanced position; but still it lay within the range of very dangerous influences. Abraham got into trouble there, and so does Isaac, in this chapter, and that, too, in the very same way.

Abraham denied his wife, and so does Isaac. This is peculiarly solemn. To see both the father and the son fall into the same evil, in the same place, tells us, plainly, that the influence of that place was not good.

Had Isaac not gone to Abimelech, king of Gerar, he would have had no necessity for denying his wife; but the slightest divergence from the true line of conduct superinduces spiritual weakness. It was when Peter stood and warmed himself at the high priest's fire that he denied his Master. Now, it is manifest that Isaac was not really happy in Gerar. True, the Lord says unto him, "sojourn in this land;" but how often does the Lord give directions to His people morally suitable to the condition He knows them to be in, and calculated also to arouse them to a true sense of that condition? He directed Moses, in Num. 13 to send men to search the land of Canaan; but had they not been in a low moral condition, such a step would not have been necessary. We know well that faith does not need "*to spy out*" when God's promise lies before us. Again, he directed Moses to choose out seventy elders to help him in the work; but had Moses fully entered into the dignity and blessedness of his position, he would not have needed such a direction. So, in reference to the setting up of a king, in 1 Sam. 8. They ought not to have needed a king. Hence, we must always take into consideration the condition of an individual or a people to whom a direction is given before we can form any correct judgement as to the direction.

But again it may be said, if Isaac's position in Gerar was wrong, how do we read, "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received the same year an hundred-fold: and the Lord blessed him." (ver. 12) I reply, we can never judge that a person's condition is right because of prosperous circumstances. We have had already to remark, that there is a great difference between the Lord's presence and His blessing. Many have the latter without the former; and, moreover, the heart is prone to mistake the one for the other — prone to put the blessing; for the presence; or at least to argue that the one must ever accompany the other. This is a great mistake. How many do we see surrounded by God's blessings, who neither have, nor wish for, God's presence? It is important to see this. A man may "wax great, and go forward, and grow until he becomes very great, and have possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants," and all the while, not have the full, unhindered joy of the Lord's presence with him. Flocks and herds are not the Lord. They are things on account of which the Philistines might envy Isaac, whereas they never would have envied him on account of the Lord's presence. He might have been enjoying the sweetest and richest communion with God, and the Philistines have thought nothing whatever about it? simply because they had no heart to understand or appreciate such a reality. Flocks, herds, servants, and wells of water they could appreciate; but the divine presence they could not appreciate.

However, Isaac at length, makes his way from amongst the Philistines, and gets up to Beersheba. "*And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father; fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee.*" (Ver. 24) Mark, it was not the Lord's blessing merely, but the Lord Himself. And why? because Isaac had left the Philistines, with all their envy, and strife, and contention behind, and gone up to Beersheba. Here the Lord could show Himself to His servant. His liberal hand might follow him during his sojourn in Gerar; but His presence could not there be enjoyed. To enjoy God's presence, we must be where He is, and He certainly is not to be found amid the strife and contention of an ungodly world; and hence, the sooner the child of God gets away from all such, the better. So Isaac found it. He had no rest in his own spirit; and he assuredly did not, in any wise, serve the Philistines by his sojourn amongst them. It is a very common error to imagine that we serve the men of this world by mixing ourselves up with them in their associations and ways. The true way to serve them is to stand apart from them in the power of communion with God, and thus show them the pattern of a more excellent way.

Mark the progress in Isaac's soul, and the moral effect of his course. "He went up from thence," "The Lord appeared unto him," "he builded an altar," "he called upon the name of the Lord," "he pitched his tent," "his servants digged a well." Here we have most blessed progress. The moment he took a step in the right direction, he went from strength to strength. He entered into the joy of God's presence — tasted the sweets of true worship, and exhibited the character of a stranger and pilgrim, and found peaceful refreshment, an undisputed well, which the Philistines could not stop because they were not there.

These were blessed results in reference to Isaac himself; and now observe the effect produced upon others. "Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phicol, the chief captain of his army. And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? And they said, We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee: and we said, Let there now be an oath betwixt us," &c. The true way to act on the hearts and consciences of the men of the world is to stand in decided separation from them, while dealing in perfect grace toward them. So long as Isaac continued in Gerar, there was nothing but strife and contention. He was reaping sorrow for himself, and producing no effect whatever upon those around him. On the contrary, the moment he went away from them, their hearts were touched, and they followed him, and desired a covenant. This is very instructive. The principle unfolded here may be seen constantly exemplified in the history of the children of God. The first point with the heart should ever be, to see that in our position we are right with God, and not only right in position, but in the moral condition of the son. When we are *right with God*, we may expect to act salutary upon men. The moment Isaac got up to Beersheba, and took his place as a worshipper, his own soul was refreshed, and he was used of God to act upon others. So long as we continue in a low position, we are robbing ourselves of blessing, and failing, totally, in our testimony and service.

Nor should we, when in a wrong position, stop to inquire, as we so often do, "Where can I find anything better?" God's order is, "Cease to do evil;" and when we have acted upon that holy precept, we are furnished with another, namely, "learn to do well." If we expect to "learn" how to do well," before we "cease to do evil," we are entirely mistaken. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead." (*ek ton nekron.*) And what then? "Christ shall give thee light." (Eph. 5: 14)

My beloved reader, if you are doing what you know to be wrong, or if you are identified, in any way, with what you own to be contrary to scripture, hearken to the word of the Lord, "Cease to do evil." And, be assured, when you have yielded obedience to this word, you will not long be left in ignorance as to your path. It is sheer unbelief that leads us to say, "I cannot cease to do evil, until I find something better." The Lord grant us a single eye, and a docile spirit.

### **Genesis 27-35**

These chapters present to us the history of Jacob—at least, the principal scenes in that history. The Spirit of God here sets before us the deepest instruction, first, as to God's purpose of infinite grace; and, secondly, as to the utter worthlessness and depravity of human nature.

There is a passage in Gen. 25 which I purposely passed over, in order to take it up here, so that we might have the truth in reference to Jacob fully before us "And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her: and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the Lord. And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." This is referred to in Malachi, where we read, "I have loved you, saith the

Lord: yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I have loved Jacob, and hated Esau." This is again referred to in Rom. 9: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Thus we have very distinctly before us, God's eternal purpose, according to *the election of grace*. There is much involved in this expression. It banishes all human pretension from the scene, and asserts God's right to act as He will. This is of the very last importance. The creature can enjoy no real blessedness until he is brought to bow his head to sovereign grace. It becomes him so to do, inasmuch as he is a sinner, and, as such, utterly without claim to act or dictate. The great value of finding oneself on this ground is, that it is then no longer a question of what we deserve to get, but simply of what God is pleased to give. The prodigal might talk of being a servant, but he really did not deserve the place of a servant, if it were to be made a question of desert; and, therefore, he had only to take what the father was pleased to give — and that was the very highest place, even the place of fellowship with himself. Thus it must ever be. "Grace all the work shall crown, through everlasting days." Happy for us that it is so. As we go on, day by day, making fresh discoveries of ourselves, we need to have beneath our feet the solid foundation of God's grace: nothing else could possibly sustain us in our growing self-knowledge. The ruin is hopeless, and therefore the grace must be infinite: and infinite it is, having its source in God Himself, its channel in Christ, and the power of application and enjoyment in the Holy Ghost. The Trinity is brought out in connection with the grace that saves a poor sinner. "Grace reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." It is only in redemption that this reign of grace could be seen. we may see in creation the reign of wisdom and power; we may see in providence the reign of goodness and long-suffering; but only in redemption do we see the reign of grace, and that, too, on the principle of righteousness.

Now, we have, in the person of Jacob, a most striking exhibition of the power of divine grace; and for this reason, that we have in him a striking exhibition of the power of human nature. In him we see nature in all its obliquity, and therefore we see grace in all its moral beauty and power. From the facts of his remarkable history, it would seem that, before his birth, at his birth, and after his birth, the extraordinary energy of nature was seen. Before his birth, we read, "the children struggled together within her." At his birth, we read, "his hand took hold on Esau's heel." And, after his birth — yea to the turning point of his history, in Gen. 32, without any exception — his course exhibits nothing but the most unamiable traits of nature; but all this only serves, like a drab background, to throw into relief the grace of Him who condescends to call Himself by the peculiarly touching name, "the God of Jacob" — a name most sweetly expressive of free grace.

Let us now examine the chapters consecutively. Gen. 27 exhibits a most humbling picture of sensuality, deceit, and cunning; and when one thinks of such things in connection with the people of God, it is sad and painful to the very last degree. Yet how true and faithful is the Holy Ghost! He must tell all out. He cannot give us a partial picture. If he gives us a history of man, he must describe man as he is, and not as he is not. So, if He unfolds to us the character and ways of God, He gives us God as He is. And this, we need hardly remark, is exactly what we need. We need the revelation of one perfect in holiness, yet perfect in grace and mercy, who could come down into all the depth of man's need, his misery and his degradation, and deal with Him there, and raise him up out of it into full, unhindered fellowship with Himself in all the reality of what He is. This is what scripture gives us. God knew what we needed, and He has given it to us, blessed be His name!

And, be it remembered, that in setting before us, in faithful love, all the traits of man's character,

it is simply with a view to magnify the riches of divine grace, and to admonish our souls. It is not, by any means, in order to perpetuate the memory of sins, for ever blotted out from His sight. The blots, the failures, and the errors of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have been perfectly washed away, and they have taken their place amid "the spirits of just men made perfect;" but their history remains, on the page of inspiration, for the display of God's grace, and for the warning of God's people in all ages; And, moreover, that we may distinctly see that the blessed God has not been dealing With perfect men and women, but with those of "like passions as we are" that He has been walking and bearing with the same failures, the same infirmities, the same errors, as those over which we mourn every day. This is peculiarly comforting to the heart; and it may well stand in striking contrast with the way in which the great majority of human biographies are written, in "which, for the most part, we find, not the history of men, but of beings devoid of error and infirmity. histories have rather the effect of discouraging than of edifying those who read them. They are rather histories of what men ought to be, than of what they really are, and they are, therefore, useless to us, yea, not only useless, but mischievous.

Nothing can edify save the presentation of God dealing with man as he really is; and this is what the word gives us. The chapter before us illustrates this very fully. Here we find the aged patriarch Isaac, standing, as it were, at the very portal of eternity, the earth and nature fast fading away from his view, yet occupied about "savory meat," and about to act in direct opposition to the divine counsel, by blessing the elder instead of the younger. Truly this was nature, and nature with its "eyes dim." If Esau had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, Isaac was about to give away the blessing for a mess of venison, How very humiliating!

But God's purpose must stand, and He will do all His pleasure. Faith knows this; and, in the power of that knowledge, can wait for God's time. This nature never can do, but must set about gaining its own ends, by its own inventions. These are the two grand points brought out in Jacob's history — God's purpose of grace, on the one hand; and on the other, nature plotting and scheming to reach what that purpose would have infallibly brought about, without any plot or scheme at all. This simplifies Jacob's history amazingly, and not only simplifies it, but heightens the soul's interest in it also. There is nothing, perhaps, in which we are so lamentably deficient, as in the grace of patient, self-renouncing dependence upon God. Nature will be working in some shape or form, and thus, so far as in it lies, hindering the outshining of divine grace and power. God did not need the aid of such elements as Rebekah's cunning and Jacob's gross deceit, in order to accomplish His purpose. He had said, "the elder shall serve the younger." This was enough — enough for faith, but not enough for nature, which must ever adopt its own ways, and know nothing of what it is to wait on God.

Now, nothing can be more truly blessed than the position of hanging in child-like dependence upon God, and being entirely content to wait for His time. True, it will involve trial; but the renewed mind learns some of its deepest lessons, and enjoys some of its sweetest experiences, while waiting on the Lord; and the more pressing the temptation to take ourselves out of His hands, the richer will be the blessing of leaving ourselves there. It is so exceedingly sweet to find ourselves wholly dependent upon one who finds infinite joy in blessing us. It is only those who have tasted, in any little measure, the reality of this wondrous position that can at all appreciate it. The only one who ever occupied it perfectly and uninterruptedly was the Lord Jesus Himself. He was ever dependent upon God, and utterly rejected every proposal of the enemy to be anything else. His language was, "In thee do I put my trust;" and again, "I was cast upon thee from the womb." Hence, when tempted by the devil to make an effort to Satisfy His hunger, His reply was, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." When tempted to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, His reply was, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." When

tempted to take the kingdoms of the world from the hand of another than God, and by doing homage to another than Him, His reply was, "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." In a word, nothing could allure the perfect man from the place of absolute dependence upon God. True, it was God's purpose to sustain His Son; it was His purpose that He should suddenly come to His temple; it was His purpose to give Him the kingdoms of this world; but this was the very reason why the Lord Jesus would simply and uninterruptedly wait on God for the accomplishment of His purpose, in His own time, and in His own way. He did not set about accomplishing His own ends. He left Himself thoroughly at God's disposal. He would only eat when God gave Him bread; He would only enter the temple when sent of God; He will ascend the throne when God appoints the time. "Sit thou at my right hand, *until I make thy foes thy footstool.*" (Ps. 110)

This profound subjection of the Son to the Father is admirable beyond expression. Though entirely equal with God, He took, as man, the place of dependence, rejoicing always in the will of the Father; giving thanks even when things seemed to be against Him; doing always the things which pleased the Father; making it His grand and unvarying object to glorify the Father; and finally, when all was accomplished, when He had perfectly finished the work which the Father had given, He breathed His spirit into the Father's hand, and His flesh rested in hope of the promised glory and exaltation. Well, therefore, may the inspired apostle say, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"

How little Jacob knew, in the opening of his history, of this blessed mind! How little was he prepared to wait for God's time and God's way! He much preferred Jacob's time and Jacob's way. He thought it much better to arrive at the blessing and the inheritance by all sorts of cunning and deception, than by simple dependence upon and subjection to God, whose electing grace had promised, and whose almighty power and wisdom would assuredly accomplish all for him.

But, oh! how well one knows the opposition of the human heart to all this! Any attitude for it save that of patient waiting upon God. It is almost enough to drive nature to distraction to find itself bereft of all resource but God. This tells us, in language not to be misunderstood, the true character of human nature. In order to know what nature is, I need not travel into those scenes of vice and crime which justly shock all refined moral sense. No; all that is needful is just to try it for a moment in the place of dependence, and see how it will carry itself there. It really knows nothing of God, and therefore cannot trust Him; and herein was the secret of all its misery and moral degradation. It is totally ignorant of the true God, and can therefore be nought else but a ruined and worthless thing. The knowledge of God is the source of life — yea, is itself life; and until a man has life, what is he? or, what can he be?

Now, in Rebekah and Jacob, we see nature taking advantage of nature in Isaac and Esau. It was really this. There was no waiting upon God whatever. Isaac's eyes were dim, he could therefore be imposed upon, and they set about doing so, instead of looking off to God, who would have entirely frustrated Isaac's purpose to bless the one whom God would not bless — a purpose? founded in nature, and most unlovely nature, for "Isaac loved Esau," not because he was the first-born, but "because he did eat of his venison." How humiliating!

But we are sure to bring unmixed sorrow upon ourselves, when we take ourselves, our circumstances, or our destinies, out of the hands of God.\* Thus it was with Jacob, as we shall see in the sequel. It has been observed by another, that whoever observes Jacob's life, after he had surreptitiously obtained his father's blessing, will perceive that he enjoyed very little worldly felicity. His brother purposed to murder him, to avoid which he was forced to flee from his father's house; his uncle Laban deceived him, as he had deceived his father, and treated him with great rigor; after a servitude of twenty-one years, he was obliged to leave him in a clandestine manner, and not without danger of being brought back or murdered by his enraged brother; no sooner were these fears over, than he experienced the baseness of his son Reuben, in defiling his bed; he had next to bewail the treachery and cruelty of Simeon and Levi towards the Shechemites; then he had to feel the loss of his beloved wife; he was next imposed upon by his own sons, and had to lament the supposed untimely end of Joseph; and, to complete all, he was forced by famine to go into Egypt, and there died in a strange land. So just, wonderful, and instructive are all the ways of providence."

{\*We should ever remember, in a place of trial, that what we want is not a change of circumstances, but victory over self.}

This is a true picture, so far as Jacob was concerned; but it only gives us one side, and that the gloomy side. Blessed be God, there is a bright side, likewise, for God had to do with Jacob; and, in every scene of his life, when Jacob was called to reap the fruits of his own plotting and crookedness, the God of Jacob brought good out of evil, and caused His grace to abound over all the sin and folly of His poor servant. This we shall see as we proceed with his history.

I shall just offer a remark here upon Isaac, Rebekah, and Esau. It is very interesting to observe how, notwithstanding the exhibition of nature's excessive weakness, in the opening of Genesis 27, Isaac maintains, by faith, the dignity which God had conferred upon him. He blesses with all the consciousness of being endowed with power to bless! He says, "I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed.. Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him; and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?" He speaks as one who, by faith, had at his disposal all the treasures of earth. There is no false humility, no taking a low ground by reason of the manifestation of nature. True, he was on the eve of making a grievous mistake — even of moving right athwart the counsel of God; still, he knew God, and took his place accordingly, dispensing blessings in all the dignity and power of faith. "I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed." "With corn and wine have I sustained him." It is the proper province of faith to rise above all one's own failure and the consequences thereof, into the place where God's grace has set us.

As to Rebekah, she was called to feel all the sad results of her cunning actings. She, no doubt, imagined she was managing matters most skillfully; but, alas! she never saw Jacob again: so much for management! How different it would have been had she left the matter entirely in the hands of God. This is the way in which faith manages, and it is ever a gainer. "Which of you by taking thought, can add to his stature one cubit?" We gain nothing by our anxiety and planning; we only shut out God, and that is no gain. It is a just judgement from the hand of God to be left to reap the fruits, of our own devices; and I know of few things more sad than to see a child of God so entirely forgetting his proper place and privilege, as to take the management of his affairs into his own hands. The birds of the air, and the lilies of the field, may well be our teachers when we so far forget our position of unqualified dependence upon God.

Then, again, as to Esau, the apostle calls him "a profane person, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright," and "afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he

found no place of change of mind, though he sought it carefully with tears." Thus we learn what a profane person is, viz. one who would like to hold both worlds; one who would like to enjoy the present, without forfeiting his title to the future. This is, by no means, an uncommon case. It expresses to us the mere worldly professor, whose conscience has never felt the action of divine truth, and whose heart has never felt the influence of divine grace.

We are now called to trace Jacob in his movement from under his fathers roof, to view him as a homeless and lonely wanderer on the earth. It is here that God's special dealings with him commence. Jacob now begins to realise, in some measure, the bitter fruit of his conduct, in reference to Esau; while, at the same time, God is seen rising above all the weakness and folly of His servant, and displaying His own sovereign grace and profound wisdom in His dealings with him. God will accomplish His own purpose, no matter by what instrumentality; But if His child, in impenitence of spirit, and unbelief of heart, will take himself out of His hands, he must expect much sorrowful exercise and painful discipline. Thus it was with Jacob: he might not have had to flee to Haran, had he allowed God to act for him. God would, assuredly, have dealt with Esau, and caused him to find his destined place and portion; and Jacob might have enjoyed that sweet peace which nothing can yield save entire subjection in all things to the hand and counsel of God.

But here is where the excessive feebleness of our hearts is constantly disclosed. We do not lie passive in God's hand; we will be acting; and, by our acting, we hinder the display of God's grace and power on our behalf. "*Be still* and know that I am God," is a precept which nought, save the power of divine grace, can enable one to obey. "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. (*eggus*) Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." What will be the result of this activity? "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall garrison (*phrouresei*) your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4: 5-7)

However, God graciously overrules our folly and weakness, and while we are called upon to reap the fruits of our unbelieving and impatient ways, He takes occasion from them to teach our hearts still deeper lessons of His own tender grace and perfect wisdom. This, while it, assuredly, affords no warrant whatever for unbelief and impatience, does most wonderfully exhibit the goodness of our God, and comfort the heart even while we may be passing through the painful circumstances consequent upon our failure. God is above all; and, moreover, it is His special prerogative to bring good out of evil; to make the eater yield meat, and the strong yield sweetness; and hence, while it is quite true that Jacob was compelled to be an exile from his father's roof in consequence of his own restless and deceitful acting, it is equally true that he never could have learnt the meaning of "Bethel" had he been quietly at home. Thus the two sides of the picture are strongly marked in every scene of Jacob's history. It was when he was driven, by his own folly, from Isaac's house, that he was led to taste, in some measure, the blessedness and solemnity of "God's house."

"And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. and he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep." Here we find the homeless wanderer just in the very position in which God could meet him, and in which He could unfold His purposes of grace and glory. Nothing could possibly be more expressive of helplessness and nothingness than Jacob's condition as here set before us. Beneath the open canopy of heaven, with a pillow of stone, in the helpless condition of sleep. Thus it was that the God of Bethel unfolded to Jacob His purposes respecting him and his seed. "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold the Lord

stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Here we have, indeed, "grace and glory." The ladder "set *on the earth*" naturally leads the heart to meditate on the display of God's grace, in the Person and work of His Son. On the earth it was that the wondrous work was accomplished which forms the basis, the strong and everlasting basis, of all the divine counsels in reference to Israel, the Church, and the world at large. On the earth it was that Jesus lived laboured. and died; that, through His death, He might remove out of the way every obstacle to the accomplishment of the divine purpose of blessing to man.

But "the top of the ladder reached to heaven." It formed the medium of communication between heaven and earth; and "behold the angels of God ascending and descending upon it" — striking and beautiful picture of Him by whom God has come down into all the depth of man's need, and by whom also He has brought man up and set him in His own presence for ever, in the power of divine righteousness! God has made provision for the accomplishment of all His plans, despite of man's folly and sin; and it is for the everlasting joy of any soul to find itself, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, within the limits of God's gracious purpose.

The prophet Hosea leads us on to the time when that which was foreshadowed by Jacob's ladder shall have its full accomplishment. "And in that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow, and the sword, and the battle, out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgement, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God." (Hosea 2: 18-23) There is also an expression in the first chapter of John, bearing upon Jacob's remarkable vision; it is Christ's word to Nathanael, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." (Ver. 51)

Now this vision of Jacob's is a very blessed disclosure of divine grace to Israel. We have been led to see something of Jacob's real character, something, too, of his real condition; both were evidently such as to show that it should either be divine grace for him, or nothing. By birth he had no claim; nor yet by character. Esau might put forward some claim on both these grounds; i.e., provided God's prerogative were set aside; but Jacob had no claim whatsoever; and hence, while Esau could only stand upon the exclusion of God's prerogative, Jacob could only stand upon the introduction and establishment thereof. Jacob was such a sinner, and so utterly divested of all claim, both by birth and by practice, that he had nothing whatever to rest upon save God's purpose of pure, free, and sovereign grace. Hence, in the revelation which the Lord makes to His chosen servant, in the passage just quoted, it is a simple record or prediction of what He Himself would yet do. "*I am.... I will give.... I will keep .... I will bring..... I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of*" It was all Himself. There is no condition whatever. No *if* or *but*; for when *grace* acts there can be no such

thing. Where there is an *if*, it cannot possibly be grace. Not that God cannot put man into a position of responsibility, in which He must needs address him with an 'if.' We know He can; but Jacob asleep on a pillow of stone was not in a position of responsibility, but of the deepest helplessness and need; and therefore he was in a position to receive a revelation of the fullest, richest, and most unconditional grace.

Now, we cannot but own the blessedness of being in such a condition, that we have nothing to rest upon save God Himself; and, moreover, that it is in the most perfect establishment of God's own character and prerogative that we obtain all our true joy and blessing. According to this principle, it would be an irreparable loss to us to have any ground of our own to stand upon, for in that case, God should address us on the ground of responsibility, and failure would then be inevitable. Jacob was so bad, that none but God Himself could do for him.

And, be it remarked, that it was his failure in the habitual recognition of this that led him into so much sorrow and pressure. God's revelation of Himself is one thing, and our resting in that revelation is quite another. God shows Himself to Jacob, in infinite grace; but no sooner does Jacob awake out of sleep, than we find him developing his true character, and proving how little he knew, practically, of the blessed One who had just been revealing Himself so marvellously to him. "He was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." His heart was not at home in the presence of God; nor can any heart be so until it has been thoroughly emptied and broken. God is at home, blessed be His name, with a broken heart, and a broken heart at home with Him. But Jacob's heart was not yet in this condition; nor had he yet learnt to repose, like a little child, in the perfect love of one who could say, "Jacob have I loved." "Perfect love casteth out fear;" but where such love is not known and fully realised, there will always be a measure of uneasiness and perturbation. God's house and God's presence are not dreadful to a soul who knows the love of God as expressed in the perfect sacrifice of Christ. such a soul is rather led to say, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth." (Ps. 26: 8) And, again, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple." (Ps. 27: 4) and again, "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord." (Ps. 84) When the heart is established in the knowledge of God, it will assuredly love His house, whatever the Character of that house may be, whether it be Bethel, or the temple at Jerusalem, or the Church now composed of all true believers, "buildd together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." However, Jacob's knowledge, both of God and His house, was very shallow, at that point in his history on which we are now dwelling.

We shall have occasion, again, to refer to some principles connected with Bethel; and shall, now, close our meditations upon this chapter, with a brief notice of Jacob's bargain with God, so truly characteristic of him, and so demonstrative of the truth of the statement with respect to the shallowness of his knowledge of the divine character. "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my Father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Observe, "*if* God will be with me." Now, the Lord had just said, emphatically, "I *am* with thee, and *will keep thee in all places* whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land," &c. And yet poor Jacob's heart cannot get beyond an "*if*" nor, in its thoughts of God's goodness, can it rise higher than "bread to eat, and raiment put on." Such were the thoughts of one who had just seen the magnificent vision of the ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with the Lord standing above, and promising an

innumerable seed, and an everlasting possession. Jacob was evidently unable to enter into the reality and fullness of God's thoughts. He measured God by Himself, and thus utterly failed to apprehend Him. In short, Jacob had not yet verily got to the end of himself; and hence he had not really begun with God.

"Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east." As we have just seen, in Gen. 28 Jacob utterly fails in the apprehension of God's real character, and meets all the rich grace of Bethel with an "if" and a miserable bargain about food and raiment. We now follow him into a scene of thorough bargain-making. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." There is no possibility of escaping from this. Jacob had not yet found his true level in the presence of God; and, therefore, God uses circumstances to chasten and break him down.

This is the real secret of much, very much, of our sorrow and trial in the world. Our hearts have never been really broken before the Lord; we have never been self-judged and self-emptied; and hence, again and again, we, as it were, knock our heads against the wall. No one can really enjoy God until he has got to the bottom of self, and for this plain reason, that God has begun the display of Himself at the very point at which the end of flesh is seen. If, therefore, I have not reached the end of my flesh, in the deep and positive experience of my soul, it is morally impossible that I can have anything like a just apprehension of God's character. But I must, in some way or other, be conducted to the true measure of nature. To accomplish this end, the Lord makes use of various agencies which, no matter what they are, are only effectual when used by Him for the purpose of disclosing, in our view, the true character of all that is in our hearts. How often do we find as in Jacob's case, that even although the Lord may come near to us, and speak in our ears, yet we do not understand His voice, or take our true place in His presence. "The Lord is in this place, and I knew it not ..... How dreadful is this place!" Jacob learnt nothing by all this, and it, therefore, needed twenty years of terrible schooling, and that, too, in a school marvellously adapted to his flesh; and even that, as we shall see, was not sufficient to break him down.

However, it is remarkable to see how he gets back into an atmosphere so entirely suited to his moral constitution. The bargain-making Jacob, meets with the bargain-making Laban, and they are both seen, as it were, straining every nerve to outwit each other. Nor can we wonder at Laban, for he had never been at Bethel: he had seen no open heaven, with a ladder reaching from thence to earth; he had heard no magnificent promises from the lips of Jehovah, securing to him all the land of Canaan, with a countless seed: no marvel, therefore, that he should exhibit a grasping grovelling spirit; he had no other resource. It is useless to expect from worldly men ought but a worldly spirit, and worldly principles and ways; they have gotten nought superior; and you cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean. But to find Jacob, after all he had seen and heard at Bethel, struggling with a man of the world, and endeavouring, by such means, to accumulate property, is peculiarly humbling.

And yet, alas! it is no uncommon thing to find the children of God thus forgetting their high destinies and heavenly inheritance, and descending into the arena with the children of this world, to struggle there for the riches and honours of a perishing, sin-stricken earth. Indeed, to such an extent is this true, in many instances, that it is often hard to trace a single evidence of that principle which St. John tells us "overcometh the world." Looking at Jacob and Laban, and judging of them upon natural principles, it would be hard to trace any difference. One should get behind the scenes, and enter into God's thoughts about both, in order to see how widely they differed. But it was God that had made them to differ, not Jacob; and so it is now. Difficult as it may be to trace any difference between the children of light and the children of darkness, there is, nevertheless, a very wide difference indeed — a difference founded on the solemn fact that the former are "the vessels of mercy, which God has before prepared unto glory," while the latter are "the vessels of wrath, fitted (not by God, but by sin) to

destruction." Rom 9: 22, 23)\* This makes a very serious difference. The Jacobs and the Labans differ materially, and have differed, and will differ for ever, though the former may so sadly fail in the realization and practical exhibition of their true character and dignity.

{\*It is deeply interesting to the spiritual mind to mark how sedulously the Spirit of God, in Rom. 9 and indeed throughout all scripture, guards against the horrid inference which the human mind draws from the doctrine of God's election — when He speaks of "vessels of wrath," He simply says, "fitted to destruction." He does not say that God "fitted" them.

Whereas, on the other hand, when He refers to "the vessels of mercy" he says, "whom he had afore prepared unto glory." This is most marked.

If my reader will turn for a moment to Matt 25: 34-41, he will find another striking and beautiful instance of the same thing.

When the king addresses those on His right hand, he says, "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you* from the foundation of the world." (Verse 34) But when He addresses those on His left, He says, "Depart from me ye cursed." He does not say, "cursed of My Father." And, further, He says, "into everlasting fire, prepared," not for *you*, but "for the devil and his angels." (Verse 41)

In a word, then, it is plain that God has "prepared" a kingdom of glory, and "vessels of mercy" to inherit that kingdom; but He has not prepared "everlasting fire" for men, but for the "devil and his angels" nor has He fitted the "vessels of wrath," but they have fitted themselves.

The word of God as clearly establishes "election" as it sedulously guards against "*reprobation*." Everyone who finds himself in heaven will have to thank God for it; and everyone that finds himself in hell will have to thank himself. }

Now, in Jacob's case, as set forth in the three chapters now before us, all his toiling and working, like his wretched bargain before, is the result of his ignorance of God's grace, and his inability to put implicit confidence in God's promise. The man that could say, after a most unqualified promise from God to give him the whole land of Canaan, "IF God will give me food to eat and raiment to put on," could have had but a very faint apprehension of who God was, or what His promise was either; and because of this, we see him seeking to do the best he can for himself. This is always the way when grace is not understood: the principles of grace may be professed, but the real measure of our experience of the power of grace is quite another thing. One would have imagined that Jacob's vision had told him a tale of grace; but God's revelation at Bethel, and Jacob's actings at Haran, are two very different things; yet the latter tell out what was Jacob's sense of the former. Character and conduct prove the real measure of the soul's experience and conviction, whatever the profession may be. But Jacob had never yet been brought to measure himself in God's presence, and therefore he was ignorant of grace, and he proved his ignorance by measuring himself with Laban, and adopting his maxims and ways.

One cannot help remarking the fact that inasmuch as Jacob failed to learn and judge the inherent character of his flesh before God, therefore he was, in the providence of God, led into the very sphere in which that character was fully exhibited in its broadest lines. He was conducted to Haran, the country of Laban and Rebekah, the very school from whence those principles, in which he was such a remarkable adept, had emanated, and where they were taught, exhibited, and maintained. If one wanted to learn what God was, he should go to Bethel; if to learn what man was, he should go to Haran. But Jacob had failed to take in God's revelation of Himself at Bethel, and he therefore went to Haran, and

there showed what he was — and oh, what scrambling and scraping! what shuffling and shifting! There is no holy and elevated confidence in God, no simply looking to and waiting on Him. True, God was with Jacob — for nothing can hinder the outshining of divine grace. Moreover, Jacob in a measure owns God's presence and faithfulness. Still nothing can be done without a scheme and a plan. Jacob cannot allow God to settle the question as to his wives and his wages, but seeks to settle all by his own cunning and management. In short, it is "the supplanter" throughout. Let the reader turn, for example, to Gen. 30: 37-42, and say where he can find a more masterly piece of cunning. It is verily a perfect picture of Jacob. In place of allowing God to multiply "the ringstraked, speckled, and spotted cattle," as he most assuredly could have done, had He been trusted, he sets about securing their multiplication by a piece of policy which could only have found its origin in the mind of a Jacob. So in all his actings, during his twenty years' sojourn with Laban; and finally, he, most characteristically, "steals away," thus maintaining, in everything, his consistency with himself.

Now, it is in tracing out Jacob's real character, from stage to stage of his extraordinary history, that one gets a wondrous view of divine grace. None but God could have borne with such an one, as none but God would have taken such an one up. Grace begins at the very lowest point. It takes up man as he is, and deals with him in the full intelligence of what he is. It is of the very last importance to understand this feature of grace at one's first starting; it enables us to bear, with steadiness of heart, the after discoveries of personal vileness, which so frequently shake the confidence and disturb the peace of the children of God.

Many there are who, at first, fail in the full apprehension of the utter ruin of nature, as looked at in God's presence, though their hearts have been attracted by the grace of God, and their consciences tranquillised, in some degree, by the application of the blood of Christ. Hence, as they get on in their course, they begin to make deeper discoveries of the evil within, and, being deficient in their apprehensions of God's grace, and the extent and efficiency of the sacrifice of Christ, they immediately raise a question as to their being children of God at all. Thus they are taken off Christ, and thrown on themselves, and then they either betake themselves to ordinances, in order to keep up their tone of devotion, or else fall back into thorough worldliness and carnality. These are disastrous consequences, and all the result of not having "the heart established in grace."

It is this that renders the study of Jacob's history so profoundly interesting and eminently useful. No one can read the three chapters now before us, and not be struck at the amazing grace that could take up such an one as Jacob, and not only take him up, but say, after the full discovery of all that was in him, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." (Num. 23: 21) He does not say that iniquity and perverseness were not in him. This would never give the heart confidence — the very thing, above all others, which God desires to give. It could never assure a poor sinner's heart, to be told that there was *no sin in him*; for, alas! he knows too well there is; but to be told there is no sin *on* him, and that, moreover, in God's sight, on the simple ground of Christ's perfect sacrifice, must infallibly set his heart and conscience at rest. Had God taken up Esau, we should not have had, by any means, such a blessed display of grace; for this reason, that he does not appear before us in the unamiable light in which we see Jacob. The more man sinks, the more God's grace rises. As my debt rises, in my estimation, from the fifty pence up to the five hundred, so my sense of grace rises also, my experience of that love which, when we "had nothing to pay, could "frankly forgive" us all. (Luke 7: 42) Well might the apostle say, "it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace: not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein." (Heb. 13: 9)

## Genesis 32

And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." Still God's grace follows him, notwithstanding all. "Nothing changeth God's affection." Whom He loves, and as He loves, He loves to the end. His love is like "Himself," the same yesterday, today, and for ever." But how little effect "God's host" had upon Jacob may be seen by his actings, as here set before us. "and Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother, unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom." He evidently feels uneasy in reference to Esau, and not without reason; He had treated him badly, and his conscience was not at ease; but instead of casting himself unreservedly upon God, he betakes himself to his usual planning again, in order to avert Esau's wrath. He tries to *manage* Esau, instead of leaning on God.

And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto *my lord* Esau; *Thy servant* Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now." ALL this bespeaks a soul very much off its centre in God. "My lord," and "thy servant," is not like the language of a brother, or of one in the conscious dignity of the presence of God; but it was the language of Jacob, and of Jacob, too, with a bad conscience.

"And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed." But what does he first do? Does he at once cast himself upon God? No; he begins to manage. "He divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, If Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape." Jacob's first thought was always a plan, and in this we have a true picture of the poor human heart. True, he turns to God, after he makes his plan, and cries to Him for deliverance; but no sooner does he cease praying than he resumes the planning. Now, praying and planning will never do together. If I plan, I am leaning more or less on my plan; but when I pray, I should lean exclusively upon God. Hence, the two things are perfectly incompatible; they virtually destroy each other. When my eye is filled with my own management of things, I am not prepared to see God acting for me; and, in that case, prayer is not the utterance of my need, but the mere superstitious performance of something which I think ought to be done, or it may be, asking God to sanctify my plans. This will never do. It is not asking God to sanctify and bless my means, but it is asking Him to do it all Himself.\*

{\*No doubt, when faith allows God to act, He will use His own agency; but this is a totally different thing from His owning and blessing the plans and arrangements of unbelief and impatience. This distinction is not sufficiently understood. }

Though Jacob asked God to deliver him from his brother Esau, he evidently was not satisfied with that, and therefore he tried to "appease him with a present." Thus his confidence was in the "present," and not entirely in God. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." It is often hard to detect what is the real ground of the heart's confidence. We imagine, or would fain persuade ourselves, that we are leaning upon God, when we are, in reality, leaning upon some scheme of our own devising. Who, after hearkening to Jacob's prayer, wherein he says, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children," could imagine him saying, "I will appease him with a present." Had he forgotten his prayer? Was he making a God of his present? Did he place more confidence in a few cattle than in Jehovah, to whom he had just been committing himself? These are questions which naturally arise out of Jacob's actings in reference to Esau, and we can readily answer them by looking into the glass of our own hearts. There we learn, as well as on the page of Jacob's history, how much more apt we are to lean on our own management than on God; but it will not do; we must be brought to see the end of our management, that it is perfect folly, and that the true path of wisdom is to repose in

full confidence upon God.

Nor will it do to make our prayers part of our management. We often feel very well satisfied with ourselves when we add prayer to our arrangement, or when we have used all lawful means, and called upon God to bless them. When this is the case, our prayers are worth about as much as our plans, inasmuch as we are leaning upon them instead of upon God. We must be really brought to the end of everything with which self has ought to do; for until then, God cannot show Himself. But we can never get to the end of our plans until we have been brought to the end of ourselves. We must see that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." (Isa. 40: 6)

Thus it is in this interesting chapter; when Jacob had made this prudent arrangements, we read, "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." This is a turning point in the history of this very remarkable man. To be left alone with God is the only true way of arriving at a just knowledge of ourselves and our ways. We can never get a true estimate of nature and all its actings, until we have weighed them in the balance of the sanctuary, and there we ascertain their real worth, No matter what we may think about ourselves, nor yet what man may think about us; the great question is, what does God think about us? and the answer to this question can only be heard when we are "left alone." Away from the world; away from self; away from all the thoughts, reasonings, imaginations, and emotions of mere nature, and "alone" with God — thus, and thus alone, can we get a correct judgement about ourselves.

"Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him." Mark, it was not Jacob wrestling with a man; but a man wrestling with Jacob. This scene is very commonly referred to as an instance of Jacob's power in prayer. That it is not this is evident from the simple wording of the passage. My wrestling with a man, and a man wrestling with me, present two totally different ideas to the mind. In the former case I want to gain some object from him; in the latter, he wants to gain some object from me. Now, in Jacob's case, the divine object was to bring him to see what a poor, feeble, worthless creature he was, and when Jacob so pertinaciously held out against the divine dealing with him, "he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him." The sentence of death must be written on the flesh — the power of the cross must be entered into before we can steadily and happily walk with God. We have followed Jacob so far, amid all the windings and workings of his extraordinary character — we have seen him planning and managing during his twenty years sojourn with Laban; but not until he "was left alone," did he get a true idea of what a perfectly helpless thing he was in himself. Then, the seat of his strength being touched, he learnt to say, "I will not let *thee* go."

"Other refuge have I none;

Clings my helpless soul to thee."

This was a new era in the history of the supplanting, planning, Jacob. Up to this point he had held fast by his own ways and means; but now he is brought to say, "I will not let *thee* go." Now, my reader remark, that Jacob did not express himself thus until "the hollow of his thigh was touched." This simple fact is quite sufficient to settle the true interpretation of the whole scene. God was wrestling with Jacob to bring him to this point. We have already seen that, as to Jacob's power in prayer, he had no sooner uttered a few words to God than he let out the real secret of his soul's dependence, by saying, "I will appease him (Esau) with a present." Would he have said this if he had really entered into the meaning of prayer, or true dependence upon God? Assuredly not. If he had been looking to God alone to appease Esau, could he have said, "I will appease him by a present" Impossible: God and the creature must be kept distinct, and will be kept so in every soul that knows much of the sacred reality of a life of faith.

But, alas here is where we fail, if one may speak for another. Under the plausible and apparently pious formula of using means, we really cloke the positive infidelity of our poor deceitful hearts; we think we are looking to God to bless our means, while, in reality, we are shutting Him out by leaning on the means, instead of leaning on Him. Oh! may our hearts be taught the evil of thus acting. May we learn to cling more simply to God *alone*, that so our history May be more characterised by that holy elevation above the circumstances through which we are passing. It is not, by any means, an easy matter so to get to the end of the creature, in every shape and form, as to be able to say, "I Will not let thee go except thou bless me." To say this from the heart, and to abide in the power of it, is the secret of all true strength. Jacob said it when the hollow of his thigh was touched; but not till then. He struggled long, ere he gave way, because his confidence in the flesh was strong. But God can bring down to the dust the stoutest character. He knows how to touch the spring of nature's strength, and write the sentence of death thoroughly upon it; and until this is done, there can be no real "Power with God or man." We must be "weak" ere we can be "strong." "The power of Christ" can only "rest on us" in connection with the knowledge of our infirmities. Christ cannot put the seal of His approval upon nature's strength, its wisdom, or its glory: all these must sink that He may rise. Nature can never form, in any one way, a pedestal on which to display the grace or power of Christ; for if it could, then might flesh glory in His presence; but this, we know, can never be.

And, inasmuch as the display of God's glory, and God's name or character, is connected with the entire setting aside of nature, so, until this latter is set aside the soul can never enjoy the disclosure of the former. Hence, though Jacob, is called to tell out his name, to own that his name is Jacob, or a supplanter," he yet receives no revelation of the name of Him who had been wrestling with him, and bringing him down into the dust. He received for himself the name of Israel, or prince," which was a great step in advance?; but when he says, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name;" he received the reply, "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?" The Lord refuses to tell His name, though he had elicited from Jacob the truth as to himself, and He blesses him accordingly. How often is this the case in the annals of God's family! There is the disclosure of self in all its moral deformity; but we fail to get hold practically of what God is, though He has come so very close to us, and blessed us, too, in connection with the discovery of ourselves. Jacob received the new name of Israel when the hollow of his thigh had been touched. He became a mighty prince when he had been brought to know himself as a weak man; but still the Lord had to say, "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?" There is no disclosure of the name of Him who, nevertheless, had brought out the real name and condition of Jacob.

From all this we learn that it is one thing to be blessed by the Lord and quite another thing to have the revelation of His character, by the Spirit, to our hearts. "He blessed him there;" but he did not tell His name. There is blessing in being brought, in any measure, to know ourselves, for therein we are led into a path, in which we are able, more clearly, to discern what God is to us in detail. Thus it was with Jacob. When the hollow of his thigh was touched he found himself in a condition in which it was either God or nothing. A poor halting man could do little, it therefore behoved him to cling to one who was almighty.

I would remark, ere leaving this chapter, that the book of Job is, in a certain sense, a detailed commentary on this scene in Jacob's history. Throughout the first thirty-one chapters, Job grapples with his friends, and maintains his point against all their arguments; but in Job 32 God, by the instrumentality of Elihu, begins to wrestle with him; and in Job 38 He comes down upon Him directly with all the majesty of His power, overwhelms him by the display of His greatness and glory, and elicits from him the well-known words, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine

eye seeth *thee*. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job. 42: 5, 6) This was really touching the hollow of his thigh. And mark the expression, "mine eye seeth thee." He does not say, "I see myself" merely; no; but "thee." Nothing But a view of what God is, can really lead to repentance and self-loathing. Thus it will be with the people of Israel, whose history is very analogous with that of Job. When they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, they will mourn, and then there will be full restoration and blessing. Their latter end, Like Job's, will be better than their beginning. They will learn the full meaning of that word, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help." (Hosea 13: 9)

### **Genesis 33 & Genesis 34**

We may here see how groundless were all Jacob's fears, and how useless all his plans. Notwithstanding the wrestling, the touching the hollow of the thigh, and the halting, we find Jacob still planning. "And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost." This arrangement proved the continuance of his fears. He still anticipated vengeance from the hand of Esau, and he exposed those about whom he cared least, to the first stroke of that vengeance. How wondrous are the depths of the human heart? How slow it is to trust God! Had Jacob been really leaning upon God, he never could have anticipated destruction for himself and his family; but alas! the heart knows something of the difficulty of simply reposing, in calm confidence, upon an over present, all-powerful, and infinitely gracious God.

But mark, now, the thorough vanity of the heart's anxiety. "and Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him; and they wept." The present was quite unnecessary — the plan, useless. God "appeased" Esau, as He had already appeased Laban. Thus it is He ever delights to rebuke our poor, coward, unbelieving hearts, and put to flight all our fears. Instead of the dreaded sword of Esau, Jacob meets his embrace and kiss; instead of strife and conflict, they mingle their tears. Such are God's ways. Who would not trust Him? Who would not honour Him with the heart's fullest confidence? Why is it that, Notwithstanding all the sweet evidence of His faithfulness to those will put their trust in Him, we are so ready, on every fresh occasion, to doubt and hesitate? The answer is simple, we are not sufficiently acquainted with God. "acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace." (Job 22: 21) This is true, whether in reference to the unconverted sinner, or to the child of God. The true knowledge of God, real acquaintance with Him, is life and pence. "This is, life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." (John 17: 3) The more intimate our acquaintance with God, the more solid will be our peace, and the more will our souls be lifted above every creature dependence. "God is a Rock," and we only need to lean our whole weight upon Him, to know how ready and how able He is to sustain us.

After all this manifestation of God's goodness, we find Jacob settling down in Succoth, and, contrary to the spirit and principles of a pilgrim life, building a house, as if it were his home. Now, Succoth was evidently not his divinely-appointed destination. The Lord had not said to him, "I am the God of Succoth;" no; but "I am the God of Bethel." Bethel, therefore, and not Succoth, should have been Jacob's grand object. But, alas! the heart is always prone to rest satisfied with a position and portion short of what God would graciously assign.

Jacob then moves on to Shechem, and purchases ground, still falling short of the divine mark, and the name by which he calls his altar is indicative of the moral condition of his soul. He calls it "El-elohe Israel," or "God, the God of Israel." This was taking a very contracted view of God. True, it is our

privilege to know God as our God; but it is a higher thing to know Him as the God of His own house, and to view ourselves as part of that house. It is the believer's privilege to know Christ as his Head; but it is a higher thing to know Him as the Head of His body the Church, and to know ourselves as members of that body.

We shall see, when we come to Gen. 35 that Jacob is led to take a higher and a wider view of God; but at Shechem he was manifestly on low ground, and he was made to smart for it, as is always the case when we stop short of God's own ground. The two tribes and a half took up their position on this side of Jordan, and they were the first to fall into the enemy's hand. So it was with Jacob. We see, in Gen. 34 the bitter fruits of his sojourn at Shechem. There is a blot cast upon his family, which Simeon and Levi attempt to wipe out, in the mere energy and violence of nature, which only led to still deeper sorrow; and that, too, which touched Jacob still more keenly than the insult offered to his daughter: "And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me, to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and *I* being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against *me*, and slay *me*; and *I* shall be destroyed, *I* and my house." Thus, it was the consequences in reference to himself that affected Jacob most. He seems to have walked in constant apprehension of danger to himself or his family, and in the manifestation of an anxious, a cautious, timid, calculating spirit, utterly incompatible with a life of genuine faith in God.

It is not that Jacob was not, in the main, a man of faith; he assuredly was, and as such, gets a place amongst the "cloud of witnesses" in Heb. 11. But then he exhibited sad failure from not walking in the habitual exercise of that divine principle. Could faith have led him to say, "I shall be destroyed, I and my house?" Surely not. God's promise in Gen. 28: 14, 15, should have banished every fear from his poor timid spirit. "I will keep thee .....I will not leave thee. This should have tranquillised his heart. But the fact is, his mind was more occupied with his danger among the Shechemites than with his security in the hand of God. He ought to have known that "not a hair of his head could be touched, and therefore, instead of looking at Simeon and Levi, or the consequences of their rash acting, he should have judged himself for being in such a position at all. If he had not settled at Shechem, Dinah would not have been dishonoured, and the violence of his sons would not have been exhibited. We constantly see Christians getting into deep sorrow and trouble through their own unfaithfulness; and then, instead of judging themselves, they begin to look at circumstances, and to cast upon them the blame.

How often do we see Christian parents, for instance, in keen anguish of soul about the wildness, unsubduedness, and worldliness of their children; and, all the while, they have mainly to blame themselves for not walking faithfully before God in reference to their family. Thus was it with Jacob. He was on low moral ground at Shechem; and, inasmuch as he lacked that refined sensibility which would have led him to detect the low ground, God, in very faithfulness, used his circumstances to chastise him. "God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." This is a principle flowing out of God's moral government, a principle, from the application of which none can possibly escape; and it is a positive mercy to the children of God that they are obliged to reap the fruits of their errors. It is a mercy to be taught, in any way, the bitterness of departing from, or stopping short of, the living God. We must learn that this is not our rest; for, blessed be God, He would not give us a polluted rest. He would ever have us resting in, and with Himself. Such is His perfect grace; and when our hearts founder, or fall short, His word is, "If thou wilt return, return *unto Me*." False humility, which is simply the fruit of unbelief, would lead the wanderer or backslider to take lower ground, not knowing the principle or measure of God's restoration. The prodigal would seek to be made a servant, not knowing that, so far as he was concerned, he had no more title to take place of a servant than to that of a son; and, moreover, that it would be utterly unworthy of the father's character to put him in such a

position. We must come to God on a principle and in a manner worthy of Himself, or not at all.

### Genesis 35

"And God said unto Jacob. Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there." This confirms the principle on which we have been dwelling. When there is failure or declension, the Lord calls the soul back to Himself. "Remember therefore *from whence thou art fallen*; and repent and do *the first works*." (Rev. 2: 5) This is the divine principle of restoration. The soul must be recalled to the very highest point; it must be brought back to the divine standard. The Lord does not say, 'remember where you are;' no; but 'remember the lofty position from whence you have fallen.' Thus only can one learn how far he has declined, and how he is to retrace his steps.

Now, it is when thus recalled to God's high and holy standard, that one is really led to see the sad evil of one's fallen condition. What a fearful amount of moral evil had gathered round Jacob's family, unjudged by Him, until his soul was roused by the call to "go up to Bethel." Shechem was not the place in which to detect all this evil. The atmosphere of that place was too much impregnated with impure elements to admit of the soul's discerning, with any degree of clearness and precision, the true character of evil. But the moment the call to Bethel fell on Jacob's ear, "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean and change your garments, and let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." The very mention of "the house of God" struck a chord in the soul of the patriarch; it carried him, in the twinkling of an eye, over the history of twenty eventful years. It was at Bethel he had learnt what God was, and not at Shechem; hence he must get back to Bethel again, and erect an altar upon a totally different base, and under a totally different name, from his altar at Shechem. This latter was connected with a mass of uncleanness and idolatry.

Jacob could speak of "El-elohe-Israel," while surrounded by a quantity of things utterly incompatible with the holiness of the house of God. It is important to be clear in reference to this point. Nothing can keep the soul in a path of consistent, intelligent separation from evil save the sense of what "the house of God" is, and what becomes that house. If I merely look at God, in reference to myself, I shall not have a clear, full, divine sense of all that flows out of a due recognition of God's relation to His house. Some there are who deem it a matter of no importance how they are mixed up with impure materials in the worship of God, provided they themselves are true and upright in heart, In other words, they think they can worship God at Shechem; and that an altar, named "El-elohe Israel," is just as elevated, just as much according to God, as an altar named "El Bethel." This is evidently a mistake. The spiritually minded reader will at once detect the vast moral difference between Jacob's condition at Shechem, and his condition at Bethel; and the same difference is observable between the two altars. Our ideas, in reference to the worship of God, must, of necessity, be affected by our spiritual condition; and the worship which we present will be low and contracted, or elevated and comprehensive, just in proportion as we enter into the apprehension of His character and relationship.

Now, the name of our altar, and the character of our worship, express the same ideas. El-Bethel worship is, higher than El-elohe-Israel worship, for this simple reason, that it conveys a higher idea of God. It gives me a more elevated thought of God to speak of Him as the God of His house, than as the God of a solitary individual truth, there is beautiful grace expressed in the title, "God, the God of Israel;" and the soul must ever feel happy in looking at the character of God, so graciously connecting Himself with every separate stone of His house, and every separate member of the body. Each stone in the building of God is a "lively stone" as connected with the "living stone," having communion with

the living God," by the power of "the Spirit of life." But while all this is blessedly true, God is the God of His house; and when we are enabled, by an enlarged spiritual intelligence, to view Him as such, we enjoy a higher character of worship than that which flows from merely apprehending what He is to ourselves individually.

But there is another thing to be remarked in Jacob's recall to Bethel. He is told to make an altar "unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." He is thus reminded of "the day of his distress." It is often well to have our minds led in this way to the point in our history in which we found ourselves brought down to the lowest step of the ladder. Thus Saul is brought back to the time when he was "little in his own eyes." This is the true starting point with all of us. "When thou wast little in thine own eyes," is a point of which we often need to be reminded. It is then that the heart really leans on God. Afterwards we begin to fancy ourselves to be something, and the Lord is obliged to teach us afresh our own nothingness. When first one enters upon a path of service or testimony, what a sense there is of personal weakness and incapacity! and as a consequence, what leanings upon God! what earnest, fervent appeals to Him for help and strength. Afterwards we begin to think that, from being so long at the work, we can get on by ourselves, at least there is not the same sense of weakness, or the same simple dependence upon God; and then our ministry becomes a poor, meagre, flippant, wordy thing, without unction or power — a thing flowing, not from the exhaustless tide of the Spirit, but from our own wretched minds.

From ver. 9-15, God repeats His promise to Jacob, and confirms the new name of "prince," instead of "supplanter;" and Jacob again calls the name of the place "Bethel." At verse 18 we have an interesting example of the difference between the judgement of faith and the judgement of nature. The latter looks at things through the hazy mist with which it is surrounded; the former looks at them in the light of the presence and counsels of God. "And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died,) that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin." Nature called him, "the son of my sorrow;" but faith "the son of the right hand." Thus is it ever. The difference between the thoughts of nature must ever be wide indeed, and we should earnestly desire that our souls should be governed by the latter, and not by the former.

### **Genesis 36**

Furnishes a catalogue of Esau's sons, with their various titles and localities. We shall not dwell on this, but pass on to one of the most fruitful and interesting sections in the entire canon of inspiration.

### **Genesis 37-50**

On which we shall dwell more particularly. There is not in scripture a more perfect and beautiful type of Christ than Joseph. Whether we view Christ as the object of the Father's love, the object of the envy of His own, — in His humiliation, sufferings, death exaltation, and glory, in all we have Him strikingly typified by Joseph.

In Gen. 37 we have Joseph's dreams, the statement of which draws out the enmity of his brethren. He was the object of his father's love, and the subject of very high destinies, and inasmuch as the hearts of his brothers were not in communion with these things, they hated him. They had no fellowship in the father's love. They would not yield to the thought of Joseph's exaltation. In all this they represent the Jews in Christ's day. He came to His own and his own received him not." He had "no form nor comeliness in their eyes." They would neither own Him as the Son of God, nor king of Israel. Their eyes were not open to behold "his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of "grace and truth." They would not have Him; yea, they hated Him.

Now, in Joseph's case, we see that he, in no wise, relaxed his testimony in consequence of his brethren's refusal of his first dream. "And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brethren;" and they hated him yet the more....And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brethren." This was simple testimony founded upon divine revelation; but it was testimony which brought Joseph down to the pit. Had he kept back his testimony, or taken off ought of its edge and power, he might have spared himself; but no; he told them the truth, and therefore they hated him.

Thus was it with Joseph's great Antitype. He bore witness to the truth — He witnessed a good confession He kept back nothing — He could only speak the truth because He was *the* truth, and His testimony to the truth was answered, on man's part, by the cross, the vinegar, the soldier's spear. The testimony of Christ, too, was connected with the deepest, fullest, richest grace. He not only came as "the truth," but also as the perfect expression of all the love of the Father's heart:" grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." He was the full disclosure to man of what God was. Hence man was left entirely without excuse. He came and showed God to man, and man hated God with a perfect hatred. The fullest exhibition of divine love was answered by the fullest exhibition of human hatred. This is seen in the cross; and we have it touchingly foreshadowed at the pit into which Joseph was cast by his brethren.

"And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh; come now, therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit; and we will say, some evil beast hath devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams." These words forcibly remind us of the parable in Matthew 22. "But, last of all, he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir, come let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him." God sent His Son into the world with this thought, "They will reverence my son;" but, alas! man's heart had no reverence for the "well beloved" of the Father. They cast him out. Earth and heaven were at issue in reference to Christ; and they are at issue still. *Man* crucified Him; but *God* raised Him from the dead. Man placed Him on a cross between two thieves; God set Him at His own right hand in the heavens. Man gave Him the very lowest place on earth; God gave Him the very highest place in heaven, in brightest majesty.

ALL this is shown out in Joseph's history. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him; but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel;) even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breast and of the womb; the blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, unto the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills; they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren." (Gen. 49: 22-26)

These verses beautifully exhibit to our view "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." "The archers" have done their work; but God was stronger than they. The true Joseph has been shot at and grievously wounded in the house of his friends; but "the arms of his hands have been made strong" in the power of resurrection, and faith now knows Him as the basis of all God's purposes of blessing and glory in reference to the Church, Israel, and the whole creation. When we look at Joseph in the pit, and in the prison, and look; at him afterwards as ruler over all the land of Egypt, we see the difference between the thoughts of God and the. thoughts of men; and so when we look at the cross,

and at "the throne of the majesty in the heavens," we see the same thing.

Nothing ever brought out the real state of man's heart toward God but the coming of Christ. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin." (John 15: 22) It is not that they would not have been sinners. No; but "they had not had sin." So He says, in another place, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin." (John 9: 41) God came near to man in the Person of His Son, and man was able to say, "this is the heir;" but yet he said, "come, let us kill him." Hence, "they have no cloak for their sin." Those who say they see, have no excuse. *confessed blindness* is not at all the difficulty, but *professed sight*. This is a truly solemn principle for a professing age like the present. The permanence of sin is connected with the mere profession to see. A man who is blind, and knows it, can have his eyes opened; but what can be done for one who thinks he sees, when he really does not?

### **Genesis 38.**

Presents one of those remarkable circumstances in which divine grace is seen gloriously triumphing over man's sin. "It is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda." (Heb. 7: 14) But how? "Judas begat Phares and Zara of *Thamar*." (Matt. 1: 3) This is peculiarly striking. God, in His great grace, rising above the sin and folly of man, in order to bring about His own purposes of love and mercy. Thus, a little further on, in Matthew, we read, "David the king begat Solomon, of her that had been the wife of Urias." It is worthy of God thus to act. The Spirit of God is conducting us along the line through which, according to the flesh, Christ came; and, in doing so, he gives us, as links in the genealogical chain, *Thamar* and *Bathsheba*! How evident it is that there is nothing of man in this! How plain it is that when we reach the close of the first chapter of Matthew, it is "God manifest in the flesh" we find, and that, too, from the pen of the Holy Ghost man could never have devised such a genealogy. It is entirely divine, and no spiritual person can read it without seeing in it a blessed exhibition of divine grace, in the first place; and of the divine inspiration of Matthews gospel, in the second place, at least, of his account of Christ's genealogy according to the flesh. I believe a comparison of 2 Sam. 11 and Gen. 38 with Matt. 1 will furnish the thoughtful Christian with matter for a very sweet and edifying meditation.

In perusing these interesting sections of inspiration, we perceive a remarkable chain of providential actings, all tending to one grand point, namely, *the exaltation of the man who had been in the pit*; and, at the same time, bringing out, by the way, a number of subordinate objects. "The thoughts of many hearts" were to be "revealed;" but Joseph was to be exalted. "He called for a famine upon! the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant; whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in Iron; until the time that his word came; the word of the Lord tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance; to bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his senators wisdom." (Psalm 105: 16-22)

It is well to see that the leading object was to exalt the one whom men had rejected; and then to produce in those same men a sense of their sin in rejecting. And how admirably all this is effected! The most trivial and the most important, the most likely and the most unlikely, circumstances are made to minister to the development of God's purposes. In Gen. 39 Satan uses Potiphar's wife, and in Gen. 40 he uses Pharaoh's chief butler. The former he used to put Joseph into the dungeon; and the latter he used to keep him there, through his ungrateful negligence; but all in vain. God was behind the scenes. His finger was guiding all the springs of the vast machine of circumstances, and when the due time was come, He brought forth the man of His purpose, and set His feet in a large room. Now, this is ever God's prerogative. He is above all, and can use all for the accomplishment of His grand and

unsearchable designs. It is sweet to be able thus to trace our Father's hand and counsel in everything. Sweet to know that all sorts of agents are at His sovereign disposal; angels, men, and devils — all are under His omnipotent hand, and all are made to carry out His purposes.

In the scripture now before us, all this is seen in a most remarkable manner. God visits the domestic circle of a heathen captain, the household of a heathen king, yea, and his bed-side, and makes the very visions of his head upon his bed contribute to the development of His counsels. Nor is it merely individuals and their circumstances that we see thus taken up and used for the furtherance of God's ends; but Egypt and all the surrounding countries are brought into the scene; in short, the whole earth was prepared by the hand of God to be a theatre on which to display the glory and greatness of the one "who was separate from his brethren." Such are God's ways; and it is one of the happiest and most elevating exercises for the soul of a saint to trace thus the admirable actings of his heavenly Father. How forcibly is God's providence brought out in this profoundly interesting history of Joseph! Look, for a moment, into the dungeon of the captain of the guard. See there a man "laid in iron," charged with a most abominable crime — the outcast and offscouring of society; and yet see him, almost in a moment, raised to the very highest eminence, and who can deny that God is in it all?

"And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: Only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. And he made him to ride in the second chariot that he had: and they cried before him, bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." (Gen. 41: 39-44)

Here, then, was exaltation of no ordinary kind. Contrast this with the pit and the dungeon; and mark the chain of events by which it was all brought about, and you have, at once, a marked exhibition of the hand of God, and a striking type of the sufferings and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph was taken from the pit and the dungeon, into which he had been brought by the envy of his brethren, and the false judgement of the Gentile, to be ruler over the whole land of Egypt; and not only so, but to be the channel of blessing, and the sustainer of life, to Israel and the whole earth. This is all typical of Christ; indeed, a type could hardly be more perfect. We see a man laid, to all intents and purposes, in the place of death, at the hand of man, and then raised up by the hand of God, and set in dignity and glory. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." (Acts 2: 22-24)

But there are two points in Joseph's history which, together with what has been noticed, render the type remarkably perfect; I allude to his marriage with a stranger in Gen. 41, and his interview with his brethren in Gen. 45. The following is the order of events. Joseph presents himself to his brethren as one sent by the father; they reject him, and, so far as lies in them, put him in the place of death; God takes him up from thence, and raises him to a position of highest dignity: thus exalted, he gets a bride; and when his brethren, according to the flesh, so thoroughly broken and prostrate before him, he makes himself known to them, tranquillises their hearts, and brings them into blessing; he then becomes the channel of blessing to them and to the whole world.

I shall just make a few remarks on Joseph's marriage and the restoration of his brethren. The strange wife shadows forth the Church. Christ presented Himself to the Jews, and being rejected, took His seat on high, and sent down the Holy Ghost to form the Church, composed of Jew and Gentile, to be united with Him in heavenly glory. The doctrine of the Church has already been dwelt upon in our remarks on Gen. 24, but one or two points remain to be noticed here. And, first, we may observe, that Joseph's Egyptian bride was intimately associated with him in his glory. [Joseph's wife sets forth the Church as united to Christ in His glory; Moses' wife presents the Church as united to Christ in His rejection.] She, as being part of himself, shared in all that was his. Moreover, she occupied a place of nearness and intimacy, known only to herself. Thus it is with the Church, the bride of the Lamb. She is gathered to Christ to be the sharer, at once, of His rejection and His glory. It is Christ's position which gives character to the position of the Church, and her position should ever give character to her walk. If we are gathered to Christ, it is as exalted in glory, and not as humbled down here. "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." (2 Cor. 5: 26) The Church's gathering point is Christ in glory. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me." (John 12: 32)

There is far more of practical value in the clear apprehension of this principle than might, at first sight, appear. It is ever the aim of Satan, as it is the tendency of our hearts, to lead us to stop short of God's mark in everything, and specially in the centre of our unity as Christians. It is a popular sentiment, that "the blood of the Lamb is the union of saints," i.e., it is the blood which forms their centre of unity. Now, that it is the infinitely precious blood of Christ which sets us individually as worshippers in the presence of God, is blessedly true. The blood, therefore, forms the divine basis of our fellowship with God. But when we come to speak of the centre of our unity as a church, we must see that the Holy Ghost gathers us to the Person of a risen and glorified Christ; and this grand truth gives character — high and holy character to our association as Christians. If we take lower ground than this we must inevitably form a sect or an schism. If we gather round an ordinance, however important, or round a truth, however indisputable, we make something less than Christ our centre.

Hence, it is most important to ponder the practical consequences which flow out of the truth of our being gathered to a risen and glorified Head in the heavens. If Christ were on earth, we should be gathered to Him here; but, inasmuch as He is hidden in the heavens, the Church takes her character from His position there. Hence, Christ could say, "they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world;" and again, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." (John 17: 16, 19) So also, in 1 Peter, we read, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious; ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an Holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2: 4, 5) If we are gathered to Christ we must be gathered to Him *as* He is, and *where* He is; and the more the Spirit of God leads our souls into the understanding of this, the more clearly we shall see the character of walk that becomes us. Joseph's bride was united to him, not in the pit or the dungeon, but in the dignity and glory of his position in Egypt; and, in her case, we can have no difficulty in perceiving the vast difference between the two positions.

But, further, we read, "And unto Joseph were born two sons, *before the years of famine came.*" There was a time of trouble coming; but previous thereto, the fruit of his union appeared. The children whom God had given him were called into existence previous to this time of trial. So will it be in reference to the Church. all the members thereof will be called out, the whole body will be completed and gathered to the Head in heaven, previous to "the great tribulation" which shall come upon all the earth.

We shall now turn, for a little, to Joseph's interview with his brethren, in which we shall find some points of resemblance to Israel's history in the latter day. During the period that Joseph was hidden from the view of his brethren, these latter were called to pass through deep and searching trial — through intensely painful exercises of conscience. One of these exercises is poured out in the following words: "And they said one to another, *We are verily guilty* concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and *we would not hear*; therefore is *this distress come upon us*. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear therefore, behold, also, *his blood is required*." (Gen. 42: 21, 22) Again, in Gen. 44 we read, "And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord What shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants." None can teach like God. He alone can produce in the conscience the true sense of sin, and bring the soul down into the profound depths of its own condition in His presence. This is all His own work. Men run on in their career of guilt, heedless of everything, until the arrow of the Almighty pierces their conscience, and then they are led into those searchings of heart, and intense exercises of soul, which can only find relief in the rich resources of redeeming love. Joseph's brethren had no conception of all that was to flow to them from their actings toward him. "They took him and cast him into a pit ..... and they sat down to eat bread." "Woe to them.... that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." (Amos 6: 6)

However, God produced grief of heart, and exercises of conscience, and that in a most wonderful way. Years rolled on, and these brethren might have vainly imagined that all was right; but, then, "seven years of plenty, and seven years of scarcity!" What did they mean? Who sent them? And for what were they designed? Admirable providence! Unsearchable wisdom! The famine reaches to Canaan, and the calls of hunger actually bring the guilty brethren to the feet of the injured Joseph! How marked is the display of God's own hand in all this! There they stand, with the arrow of conviction thrust through and through their consciences, in the presence of the man whom they had, "with wicked hands," cast into the pit. Surely their sin had found them out; but it was in the presence of Joseph. Blessed place!

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren." (Gen. 45: 1) No stranger was allowed to witness this sacred scene. What stranger could understand or appreciate it? We are here called to witness, as it were, divinely wrought conviction in the presence of divine grace; and we may say, when these two come together there is an easy settlement of every question.

"And Joseph said unto his brethren, *Come near to me*, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, Whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you, to preserve life. .... And God sent me before you, to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you sent me hither, but God." This is grace indeed, setting the convicted conscience perfectly at rest. The brethren had, already, most thoroughly, condemned themselves, and hence Joseph had only to pour in the blessed balm into their broken hearts. This is all sweetly typical of God's dealings with Israel, in the latter day, when "they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and mourn." Then they shall prove the reality of divine grace, and the cleansing efficacy of that "fountain which shall be opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." (Zech. 13: 1).

In Acts 3, we find the Spirit of God in Peter seeking to produce this divine conviction in the

consciences of the Jews. "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses." These statements were designed to elicit from the hearts and lips of the hearers the confession made by Joseph's brethren — "we are verily guilty." Then follows the grace. "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." We here see that, although the Jews really carried out the enmity of their hearts, in the death of Christ, as did also Joseph's brethren in their treatment of him, yet, the grace of God to each is seen in this, that all is shown to be decreed and foreshown of God for their blessing. This is perfect grace, surpassing all human thought; and all that is needed, in order to the enjoyment thereof, is a conscience truly convicted by the truth of God. Those who could say, "We are verily guilty," could rightly understand the words of precious grace, "It was not you, but God." Thus it must ever be. The soul that has thoroughly pronounced its own condemnation, is prepared to understand and appreciate God's pardon.

The remaining chapters of this book are taken up with the removal of Jacob and his family into Egypt, and their settlement there; Joseph's actings during the remaining years of famine; Jacob's blessing the twelve patriarchs; his death and burial. We shall not dwell in detail upon these things, though the spiritual mind may find much to feed upon therein.\* Jacob's groundless fears dissipated by the sight of his son alive, and exalted — the peculiar grace of God seen in its overruling power, yet evidently mingled with judgement, inasmuch as Jacob's sons have to go down into the very place whither they had sent their brother. Again, Joseph's remarkable grace throughout: though exalted by Pharaoh, he hides himself, as it were, and binds the people in abiding obligation to the king. Pharaoh says, "Go to Joseph," and Joseph, in effect, says, "all you have and all you are belong to Pharaoh." This is sweetly interesting, and leads the soul on to that glorious time when the Son of man shall take the reins of government into His Own hand, by divine appointment, and rule over the whole redeemed creation, His Church — the bride of the Lamb — occupying the nearest and most intimate place, according to the eternal counsels. The house of Israel, fully restored, shall be nourished and sustained by His gracious hand; and all the earth shall know the deep blessedness of being under His sceptre. Finally, having brought everything into subjection, He shall hand back the reins of government into the hands of God, that "he may be all in all." From all this we may form some idea of the richness and copiousness of Joseph's history. In short, it sets before us, distinctly, in type, the mission of the Son to the house of Israel — His humiliation and rejection — the deep exercises and final repentance and restoration of Israel — the union of the Church with Christ — His exaltation and universal government, and, finally, it points us forward to the time when "God shall be all in all." It is quite needless to remark, that all these things are largely taught, and fully established, throughout the entire canon of inspiration: we do not, therefore, build their truth upon Joseph's history; still it is edifying to find such early foreshadowings of these precious truths: it proves to us the divine unity which pervades holy scripture. Whether we turn to Genesis or to Ephesians — to the prophets of the Old or those of the New Testament — we learn the same truths. "ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD.

{\*The close of Jacob's career stands in most pleasing contrast with all the previous scenes of his eventful history. It reminds one of a serene evening, after a tempestuous day: the sun, which during the day had been hidden from view by clouds, mists, and fogs, sets in majesty and brightness, gilding with his beams the western sky, and holding out the cheering prospect of a bright tomorrow. Thus is it with

our aged patriarch. The supplanting, the bargain-making, the running, the management, the shifting, the shuffling the unbelieving selfish fears — all those dark clouds of nature and of earth seem to have passed away, and he comes forth, in all the calm elevation of faith, to bestow blessings, and impart dignities, in that holy skillfulness, which communion with God can alone impart.

Though nature's eyes are dim, faith's vision is sharp. He is not to be deceived as to the relative positions assigned to Ephraim and Manasseh, in the counsels of God. He has not, like his father Isaac, in Gen. 27, to "tremble very exceedingly," in view of an almost fatal mistake. Quite the reverse. His intelligent reply to his less instructed son is, "I know it, my son, I know it." The power of sense has not, as in Isaac's case, dimmed his spiritual vision. He has been taught, in the school of experience, the importance of keeping close to the divine purpose, and nature's influence cannot move him from thence.

In Gen. 48: 11, we have a very beautiful example of the mode in which our God ever rises above all our thoughts, and proves Himself better than all our fears. "And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed." To nature's view, Joseph was dead; whereas in God's view he was alive, and seated in the highest place of authority, next the throne. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. 2: 9) Would that our souls could rise higher in their apprehension of God and His ways.

It is interesting to notice the way in which the titles "Jacob" and "Israel" are introduced in the close of the Book of Genesis; as, for example, "One told Jacob, and said, Behold thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed" Then, it is immediately added, "And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz." Now, we know, there is nothing in scripture without its specific meaning, and hence this interchange of names contains some instruction. In general, it may be remarked, that "Jacob" sets forth the depth to which God had descended; "Israel," the height to which Jacob was raised. }