

The Call of God — Abraham and Lot.

Genesis 12.

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In a day of such widely extended profession as the present, it is specially important that Christians should be deeply impressed with the necessity of realising personally the call of God, without which there can be no permanence or steadiness in the Christian course.

It is a comparatively easy thing to make a profession at a time when profession prevails; but it is never easy to walk by faith — it is never easy to give up present things, in the hope of "good things to come." Nothing but that mighty principle which the Apostle denominates "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11: 1), can ever enable a man to persevere in a course which in a world where all is wrong — all out of order, must be thorny and difficult. We must feel "persuaded" of something yet to come — something worth waiting for — something that will reward all the toil of a pilgrim's protracted course, ere we rise up out of the circumstances of nature and the world, to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12: 1).

All this is fully exemplified in Abraham, and the exemplification receives additional force from the contrast exhibited in the character of Lot and others who are introduced in the course of the narrative.

In Acts 7, we have the following words which bear directly upon the subject before us. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he lived in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and come into the land that I shall show thee" (vers. 12). Here then we are presented with the first dawning of that light which attracted Abraham out of the darkness of "Ur, of the Chaldees," and which shining in upon his wearisome path, from time to time, gave fresh vigour to his soul, as he journeyed in quest of "that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." "The God of glory" caused Abraham to see, in the light of His character, the true condition of things in Ur, and further, to believe, as some one has observed, *a report concerning future glory and inheritance*, and he therefore hesitates not, but instantly girds himself up for the journey.

However, upon a close comparison of the opening of Acts 7 with Genesis 12: 1, we get an important principle. From the time that God appeared unto Abraham, until he finally gets up into the land of Canaan, an event occurs involving much deep instruction to us. I allude to the death of Abraham's father, as we read in Acts 7, "From thence, *when his father* was dead, He removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell" (ver. 4). This will enable us to understand the force of the expression in Gen. 12, "The Lord *had* said unto Abram" etc. (ver. 1). From both these passages, it would plainly appear the movement made by Terah and his family, recorded in Gen. 10: 31, was the result of a revelation made by "the God of glory" to Abram, but it would not appear that *Terah* had received any such revelation from God. He is presented to us rather as a hindrance to Abram than any thing else, for until he died, Abram did not come into the land of Canaan — his divinely appointed destination.

Now, this circumstance, trivial as it may seem to a cursory reader, confirms in the strongest manner the statement already advanced, namely, that unless the call of God — the revelation from "the God of glory" be *personally realised*, there can be no permanence or steadiness in the Christian course. Had Terah realised that call, he would neither have been a clog to Abram in his path of faith, nor yet

would he have dropped off, like a mere child of nature, ere reaching the future land of promise. We get the same principle illustrated in Laban afterward in Gen. 24. Laban, as some one has well observed, was fully alive to the value of the gold and silver jewels which the servant of Abraham had brought with him, but he had not heart to value *the report* concerning future things, which dropped from his lips. In other words, he did not receive a revelation from "the God of glory," and as a consequence, he remained, as the same writer has observed, "*a thorough man of the world.*"

In the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we are taught the same truth. There were other persons with him when he was struck to the ground by the lustre of the glory of the Lord Jesus; these persons "saw indeed the light" — they witnessed many of the external circumstances which had arrested the furious zealot; but as he himself states, "*they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me*" (Acts 22: 9). Here is the grand point. The voice must speak "*to me*" — "the God of glory" must appear "*to me*," ere I can take the place of a pilgrim and stranger in the world, and perseveringly, "run the race that is set before me." It is not *national faith*, nor *family faith*, but *personal faith* that will constitute us real witnesses for God in the world.

But when Abram was released from the clog which he had experienced in the person of his father, he was enabled to enter with vigour and decision upon the path of faith — a path which "flesh and blood" can never tread — a thorny path beset with difficulties from first to last, in which God alone can sustain the soul. "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. *And the Canaanite was then in the land.* And the Lord appeared unto Abram and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land: *and there builded he an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him*" (Gen. 12: 6-7). Here Abram at once takes his stand as a *worshiper*, in the face of "the Canaanite." The altar marks him as one who, having been delivered from the idols of Ur of the Chaldees, had been taught to bow before the altar of the one true God, "who made heaven and earth." In the following verse, we get the second grand feature in the character of the man of faith, namely, "*the tent,*" denoting strangership in the world. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a *strange country, dwelling in tabernacles* with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise"(Heb. 11: 9).

We shall have occasion to notice more fully, as we proceed, these two important points in the life of Abraham, and shall therefore rest satisfied for the present with establishing the fact that the tent and the altar do most clearly present him to us as a *stranger* and a *worshiper*, and that as such, he was a man entirely separated from the course of this evil world.

Scarcely had Abram entered upon his course, when he had to encounter one of those difficulties which have a special tendency to test the genuineness of faith both as to its quality and its object. "And there was a famine in the land." The difficulty meets him in the very place into which the Lord had called him. Now, it is no easy matter when we perceive trial and sorrow, privation and difficulty awaiting us, while walking in "the strait and narrow way," still to persevere — still to pursue the onward path, and especially if we observe within our reach, as Abram did, an entire exemption from the particular trial under which we may be smarting. The men of this world "are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued as other men." This feeling is still further increased by the entire absence of every thing, as far as sight is concerned which could act as a confirmation of our hope. Abram had not so much as to set his foot upon — famine was raging around him on every side, *save in Egypt*. Could he only find himself *there*, he would be able to live in ease and abundance.

Here, however, the man of faith must pursue the path of simple obedience. God had said, "Get thee out of thy country unto a land that I will show thee." Abram may, it is true, afterward discover that obedience to this command will involve his abiding in a land where nothing but starvation, apparently,

awaits him. But even though it should be so, God had not in any way qualified the command — No, the word was simple and definite: "Into a land that *I* will show thee." This should have been as true and as binding upon Abram when famine reigned around him, as when peace and abundance prevailed. Famine should not, therefore, have induced him to leave the land, neither should abundance have induced him to remain. The influential words were, "I will show thee."

But Abram leaves this land — he succumbs, for the moment, to the heavy trial, and bends his footsteps down to Egypt, leaving behind him his tent and altar. There he obtained ease and luxury; he escaped, no doubt, the formidable trial under which he had suffered in the land of promise; but he lost, for the time being, his worship and strangership — things which should ever be dearest to the heart of a pilgrim.

There is nothing in Egypt for Abram to feed upon as a spiritual man; it might, and doubtless did, afford abundance for him as a natural man, but that was all. Egypt would give nothing to Abram unless he sacrificed his character both as a stranger and as a worshiper of God. It is needless to observe that it is exactly so at this very hour. There is plenty in the world upon which our old nature could feed most luxuriously. There are the rich delights "of the flesh and of the mind," and abundant means of gratifying the desires of the heart, but what of all these, if the enjoyment thereof leads, as it must necessarily do, right out of the path of faith — the path of simple obedience.

Here then is the question for the Christian: which shall I have, the gold and silver, the flocks and herds — the present ease and affluence of Egypt, or the tent and altar of "the land of promise"? Which shall I have: the carnal ease and delight of the world, or a peaceful holy walk with God *here*, and eternal blessedness and glory hereafter? We cannot have both, for, "If *any man* love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

But, we may ask, why was it that Abram had to experience famine and trial in the land of promise? Why did he not find a home and plenty there? Simply because "the Canaanite and Perizzite dwelt then in the land" (Gen. 13: 7). The land had not as yet been fitted up to be the residence of God's redeemed ones. Abram's faith might have enabled him to penetrate through the long and dreary period which should intervene ere the promise could be consummated; but that very principle of faith it was that made him "a pilgrim and a stranger." He could wait for God's time, and until then remain without "so much as to set his foot on" (Acts 7: 5). So should it be now. The true man of faith cannot find a home in the earth because "the Canaanite" is there. By and by it will not be so, for, "all that offends" will be gathered out of the kingdom, and the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. (Rev 11: 15) and then righteousness shall prevail "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."

Genesis 13

This beautiful chapter shows us the man of faith recovering himself, through the faithfulness and loving-kindness of God, who never allows such to wander far, or tarry long away. The gold and silver, the flocks and herds of Egypt, could not long prove a satisfying portion for Abram, while deprived of his tent and his altar, and he therefore once more, in the renewed energy of faith rises, as it were, from the dust of Egypt, and retraces his steps to the land of promise. Happy recovery! Certain evidence of a fixed and honest purpose to serve the Lord. "The ship may be tossed by the waves and the winds, *but the magnet still points to the north.*"

But some expressions in the opening of this chapter confirm most fully a thought already expressed, namely, that Abram gained nothing, "as before God," by his visit to Egypt. Thus, for example, "Abram went on his journeys . . . unto the place where his tent had been *at the beginning*,

unto the place of the altar which he had made there *at the first*" (vers 3-4). The words "beginning," and "at the first," prove that Abram had made no progress while in Egypt, but that, while there, all his time was, as it were, lost. No doubt he learnt a wholesome lesson, and it is well when by our failures, we learn to distrust our own hearts, and dread the pernicious influence of the world. Abram learnt that there could be no tent or altar in Egypt. It is only faith that can enable a man to raise an altar or erect a tent, but in Egypt all is sight and not faith, and hence, the moment Abram set his foot there he ceased to show forth the genuine fruits of faith — yea, the very principle which led him to leave the land of promise. Led him, at the same time, to relinquish his character as a stranger and a worshiper.

How forcibly are we here reminded of a proposal made long after this, by a king of Egypt, to Abraham's seed. "And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said: Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land" (Ex. 8: 25). Thus, it would seem ever to have been the design of the enemy to get the people of God, the holy seed, to defile themselves by worshipping or sacrificing to God, *in the world*; i.e., to make their character, as worshipers of God, accord with that of men of the world — men holding a place in society where Christ is an outcast; thus, of course, declaring that there is no difference between the religion of the world and the religion of God — a truly fearful delusion, calculated to lead many souls out of the way of truth and holiness.

It is most sad to hear, at times, those who surely ought to know better, in order, as they say, to manifest *a liberal spirit*, speaking of the religion of the world in all its multiplied forms, as if it were all right; or, as if it were a matter of total indifference whether we remained in communion with error or not. Oh, let us not be deceived! God's principle of separation is as strong and as binding today as it was in the days of Abram or Moses. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing," must hold good as long as the "unclean thing" exists; nor can any outward form alter the character — the true essential character of "the unclean thing" so as to make it "a clean thing."

Moses, then, was not liberal, in the above acceptation of the word, for he at once refused to countenance the religion of the world. "It is not meet so to do." Memorable words! Would that there were more amongst us who, when invited to countenance the religion of the world, would reply, "It is not meet so to do." Abram could not worship in Egypt, neither could his seed.

But Abram had more difficulties than one to encounter in his course. The path which every man of faith is called to tread lies between two dangerous extremes. One is the temptation to return to the world; the other, to strive with brethren by the way. Abram had just recovered himself from the effects of the former, and we have now to behold him buffeting the latter.

The moment Abram emerged from Egypt, he appeared in a special manner to move under a new responsibility, namely, responsibility to his brother to walk with him in harmony. While in Egypt, this responsibility stood quite in the shade. The institutions — laws — habits — luxury and ease of Egypt, would in an eminent degree tend to do away with every such feeling. All these things would have had the effect of erecting barriers around each individual tending to prevent him from recognising the fact that he was his "brother's keeper." Nor is it otherwise now. So long as we continue in the world — the religious world, as it is termed — we shall find ourselves completely relieved from the difficult task of being our "brother's keeper." Those who advocate a continuance therein may deny this fact, but it is all in vain, for Scripture and experience alike demonstrate it. Abram and Lot *did not strive in Egypt*, and a religious establishment presents this attraction at least — and it is by no means a feeble one — it effectually prevents *brotherly collision* and, of course, where there is no collision there can be no strife — no dispute; where collision takes place, there must be either grace to enable us to walk in unity of mind, or strife and contention. But Egypt saps the very springs of grace by leading us out of a place of

simple dependence upon the Lord, (for dependence ever genders grace and forbearance) and because she does so, she, at the same time, teaches us, or attempts at least to teach us, that we do not need grace, by leading us into a sphere in which responsibility to brethren is never realised; thus the need is not felt; weakness is mistaken for strength, folly for wisdom.

When the Christian at first starts on his course, he fondly dreams of nothing but perfection in his fellow Christians; but in this he soon finds himself mistaken, for we have all our infirmities, and as the apostle states, "In many things we offend all." But why, we may ask, was there such a speedy development of infirmity upon their coming up out of Egypt? Because they were now called to walk in the power of a naked principle, without any of the props or barriers of Egypt. They were called to walk by faith, and "faith worketh by love."

Now "the Canaanite," etc., "was then in the land." This should have acted as a hindrance to any strife between "*brethren*," for the Canaanite cannot understand anything about the infirmities of believers, and he therefore puts all their failure down to some defect in the principle professed.

But in every strife between brethren, there must be fault somewhere. In the contention between Paul and Barnabas there was fault somewhere. Nor can we be at any loss to decide where it lay. Barnabas wished to take *his relative* with him, but this relative had before proved himself unfit, or at least unwilling, to "endure hardness," therefore it could not have been with a single eye to the Lord's work that Barnabas desired his company. The Lord Himself, too, at once takes Paul's side of the question by providing him with a dear son and fellow-labourer, in the person of Timothy, with whom he had "none like-minded."

So it is exactly in the case before us. We can have no hesitation in asserting that Lot was the man in error here. Lot does not appear to have fully got rid of the spirit of the world, and where there is this spirit predominating in any one he will ever find the path of faith too strait for him to walk in, and so it was, "They could not dwell together."

If, then, it be asked on what grounds one would pronounce Lot to have been in the wrong? The answer is, first, Lot's subsequent conduct; and, secondly, the Lord's dealings with Abram, "after that Lot was separated from him."

What then did Lot do? "*He lifted up his eyes.*" This is ever our mode of acting when not under the direct power of faith. Whenever we lift up our eyes without divine direction, we are sure to go wrong. I say, without divine direction, for we find the Lord afterwards directing Abram to lift up his eyes, but then that was totally different from Lot's act, which was simply the suggestion of mere human wisdom and foresight. Human wisdom and foresight, however, can never assist our progress as men of faith — no, quite the reverse; human wisdom will ever suggest things which, if acted upon, will lead us right athwart the path of a man of faith. Therefore Lot, in lifting up his eyes, could not penetrate beyond the "things that are seen and temporal." Such was the utmost bound of his range of vision. The things on which his eyes rested were those with which he had been conversant while in Egypt, as we read, "He beheld all the plain of Jordan that it was well watered everywhere . . . *like the land of Egypt*" (ver. 10). Here we observe that Lot had never been really detached in heart and affection from Egypt — he had never learnt the vanity and unsatisfactoriness of all her resources in the light of a better order of things — he had never contrasted her with that "*city which hath foundations*, whose builder and maker is God" — in a word, he "having put his hand to the plough," was now beginning "to look back," and thus to prove himself "unfit for the kingdom of heaven."

There is a striking notice of all this afforded in the opening verse of this chapter, "Abram went up out of Egypt and *Lot with him.*" Here we get the secret of Lot's after instability. He appears to have

gone up rather *with Abram* than *with God*, and the consequence was that, when he parted with Abram, he had nothing to lean upon. He had been hitherto moving under Abram's protection and guidance instead of being directly before the Lord, and therefore when he lost Abram he went astray.

Now then is the moment for Abram to "lift up his eyes," at the Lord's command, and oh, what a different range of vision was his! While Lot could not penetrate beyond the narrow limits of the present scene, Abram was enabled to survey the length and breadth of God's inheritance. He soars on the strong and rapid pinion of faith, and is, as it were, lost in the unbounded beneficence of God; while Lot, the man walking by sight, is well-nigh lost in the deep gulf of Sodom's corruption.

Let us then, ere we enter upon the next chapter, take a view of the different circumstances of these two men who had started together. "Lot lifted up his eyes," and the prospect on which they rested was, as might be expected, such as suited his natural desires, "well-watered plains," which, however fair in man's view, were nevertheless, in the sight of the Lord, filled with exceeding wickedness (cp. vers. 10 and 14). Abram, on the contrary, had allowed his eye to wander over the length and breadth of the *promised* inheritance — uninfluenced by all else, he viewed the portion which God was *reserving* for him and his seed, and took up his position accordingly.

Thus do we find Lot in the unhallowed region of Sodom; and Abram — the pilgrim and stranger, with his tent and altar — "in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron."

Genesis 14

Here we have a very minute account of a battle fought by "four kings with five," and we may ask, What connection had this strife between "the potsherds of the earth," with the history of the people of God? With Abram indeed none, in one sense, for he was outside it all. *His tent* marked him as a stranger to all these things — it marked him as one to whom the battle of "four kings with five" would be a matter of very trivial moment. And then his altar marked him as one whose pursuits were quite of another character, even a heavenly. His tent showed him to be a stranger on earth — his altar showed him to be at home in Heaven. Happy man! Happy pilgrim! who could thus from his high elevation, even the lofty watch-tower of faith, look down, as a passer-by, upon the battle fields of an evil world. It mattered not to Abram whether the laurel of victory were about to wreath the brow of the king of Sodom, or of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam; his portion was not in danger through their strife, because he had it in that place "where thieves do not break through and steal."

But, though it was the happy lot of Abram to have his being and his portion in a place where wars could have no influence, yet such was not the case with his more worldly-minded brother. His position was such as to place him in the midst of the strife, and consequently the issue of this battle could not fail to be of the deepest moment to him. If the child of God will stoop so low as to mix himself up with the world, he must calculate upon being made a participator in its convulsions, and woe be to that man who shall have his portion in the world in that day (now fast approaching) when all things shall be shaken by the mighty hand of God in judgement.

I would here observe that what has ever made the history of nations and the movements of mighty kings and conquerors, matters of interest to the Holy Spirit, has been the connection of such things with the history of the people of God. Beyond this they possessed nothing of moment to Him. He could find no pleasure in dwelling upon the abstract history of man. The busy strife and tumult of nations — the fierce contests of ungodly tyrants grasping after power — the movements of armies, could not attract the notice of the Spirit of peace; nevertheless, when such things became, in the least degree, connected with the history of a "righteous soul," the Holy Ghost can be most minute in detailing the circumstances of a battle, as is observable in the case under consideration.

What then were the results of this contest to Lot? Ruin to him and his family. He was made prisoner and all his goods were taken (ver. 12). He had laid up treasure for himself upon earth, and the thieves had broken through; and thus, while Abram was above it all, in the power — the separating power of communion with God, he found himself a prisoner and a beggar. He had sown to the flesh, and of the flesh he must now "reap corruption."

But this was just the moment for Abram to show himself in the powerful activities of love. He had, as above observed, hitherto surveyed with calm indifference these movements of "kings and their armies," but the very same faith which had made him indifferent about the strifes of men, made him quick to take cognisance of a *brother* in distress. Faith not only purifies the heart from worldly and carnal desires, but it also "works by love," as is powerfully shown in Abram's case, for "when Abram saw that his brother was taken captive he armed his trained servants," etc. (ver. 14).

Now, it is to be observed that it is in the hour of distress and difficulty that the relationship of brother gets the prominent place. In days of unruffled peace, Lot might be known to Abram as "his brother's son," but now he was in sorrow, and therefore the claims of brotherhood act, and act powerfully and effectually. True he had contended about a piece of land — he had turned aside from his venerable companion, and had taken up his abode at Sodom, but what of that? He was now in trouble, and therefore all is forgotten, but the fact that they were brethren.

We are now called to witness a deeply interesting scene. Abram himself is about to meet a temptation — a temptation at once repulsed indeed by the power of God in him, but nevertheless, a temptation. The king of Sodom was about to come forth to display his treasures before the eye of Abram, and he had by nature a heart to value those treasures.

That man knows not his own heart who could say that the world does not present many — very many attractions to the natural heart. There is a species of misanthropy which looks like elevation above the world, but which, after all, is not it. The cynic philosopher Diogenes, when he told Alexander to get out of his sunshine, was as proud and as worldly a man as Alexander himself. The only true and real way in which to be separated from, and elevated above, the world, is by the knowledge of heavenly things, and Abram was led, through the mercy of God, into that knowledge.

But the victory obtained by Abram, was not owing to any power in himself. He had, as I have observed, a heart to value the things which the enemy had to give him; and, therefore, if he triumphed, it was through the operation of a power outside himself. In all this transaction, the One who had watched over His dear servant during the dark season of his sojourn in Egypt, and who, moreover, had, by that very sojourn, taught him a lesson as to the true character of the world, was now closely observing his ways, and making preparations for his relief; He was cognisant of the movements and designs of the enemy, from first to last, and He therefore prepares to supply a heavenly antidote to nullify his poison.

It is particularly worthy of observation that between the time at which the king of Sodom went forth to meet Abram, and that wherein he made the proposal to him with reference to "the persons and the goods," there is a remarkable character introduced, namely, Melchizedek. This stranger, commissioned by God, was on his way to fortify Abram's heart at the very moment when the enemy was on his way to attack (cp. ver. 17, 18, and 21). Now, why did not "the priest of the Most High God" come to meet Abram before? Because this was the very moment in which Abram most needed the strength which he had to bring. The enemy was about to display his gilded bait before the eye of the man of God, and therefore is Melchizedek at hand to display in his view the divine realities of the kingdom. He was about to feed and strengthen his soul with the "bread," and cheer him with the

"wine," of the kingdom, in order that, "in the strength of that meat" he might mount above the influence of all the allurements of the world. From all this we may learn that it is communion with the joys and glories of the kingdom that can alone cause the heart to reject the pollutions of the world.

Reader, upon what are you now feeding? What constitutes your habitual food? Is it "the bread and wine" which the Lord provides, or "the goods" of Sodom? Are your ears open to the pernicious suggestions of the *King of Sodom*, or to the heavenly communications of the *King of Salem*? The Lord grant that our hearts may ever choose that in which He delights.

But to proceed, Melchizedek leads Abram's soul into present communion with "THE MOST HIGH GOD, THE POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH," and thus completes the wondrous contrast between "the King of Sodom" and "the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth" — "the goods of Sodom" and the extensive possessions of Heaven and earth. Blessed contrast, which faith ever draws! It is needless to say that Abram at once rejects the offer of the King of Sodom. The bread and wine, and the benediction of "the priest of the Most High God," had raised Abram to such a height that he could, in one comprehensive glance, take in the vast possessions of Heaven and earth, and further, look down from thence upon the despicable proposal of the King of Sodom and reject it. Melchizedek had just said, "the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth," and Abram had laid hold on these words and made use of them in his reply to the adversary. "I have lifted up my hand," said he, "to the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (vers. 22-23).

Abram appears to breathe the very atmosphere of the presence of Him "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance, in whose sight the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold! he taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted to Him as less than nothing and vanity" (Isa. 40: 12, 15-18).

And surely, we may say, it was only thus that Abram could triumph; and let no one who moves not, in some measure, in the same sphere, affect to despise the world — nothing can be more truly vain. There must be the experimental acquaintance with the better thing — the fondly cherished hope of "*good things to come*" — ere we can obtain full victory over present things, and our own worldly desires. "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, *knowing in yourselves* that ye have *in heaven a better and an enduring substance*" (Heb. 10: 34). If we are really waiting for the manifestation of the glory, we shall be found standing apart from everything which will be judged in that day: and it is written, "Yet once more, I shake not the earth only but also heaven; and this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb. 12: 26-27).

We have, in the last verse of our truly interesting chapter, a happy feature in the character of the true man of faith. Abram would not force others to walk according to his elevated standard. Although *he* might be able to reject, in the most unreserved manner, the offers of the king of Sodom, yet *others* might not be able to do so, and therefore he says, with regard to "Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, *let them take their portion.*" Our walk should ever be "according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12: 3). We have seen, in our own day, many persons led, at the outset, to give up a variety of worldly things, and afterwards plunge still deeper into those things; and why? Because they acted

through mere excitement or human influence, and were not able to say with Abram, "*I have lift up my hand unto the Lord.*"

Genesis 15

In the opening verse of this chapter, we have a principle fraught with comfort and encouragement to us — a principle eminently calculated to call out into full exercise a spirit of true devotedness to the Lord. We observe here, the Lord's grace in acknowledging and accepting the sacrifice laid upon His altar — the willing offering of the devoted heart of His servant. Our God is never slow in owning such things, nor in rewarding them a hundredfold. Abram had just been manifesting a spirit of self-denial in refusing the attractive offers of the King of Sodom. He had refused to be enriched from such a source, and had taken "the Most High God" for his portion and his reward, therefore the Lord comes forth to confirm the soul of his servant with these words, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." "God is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love" (Heb. 6: 10). A similar principle is presented to us in Genesis 13, where Abram is seen giving way to Lot, in the matter of choosing the land. Abram's whole anxiety in that matter was about the Lord's honour, as maintained in the harmonious walk of "*brethren*" before the "Canaanite and the Perizzite." "Let there be no strife," says he, "between me and thee . . . *for we be brethren.*" Nor did Abram desire to suppress the strife, by *exacting concessions* from Lot. No; he was willing to concede everything himself — to surrender every claim — to sacrifice every advantage, provided the strife were suppressed. "Is not the *whole land* before thee?" *Take* what you please — possess yourself of the fairest spot in all the region round about. Here, as some one has observed, is the liberality — the unselfishness of faith. What was land to Abram in comparison with the Lord's glory? Nothing. He could give up anything, or everything, for that. How then does the Lord meet this self-sacrifice on the part of His servant? Just as He does in this chapter 15, by coming in, in the plenitude of His goodness, to make it up to him a hundredfold. "Lift up *now* thine eyes . . . *for all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee*" (Gen. 13: 14-15). How truly gracious it is of the Lord to enable His servant to make a sacrifice for Him, and then reward that sacrifice by a vast increase of blessing. Such are His ways — His ever adorable ways.

We are now called to trace in Abram the development of a feature which, in a special manner, demonstrates the high order of his communion with God. After all God's revelations and promises to him, his soul still breathes after an object without which all besides was defective. True, he had surveyed, with the eye of faith, the promised inheritance. — the magnificent gift of divine benevolence: yet, notwithstanding all this, was there a great desideratum mighty blank. He sighed for a Son. A son *alone* could render complete, in Abram's estimation, all his previous privileges. "And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and *the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.* And Abram said, Behold to me thou hast given no seed: and lo, *one born in my house is mine heir*" (vers. 2-3). Now, we have, in tracing the path of this remarkable man, beheld him, at times, displaying some very noble features of character. His generosity — his high elevation of mind — his pilgrim-like habits — all these things denote a man of the very highest order; yet I hesitate not to say, that we find him, in the passage just quoted, exhibiting a temper of soul, more in harmony with the mind of Heaven than anything we have met hitherto. Abram desired to have his house enlivened by the cry of a child. He had been long enough conversant with the spirit of bondage breathed by "the steward of his house," but the titles of *lord* and *master*, though all very good in their place, could not satisfy the heart of Abram, for Abram had been taught of God, and God ever instructs His children in those things which He loves, and which He exhibits in His dealings with them. And I would just observe, in connection with this, that we see in the case of the prodigal in Luke 15, the development of a principle very much in connection with what we have been saying. He says, in the

very midst of all his misery "I will arise and go unto my Father, and will say unto him, *Father*." Here we have a fine feature in the character of this poor wanderer. He had such a sense of the grace of him against whom he had sinned, that he could yet say "*Father*," notwithstanding his long course of rebellion and folly.

But let us observe with what accuracy Abram lays hold of the great principle afterwards brought out by the Spirit in Romans 8. "*If children, then heirs*." Abram felt that *sonship* and *heirship* were inseparably connected, so much so, that without the former the latter could not be. This is the meaning of his question, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" Abram rightly judges that to have "*no seed*" was to have *no inheritance*, for the word is, not if *stewards or servants*, then heirs, but "*if children, then heirs*" (Rom. 8: 17).

How very important it is that we should ever bear in mind, that all our present privileges and future prospects stand connected with our character as "sons." It may be all well and very valuable, in its right place, to realise our responsibility to act as "faithful and wise stewards," in the absence of our Master; still the most ample privileges — the highest enjoyments — the brightest glories, which belong to us through the grace and mercy of our God, stand intimately connected with our character and place as "sons" (cp. John 1: 12; Rom. 8: 14, 19; 1 John 3: 1-2; Eph. 1: 5; Eph. 5: 1; Heb. 12: 5).

In the vision presented to us in the close of our chapter, and which was granted to Abram as an answer to his question, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" we have a further illustration of the teaching of Romans 8. Abram is taught by the vision, that the *inheritance* was only to be reached through *suffering* — that the *heirs* must pass through *the furnace*, previous to their entering upon the enjoyment of that which God was reserving for them; and I doubt not that, were we more deeply and experimentally taught in the divine life, we should more fully apprehend the moral fitness of such training. Suffering then, is not connected, in this chapter, with sonship, but with heirship; and so we are taught in Romans 8. "If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that *we suffer* with Him, that we may be also *glorified* together." Again, we must, "through much *tribulation*, enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). The Lord Jesus Himself, likewise, stands as the great illustration of the principle upon which we are dwelling. He occupied the place and enjoyed the favour of a Son from before all worlds (Prov. 8), yet ere He could lay His hand upon the inheritance He must pass through suffering. He had a baptism to be baptised with, and was straitened (*sunecomenos*) until it was accomplished. So I also when He remembered that "a corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die," or else abide *alone*, His soul was "*troubled*." I Now, we are to "know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings," before we can know Him in the fellowship of His glory; hence it is that ; the palmed multitude mentioned in Revelation 7 had to pass through "great tribulation" (*tes megales thlipseos*) ere they reached their peaceful, heavenly home. Passages of Scripture might be multiplied in proof of this point, but I will merely refer to the following, viz. — Phil. 1: 29; 1 Thess. 3: 4; 2 Thess. 1: 5; 1 Tim. 4: 10; 2 Tim. 2: 12; 1 Peter 5: 10.

But, in this remarkable vision, there are two points which, as they appear prominently in the whole of Israel's after history, deserve to be particularly noticed. I allude to "the smoking furnace, and the burning lamp" (ver. 17). It has been well observed, by a recent writer, that Israel's history might be summed up in these two words, "the furnace and the lamp." Egypt was a trying furnace to the seed of Abraham. There the fire burned fiercely, but it was soon followed by "the burning lamp" of God's own deliverance. The cry of the suffering seed had come up into the ears of Jehovah. He had heard their groanings and seen their afflictions, and had come down to display above their heads "the lamp" of salvation. "I am come down to deliver them," said He to Moses. Satan might take delight in kindling the furnace, and in adding to its intensity, but the blessed God, on the other hand, ever delighted in

letting the rays of His lamp fall upon the dark path of His suffering heirs. So, when Jehovah had, in the faithfulness of His love, brought them into the land of Canaan, they again and again, kindled a furnace by their sins and iniquities; He, as frequently, raised up deliverers in the persons of the judges which were as so many lamps of deliverance to them. Further, when by their aggravated rebellion, they were plunged into the furnace kindled at Babylon, even there we observe the glimmerings of "the burning lamp," and finally it shone out for their full deliverance, in the decree of Cyrus.

Now, the Lord was constantly reminding the children of Israel of the above truth. He says to them, "But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the *iron furnace*" (Deut. 4: 20; 1 Kings 8: 51). Again, "Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers, in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from *the iron furnace*" (Jer. 11: 3-4).

Finally, we may ask, are the seed of Abraham now suffering in the furnace, or are they enjoying the lamp of God? — for they must be experiencing either the one or the other — the furnace, assuredly. They are scattered over the face of the earth as a proverb and a byword, a reproach and a hissing among all the nations of the earth. Thus are they in the iron furnace. But, as it has ever been, "the burning lamp" will assuredly follow "the smoking furnace," for "all Israel shall be saved; as it is written there shall come out of Zion *the Deliverer* and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Isa. 59: 20; Rom. 11: 26).

Thus we see how that Israel's eventful history has all along stood connected with the smoking furnace and the burning lamp, here seen in vision by Abram. They are either presented to us in the furnace of affliction through their own sin, or enjoying the fruit - of God's salvation; and even at this moment when, as has been already observed, they are manifestly in the furnace, we can witness the fulfilment of God's promise, so often repeated, "And unto his son will I give on tribe, that David My servant may have a *lamp* [margin] always before Me in Jerusalem the city which I have chosen Me to put My name there" (1 Kings 11: 36; 1 Kings 15: 14; 2 King 8: 19; Psalm 132: 17). If it be asked where does this lamp shine now? Not on earth, for Jerusalem, the place of its earthly display, "trodden down of the Gentiles," but the eye of faith can behold it shining with undimmed lustre "in the true tabernacle," where it will continue to shine "until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in"; and then, when the furnace, seen in this chapter by Israel's great progenitor, shall have been heated to the very highest degree of intensity, when the blood of Israel's tribes shall flow like water round the walls of Jerusalem, even then, shall the blessed lamp come forth from the place where it now shines, and cast its cheering rays upon the dark path of the oppressed and sorrowing remnant, bringing to mind those oft-illustrated words, "O ISRAEL, THOU HAST DESTROYED THYSELF; BUT IN ME IS THY HELP."

{I would refer the reader to the following Scriptures in confirmation of what has been above advanced on the subject of "the lamp." — Ex. 27: 20; 2 Sam. 22: 29; Ps. 119: 105; Prov. 6: 23; Prov. 13: 9; Isaiah 62: 1}

Genesis 16 - 17

These two chapters give us an account of Abram's effort to obtain the promised seed by harkening to the voice of his wife, also of God's mode of teaching him the unprofitableness of such an appeal to the mere energy of nature as that which his effort involved.

At the very opening of Abram's course we find his faith put to the test in the matter of the famine, but here we find him tried in quite another way, a way moreover, which involved a far higher exercise of faith and spiritual power. "His own body now dead and the deadness of Sarah's womb;" although, in the main, "he considered them not," must have acted upon his mind to a considerable extent.

Now, as is the case of the famine already alluded to, Egypt was at hand, holding out a refuge from anxiety as to present supply, so here, "*an Egyptian maid*" — one of those maid-servants, doubtless, which Abram had gotten during his sojourn in that evil place — was presented to him as a relief in the time of anxiety touching the promised seed. "*Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.*"

But why introduce the element of bondage into his house? Why did not Abram's mind shrink from the thought of "the bondwoman and her son" as much as it had shrunk from the thought of "the steward of his house"? Might not the question, "Lord, what wilt Thou give me," be asked in connection with one as well as the other? Surely it was as much opposed to the divine economy to grant the inheritance to the seed of "*a bond-woman,*" as to a "*servant.*" In either case it would be an allowance of the claims of nature, which cannot be.

The principles involved in this act of Abram's are fully laid open to us in the inspired commentary given in the Epistle to the Galatians. There we read, "Abram had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh — but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4: 22-26).

The churches of Galatia had been led away from the simplicity and liberty of Christ and had returned to "*the flesh.*" They were beginning to substitute religious ceremonies for the energies of the Spirit of Christ. Hence it is that the apostle, in the course of his reasoning with them on their unhappy movement, refers to the matter recorded in our chapters, and the way in which he expounds it to them renders it unnecessary to dwell longer upon it. This step of Abram's only "gendered to bondage;" it introduced an unhealthy and an unhappy element into his house which, as we shall see when we proceed further with our subject, he had to expel ere he could reach the highest point of elevation in his course.

In Genesis 17 we have God's remedy presented to us, and most consolatory it is to observe how the Blessed One at once comes in order to lead back His servant to the *simple* yet *difficult* position of faith in Himself — simple, because therein we have but one object with which to be occupied — difficult, because therein we have to contend against the workings of "an evil heart of unbelief," leading us to "depart from the living God."

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram and said unto him, I AM THE ALMIGHTY GOD, *walk before Me, and be thou perfect.*" Here was at once the effectual cure for all impatient anxiety. "*I am Almighty*" — I can quicken the dead — I can call those things that be not as though they were — I can, if needs be, raise up of stones, children unto you — no flesh shall glory in My presence. "I am Almighty, walk before Me and be thou perfect."

It is perhaps one of the finest principles with which the mind can be occupied, that our God desires that He may ever be learnt in the variety of His perfections, by the need of His people. We have already met a striking illustration of this important principle, in the matter of Abram's conflict with the king of Sodom, in Genesis 14. There, when Abram was tempted by the offers of the enemy, he found relief in the apprehension of God's character as "the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth." The character of the communion into which Melchizedek led the soul of Abram was suited to the circumstances in which he stood. So is it exactly in this 17th chapter. Communion with God as "the Almighty" was the sole remedy for impatient anxiety as to the fulfilment of any promise.

Now, when once the Lord exhibits Himself in His character of "Almighty," there can be no

obstacle whatsoever to the outflow of His grace; for, when almighty power and almighty grace combine in behalf of the sinner, faith may count upon a rich and an abundant harvest.

The promises, therefore, with which this chapter abounds are just such as we might have expected. "I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17: 6-8). Surely these are promises which *almighty grace* alone could utter, *almighty power* alone fulfil.

The above promises stand connected with "the covenant of circumcision — which is specially important as looked at in connection with Abram's effort to obtain the seed otherwise than by the operations of God's own hand. It would be profitable to dwell for a little upon the doctrine of this covenant of circumcision but my design in taking up this history, is not by any means to handle it in a doctrinal way, but rather to draw from it some of those valuable principles of a decidedly practical tendency with which it so richly abounds; and therefore I pass rapidly over chapters 16 - 17, which contain a mine of precious doctrinal truth quite sufficient to occupy a separate treatise.

[I would observe here that the doctrine of the Epistle to Galatians stands intimately connected with Gen. 16 & Gen. 17. I might add, the important doctrine of Israel's future restoration. We also get the doctrine of justification by faith fully illustrated in Gen. 15.]

Ere closing my observations on this section of our narrative, I would add that it is *faith* alone which can enable one to listen, as Abraham here does, to the promises of Almighty God, and when faith listens, God will surely continue to speak. Abram here gets his name changed to Abraham, and the Lord unfolds to him the future greatness and number of his seed, while Abraham hearkens in the unquestioning silence of faith. But when the "Almighty God" goes on to say with reference to Sarai, "As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her" (vers. 15-16), he is at once overwhelmed by the pledges of such marvellous power and grace to be exercised towards him. They exceeded anything he had as yet known, and "Abraham fell on his face." This is very instructive. Abraham with his face in the dust, overcome by the plenitude of almighty power and grace! Surely, we may say, while dwelling upon such a Scripture as this, it is only *faith* that can rightly entertain the "*Almighty God*," it alone can give Him His due and proper place and honour Him as He should be honoured. When the Almighty displays Himself, self must be excluded, hence we find that Abram is set aside in all this — Sarai is lost sight of — "*the bondwoman and her son*" are, for the moment put far out of view, and nothing is seen but "the Almighty God" in the sovereignty and fullness of His grace and power, and the faith that could lie prostrate in the dust, in silent adoration of such a display of the divine glories.

How different is this from the preceding chapter! There we find Abram hearkening to the suggestion of Sarai his wife, with regard to the bondwoman — here we find him hearkening to the voice of Jehovah, as Almighty, who is about to quicken the dead womb of Sarah, and to call those things that be not as though they were, that no flesh might glory in His presence. There it is Abram and Sarai *without God* — here it is *God without Abram and Sarai*. In a word, there it is *flesh* — here it is spirit — there it is sight — here it is *faith*. Wondrous contrast! Exactly similar to that afterwards displayed by the apostle to the churches of Galatia, when he sought to restore them from the sad influence of "the beggarly elements" of the flesh and the world, to the full liberty wherewith Christ had

made them free.

Genesis 18 - 19

I class these two chapters together because, like those we have just been considering, they furnish us with a contrast — a contrast most marked and striking between the position occupied by Abraham in Genesis 18, and that occupied by Lot in Genesis 19.

The Lord Jesus when asked by Judas, not Iscariot, "How is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" replied, "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). Again, "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 will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3: 20). Now, Abraham furnishes us with an exceedingly happy exemplification of the Galatians stands intimately connected with Gen. 16 - 17, and n. We also get the doctrine of justification by faith fully illustrated truth stated in the above passages. "The Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and He sat in *the tent door* in the heat of the day" (Gen. 18: 1). Here we find Abraham again in the full exhibition of his stranger character. *Mamre and the tent* are associated in our minds with the day of his triumph over the king of Sodom. Abraham is still a stranger and a pilgrim "dwelling in tabernacles." The revelation made unto him by the Almighty God had not altered the tone of his character in this respect, but had rather imparted fresh vigour and energy thereto. A simple dependence upon the promise of the Almighty God was the most effectual means of maintaining him in his stranger condition.

Now, it is, in the very highest degree instructive to see the honour here put upon the character and condition of the stranger. Throughout the wide range of the world there was just *one spot* in which the Lord could accept the rites of hospitality and make Himself at home, and that was "*in the tent of a pilgrim and stranger.*" The Lord would not honour the sumptuous halls and princely palaces of Egypt with His presence. No. All His sympathies and all His affections hung around the stranger of Mamre, who was the only one who, in the midst of an evil world could be induced to take God for his portion.

What a season of enjoyment it must have been to Abraham while those heavenly strangers sat with him and partook of the offerings of his generous heart. Mark how he calls forth into action all the energies of his house to do honour to his guests. He hastens from the tent to the field, and from the field to the tent again, and seems to lose sight of himself in his effort to make others happy.

Nor is it merely by partaking of Abraham's hospitality that the Lord gives expression to the high estimation in which He holds him He renews His promise to him with regard to the son — He opens up His counsels to him with reference to Sodom. "Shall I," says He "hide from Abraham that thing which I do seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? *For I know him*, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (vers. 17-19).

Here Abraham is seen as "*the friend of God.*" "The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth," but Abraham was made acquainted with what the Lord was about to do to Sodom, while Lot — the one who was so deeply interested in the solemn event — was left in profound ignorance about it.

How then does Abraham make use of his favoured position? Does he use it to strengthen more fully, and place on a firmer basis, the future interests of his house? Surely the natural heart would at once have prompted him to make such a use of his present advantage in the matter of nearness to Jehovah. Does he use it thus? Nay. Abraham had learnt too much of the ways of God to act in a way

savouring so much of the selfishness of a heartless world. But, even had he thought of such a thing, he had no need to utter a syllable on the subject, for "*the Almighty God*" had most amply satisfied his heart with regard to the everlasting interests of his house — He had fixed it upon such a foundation that an anxious thought would have evidenced a complete want of moral order in Abraham's soul. He therefore entertained not a thought about himself or his house, but like a genuine man of faith, *he takes advantage of his place in the presence of God to intercede for a brother, whose worldliness had plunged him into the very midst of that place which was about to be given over to everlasting destruction.* "And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (ver. 23) "*The righteous!*" to whom can he allude? Can it be to the man who had so deliberately turned aside out of the path of faith to take up his abode at Sodom? Yes; he speaks of Lot — he calls him "*righteous*" — he speaks of him in the very same terms as the Spirit in the apostle afterward speaks of him when he calls him a "*righteous soul.*" Abraham, therefore was taught of God when he could recognise in the man surrounded by all the pollution of Sodom "*a righteous soul.*"

{Although I consider Lot the principal object in Abraham's mind while interceding before the Lord, I do not forget there is mention made of "fifty," etc.}

I doubt not it will be admitted by every one taught of God that the conduct of Abraham in this chapter, furnishes us with one of the most important results of a holy and separated walk. We observe in it a man pleading with God in a most urgent strain for one who had turned his back upon him, and selected Sodom as the place of his abode. How completely must Abraham's soul have been lifted above "the things that are seen" when he could thus forget "the strife" and the departure, worldliness and evil of Lot, and plead for him still as "*a righteous soul.*" If Abraham appears as "*the friend of God*" under other circumstances and other scenes, surely he is here seen as the *child* of God exhibiting most sweetly those principles which he had learnt in communion with his heavenly Father.

We shall now leave Abraham, for a little, enjoying his happy place before the Lord, while we contemplate the last sad scene in the life of one who seems to have valued the things of this life more highly than was consistent with the character of "*a stranger and pilgrim*" or "*a righteous soul.*" From the time that the separation took place between Abraham and Lot, the former seems to have proceeded "*from strength to strength;*" while the latter, on the contrary, seems to have proceeded only downwards, from one stage of weakness to another, until we find him, at the close, making shipwreck of everything, and merely "*escaping with his life.*" The loss of all his goods in the battle between the "*four kings and five*" does not seem to have had any effect upon the mind of Lot in the way of teaching him the evil or being mixed up with the world; yea, he seem to have become more deeply involved in worldliness after that event than he had been before; for, at the first, he merely "*itches this tent towards Sodom*" (Gen. 13: 12); but now we find him sitting "*in the gate*" (Gen. 19: 1), which, as we know, was then the place of honour. When once a man has put his hand to the plough if he begin to look back, we have been told by Him who cannot err, that "*he is not fit for the kingdom of God.*" Nor is it possible to count upon the fearful lengths to which a man may go when once the world, in any one of its varied aspects, has taken possession of his heart, or when once he has begun to turn his back upon the people of God. The terrible declension spoken of in Hebrews 10, which stops not short of "*trampling under foot the Son of God,*" has its beginning in the apparently simple act of "*forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.*" How needful, therefore, it is that we should take heed to our ways, and watch the avenues of our hearts and minds, lest any evil thing should get dominion over us, which, however trivial in itself, might lead to the most appalling results.

Now, it strikes me, that we have in the circumstance presented to us in the opening of Genesis 19 the full evidence of Lot's fallen condition. The Lord Himself does not appear at all. He remains at a

distance from the unholy place, and merely sends *His angels* to execute His commission upon the devoted city of Sodom. The angels, too, exhibit all the symptoms of distance and strangership — they refuse to go into Lot's house when invited, saying, "*Nay, but we will abide in the street all night.*" True, they subsequently enter into his house; but, if they do so, it is not so much to enjoy refreshment as to counteract the sad effects of Lot's wrong circumstances. How different was the scene at Lot's house from that which they had so lately witnessed at the tent of the stranger of Mamre! The tumult of the men of Sodom — to whom, notwithstanding all their ungodly deeds and ungodly speeches, Lot applies the title of "*brethren*" — the evident embarrassment of Lot at being discovered in such painful circumstances — the shocking proposal which he is constrained to make in order to screen his guests from the violence of the ungodly men of Sodom — the struggle at the door, and Lot's danger — all these things must have shocked the heavenly strangers, and stood in marked contrast with the holy peace and retirement of Abraham's tent, together with his own calm and dignified demeanour throughout the scene. Well might those angels have been astonished to find "a righteous soul" in such a place, when he could have enjoyed, in company with his separated brother, the peaceful and holy joys of his steady and consistent course.

But the time had now arrived for the pouring out of the cup of divine wrath upon Sodom. "The men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? . . . bring them out of *this place*: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it" (vers. 12-13). The critical moment which the Lord Jesus, in the gospel, notes by the exceedingly solemn word "UNTIL," was now at hand for the careless inhabitants of Sodom, who dreamed not of any interruption to their "eating, and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage." A moment's respite is allowed, during which Lot bears a message to his son-in-law, a testimony as to the rapidly approaching judgement; but, ah! what power could the testimony of one who had voluntarily come in and settled amongst them, have upon those who had lived and moved from their earliest infancy in the midst of the ungodly scene? How could Lot expect that his words would have any weight when his ways had so sadly contradicted them? He might now, with terrified aspect and earnest entreaties, urge them to leave a place which he knew was doomed to everlasting destruction, but they could not forget the calm and deliberate way in which he had at first "pitched his tent toward Sodom," and finally taken his seat "in the gate;" hence, as might be expected, "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law" (Gen. 19: 14). And how, so far as he was concerned, could it be otherwise? His sons-in-law might be, and doubtless were, responsible before God for the rejection of the testimony; but Lot could not, by any means, expect them to heed him much, indeed, we find that even he himself was tardy in departing from the place; for "*while he lingered*" — while his heart still went after some object or another that was dear to him — "*the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand's of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him forth and set him without the city*" (Gen. 19: 16). From this statement, it is manifest that, had not the men "laid hold of, and brought forth" Lot, he would, no doubt, have "lingered" on "*until the fire of God's judgement had fallen upon him, and prevented even his escaping with his life.*" But they "pulled him out of the fire," because "the Lord had mercy upon him."

But this escape of Lot's only served to put fresh honour upon Abraham, for we read that "when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he *remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow*" (ver. 29). Thus, as Abraham's sword had delivered Lot in the time of the conquest of Sodom, his prayer delivered him in the time of its final overthrow, "for the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Nor does the contrast between those two men stop here. There is yet another scene in which they stand at a great distance from each other as to the moral condition of their souls. "Abraham gat him up early in the morning, to the place where he stood before the Lord" (ver.

27). Here the man of faith, the holy pilgrim, once more raises his head amid the mighty scene of desolation. All was over with Sodom and its guilty inhabitants, "the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." Sad spectacle! The din and bustle of that once stirring city was hushed; silence reigned around — the buying and selling — the eating and drinking — the marrying and giving in marriage — all the intercourse of social life had been awfully broken in upon. The solemn "UNTIL" had come at last — the only one in all that wicked place who, notwithstanding his failure, could be regarded as "the salt," had been removed — the measure of Sodom's iniquity had been filled up — the day of divine long-suffering closed, and nothing now met the eye of Abraham but misery and desolation throughout all the plain. How melancholy! And yet it was but a type of the far more terrible desolation which shall sweep across this guilty world when the Son of man makes His appearance, "when every eye shall see Him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn and wail because of Him."

Thus, "Abraham stood *before the Lord*" completely exempt from all the sad effects of the recent visitation, as far as he was personally concerned. His stranger condition which, in the days of Chedorlaomer, had enabled him to live outside of Sodom and all its circumstances, still kept him free, and was the means of his escape from Sodom's unutterable woe and misery. Had Abraham, when solicited by the King of Sodom, mixed himself up with the things of Sodom, he would have been involved, in some measure, as was his brother Lot, in its overthrow. He himself would have been saved, but his work would have been burnt up. But Abraham was looking for "a city that hath foundations," and he knew at once that Sodom was not that city, and hence he would have nothing whatever to do with it. He would "hate even the garment spotted by the flesh" — he would "touch not the unclean thing," and now he was permitted to realise the blessed results of his conduct, for, while Lot had to retreat in confusion and sorrow to a cave in the mountains, his wife and all his possessions being lost, Abraham takes his stand, in all that blessed calmness and dignity which ever characterised him, in the presence of Jehovah, and from thence surveys the heart-rending scene.

But what of Lot? How did he end his course? "Oh, tell it not in Gath! publish it not in the streets of Askelon!" Well may we desire to throw a veil over the closing scene of the life of one who does not seem to have ever realised, as he should, the power of the *call of God*. He had always displayed a secret desire for the things of Egypt or those of Sodom His heart does not seem to have been thoroughly detached from the world, and therefore his course was always unsteady; from the time he separated himself from Abraham, he went from bad to worse — from one stage of evil to another, until at last the scene closes with the shocking transaction in the cave; the sad results of which were seen in the persons of Moab and Ammon, the enemies of the people of God.

Thus ended the course of Lot, whose history ought to be a solemn warning to all Christians who feel a tendency to be carried away by the world. The history has not been left on record without a purpose. "Whatever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning," may we therefore learn from the above narrative, "not to lust after evil things," for, although "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation," yet it is our place to keep as much out of the way of temptation as we can, and our prayer should ever be "lead us not into temptation." "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2: 17)

Genesis 20 — Genesis 21

Lot has now passed off the scene — his sun has gone down amid thick clouds and a gloomy atmosphere; it now remains for us to pursue, for a few moments longer, the narrative of Abraham's ways, and God's dealings with him.

There was one point involved in Genesis 12 which I left untouched, knowing that it would come

before us again in this place.

When Abraham went down into Egypt, he entered into a compact with Sarah his wife to *conceal part of the truth*, "Say, I pray thee," said he, "thou art my sister" (Gen. 12: 13). One evil ever leads to another. Abraham was moving in the wrong direction when he went down into Egypt for help, and therefore did not exhibit that refinement of conscience which would have told him of the moral unsoundness of this mental reservation. "Speak every man truth with his neighbour," being a divine principle, would always exercise an influence upon one walking in communion with God; but Abraham's desire to get out of present trial was an evidence of failure in communion, and hence "his moral sense," as a recent writer has termed it, was not as keen or as elevated as it should have been. However, although the Lord plagued Pharaoh's house because of his having taken Sarah into it, and further, although Pharaoh rebukes Abraham for his acting in the matter, yet the latter says nothing whatever about the deliberate compact into which he had entered with his wife, to keep back part of the truth; he silently takes the rebuke and goes on his way, but the root of the evil remained still in his heart, ready to show itself at any time if circumstances should arise to draw it out.

Now, it is marvellous to behold Abraham coming up out of Egypt — building an altar and pitching a tent — exhibiting the noble generosity of faith — vanquishing Chedorlaomer and repulsing the temptation of the King of Sodom — urging his request for a son and heir, receiving the most gracious answer — on his face before God in the sense of His almighty grace and power — entertaining the heavenly strangers and interceding for his brother Lot. In a word, I say, it is marvellous to behold Abraham passing through such brilliant scenes, comprising a series of years, and, all the while, this moral point, in which he had erred at the very threshold of his course, remains unsettled in his heart. True, it did not develop itself during the period to which I have just referred, but why did it not? Because Abraham was not in circumstances to call it out, but there it was notwithstanding. The evil was *not fully brought out* — not confessed, not got rid of — and the proof of this is, that the moment he again finds himself in circumstances which could act upon *his weak point*, it is at once made manifest that the weak point is there. The temptation through which he passed in the matter of the King of Sodom, was not by any means calculated to touch this peculiar point; nor was anything that occurred to him from the time he came up out of Egypt until he went down into Gerar, calculated to touch it, for had it been touched, it would no doubt have exhibited itself.

We never can know what is in our hearts until circumstances arise to draw it out. Peter did not imagine that he could deny his Lord, but when he got into circumstances which were calculated to act upon his peculiar weakness, he showed that the weakness was there.

It required the protracted period of forty years in the wilderness to teach the children of Israel "what was in their hearts" (Deut. 8: 2) and it is one of the grand results of the course of discipline through which each child of God passes, to lead him into a more profound knowledge of his own weakness and nothingness. "We had the *sentence of death in ourselves*, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1: 9). The more we are growing in the sense of our infirmities, the more shall we see our need of clinging more closely to Christ — drawing more largely upon His grace, and entering more fully into the cleansing virtue and value of His atoning blood. The Christian, at the opening of his course, never knows his own heart; indeed, he could not bear the full knowledge of it; he would be overwhelmed thereby. "The Lord leads us not by the way of the Philistines lest we should see war," and so be plunged, in despair. But He graciously leads us by a circuitous route, in order that our apprehension of His grace may keep pace with our growing self-knowledge.

In Genesis 20, then, we find Abraham again, after the lapse of many years, falling into the old error, a suppression of truth, for which he has to suffer a rebuke from a mere man of the world. The man of the world, in this scene, seemed, for the moment, to possess a more refined moral sense than the man of God. "Said he not unto me," says he, "'She is my sister'! and she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother': in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this." But mark how God enters the scene for the purpose of vindicating His servant. He says to Abimelech, "Behold, thou art but a dead man." Yes, with all "the integrity of his heart and innocency of his hands" — with all his fine moral sense of right and wrong, he was "but a dead man," when it came to be a question, for one moment, between him and even an erring child of God. God, in His grace, was looking at His dear servant from quite a different point of view from that adopted by Abimelech. All that the latter could see in Abraham was a man guilty of a manifest piece of deception, but God saw more than that, and therefore He says to Abimelech, "Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." What dignity is here put upon Abraham! God himself vindicates him before the world! Not a syllable of reproof! — not a breath of disapprobation! — no, *"he is a prophet and he shall pray for thee and thou shalt live."* How truly consolatory it is for the poor, weak, and harassed believer to remember that His Father is ever viewing him through the medium of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sees nothing whatever upon His child but the excellency and perfectness of Jesus. Thus, while a man of the world may have to rebuke a child of God, as in the case before us, God declares that He values that character which the believer has received from Him more than all the amiability, integrity, and innocency that nature can boast of.

{It has been observed that, if we look through a piece of stained glass, it will cast its peculiar hue upon everything at which we look; we may view the greatest variety of colours, yet do we see in all the shade of the medium through which we are looking. So it is with God. The Medium through which He views His people is Christ; hence, He sees not their various shades and imperfections, for all present to His eye the perfectness of the Lord Jesus. As He is, so are we.

“Beholders, many faults may find
But they can guess at Jesus mind,
content, if written in His book.”}

This reminds us of the way in which the Lord vindicates the Baptist before the multitude, although He had sent a message to himself which must have exercised him deeply: "I say unto you, among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet then John the Baptist" (Luke 7: 28). Thus, whatever unfavourable aspect the child of God may wear in the world's view, God will ever show Himself the vindicator of such. "He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm" (1 Chr. 16: 21-22).

However, as was observed with regard to John the Baptist, the message sent from the Lord to His servant must have exercised his spirit deeply in secret, so is it in Abraham's case. Abraham must have felt deeply humbled in his soul at the thought of what had occurred, and the consciousness of the fact that God would not enter into judgement with him about it would have augmented that feeling. When Abraham fell into the same error in Egypt we do not find that Pharaoh's reproof produced any manifest effect. He was not humbled by it to such a degree as to make a full confession of the whole thing. He takes his departure out of Egypt, but the root of evil remains in his heart, ready to shoot forth its pernicious branches again. Not so in Genesis 20; here we get at once at the root of the matter — Abraham opens up his whole hearts he confesses that from the very first moment of his course he had retained this thing in his heart which had twice betrayed him into an act, which, to say the least of it,

would not bear the light. And as there is the full confession of the evil on his part, so is there the complete renunciation of it — he gets rid of it fully, root and branch. The leaven is put forth out of every corner of his heart, he hearkens to Abimelech's reproof and profits by it; it was God's instrument by which He brought out the matter, and delivered the soul of his servant from the power of evil.

But, in addition to the point upon which we have been dwelling, there was yet another question to be settled ere Abraham could reach the most elevated point of his course as a man of faith. The bondwoman and her son were yet in the house. He must put forth these from *his house* as he had put forth the evil from *his heart*. The house and the heart must be cleared out. In Genesis 21 we find matters brought to a crisis with regard to the bondwoman and her son, concerning whom we have heard comparatively nothing until now. The element of bondage had heretofore lain dormant in Abraham's house because not roused into action, by anything of an opposite nature and tendency. But in the birth of Isaac — the son of the free woman — the child of promise — we see a new element introduced. The spirit of liberty and the spirit of bondage are thus brought into contact, and the struggle must issue in the expulsion of either one or the other. They cannot move on in harmony, for "how can two walk together except they be agreed."

Now we are invited by the apostle, in his Epistle to the Galatians, to behold in these two children, "the two covenants," the one *gendering to bondage*, the other *to liberty*; and further, to behold in them samples of the fleshly and spiritual seed of Abraham, the former, "born after the flesh," the latter, "born after the Spirit." Nor can anything be more marked than the line of demarcation between, not only the two covenants, but the two seeds. They are totally distinct the one from the other, and can never, by any operation, be brought to coalesce. Abraham was made to feel, and that painfully, this fact. "Cast out this and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac" (Gen. 21: 10). Here the natural result shows itself. The two elements could not mingle. As well might the north and the south winds be expected to blow in all their strength without exciting a convulsion in the elements.

But it was most painful work to Abraham to be obliged thus to thrust forth his son. "The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son;" but it mattered not, he must be put out, for the son of a bondwoman could never inherit the promises made only to the spiritual seed. If Ishmael were to have been retained, it would have been an open allowance of the claims of the flesh. Abraham would have found something "as pertaining to the flesh and would thus have had "whereof to glory." But no — all God's promises are to be made good to those who, like Isaac, are the children of promise, born after the Spirit, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1: 13). Ishmael was manifestly born "of the will of the flesh, and of the will of man," and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." The flesh must therefore be set aside and kept under, no matter how "grievous" it may be to our hearts. The Christian will often find it grievous enough to keep down the old principle which ever lusts against the new, but the Lord gives spiritual power for the struggle so that "we are more than conquerors through Him that loves us."

But it is not my present purpose to pursue the doctrinal matter involved in this instructive history; were I to do so it would carry me far beyond the limits I have prescribed for myself in this little paper, the design of which is, as before observed, simply to direct attention to a few leading principles put forward in the narrative. I will therefore pass on to the next chapter which is the last of the section laid out for consideration.

Genesis 22

The circumstances through which Abraham passed in chapters 20 and 21 were most important

indeed. An evil which had long been harboured in his heart had been put away; the bondwoman and her son, who had so long retained quiet possession of his house, were cast out, and he now stands forth as "a vessel sanctified and meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work."

"And it came to pass *after these things*, that God did tempt [or try] Abraham." Here Abraham is at once introduced into a place of real dignity and honour. When God tries an individual it is a certain evidence of His confidence in him. We never read that "God did tempt Lot" — no, the goods of Sodom furnished a sufficiently strong temptation for Lot. The enemy laid a snare for him in the well-watered plains of Sodom which he seemed but too prone to fall into. Not so with Abraham. He lived more in the presence of God, and was, therefore less susceptible of the influence of that which had ensnared his erring brother.

Now, the test to which God submits Abraham — the furnace in which He tries him, marks at once a pure and genuine metal. Had Abraham's faith not been of the purest and most genuine character, he would assuredly have winced under the fiery ordeal through which we behold him passing in this beautiful chapter. When God promised Abraham a son, he believed the promise "and it was counted unto him for righteousness." "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." But then, having received this son, having realised the truth of the promise, was there not a danger that he would rest in the *gift* instead of in the *Giver*? Was there not a danger that he would lean upon Isaac, in thinking upon the future seed and future inheritance, rather than upon God Himself who had promised him the seed? Surely there was; and God knew that, and therefore tries His servant in a way, more than anything, calculated to put him to the test as to the object on which his soul was resting. The grand inquiry put to Abraham's heart, in this wondrous transaction, was, "are you still walking before the Almighty God, the quickener of the dead?" God desired to know whether he could apprehend in Him the One who was as able to raise up children from the ashes of his sacrificed son as from the dead womb of Sarah. In other words, God desired to prove that Abraham's faith reached forth, as some one has observed, *to resurrection*, for if it stopped short of this, he never would have responded to the startling command, "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" (Gen. 22: 2). But Abraham "staggered not." He at once responds to the call. God had asked for Isaac, and Isaac must be given, and that too without a breath of murmur. He could give up anything or everything so long as his eye rested upon "the Almighty God." And mark the point of view in which Abraham puts this journey of his to Mount Moriah, "I and the lad will go yonder and *worship*." Yes, it was an act of worship, for he was about to lay upon the altar of the Quickener of the dead the one in whom all God's promises centred. It was an act of worship — most elevated worship, for he was about to prove, in the sight of Heaven and hell, that no other object filled his soul but the Almighty God. Hence, what calmness! what self-possession! what pure devotion! what elevation of mind! what self-renunciation! He never falters throughout the scene. He saddles the ass, prepares the wood, and sets off to Mount Moriah, without giving expression to one anxious thought, although, as far as human eye could see, he was about to lose the object of his heart's most tender affection, yea, the one upon whom the future interests of his house, to all appearance, depended.

Abraham, however, showed most fully that his heart had found a nearer and dearer object than Isaac, dear as he was; he showed also that his faith was resting upon another object altogether with reference to the future interests of his seed, *and that he was as simply resting upon the promise of Almighty God after the birth of Isaac as before it.*

Behold, then, this man of faith as he ascends the mount, taking with him his "well-beloved"! What a scene of breathless interest!

{It strikes me that we get, in Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah a remarkable type of the mysterious scene afterwards exhibited at Calvary, when God was really providing Himself a lamb. We can have no difficulty in losing sight of Herod and Pilate, the chief priests and scribes, the Pharisees and the multitude, and thus we have none remaining but the Father and the Son who, in company, ascend the Mount and carry out the gracious work of redemption in the unbroken solitude of that place.}

How must the angelic hosts have watched this illustrious father from stage to stage of his wondrous journey, until at last they beheld his hand stretched forth for the knife to slay his son — that son for which he had so long and ardently wished, and for which he had so steadily trusted God. Then again, what an opportunity for Satan to ply his fiery darts! What abundant room for such suggestions as the following, viz., "What will become of the promises of God with regard to the seed and the inheritance, if you thus sacrifice your only son? *Beware* that you are not led astray by some false revelation; or, *if it be true* that God has said so and so, doth not God know that, in the day you sacrifice your son, all your hopes will be blasted? Further, think of Sarah; what will she do if she lose Isaac, after having induced you to expel from your house Ishmael?" All these suggestions, and many beside, the enemy might bring to bear upon the heart of Abraham. Nor would Abraham himself have been beyond the region of those thoughts and reasonings which, at such a time, would not fail to arise within him. What then was his answer to all such dark suggestions? RESURRECTION! "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: ACCOUNTING THAT GOD WAS ABLE TO RAISE HIM UP, EVEN FROM THE DEAD; FROM WHENCE ALSO HE RECEIVED HIM IN A FIGURE" (Heb. 11: 17-19).

Resurrection is God's mighty remedy for all the mischief and ruin introduced by Satan; when once we arrive at this point, we have done with the power of Satan, the last exercise of which is seen in death. Satan cannot touch the life that has been received in resurrection, for the last exercise of his a power is seen in the grave of Christ; beyond that he can do nothing. Hence the security of Church's place; her "life is hidden with Christ in God." Blessed hiding place! May we rejoice in it more and more each day.

I will now draw this paper to a close. We have followed Abraham in his course, from Ur of the Chaldees up to the Mount Moriah — we have seen him resign, at the call of God, family and kindred, lands and possessions, worldly ease and prosperity; and lastly, we have seen him, in the power of faith, at the same call of God, ascend the solitary mount, for the purpose of laying "his only begotten" upon God's altar, and thus to declare that he could give up everything and every one but God Himself — and that, being acquainted with the meaning of "THE ALMIGHTY" and "RESURRECTION," he cared not though he were called to look to the stones for the raising up of seed unto him.

On the other hand, we have followed Lot from Ur of the Chaldees also; but alas! his path was a far different one from that of his brother. He does not seem to have realised the power of the call of God in his own soul; he moved rather under Abraham's influence than under that of Jehovah; hence we find that, while Abraham was, at every step of his journey, letting go the world, Lot was doing the very reverse; he was grasping at the world in every shape and form, and he obtained that at which he was grasping, but what then? What of the end? Ah, that is the point. What of Lot's end? Instead of being a noble spectacle unto angels, and a pattern to all future generations of the faithful — of what faith can enable a man "to do and to suffer" for God — he was just the reverse; he was led away by the enemy of his soul, who ensnared him by means of the things of the world; he spent his days amid the uncleanness of Sodom, and the scene closes with the sad circumstances in the cave. All he did for God or his people

was to beget the Ammonite and the Moabite, the enemies of both.

How wondrous then is that grace, which, speaking of the history of such an one, could say, "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds" (2 Peter 2: 7-8).