

## **GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM REITERATED.**

– GEN. 15:1-18. – AUG. 11. –

**"I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."**

LOT had not lived a great while in Sodom when king Chedorlaomer descended upon the Sodomites with an army and took away many persons and great spoils of flocks, herds, etc., including Lot and his family and possessions. Word of this affair reached Abraham, who armed his own servants, 318, and with two associates pursued the victors, who, doubtless expecting no army or night attack, were careless as to their defenses, and being surprised by a night attack were routed; and Lot and his family and goods, and the Sodomites and their goods were released. The conduct of Abraham in connection with this matter was most noble and unselfish. Not only did he inconvenience himself and all his affairs for the sake of others, but subsequently he refused any share of the booty which he had saved. Would that the children of God could fully appreciate such benevolence and copy it more in the little affairs of life! Much of the distress prevailing in the world is the direct or indirect result of selfishness, and all of the Lord's people should be on the alert to practice and to exemplify the opposite spirit of benevolence in the little things as well as in the great things of life; and should remember that selfishness is a depravity, which needs to be fought against, and to be, so far as possible, overcome by the new nature.

One would have supposed that Lot's vexatious experience in Sodom, and after experience in his capture and subsequent deliverance by his uncle, would have led him to desire a reunion with his uncle, with a keener appreciation than ever of the fact that God was with his uncle, blessing him and guiding his affairs and interests. But this does not seem to have been the case: he

was still willing to cast his lot with the ungodly. He reminds us of the words of the Psalmist, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." (Psa. 1:1) Lot did not pursue this course, and hence failed of a blessing. It was not sufficient that his righteous soul should be "vexed" continually by the misconduct of those about him; his love for righteousness should have been such as to lead him to the sacrifice of temporal interests on behalf of his own heart and on behalf of the interests of his family. Let all of the Lord's people who may find themselves in a similar position remember the Apostle's words, "Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." – Heb. 12:13.

It was directly after his experience in the delivery of Lot and the defeat of Chedorlaomer, and while Abraham was evidently feeling somewhat disheartened or discouraged, that the Lord again manifested himself to him. We do not know the cause of the discouragement, but may infer that he realized that in his attack upon, and defeat of the army and the military **[R2853 : page 248]** forces behind it, he had probably incurred a displeasure which could not be wiped out by anything short of the destruction of his own camp. As ever, Abraham was peaceably disposed; and the battle he had just won implied the straining of his whole nature. He had done what he considered to be his duty in the interest of justice, and especially in the defense of his own ward, Lot; but now that the excitement was past the reaction set in, and with it certain gloomy feelings and forebodings. So also some of the Lord's people today have moments in which for various reasons the flame of faith and hope smokes, and darkens the eyes of their understanding and the clearness of their perception of the divine character and plan; but if they still hold firmly by faith to the hands of divine providence they will find, as Abraham did, that even the trials

and difficulties and discouragements of life will be overruled for good to them.

It was while Abraham was downcast that the Lord appeared to him in vision and said to him, in the language of our Golden Text, "Fear not Abraham: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Apparently this was the great lesson that God was teaching him and which he was learning by the experience permitted, much better than had the Lord not delayed some of the promised favors. Abraham was now 84 years old; and, altho wealthy and highly favored of the Lord, he was a pilgrim and a stranger, away from kindred and home through his respect to the divine call and promise. He had no children to cheer and enliven and comfort his home, and even his nephew, Lot, whom he had not detained unwillingly, had preferred the companionship of the wicked and had left him, and even when rescued from his enemies, at the cost of danger and sacrifice, he had not appreciated the matter fully, and still preferred the strangers.

No wonder poor Abraham felt as tho his life, passing quickly by, was a comparative failure – no wonder he felt discouraged. How the words of the vision must have brought new thoughts, new sentiments to his heart; God was his *shield* – to protect him, to guard him from the anger and power of all the kings of earth and their armies, and able and willing to make all things work together for his good. What a comfort was in this thought. How it reminds us that God is our shield also; our protector from every evil thing and power. The thought is beautifully expressed in one of our hymns: –

"Shield of my soul, tho tempests rage,  
And 'gainst me hosts of foes engage,  
My refuge and my fortress thou;  
Before thee every foe must bow."

The latter part of the message is no less striking: the fact that, nor flocks nor herds nor servants nor children nor friends, were to be the *prize* upon which his heart should be set; but that God himself was to be his *reward*; – the having of God for a friend and counselor and guide was to be esteemed far beyond every earthly interest and blessing. And so it is also with the Church of the Gospel age. We may have blessings or adversities or both, as respects the present life. We have promises which pertain to the life that now is and also to that which is to come; but all of these together are inferior, subordinate to the one great thought that God, the great Creator is ours, – our Father, our God, our Friend.

Undoubtedly Abraham's heart was comforted by this message; and yet his reason was still operative, and hence his inquiry of the Lord, How can you bless me and fulfil to me your gracious promises, seeing that I go childless – seeing that my servant Eliezer and his children are the only heirs apparent for my estate? Is **[R2854 : page 248]** it wonderful, Lord, that I should feel discouraged, seeing that apparently the most indispensable part of your promise is unfulfilled for now fourteen years, and that Sarah and myself are growing old; and that even my nephew, Lot, who might have perpetuated the family and been the heir of my estate, cares not for me and has gone from me? The Lord was not displeased to have Abraham use his reason in this manner, for it was not a reasoning of skepticism or doubt as respected the divine power, but merely the proper questioning of faith as to how the promises on which he had left his home could be fulfilled; and a request for guidance in understanding. And so may we inquire of the Lord respecting his gracious promises. Indeed, he invites us to reason, saying, "Come, let us reason together." In Abraham's case the Lord merely repeated and amplified previous statements to the effect that he should have a child of his own who should be his heir; and leading him out from his dwelling

in the starry night, he assured him that his children would yet be multitudinous as the stars of heaven. This feature of the promise evidently applies to the spiritual Seed – the Christ, the elect of God, Head and body, as explained by the Apostle. (Gal. 3:29; 1 Pet. 1:2.) The other expressions, – "as the dust of the earth," and "as the sands of the sea," represent, not the natural children of Abraham, but the whole number of the human family who, under the blessing of the spiritual Seed, during the Millennium, shall ultimately attain to the *faith* and *obedience* of Abraham, and full human restitution and the Lord's reward for these – life everlasting. – Rom. 11:12,15,32.

The record is that Abraham believed on the Lord – his faith in God triumphed over every obstacle and rested securely, confidently; – his doubts and fears fleeing away. The faith of Abraham is the particular point **[R2854 : page 249]** of his character prominently set before us in the Scriptures for the encouragement of our faith, for our example. Abraham was not perfect, even as others of our race are imperfect, – "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10.) But we are told that God so highly esteemed Abraham's faith that he counted it as making up for his natural blemishes and imperfections. "It was counted [reckoned] to him for righteousness." (Rom. 4:3.) He had faith in what God had told him, and, as James (2:22) points out, he manifested his faith by his general conduct. We of the Gospel age are also justified by faith – righteousness is reckoned to us through the exercise of faith – but not faith in the same promises.

God does not promise us earthly children nor an earthly inheritance in the land of Palestine as he did promise to Abraham; hence we are not to have faith in the same things. As the Apostle says, God has given unto us "exceeding great and precious promises" – promises much greater than those given to Abraham: heavenly, instead of earthly promises. We are to

believe the promises given to us and to act upon them as implicitly as Abraham believed the promises given to him and acted upon them. The promises made to Abraham were attested by the Lord's word and by his oath, and similarly, tho on a still higher plane, the Lord has made known to us, has attested to us, his love and power, and his willingness to perform for us all the good things promised.

In answer to Abraham's request the Lord attested his promise in connection with sacrifices, after a manner that was probably customary at that time, as described in our lesson. The sacrificed animals, part over against part, were separated by a narrow path along which between the parts passed a small furnace enveloped in smoke, out of which shot a flame of fire. In connection with the weird scene the Lord revealed to Abraham that his posterity would not come into the land of promise for some four hundred years after his son should be born, but would have affliction as a people, even as Israel experienced this in Egypt. The four hundred years being a statement in round numbers, otherwise more explicitly stated as four hundred and thirty years, included the wanderings of Isaac and Jacob before going down into Egypt, as well as the captivity in Egypt. The revelation further pointed out the fact that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt would be with great wealth, and that in connection with it judgments of the Lord would come upon Egypt, and that meantime the Amorites, who then resided in Canaan, would fill to the full the measure of their iniquity, and fully deserve to lose the land of promise; and at that time Israel would be brought in to inherit it.

As God's favor and faithfulness toward Abraham were attested by the sacrifices and revelations of the divine plan, so do they testify to his faithfulness in this Gospel age, that we also may have strong consolation, and full assurance of faith. He testifies to us the fulness of his favor and love by showing us

the better sacrifices for sins, through which the New Covenant is sealed, ratified, made operative. He has shown us through his Word that darkness must prevail for a time, and that the Christ (Head and body) must be brought in contact with the fiery furnace of trial and affliction, the smoke of which might well represent the incidental confusion and darkness that necessitates our walk by faith and not by sight, while the flame of light would represent our guidance by the holy Spirit. Being thus assured by the Lord of his love for us, and of the bountiful provision made for our welfare, and of the necessity for trials, persecutions and difficulties during the time of the great darkness, we are strengthened in our faith and enabled to endure as seeing him who is invisible, and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

It was at this time that the Lord revealed to Abraham that the great blessings already promised him were to have a far distant fulfilment – for it was here indicated that he should die and his children not inherit the land for some four hundred years: and that he would not see the fulfilment of the promises, altho a part of the promise was that he, as well as his seed, should inherit the land, and join in the work of universal blessing and uplifting of humanity. Abraham was thus indirectly taught to hope in the resurrection, for this last revelation clearly implied that he could have neither part nor lot in it except God would raise him from the dead. And this was in full accord with the subsequent words of Stephen. (Acts 7:5.) It was no doubt for Abraham's good that the Lord did not tell him that it would be about four thousand years before the full blessing would begin; – did not reveal to him that the natural seed could not inherit all of the great promises; – that the likeness of his seed to the stars of heaven and to the sands of the sea were two different figures; – the first representing the spiritual and heavenly seed, and the other an earthly or human seed. It was to his advantage not to know that so long a time would elapse before the completion of

the spiritual seed, of which Christ is the Head and the Gospel Church the body; and that through this Seed, glorified, must come the blessings upon the earthly seed, and through the latter to all the families of the earth during the Millennial age.

But God has revealed these things to us, and we may well feel that we have more advantage every way in connection with the divine promises and plan than [R2854 : page 250] even faithful Abraham, whose trustfulness under very adverse conditions is a stimulus to all of God's children. We have not only his example, but many other noble examples, including that of our Lord and his apostles; and we can see, under the guidance of the Word, as revealed by the spirit, that all things have been and are yet working together harmoniously for the development of the Lord's great plan for man's salvation, briefly summarized in his promise to Abraham, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Nothing is more evident than that God's promises to Abraham have not yet been fulfilled. Abraham reasoned that they would not be fulfilled in his day; Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets reasoned that they had not been fulfilled during the Jewish age; and the Apostle declares that the whole twelve tribes of Israel were still waiting for the fulfilment of those promises in his day. (Acts 26:6,7.) Those promises have surely not been fulfilled during this Gospel age, as we all are witnesses – the natural seed of Abraham has been outcast, persecuted and without divine favor, while the true ones of spiritual Israel, though possessed of divine favor and rejoicing therein, have been persecuted and caused to suffer for righteousness' sake, and thereby to learn lessons of patience and experience to prepare them for the great work they are yet to do in fulfilment of the divine promises to Abraham.

The Apostle Paul clearly sets this matter forth in Gal. 3:16-29. He tells us that Christ is the Seed of Abraham – the spiritual Seed; and are not we "members of the body of Christ," over whom, as the Scriptures declare, Jesus Christ is the head forever under God's blessing? (Eph. 1:22,23.) And so the Apostle declares (vs. 29), "If ye be Christ's [members], then are ye Abraham's Seed, and *heirs* according to the promise."

And if the Lord's saints are still heirs of that Abrahamic promise, assuredly it proves that the promise has not yet reached fulfilment. Thank God that we are still privileged to be *heirs* of that wonderful promise, "heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together." Let our faith be strong, trusting in the promise and in him who made it, who is able to do for us, and for all who trust in him, exceedingly abundantly more and better things than we know how to ask or **[R2855 : page 250]** expect. Let us through patient perseverance, based upon an undimmed faith, complete our sojourning here; and by the Lord's grace make our calling and election sure to a share in the promised glory, honor and immortality, and in the opportunity to bless, which the Lord purposes to give to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

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