

"THE GIFTS AND CALLINGS OF GOD."

– GENESIS 12:1-8. – FEBRUARY 10. –

Golden Text: – "I will bless thee and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing."

OUR LESSON relates to the call of Abram (high father), whom God renamed Abraham (father of a multitude), although indirectly the special point of the lesson refers to the calling of Abraham's seed, natural and spiritual, and the divine bestowments to them, constituting them the centers of hope to the world of mankind. Already they have been greatly used of the Lord, but the Scriptures indicate that their influence and usefulness toward their fellow-creatures have only begun, and will reach their glorious culmination during the Millennium. Abraham's early life was spent at Ur of Chaldea, the ruins of which (now known by the name of Mugheir) are being excavated and explored. They indicate that it was once a seat of business activity, and Professor Sayce says that the name Abram (Abu-Ramu) is found on early Babylonian contract tablets, and some tablets recently unearthed at Ur contain part of the story of the deluge. Scholars are hoping to find in these ruins the Babylonian library, containing the original tablets from which the narratives of the creation and flood were copied for the library of Nineveh.

We are to remember that Abraham was born two years after the death of Noah, and that Noah's father, Lamech, was born fifty-six years before Adam's death – hence the chain of tradition had few links up to Abraham's time, even though the period was nearly 2,000 years long. It is not strange, therefore, that the story of the creation and of the flood are found in the land of the Chaldeans at a date prior to Moses' writings – the Pentateuch. It should always be borne in mind that the Scriptures make no claim that Moses was present at the time of creation or at the time of

the flood, nor that the writer was a witness of the other incidents recorded in Genesis. Moses was merely the recorder who, under the same divine supervision and direction that enabled him to be the Law-giver and commander of typical Israel, was used as God's amanuensis in recording for our benefit such events in the lives of individuals, as well as their chronologies, as would help to perfect the chain of previous history. We should remember, also, that the records of God's doings would be appreciated by those who are loyal to him, amongst whom must be included Noah and his family, and that Abraham, as we have seen, was directly in this line – a scion of one of the best branches of Noah's immediate posterity.

THE REIGN OF SIN

The indications are that idolatry and immorality had taken firm hold upon that branch of Noah's family (Shem) **[R3936 : page 41]** of which Abraham came, and which is recognized to this day as the highest and noblest branch and the one most favored by the Almighty. The assumption is not unreasonable, therefore, that Abraham's father, Terah, and his two elder brothers, Haran and Nahor, were considerably influenced by this spirit of idolatry. The record is that God first communicated with Abram while he resided at Ur, indicating the propriety of a change of residence to Canaan. Apparently he had considerable influence with the family, so that they all removed from Ur, a distance of about six hundred miles northward to Haran, possibly a place of their own establishment and named after Terah's eldest son, who died about that time.

Whether it was God's revelation to Abraham or the death of his son Haran that influenced Terah and the family to remove from Ur we cannot know – possibly both incidents had their influence. However, it was not God's design to call Abraham's entire family but merely himself. Hence, apparently with the

Lord's approval, Abraham remained in Haran for five years, until the death of Terah. Then, with his share of the property, with his wife Sarah, who was also his half sister, and with Lot, the son of his deceased brother Haran, Abraham carried out the divine arrangement by removing from Haran into the land of Canaan, a journey of about three hundred miles more. The clear intimation of the Scriptures is that in this matter Abraham acted in harmony with God's directions, along the lines of faith and obedience. We may infer that this obedience was rendered at the cost of earthly name and fame, and that Abraham must have been out of accord with the idolatry and licentiousness and immorality of his native place, as well as full of faith in God and fully in harmony with the divine principles of righteousness, and glad to be obedient to the Lord.

ABRAHAM WAS WEALTHY AND POWERFUL

A lesson for us here is, God first, righteousness first – before earthly prosperity, especially that which might be obtained through evil methods or other fellowship with the unrighteous. True, as the Apostle says, to have no dealings with the unrighteous might imply that we need to go out of the world, since unrighteousness is so prevalent; but as in Abraham's case the Lord's invitation to us is to separate ourselves as much as possible from people and circumstances and conditions whose tendency is downward toward sin, and to affiliate ourselves as much as possible with those influences which would help us to a closer walk with God. Although Abraham had no children he had a large number of persons under his care. These were his servants, and how numerous they were may be judged from the fact that a little later Abraham was able to muster 318 fighting men amongst them – the company who went after those who had taken Lot's property. This number of fighting men would imply a considerably larger number in the aggregate. It would appear, therefore, that Abraham was a very powerful sheik or prince of

that time, the number of whose flocks and herds, requiring so many servants must have been large indeed. No wonder his servant was able to tell Rebecca that Abraham [R3936 : page 42] was very rich. Much of those riches, of course, was gained in Canaan, but a considerable portion of it evidently went with him into Canaan.

FURTHER SEPARATION FROM IDOLATRY

When Abraham and his company had come into the land of Canaan under the Lord's direction, he settled for awhile at Shechem, that portion subsequently known as Samaria. But he did not remain there long, for, as we read, the Canaanite was still in the land. It was doubtless to be free from the immoral influences of the Canaanites, and to have his people separated from these, that Abraham removed subsequently to the mountainous country near Bethel. There he established his home, there he reared an altar to the Lord and prayed. Would that each head of a family were thus careful to look out for the interests of those under his charge, that these interests should be advantageous to their welfare everywhere! Would that more could realize how indispensable it is to have an altar to the Lord in their home, where the prayer incense would ascend to the Father through the merit of the Redeemer. The true altar not having been provided of the Lord, Abraham and others of his time reared altars of stone for use in the Lord's worship. But we have the Golden altar of the Holy, and are permitted to offer thereupon, as members of the body of the great High Priest, under him as our Head and glorious representative.

THE DIVINE PROMISE

Whenever God calls any for any purpose he sets before the called ones an object, a reason, a motive, and this he did with Abraham. He not only called him out of his own country to a life of separation from sin, but he attached to that a great promise,

which had a mighty influence upon the mind of Abraham and his children and all the Jewish nation, and since then upon all the spiritual Israelites, the Israelites indeed. The promise was that not only would Abraham receive a blessing, but that in and through him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This must have seemed a very obscure promise to Abraham, and his obedience to it was the more remarkable, so that he is held up to be as an example of a proper unquestioning faith in the word and wisdom of the Almighty – "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." He might have objected that he could do more good in Ur, where wickedness prevailed, than he could accomplish in the mountains of Palestine, where he and others under his godly influence were comparatively separate from others of the world. His faith was shown in that he did not attempt to argue the matter with the Lord, but obeyed implicitly. So it is with many of God's spiritual Israel of the present time: the call of the Lord comes, and his direction of word and providence seems perhaps from our standpoint to be not in harmony with our anticipations respecting his will and the attainment of his purposes.

And alas! how few of nominal spiritual Israel take Abraham's course and get Abraham's blessing. The obedient are only "a little flock," to whom it will be the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom and its great work of blessing all the families of the earth. Many of them are inclined to resist God's providences, not exercising a sufficiency of faith. Some determine that it is their mission to convert the world; others that they must engage in political reform; others that their efforts must be used in temperance work, thus bringing about a reign of righteousness. We are not disputing that all of these are good works, and that good motives are behind them; but we do claim that many of the dear friends who are zealous in these ways are not sufficiently attentive to the Word of God to be obedient to it.

As a consequence, many of them are disappointed and numbers are sidetracked.

How many temperance workers have become discouraged at the paucity of results they are able to attain! How many interested in foreign missions are disappointed that, whereas the number of heathen a century ago was estimated at about 600,000,000, statistics today tell us that they now number 1,200,000,000. We appreciate, and feel sure that God appreciates, their good intentions, their good endeavors; yet they are liable to make shipwreck of their faith because not heeding with sufficient care the voice of him that speaketh from heaven and who directs us, –

"THIS IS THE WAY, WALK YE IN IT"

The spiritual lesson in the story of Abraham is that God is pleased to honor faith, and that the experiences of life which he permits to come to the faithful are intended for their development in faith and in the graces of the holy Spirit, and that these all are unitedly a preparation for God's still greater work of the future.

Abraham was not sent as a missionary back to Haran or to Ur, nor indeed to the people who surrounded him. The Lord's message was, "Walk thou before me and be thou perfect." God, of course, knew that Abraham was actually imperfect, tainted by the fall, and this command, therefore, signified that his heart should be perfect – his will, his intentions, and his conduct as nearly as possible in harmony with God's perfect will. The Apostle Paul shows us that he was not justified on account of any righteousness of his own, for he puts Abraham with the list of ancient worthies who were justified not by the works of the Law but by faith, and who, because of their faith, "had this testimony that they pleased God." It was his faith that led Abraham into a strange country away from his kindred, because he trusted God; it was faith that enabled him to stand various tests by the way,

including the command to offer up his son as a sacrifice, his only son, in whom centered all the promises.

It was his faith in the promise of God – that in a future time through his seed a reign of righteousness would be established in the earth – that led Abraham to look for that city [government] of sure foundation upon principles of righteousness – the heavenly city, the government or kingdom of God's dear Son, which is to put down all insubordination and bring everything into subjection to the divine will. The seed of Abraham, the elect Church of this Gospel age, is to exercise divine power in the earth and cause every knee to bow and every tongue to confess; and after instituting a reign of righteousness and blessings thereby to all the families of the earth, is to deliver up the Kingdom, perfect and complete, to God, even the Father, at the close of the Millennial age. This was the promise made to Abraham, "In thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be **[R3937 : page 43]** blessed." And he was willing to waive his share in the governmental position and power of the present time under present adverse conditions, that he might have some share in the glorious Messianic Kingdom of the future.

"YE SHALL SEE ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB"

When Messiah's Kingdom, itself invisible, shall establish a reign of righteousness in the earth, it will have amongst men visible representatives, "princes in the earth." (Psa. 45:16.) And we are assured that Abraham will be one of these, and will thus have to do actively, prominently, with the establishment of the reign of righteousness and the demonstrations of justice and mercy and love to the world of mankind, "to all the families of the earth." He is mentioned as one of this class in Hebrews 11:39,40. At one time, in company with others, we surmised that Abraham would have been placed in the heavenly Kingdom of the spiritual class; but a more careful consideration of the matter

shows us, to the contrary, that he belongs to the class of ancient worthies of whom the Apostle declares that God has provided some better thing for us than for them, although their blessing shall be a great one. Abraham, styled the father of the faithful, the Redeemer says, "rejoiced to see my day: and saw it and was glad." (John 8:56.) By faith he saw the day of Christ, the Millennial day, the Kingdom well founded; by faith he rejoiced in the glorious reign of righteousness then to be established.

But while this blessing is to come to the world through the seed of Abraham, the Scriptures indicate that a great change takes place by which the seed, the child of Abraham, Christ, becomes greater than Abraham, as it is written, "Instead of the fathers shall be the children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth." Abraham, instead of being viewed any longer as the father of Messiah, will be recognized as one of his children, perfect on the earthly plane and made a prince amongst men, to be used as an active agent of the glorified Christ in dispensing the blessings secured by the great redemptive sacrifice. Referring to the matter, our Lord points out the fact that these ancient worthies will be visible to men, but properly enough says not a word about himself and the apostles or any of the Bride class being visible. The statement is, "Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets." The fact that the still more notable ones in the Kingdom are not referred to as seen is an evidence that they will not be seen by the world, and this comports with the Lord's statement to some in his day, "Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more." It agrees also with the declaration, "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Only those changed from human to spirit nature, under the terms of the Lord's arrangement of this Gospel age, will be spirit beings, and they alone therefore will be able to see, discern, the Lord and other spirit beings.

"WHICH SEED IS CHRIST"

The Apostle points out to us most distinctly that the seed of Abraham according to the flesh was Jesus, our Lord, who is now of the flesh no more, having sacrificed it and received the begetting of the Spirit to the new nature. He is now the glorified one, the Christ, Abraham's Lord and David's Lord. And the Apostle points out to us as a great mystery the fact that God during this Gospel age is selecting from amongst mankind some to be joint-heirs with Jesus in the Kingdom – to be members of the seed of Abraham. (Eph. 3:9; Acts 15:17; Rom. 8:17.) We ask how could this be, since the Law Covenant was added, and since Jesus alone fulfilled the terms of the Law Covenant and ended all the hopes and prospects it contained? Surely no Jew preceded our Lord in the matter, and surely, since our Lord has finished his course, the offer of the Law Covenant is no longer open to a Jew, as it never was open to a Gentile. Where, then, is the prospect for either Jew or Gentile being joined with Christ, in joint-heirship with Christ in this Abrahamic Covenant?

We reply that we are accepted of the Lord, as the "Bride of Christ," the "Lamb's Wife." The Church, composed in the beginning exclusively of Jews, and subsequently almost exclusively of Gentiles, is as a whole accepted by the Lord as his Bride, and by becoming joined to him and by union or marriage with him these, whether Jews or Gentiles, are made his joint-heirs. This is the Apostle's clear statement of the matter, for after telling that Christ is the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16) he adds a word respecting the Church, his prospective Bride, saying, "If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:29.) In the one figure we are accepted as members of the Lord's body, that is, when the Apostle says, "Ye brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise;" in another figure we are accepted as members of his Bride.

THE WIFE MADE READY

As our Lord was tested in all points yet without sin, so all of these who are counted worthy to be his members must similarly stand the testing to demonstrate their character-likeness to him and their worthiness of a share in his glorious Kingdom. Hence it does not surprise us that everywhere throughout the Scriptures appeals are made to the Lord's people, not so much respecting what they shall do for others as what they shall do for themselves and for each other. We are not opposing the thought of doing good unto all men as we have opportunity, but emphasizing the other thought that we are to do good "especially to the household of faith." We are to "build one another up in the most holy faith," we are to "lay down our lives for the brethren," we are to "comfort one another," "edify one another." In a word the Bride, the Lamb's Wife, is to "make herself ready" – not without the Bridegroom's supervision and assistance, but with it and as a part of it.

As the trial of faith was the most prominent feature of Abraham's testing, so it must needs be with us, his true children. It is the trial of your faith that is much more precious than gold, as the Apostle says, and he assures us that "without faith it is impossible to please God." For this reason it is required of those who now walk in the narrow way that they shall walk by faith and not by sight. When the time comes for the shining forth of the Sun of Righteousness and the scattering of the darkness and mystery that surrounds the divine character and word and the permission of evil, there will be plenty ready and able to walk by sight; but the Lord is now looking for the few, the little flock, able and willing to walk by faith, through evil report and good report, **[R3937 : page 44]** to trust him where they cannot trace him, and to demonstrate their loyalty by their faithfulness and their endurance even unto death. The trials of the present time upon the Gospel Church are with a view to testing the character,

with a view to determining who are worthy and who are unworthy to constitute the seed of Abraham, which God promised shall ultimately bless all the families of the earth.

SURE TO BOTH THE SEEDS

The Apostle declares that God promised not the blessing through the seeds of Abraham, as of many, but "in thy seed," as of one. We have already seen that this one seed is the Christ, but we now notice that while there are not many seeds there is another seed beside this Messianic class – a seed's seed, as it were. The Apostle clearly intimates this in his declaration respecting the Law and the Gospel, that the object was "that the promise might be sure to both the seeds," not only that which is according to the Spirit, but also that which is according to the Law. This was intimated also in the fact that a promise was made to Ishmael as well as to Isaac. But the promise to Ishmael proceeded through Isaac, the one seed of promise. Similarly the Lord's blessing on all the families of the earth must proceed through the one seed, which is Christ – the Messianic seed of Abraham.

St. Paul makes very clear that there is a double allotment of divine mercy and provision – one portion to the spiritual seed and another portion to the natural seed of Abraham. In Romans 11, where, after describing the rejection of the natural seed of Abraham and the acceptance of the spiritual seed, he points to the fact that at the end of this Gospel age the spiritual seed will be complete, and then he declares that the divine blessing shall go to the natural seed of Abraham again – to those who were once broken off, rejected and blinded because they were unable to realize and appreciate the spiritual part of the promise. For them then remains an earthly or natural part, and blessing will surely come to them, because God has already declared that "the Deliverer shall come out of Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob, because this is my covenant with them, when I shall take

away their sins. As concerning the Gospel they were enemies for your sakes, but as touching the promises of God they are beloved for the fathers' sakes: for the gifts and callings of God are things not to be repented of." – Rom. 11:26-29.

After thus most clearly specifying that God's gifts and callings from the remote past included the restoration of the [R3938 : page 44] Jews to divine favor at the close of the Gospel age, the Apostle proceeds to show how this blessing must come through the spiritual seed, saying, "They shall obtain mercy through your mercy" – through the mercy of the Gospel Church, the spiritual seed of Abraham, under Christ their Head.

"ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH"

The turning of God's blessing to Israel at the close of this Gospel age will include the exaltation to honorable service of the worthy ones of the past dispensation, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets – "princes in all the earth" – ensamples of perfect manhood, leaders of the people. But it will mean more than this, for the promise was not merely that through the seed of Abraham, spiritual, the natural seed of Abraham should be blessed, but "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Hence, as the Apostle points out, the Gospel Church is a "first-fruits unto God of his creatures" in one sense, a first-fruits on a spirit plane, and natural Israel will be a first-fruits of his creatures on an earthly plane; and in proportion to their willingness, under the guidance of the ancient worthies, they may be helpful to all the families of the earth in spreading knowledge of the great Messiah and the rules and regulations of his Kingdom, for the blessing and uplifting of all the families of the earth.

Mark how the Apostle declared that if the rejection of Israel meant a blessing to the Gentiles, will not the regathering of Israel signify life from the dead to the world in general. (Rom. 11:15.) It surely will. In order for the seed of Abraham according to the

flesh to realize the blessings God has promised, an awakening from the sleep of death will be necessary, since God is no respecter of persons. In a general sense it follows that these blessings which he has covenanted to give first to Israel, he is equally willing and able to give to all mankind in due time. O, how much of goodness and mercy God can crowd into a few words! How little Abraham was able to comprehend the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of divine blessing that was conferred upon him when the Lord said, "Because thou hast done this, in blessing I will bless thee and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed, and it shall be as the stars of heaven and the sand upon the seashore."

How little Abraham could have understood that the seed that was to be as the stars of heaven is the spiritual seed, and that the seed that shall be as the sand upon the seashore is the natural seed. In a word, not only those of fleshly Israel who accepted the blessings and favors of the Kingdom, but humanity in general, all the families of the earth, will be privileged to become the seed of Abraham through faith and obedience, even as we of this Gospel age who are Gentiles have been privileged through faith and obedience to become joint-heirs in spiritual Israel with those Jews who were Israelites indeed at the first advent.

THE GOLDEN TEXT

God's promise to Abraham was abundantly fulfilled in his own person: it was fulfilled also in his natural seed and in his spiritual seed. Surely, of all, the latter is the most blessed. What more could God say to us or do for us than he has already said and done? Lifting us from the horrible pit and miry clay of sin and condemnation, he has placed our feet upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and put a new song in our mouths. Yea, more, he has adopted us into his family and made us heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord "to an inheritance incorruptible and

undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." – 1 Pet. 1:4,5.

The declaration is added, "I will bless them that bless thee, and I will curse him that curseth thee." This does not refer to blessing by the lips or cursing by the lips merely, but rather appertains to conduct – he that does good to you, **[R3938 : page 45]** who favors you, I will favor; he that injures you I will permit to be injured. How this has been fulfilled in the case of the natural Jew, even in his outcast condition! Those nations which have maltreated the Jew have suffered, those which have treated him with kindness have been more or less blessed. And if we apply the same test to the Spiritual Seed of Abraham, does it not fit even better? Has there not come a blessing of the Lord to all those who have either said or done kindness to his true people, his faithful? and has not blight followed upon those who in any sense of the word have sought to do injury to the Lord's Anointed? "If God be for us who can be against us?"
