

## THE DANGER OF COVETOUSNESS

– *GENESIS 13:1-13.* – *FEBRUARY 17.* –

**Golden Text:** – "Take heed and beware of covetousness."  
– Luke 12:15.

IN OUR last lesson we left Abraham located at Bethel, where he had erected an altar to the Lord, indicating his continued reverence and his determination to accept the Lord's terms in all of his affairs. A famine in the land shortly after must have served to test the patriarch's faith. Was this the goodly Canaan, flowing with milk and honey? and would it be subject to drouths and famines? and if so, would it compare at all with the rich country of Ur of the Chaldees, whence he had come? Had he made a mistake? Was God as good as his word? Why was the famine permitted to be more disastrous to him than to the Canaanites, who were not a herding and shepherding people? Never questioning the Lord's wisdom, Abraham moved southward through the promised land and into Egypt, in whose rich lowlands of Goshen, well watered, there was usually an abundant pasturage – possibly, too, he made sale of some of his stock. We are not told that this visit to Egypt was contrary to the divine word or will, but the record does show that it brought Abraham into trying experiences. His wife Sarah was very beautiful, and, as he had surmised, the king was charmed with her and desired her for a wife. Here it was that Abraham showed a weakness in suggesting that Sarah should be known only as his sister – that her relationship as his wife should be kept secret, lest the king should kill Abraham in order to possess his wife. This is perhaps the only blemish we find in the history of Abraham. And doubtless the reproof administered by the human king for his lack of faith and lack of sincerity in the matter proved ultimately a great blessing to the patriarch; even as many

a Christian has been made stronger through a realization of his blemishes.

How improper it would be for us to judge Abraham according to that one misstep, and how equally improper it would be to judge Christians in so harsh a manner. If he who is styled "the father of the faithful" on one occasion exhibited so great a lack of faith, yet profited by his rebuke and became stronger than ever and more than ever the "friend of God," what may we not hope from others who have made some missteps? Not that we encourage such lapses from duty, but that we encourage those who have unwillingly stumbled to be not utterly cast down thereby, but to arise and take a more firm hold upon the hand of the Lord and to press with vigor on. Another lesson is in respect to the faithfulness of the Word of the Lord in portraying the weaknesses as well as the strong elements of character of those with whom it deals. In this respect it is not, like other histories and narratives, so arranged as to hide their blemishes and to disclose their virtues. The Bible sets forth matters very plainly, truthfully, in a manner that carries conviction respecting the honesty of the recorder and the faithfulness of the record.

### **"NONE RIGHTEOUS; NO, NOT ONE"**

Perfection is a thing we cannot hope to find in any member of the human race. The Scriptures are clear upon this (Rom. 3:10), and when Jesus the Messiah is introduced it is especially pointed out that he was distinctly separate from the Adamic race – that his life came not from Adam but from the heavenly Father, and that, therefore, he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," suited to be the Redeemer of Adam and his race – able to give to God a ransom price. Respecting the race in general the poet has well said: –

"There is a fleck of rust on a flawless blade,

On the costly armour there is one;  
There's a mole on the cheek of the lovely maid,  
There are spots upon the sun."

While God sets before us the standard of perfection, saying, "Walk thou before me and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1); and again, "Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48), it is nowhere intimated that it is possible for us while still in the flesh to attain to such perfection. On the contrary it is clearly set forth in the Scriptures that **[R3939 : page 45]** the perfection that is possible to us is that of the heart, the mind, the will, the intent, which will insure the conduct of the mortal body being as nearly to this standard as possible. It is right that the standard before us should be a perfect one, even as we set for our children the writing lesson that is flawless, without expecting that they will be able to duplicate its perfection, but desiring that by observation of the proper standard they may approximate thereto better than if a low standard had been set. Besides, God could not set an imperfect standard: for him to do so would mean his agreement in a measure with sin.

When judging ourselves it is proper that we keep this perfect standard before us, and yet – lest we should become utterly discouraged, and faint by the way – we must remember that it was because of our inability to do perfectly that the ransom price of our Lord was provided at all. When criticising the imperfections and **[R3939 : page 46]** weaknesses of others through heredity we can but imperfectly judge, and it is well that we use great liberality – indeed we are forbidden to judge the motives of the heart, and are assured that God alone could properly do this. It is when we see evil fruits, and find the heart, the will, taking them up and assisting and endorsing and not denying them, that we may be sure of the wickedness of the person; but even then we are incompetent to be judges, and are

not permitted to pass sentence or inflict penalty, but rather to say, "The Lord rebuke thee." – Jude 9.

Our lesson properly starts with the return of Abraham and his family, servants, flocks and herds, accompanied by his nephew Lot, who had separate interests. The record is that Abraham was very rich, literally heavy in cattle, in silver, and in gold. The statement is apparently made to indicate that the journey from Egypt back to Bethel was a slow one; it was referred to as journeys, as though there were frequent stops. Indeed we may well suppose that, with his faith in the promise of God – that his posterity would ultimately possess that entire land – Abraham was looking about with great interest upon this future inheritance, taking especial pleasure in the slow journeys. Returned to Bethel, his previous place of settlement, we find him again a worshiper, a sacrificer, presenting offerings to the Lord with prayers and thankfulness.

Fertile though the soil of Canaan was, the flocks and herds were numerous and required a great deal of room, and no doubt it was with difficulty that they were well watered; and since Lot had a separate establishment of his own, servants, flocks, herds, etc., it is not to be wondered at that some strife arose between the servants of Abraham and those of Lot. There is a lesson for all the Lord's people in the generous manner in which Abraham dealt with this quarrel. Pointing out the necessity for a separation, and that it was better to separate than to engender quarrels between their servants, which might ultimately culminate in a quarrel between themselves, Abraham gave Lot his choice of land. "Blessed are the peacemakers," said our Lord, and surely we have evidence here that Abraham was a man of peace and a peacemaker. Had Abraham been of a selfish spirit he would have made the choice, asserting his right by reason of seniority and the fact that the Lord had brought him thither and given the land to him, and that Lot was merely there by his

sufferance and as his friend anyway, and hence should be satisfied with whatever portion would be assigned to him.

Abraham had faith in God that all things would work for his good, and that the land would ultimately be for his posterity. Thus at rest in his mind, selfishness found no room for lodgment, and the Lord overruled the matter in such a manner as to be for Abraham's ultimate welfare. This generous conduct on Abraham's part assures us that he had been similarly generous with his nephew before, and we remember the testimony of the Lord that "the liberal soul shall be made fat"; and again, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." (Prov. 11:24,25.) All of the Lord's people, according to their circumstances and conditions, should be generous – not merely in earthly matters but especially in their hearts, in their minds, in their thoughts, benevolent and kindly.

### **LOT'S COVETOUS CHOICE**

The journey into Egypt opened the eyes of Lot to the luxuries of life: so now, when he attempted to make a choice for a home separate from that of Abraham, he chose that which most nearly paralleled the richness of Egypt, namely, the valley of the Jordan near its mouth, and accordingly he pitched his tent toward Sodom – that is to say, he established his headquarters at Sodom, where he would have the luxuries of town life while the herdsmen and shepherds cared for his flocks in the nearby green pastures. From a worldly standpoint Lot chose wisely, but from the true standpoint, in view of his highest interests, he made a bad choice. He should have considered the character of the people with whom he was about to dwell, their influence upon himself, his wife and daughters, for the record is that the people of Sodom were exceedingly wicked. Abraham would not have so chosen, but as he avoided Shechem and went apart by himself,

so he would have gone again even had he chosen the Jordan valley for a pasturage. He would have established a separate village for himself and for his people, and not have led them into the temptations of Sodom.

We are not to think of Lot as a bad man, who took delight in the wickedness of Sodom and chose it on that account. The Scriptures, on the contrary, designate him as "righteous Lot," and tell us that he was "sore distressed" by the lascivious life of the wicked Sodomites, "for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." (2 Pet. 2:7,8.) What then was the failure or wickedness of Lot's character that led him to choose and to remain in this undesirable locality to his own discomfort and to the injury of his family? Apparently it was his worldly mindedness, probably his desire to please his wife and his daughters. We are not intimating that he should have ignored the proper opinions and desires of his family, but, giving these legitimate weight, he should have decided that their moral interests were far above all others and should have marked his course accordingly.

There are many amongst the Lord's people today who are much in the position of Lot. They do not in time take counsel of the Lord as to what they shall do, where they shall locate, but rather run to their own understanding, and yield to the wishes of those over whom the Lord has made them the responsible caretakers. They love their families, but not wisely; they do for them, but not to their best interests and eternal welfare. They are vexed from day to day by the wickedness around them, and yet they get themselves into that very position deliberately and intentionally. The lesson is that we should follow Abraham's course and not Lot's – we should think more of the eternal interests and less of the temporalities. We are not meaning to say that all who would train their families properly must live in the

country and not in the city, for circumstances alter cases, and with many of us the Lord's work and our own spiritual advancement can be better served in the city than in the country. What we do urge is that all the Lord's true people should seek first, primarily, the will of the Lord, his righteousness, his service, the things that would make for their peace and their everlasting blessing, rather than the things of time and sense and ease and worldly pleasure.

### **"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION"**

Our Lord taught us to pray daily, "Abandon us not to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," and probably the majority of the Lord's people offer the sense of this prayer daily. But how foolish to pray thus and not to watch to the same end – to escape the temptation! How foolish to pray for deliverance from a thing and then to walk deliberately into it! Yet this very evidently is the course of the majority of the Lord's people. And in proportion as this is so, in proportion as they do not seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, making it the paramount issue [R3939 : page 47] of life, they are laying themselves open to many trials, some of which the Apostle intimates may pierce them through with many sorrows. (I Tim. 6:10.) Let us all resolve, that in the momentous affairs of life and in the little matters as well, we will decide our course not according to covetousness, which is sure to blind us to the true situation and to make us unwise as respects the highest interests, but let us on the contrary make our choice with an eye single to the glory of God and to the best interests of our families and of ourselves; and having so decided, let us with kindness and with love stand forth for the right after the manner of Abraham, and like him be generous in our avoidance of quarrels or in the settlement of those quarrels which have already arisen.

As a rule, quarrels in the family and in the Church arise from selfishness and covetousness; and it is the privilege of those who are nearest to the Lord and most developed in his character-likeness to be the most generous in any quarrel. The majority of quarrels are over trifles, which can as well as not be compromised or yielded to; only in the case of principles may the Lord's people contend earnestly. And even then the contention should be in the spirit of love and benevolence – the spirit of willingness to yield to the other so far as personal preferences are concerned, but a firmness for the Word of the Lord and the principles of righteousness. In the Church when quarrels arise it [R3940 : page 47] will generally be found that the basis of the quarrel is a misunderstanding or selfishness, covetousness, a desire to be chief and greatest. It behooves each of the Lord's people under such circumstances to examine well his own heart, and to see that his own eye is good before he attempts to assist his brother who has the opposite view. Having made sure of his own generosity of heart, and intent and willingness to yield, and to see and admire and approve the good in others, he will then be prepared to reason with others and to help them to also take the proper, broad, generous view of the situation.

"Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory," urges the Apostle – neither in the Church nor in the home. Love is the only motive power that should be recognized amongst those who have passed from death unto life, who are New Creatures in Christ Jesus. There is generally a peaceful way of settling all differences, and our Lord himself has set it forth, and we have presented the matter in detail in DAWN, Vol. VI., chap. VI. But, where all fails, rather than allow the spirit of brotherhood to fail and enmity or anger to prevail, it were far better that those who find themselves totally unable to fellowship in love together should seek to maintain fellowship in spirit by a separation, as in the case of Abraham and Lot. Nevertheless while this is to be

approved as a final resort rather than to have internal strife, the necessity for such a course would certainly be lamentable – it would certainly imply that some if not all of the company were very immature as respects the new nature, very deficient as respects the powers of a peacemaker, very lacking in the brotherly love which can hide a multitude of faults, and endure much with long-suffering and patience, gentleness, kindness and love.

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