

ABRAHAM AND THE HEBREWS

– FEBRUARY 16. – GENESIS 12:1-9. –

"I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing." – Genesis 12:2.

"FATHER of the Faithful" is one of Abraham's titles in the Bible. He is one of the greatest characters in history. The most enlightened peoples of the earth look back to him as the Divinely-appointed channel through whom all their religious hopes and prospects have been received – Jews, Christians and Mohammedans. God's promises made to Abraham constitute the foundation of faith for all these peoples, although many of them are not aware of the fact.

The Jews are Abraham's natural descendants through Isaac and Jacob, while the Mohammedans represent specially the Ishmaelite and Esau branches of Abraham's family. Christians profess that they have become heirs to the chiefest blessings promised to Abraham's Seed, by becoming associates and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus, whom they consider the antitype of Isaac and the Heir to all things. – Galatians 3:29.

The New Testament claim is that the Church of Christ – *partly from the Jews and partly from the Gentiles* – is the antitype of Rebecca, Isaac's wife and joint-heir. As such, the Church is to be the Bride and Joint-heir of Messiah in His Kingdom. In this picture Abraham typified Jehovah God, Isaac typified Jesus Christ, and Rebecca typified the Church. The New Testament claim is that this Spiritual Seed of Abraham is yet to be God's agency in blessing Natural Israel and all the nations. But, alas, much of the New Testament teaching was lost in the darkness of medieval times.

Christians forgot their high calling, forgot that they were to be joint-heirs in Messiah's Kingdom, forgot that that Kingdom was yet to bless all the families of the earth. Instead, they got the narrow view

that merely the saintly Elect would be saved at all, and that they to all eternity would look over the battlements of Heaven and see all others of mankind in torture, and to all eternity hear their groans. Only now are Bible students gradually getting freed from the creeds and back to the teachings of God's Word. Only now are we learning the true import of St. Paul's words to the Church, "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's Seed, and heirs according to the promise [made to him]." – Gal. 3:29.

One would think that under such circumstances every Jew, every Christian, every Mohammedan, would have absolute confidence in the fact that Abraham once lived. Indeed, it has been merely their confidence in the promises of God made to Abraham that has held the Jews together as a nation and that has gathered Christians from all nations to be heirs of that same promise. Yet, strange to say, the learned Jews and Christians of our day are turning Higher Critics. They are rejecting Abraham and the promises of God made to him as merely mythical legends. How strange that they do not recognize the inconsistency of their position! It is like the tail of a dog disowning its head.

What excuse would Jews have, living in every nation and speaking fifty different languages, for still keeping themselves Jews at all, if they repudiate the peculiar promises of God which relate to them as a people and which caused them originally to remain separate from every other nation, according to Divine instructions, and in hope of a blessing ultimately? The Jew or the Christian who repudiates Abraham simply makes himself foolish in the eyes of all intelligent thinkers. Such would do themselves credit to renounce all claim to Judaism and to Christianity, and thereby they would benefit those whom they would leave.

GOD'S CALL TO ABRAHAM

The name Abraham signifies Father of a multitude. It was given to him after he had responded to God's call and showed his faith and

obedience. Originally, his name was Abram, which signifies *exalted faith*. The name Abraham occurs in the New Testament seventy-four times. Jesus referred to him nineteen times. The promises of God made to Abraham constitute the foundation for all the theology of the New Testament, as expressed by the Lord Jesus, by St. Paul, by St. Stephen, St. Peter and others.

Abraham's birthplace was Ur of the Chaldees, one hundred and twenty miles to the north of the Persian Gulf, and was known as the richest portion of Asia. His father, Terah, was a heathen. Polytheism prevailed – the worshiping of many gods. Jewish legends respecting Abraham tell that as a boy he loathed the vices with which he was surrounded. When only fourteen years old, he refused to join with the family in idol-worship, and on one occasion destroyed seventy-two costly idols.

From Ur the family migrated to Haran, about five hundred miles northwest and in the direction of Palestine. There Abraham remained until his father Terah's death. Then he removed to the land of Canaan. God's dealing with Abraham, according to St. Stephen's account (Acts 7:2,3), began while he was still in Ur. God called him out of the midst of the evil surroundings to be the founder of a new nation that would be holy and obedient to God. The words of the call are not fully given, nor are we informed of the manner in which it was conveyed. It is sufficient for us that Abraham recognized the message as from the Lord, and that he obeyed Him.

Evidently the Lord fixed no earlier date than the death of Terah for Abraham's going to Canaan. Otherwise Abraham would not have been justified in delaying the matter. Doubtless Abraham had something to do with the migration from Ur to Haran. It took them away from the idolatrous scenes of the metropolis to the quieter conditions of pastoral life, and would be recognized by Abraham as a step in the right direction – toward Canaan, so that, on the death of his father, he could be prepared to quickly enter upon the Divine arrangement.

SEPARATE YOURSELVES FROM IDOLATERS

A portion of the call is stated: "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth (injureth) thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." – Genesis 12:1-3.

It was in harmony with this Divine call that Abraham, seventy-five years old, at the death of his father Terah, took up his journey to the land of Canaan. There were no landed estates then. The Henry George idea of free land prevailed. Sometime before this, Abraham's elder brother, Nahor, had married and set up an establishment of his own. His brother Haran had died, and Terah. Abraham, with the remnant of the family – and his half-sister Sarah (princess), who became his wife, and his nephew Lot, the son of his elder brother Haran – took their flocks and herds to Canaan, so called because inhabited by sons of Canaan. – Genesis 10:18. [R5169 : page 29]

ABRAHAM'S GREAT FAITH IN GOD

The Bible makes a clear distinction between faith and credulity. Abraham was not credulous, in the evil sense of that word, but he was full of faith. This feature of his character specially endeared him to the Almighty, who, because of it, styled him His friend. As St. Paul writes, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Galatians 3:6.) It is not claimed in the Bible that Abraham was perfect, nor that any man is perfect. The reverse of this is declared: "There is none righteous (perfect), no, not one." "All come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:10,23.) None measure up to the glorious image of God, as first it was represented in Father Adam.

Neither was Abraham the friend of God because of his great education, nor because of any wonderful intellectual powers. None of

his attainments are held up to us as a basis of his special favor from God and relationship to Him. Nevertheless, we see that he had intellectual powers. The fact that he was very rich indicates that he was a good manager. His skill as a leader of men and as a general was shown at the time that Lot and all the wealthy Sodomites and their possessions were taken captive by King Chedorlaomer and his associates. In the **[R5170 : page 29]** most commonplace language we read that Abraham promptly armed 318 of his own servants, pursued the victors, by strategy routed them and recovered the spoils.

But it was not for his skill as a general, nor for his generosity in dealing with the spoils, nor for his generosity on other occasions, that God loved Abraham. The special quality that God esteemed in him is repeatedly mentioned in the Bible as having been Abraham's faith. "Abraham believed God." He did not believe his own imaginations, nor the imaginations or dreams of other men.

CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM

Abraham's children, from God's standpoint, include only those who have faith in God. The original evidence of this faith and obedience was circumcision of the flesh, which figuratively represented a turning away from sin, to be obedient to God, and to be inheritors with Abraham of the promise made to Abraham and his seed. Circumcision has become largely a ceremony to the Jews – a ceremony in which they have little or no faith. Such faithless circumcision entitles them to no special favors of the Almighty. But all Jews who still trust in Abraham and the promises made to Abraham are subject to Divine favor and, to our understanding of the Bible, will soon be recipients of marked evidences of Divine blessing at the hands of the glorious Messiah, who soon is to set up God's Kingdom.

St. Paul explains that all true Christians, coming either from the Jews or from the Gentiles, become the Spiritual Seed of Abraham – heirs of certain spiritual promises, as the natural seed are heirs of

certain earthly promises not yet fulfilled. But St. Paul tells us that as the natural seed must maintain their faith in circumcision to mark their separateness from the Gentiles, so the Spiritual Seed of Abraham must have an antitypical circumcision of the heart – still more effective, separating them from the world and from sin – marking them off as God's peculiar people zealous of good works.

We exhort both Jews and Christians to honesty and faithfulness – to obedience to God: the one class, that they may inherit the Heavenly promises; the other class, that they may be ready for the inheritance of the earthly promises, which will be theirs as soon as the Heavenly, Spiritual Seed of Abraham shall have been completed by the "change" of the First Resurrection.

