

ABRAHAM'S FAITH TESTED

– MARCH 16. – GENESIS 22:1-13. –

"I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." – Hosea 6:6.

TODAY'S STUDY tells us of one of the reasons why Abraham has been styled the "Father of the Faithful." His entire life history, as sketched in the Bible, was a life of faith, a life of trust in God, reliance upon the Divine promises. But the final test, which we study today, was terribly severe and marked the tested one as very high, according to any and every standard – Divine and human. Evidently Abraham's faith grew stronger and stronger as the years of his acquaintance with God multiplied. The faith recorded in our lesson is so colossal as to amaze us. Only a person very intimately acquainted with the Almighty, very sympathetic and trustful, could possibly have endured such a test.

This test came through the Divine command that Abraham should take his son, his only son, Isaac, in whom was centered the promises, and should offer him a sacrifice to God on Mount Moriah. To appreciate the situation, we must remember that Abraham at this time was 125 years old, and that Isaac was the son whom the Lord had indicated would be the channel for all the blessings promised.

We must go back of this, and remember the long years before Isaac's birth, when for fourteen years Abraham had been thinking that possibly Ishmael might be the channel of God's blessings. We must go still further back, and remember the long period before Ishmael's birth, in which Abraham wandered as a stranger and waited for the fulfilment of God's Promise, only to realize that his wife was absolutely sterile, barren. Now after half a century of waiting and trusting, could it be that God wished him to sacrifice

all this to demonstrate his loyalty, his faith? It was so. He had positive assurance of the command. It was no imagination. It was no whispering of witches or wizards. It was no dream.

To one of Abraham's character, the Divine command meant prompt obedience. Forthwith he started. "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." Forthwith he made ready for the journey, accompanied part of the way by his servants. Then leaving them, Abraham and Isaac journeyed to the top of Mt. Moriah, which long centuries afterward, in the time of Solomon, was the site of the Temple. The very rock upon which Isaac is supposed to have been bound, became the very location for the Brazen Altar.

We looked with great interest upon this rock recently, [R5180 : page 46] when visiting Jerusalem. We thought of the Wisdom of God manifested in the sending of Abraham to the very spot which He had foreordained should be the Temple site. The rock is surrounded by an iron fence; and it may be seen, but not touched. In its center is a hole, which, tradition says, was a drainway for the surplus blood of the sacrifices, carrying the blood away.

Well we remember how the features of today's Study came before our mind! The grand old man, Abraham, accompanied by his loyal son, the heir of the promises, and well acquainted with them, came to this spot. There the wood was placed; and then the father, with faltering lips, but determined heart, told his son of the Divine command. There he offered up his son, even though the knife did not strike the fatal blow. The offering was complete in the sight of Heaven, and the hand was stayed opportunely and, as the Apostle explains, "Abraham received his son from the dead, in a figure." – Hebrews 11:19.

THE ANTITYPE OF ALL THIS

These incidents of olden time had their own effect upon the actors; but to God's people, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they

have still further meaning. We have already seen that Abraham serves as a type of the Almighty, and that Isaac serves as a type of The Christ – Head and Body. Here then we have the antitype. The Heavenly Father freely offered up His Son on our behalf, for the sins of the whole world. "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." "God gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life" – that in Him all the families of the earth might be blessed.

God's great sacrifice of His Son did not mean His eternal death – His destruction. It meant merely that Christ should die to earthly interests, hopes, aims and ambitions, but should be begotten by the Holy Spirit to new hopes, to new aims, to new ambitions and to new conditions – beyond the veil.

So God left not His Son in death when He freely offered Him up for us all, nor did He leave Him in the human condition of sacrifice. He raised our Lord from the dead, on the third day, to the glory that he had with the Father before the world was – yes, with and to an added glory, "far above angels, principalities and powers and every name." Here we have the antitype of Abraham's offering up Isaac.

"IF WE SUFFER WITH HIM"

But there is more to the antitype. In God's providence He arranged that Jesus should be the Head to the Church, which is His Body. Hence the sufferings of Christ, accomplished by Jesus the Head, which ended nearly nineteen centuries ago, were only a part of the sufferings of the antitype of Isaac. Here the Apostle declares, "We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." – Galatians 4:28.

The Church which God has been calling out of the world since the day of Pentecost is required to prove her loyalty and faithfulness

and worthiness of sharing in the First Resurrection, by being made conformable to Christ's death. "If we suffer with Him" – as His members – "we shall also reign with Him" – as His members. The cup which the Father gave to Him of suffering and ignominy was a test to prove His faithfulness and loyalty. The same cup He has passed on to His followers, saying, "Drink ye all of it," following My example in demonstrating your love and loyalty to God and for His cause, even unto death.

That the Lord Jesus guards His sheep is distinctly stated by Himself. When He reproved Saul of Tarsus for the death of St. Stephen and for troubling the Church, He declared, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? Tarsus never saw Jesus personally in the flesh to persecute Him, but whatsoever was done to the least of His disciples was done to Jesus. This still is true, and will continue to be true until the Body of Christ, which is the Church Elect, shall have been completed and glorified. Meantime, he that harms one of the least of the Lord's little ones, and he that gives a cup of cold water to one of the least of these, does it to the Lord of Glory Himself.

THE RAM IN THE THICKET

When God through the angel stayed the hand of Abraham from accomplishing the sacrifice of his son's life, a ram caught in the thicket was provided as a sacrifice instead. Thus a ram in sacrifice became a symbol of the Seed of Abraham, and an indication of a part of the process by which reconciliation of Divine Justice will be made on behalf of all the families of the earth, to permit of their being blessed by the Messianic Kingdom.

We are to remember that this same thought was kept up in God's subsequent dealings with Israel. Thus the Passover Lamb was slain, and its blood, sprinkled figuratively, typically, foretold the fact that there could be no Church of the First-born saved during this Gospel Age, except through the slain Lamb, "the Lamb of God

which taketh away the sin of the world." Similarly, the sin-offerings and burnt-offerings of Israel spoke of the necessity for a redemptive work to be accomplished before any blessings could come to Israel, or through them to other nations, peoples, kindreds and tongues.

Amongst the many lessons which Christians may learn from the testing of Abraham's faith are these:

(1) The necessity for the death of the One through whom the blessing will eventually come to all mankind. If Jesus had not died for our sins, there would have been no remission of them. Hence there would have been no resurrection from the dead, and in that event death would have been more than a sleep. It would have meant extinction.

(2) Let us be sure that if Jesus had not faithfully consummated His part of the agreement and laid down His life, neither would He have shared in the grand consummation and exaltation to the Divine nature. St. Paul declares this, saying that He was faithful unto death, "even the death of the cross, wherefore [on this account] God also hath highly exalted Him." – Philippians 2:8,9.

(3) We are to remember that the same rule applies to all of the Church. It is not sufficient that we consecrate our lives. We must show our loyalty and faithfulness by laying them down, by taking up the cross, by drinking of His cup, by being immersed into His death. Only these will share Messiah's Throne of Glory. "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him; if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him."

Time was when I did think that with
Abundant strength my rest from wily foe
And subtle enemy would be assured; but
I am undeceived. The light of Truth has

Shone into my mind, and shown that He
In whom doth lie my "perfect strength" shall
"Teach my hands to war, my fingers how
To fight"; and so I learn that powers
Of ill are round about me as the air,
Needing a constant watch; and I have constant
Need that both my hands be free, and that
My fingers, where the power to grasp the
Sword lies hid, be taught of Him to wage
The conflict whensoever the hour may be.

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