

## ABRAHAM'S RESPONSE TO GOD

Genesis 21:14-34

At once Abraham obeyed the divine Word. "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba" Genesis 21:14. We see him rising early in the morning, and with thoughtfulness and tenderness he bade farewell to Hagar and Ishmael. It requires very little imagination to enter into his feelings as he saw them depart, realizing that a break had come into his life which could never be altered or set aside. It is striking to notice the entire absence of any remonstrance on the part of Hagar. She seems to have taken everything quietly. Ishmael, too, although seventeen years of age, showed no signs of rebellion.

The birth of Isaac had been a beautiful and striking reminder of the unchanging faithfulness of God, or the fact that He is ever true to His Word. This is the experience of God's people in all ages. Joshua said that not one thing had failed of all that God had spoken. Everything had come to pass just as He had said. "God is faithful." This is the bedrock of the believer's life. The more closely we enter into fellowship with Him through His work, the more definitely we should realize the preciousness of this great fact that "He abideth faithful."

We can easily realize that Abraham had an aching heart and a troubled spirit as he prepared to bid farewell to Ishmael, and yet, the initial mistake having been made, this severance was really the very best thing that could have happened for all concerned. God was taking up the tangled threads of His servant's life, weaving them into His own divine pattern, and overruling everything for good.

God's call to Abraham was met by divine grace sufficient for his need. God never puts more upon His people than they are able to bear. He encourages them by His promises, He assures them of His presence and power, and in response to all these encouragements His people yield themselves in obedience, and find that His grace is sufficient for them. "As thy days so shall thy strength be."

Bread and water were given to Hagar by Abraham. These are the two necessities for sustaining life. In the same way, the spiritual life must be sustained by the Bread of Life, which came down from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, on Whom we must feed in His Word; and the Water of Life, which is the Holy Spirit of God. The Bread of Life and the Water of Life are free gifts of God to the poor sinner.

Note that Hagar and Ishmael became wanderers in the wilderness. Such has been Israel's portion ever since she rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 15 we read, "And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs." In type, the Holy Spirit is here taken from Israel in "the water was spent." This explains the tragic veil which is over the hearts of the Jews as they read the Scriptures, for without the Holy Spirit no one can understand the Word of God. Hagar said, "Let me not see the death of the child." "And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice and wept." We see here a foreshadow of Jerusalem bemoaning her desolation.

"The angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven," and Hagar recognized his voice. God calls today out of heaven through the gospel of Christ to the wanderer in his despair.

In verse 18 God said of Ishmael, "I will make him a great nation." There is no hint that this promise carried with it spiritual blessing of any assurance of life in the world to come, but when God makes a promise to the sinner through the gospel, He gives him faith, righteousness, life, power and immortality.

"And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water and gave the lad drink." This is one of the first accounts of the Holy Spirit in dealing with the soul which He turns from darkness to light. The blindness of sin gives place to the vision of God.

Notice the four statements in verse 20 about the dying sinner who has been revived by the Water of Life. First, "God was with him." In the same way. He is with every person who drinks of the Water of Life and is born again. Every conceivable blessing is contained in that simple statement. If God is with us, we have life, protection, power and the supply of all our needs. Second, "he grew". So every normal Christian grows up from spiritual infancy to manhood, until he finally reaches the measure of the fulness of the stature of Christ. Third, he "dwelt in the wilderness". Every Christian during the state of his growth dwells in the wilderness of this world. Here his needs are supplied by his Heavenly Father and his character is strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Fourth, he "became an archer". He learns to shoot the arrows of God at the hearts of the unsaved and win them to the Saviour.

Verse 21 reminds us that Ishmael was outside the covenant. He dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, which was southeast of Palestine and outside the promised land. All the unsaved dwell in the wilderness. "The way of transgressors is hard."

Beginning with verse 22 and extending to the end of the chapter, we have an account of the covenant entered into at Beersheba between Abraham and the Gentiles. Abimelech, king of Gerar, and Phichol, the chief captain of his host, came to Abraham on a special errand and made to him this striking statement, "God is with thee in all that thou doest." This testimony to God's presence with Abraham showed that the patriarch's daily life was a genuine witness for God. The fact that a heathen king should be able to draw this conclusion clearly indicates the genuineness of Abraham's daily life. Realizing the presence of God with Abraham, Abimelech was very desirous of peace for himself, his kindred and his land. He thus appealed to Abraham to take a solemn oath to insure this result. Evidently Abimelech was afraid of Abraham's power. Seemingly, he feared that his growing prosperity and influence might easily lead to difficulties, and even differences, in the immediate future. At the same time, it was quite probable that religious influence was another reason for making this request. Abimelech was finding out what many others have found out since his day, namely, that the friendship of good men is often an advantage, even in things temporal.

Abraham responded to the request of Abimelech and willingly entered into the covenant. He expressed his readiness to take the oath required and to make the solemn pledge that there would be peace between him and Abimelech. His readiness to enter into this covenant showed that he was not bent on any conquest or even any selfish ends.

Abraham pointed out one difficulty in the way and made it clear that any compact of peace was really impossible until that difficulty was settled. Abimelech's servants had taken away a well of water which belonged to Abraham and it was with reference to this that the patriarch complained. Water was everything to the nomadic tribes, and its absence involved the greatest possible loss, injury and inconvenience.

In a similar manner the sinner cannot enter into proper relationship with Christ until the differences between them have been settled and the sin question dwelt with in the proper manner.

Abimelech was unaware of the fact that his servants had robbed Abraham of a well. Entirely ignorant of the action of his servants, Abimelech was anxious to remove any misunderstanding. Not only did he disclaim all knowledge of what had been done and responsibility therefor, but he complained to Abraham for not informing him of the incident. There was evidence that he was sincere, upright and genuine.

Notice that the gifts came from Abraham's side. Even so, the sinner has nothing to give to God, but God gives all to him. Abraham therefore set before Abimelech the usual covenant promise. Then he set seven lambs of the flock by themselves, and, on being asked why this difference was made, he replied that they were special gifts, and additional security for the future with reference to the well. Abraham then called the name of the place "Beersheba", meaning "the well of the oath." Thus the covenant was made, and the two men were united in a solemn compact of peace. Abimelech and Phichol returned to their country and Abraham remained at Beersheba.

Abraham planted a grove at Beersheba, which was an appropriate memorial of the perfect peace which he desired between himself, his God and his fellowman. In the course of his prayer he used an additional title for God, namely, "The Everlasting God." He was thus reminded of God's unchangeableness and His dependability. As Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days, so the believer in Christ is a sojourner and a stranger in this world.

This incident teaches us a helpful lesson as to the relation of God's people to those who are not yet within the fold. More than once Paul urged Christians to live in view of the non-Christians around them. The very phrase "them that are without" tells us of the unutterable sadness and loss of being outside the fold and separated from all the great privileges of grace in Christ Jesus. This fact alone should make us the more careful to live aright in order that those who are now without may be attracted to come within. These new experiences which we have with God are not merely a matter of personal satisfaction, blessed though they are; they tend to prepare the soul for still greater accomplishments. God's revelations are not merely luxuries for personal enjoyment, but are given for the purpose of preparing the soul for greater service and still clearer testimony for God. God reveals Himself more fully in order that we may be thoroughly equipped for greater efforts in His Kingdom.