

THE CONFIRMATION OF FAITH

Genesis 15:7-21

In response to Abraham's faith, God entered into solemn covenant with him, assuring him of the certainty of the divine promises concerning him and his seed.

I. The Foundation Of The Covenant. 15:7.

It rested on God's character which He revealed to Abraham. God introduced the covenant with the solemn announcement of His name. He said, "I am the Lord." He thus proclaimed Himself as the author and agent of redemption. This fact that He is the Lord is the basis of the law, of redemption, of grace, of faith, of righteousness, of sanctification, of the hope of heaven and of every other gift and blessing.

As a reminder of what God had already done for Abraham, Jehovah said, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees." The words "brought thee out" explain what the Lord has done for every one of His children. He has brought us out, not from Ur, but from this present evil world, from the power of Satan and from bondage to sin. God then stated His purpose in bringing Abraham out of Ur, "to give thee this land to inherit it."

II. The Desire For The Covenant. 15:8.

Abraham was saved solely, completely and exclusively by faith and not by works. However, soon after he had believed God, he began to wonder about the absolute certainty of that which he had accepted. He still lacked the full assurance. Like many of God's children today, he sought for something in addition to that which God had plainly spoken. He seemed to say, "Lord, if I had something in addition to your word, it would make me feel much better."

Abraham ventured to ask God for additional proof that his posterity would inherit the land. Having just been granted the assurance of a numerous offspring, he desired a further explanation. He appealed to God for additional knowledge and assurance saying, "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" Abraham wanted some outward and visible guarantee and pledge. He had already believed what God had said, but he had a desire for confirmation. He fully believed God's Word and, yet, wondered how and when it would be fulfilled. His attitude might well be summarized in the words of another, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

III. The Preparation For The Covenant. 15:9-10.

God gave Abraham very definite instructions. "And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not" (Genesis 15:9-10).

The animals were to be three years old, signifying maturity and full strength. They were tame animals. Had they been wild, it would have been necessary for Abraham to have captured them. They were the willing servants of man's need. Each one foreshadowed a distinctive aspect of Christ's perfection and work. The heifer of three years seems to have pointed to the freshness of His vigor. She had to do especially with the cleansing of salvation. The goat typified the sin-offering aspect, portraying the carrying away of sins. The ram typified Christ as the conqueror in His strength and power. The

turtle dove and the young pigeon had to do with the keeping power of God in sanctification, and they represented the tenderness and gentleness of Christ.

Then Abraham proceeded to fulfil the requirements connected with the solemnities of a covenant. The usual method of making a covenant was to cut an animal into two parts. Having divided the animals, he placed the corresponding pieces opposite to each other and the one bird opposite to the other, leaving a passage between. This was the usual form of agreement and contract. At least one of the parties to the covenant then solemnly walked between the two parts, thereby signifying an agreement. The idea underlying this was that of a covenant by means of sacrifice. The blood-covenant was a well-known method of ratifying solemn agreements.

IV. The Readiness For The Covenant. 15:11-12.

Faithfulness was the first and leading proof of Abraham's readiness. He had obeyed exactly according to the command of God, observing to the very letter what God required. This is always the proper attitude for every child of God. It is the true attitude for fuller teaching and greater blessing. Watchfulness was another feature of Abraham's attitude at that time. While awaiting God's time, he kept guard over the carcasses and kept away the birds of prey. His long wait is perhaps a picture of the long interval between Abraham's day and the accomplishment of God's redemptive purpose in Christ.

Receptiveness characterized Abraham. The supernatural slumber which came to Abraham prepared him for the reception of God's revelation by detaching him from all earthly things which might divert his attention and prevent the teaching to have its full effect upon his life.

V. The Message Of The Covenant. 15:13-16.

These verses contain a prophecy which received a literal fulfilment. It had reference to the sojourn of Abraham's descendants in the land of Egypt, their bondage there and their deliverance and return to Canaan. Abraham's descendants were to endure great privation. Exile, bondage and affliction were the three elements of this privation. Abraham was to learn the meaning of heirship through suffering. While his descendants were serving in that strange land, they were to be afflicted four hundred years. In all, they dwelt in Egypt four hundred and thirty years. Abraham's offspring were to come out of Egypt with great provisions through God's help and enablement. It was predicted that Abraham would be spared these afflictions and that he would experience great peace. This is the first hint that Abraham himself was to realize personally the fulness of God's purpose. God leads us step by step without revealing everything at once. As revelation after revelation came to him, the horizon of God's purpose extended wider and wider.

It was said that Abraham would die in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the Bible, burial is regarded as the only honorable means of disposing of a dead body. To lie unburied was a dishonor and a degradation. The Moabites were to be severely punished because they burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime. Modern cremation is unscriptural and non-Christian; it is materialistic in origin and irreverent to the dead.

It is clear from verse sixteen that sin accumulates until there comes a time when God's anger and judgment break out upon it. The sinner treasures up for himself wrath in the day of wrath, heaping it up as he goes on sinning without repentance. God waits in mercy, seeking to lead men to repentance. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). At

last the time will come when His judgment will break out. The patience of God is well illustrated in this passage by the fact that He waited four hundred years before destroying the Amorites. Notice that the people of God suffered long in Egypt while He was waiting with a yearning heart over the Amorites. This is always the principle on which God acts. For generations God has left His own people exposed to the temptations and dangers of the present evil world while He has been seeking lost sinners through the glorious gospel of Christ.

VI. The Making Of The Covenant. 15:17-21.

After the revelation of God's will comes the divine assurance in the form of a covenant. The symbolical action is noteworthy. A cylindrical fire-pot and a fiery torch combined to symbolize and express the divine presence. In condescension to Abraham and his experience, this symbol of the divine presence passed along the pathway between the birds and the animals, thus ratifying the covenant and giving God's servant a divine guarantee. The smoking furnace speaks of God's eternal wrath. Every time we read about smoke in the Bible it means judgment. When Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Abraham saw the smoke of judgment ascending. When God came down in judgment upon Sinai to give the law, the whole mountain was in smoke. In contrast to the smoke, we have here a burning lamp which dispels the darkness of judgment. We have then, the smoking furnace of God's wrath and the burning lamp of God's love. We have God's justice demanding the death of the transgressor and the infinite love of God seeking the redemption of that poor sinner. How these two can be satisfied is the problem of Calvary.

The descent of God's wrath upon Christ on Calvary's cross brings this light of life to every believer in Him. The two go together. The believer's life is rooted in the death of Christ. At the cross, mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other. They worked together in harmony to effect the believer's salvation. Abraham was thus taught that God made a covenant with his seed, in which by the exercise of His wrath and judgment He brought light and life to them. On the very day that the Saviour died, the new covenant was established with us and became effective. The Lord made a covenant. The Lord's covenants are not agreements between equals, but they are settlements by a benefactor upon beneficiaries. Man's part in this covenant is simply that of a recipient. In response to this covenant the attitude of the believer should be that of a feeling of deep gratitude, a response of whole-hearted trust, an expression of hearty thanksgiving and a life of loyal obedience.