

THE MAN WHO WAS GOD'S FRIEND

Genesis 12:1-17

When one looks closely into the course of revelation in the Bible the name of Abraham appears to tower over the centuries. Abraham is one of the most heroic figures in history. The Holy Spirit conferred upon him one of the greatest tributes ever given to man, namely, "the friend of God." His importance is suggested by the fact that nearly fourteen chapters in Genesis are devoted largely to his life and work. His biography is very interesting and instructive. It contains numerous practical lessons for all who would obey God and serve Him.

I. The Plea. Genesis 12:1.

While Abraham still dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees, the God of glory appeared unto him and called him to get out of his country, away from his kindred and home, and to go unto a land which He had chosen for him. It was a call from the familiar and the known to the unfamiliar and the unknown.

His call and obedience are epochal in the religious history of the world. Possibly no single emigrant of all time meant so much to the future of humanity. He was born among the heathen people of Chaldea, and his early life was spent among those who had low and material concepts of deity. But, there came to him in this darkness a vision of God as the invisible, spiritual, holy and eternal One.

Of his early life the record is silent. He comes under our observation when God called him from his native land and he obeyed, "not knowing whither he went." The promise which was made to him was world-wide and time-lasting in its scope. "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 thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. Genesis 12:2-3. Abraham looms as a gigantic figure on the horizon of history, and the way which he marked out remains clear after the lapse of more than four thousand years.

We know nothing about Abraham's religious life prior to his reception of this call, but we are confident that he had a genuine faith in the true and living God.

The people had gone into idolatry and had reached the place where recovery was impossible unless God intervened. God wanted to get Abraham away from his heathen forebears and their worship. In like manner, God wants separated believers today. "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." II Cor. 6:17. The separated life is the crying need today. Separation is the way to spiritual power and service. If an individual is to count as a believer, or if a church is to count there must be separation. The Christian who is no different from the world does not exert any helpful influence for the Kingdom of God. The church that is like other worldly organizations can do very little for the world. When God selected Abraham from the midst of iniquity, it was in order that by his separation unto God, he might be sent back as an evangel to the nations. Likewise, All who would be used of God today must know the meaning of separation from the world and its idols.

II. The Pledge. Genesis 12:2-3.

God called Abraham to become the founder of a new nation through which He could work out His redemptive plan. With that gracious and sovereign call, there came

an invaluable seven-fold pledge. God pledged Himself to make of Abraham a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, to make him a world-wide blessing, to bless those who blessed Abraham, to curse any who might curse him, and through him to bless all the families on the earth.

This divine pledge should serve as a reminder to us that God's protecting care is guaranteed to all of His children today while they are engaged in His service.

III. The Pilgrimage. Genesis 12:4-9.

On the strength of what God had said to him, Abraham promptly and without asking any questions started on his pilgrimage. He did not know where he was going, but he did know Who had called him, with Whom he was going, and for what purposes he was going. He knew that God had called, that God was leading, and he firmly believed that God would provide for him. When God guides, He always provides.

However, Abraham's obedience was only partial. While he was obedient in leaving the country, he did not leave his kindred as he had been commanded to do. Instead, his father and his family moved along with him. His father and nephew, Lot, went with him. How slow we are to answer fully God's call! Thus Abraham permitted the natural ties to interfere with his obedience to God. Then, on their way to Canaan they stopped in Haran for about five years. That is like so many today who render only a partial obedience to the will of God.

It took the death of his father, Terah, to bring Abraham to full obedience. Following his death, Abraham and his family proceeded to the land of promise. Although he was not aware of where God might lead him, Abraham did have an implicit faith in Him and was ready to trust Him fully for everything.

Abraham's obedience brought him into a realm of danger (v.6); also into the presence of God (v. 7). Consequently, he built an altar and "called upon the name of the Lord" (v. 8). The altar and the tent set forth two of the outstanding features of Abraham's life. The altar tells us that he was a worshipper of God. It speaks of sacrifices to God and devotion to Him. The tent signified the fact that he was a stranger and a pilgrim in this world. He was looking for a city, whose builder and maker was God. His experience is described in the lines:

"I am a stranger here, within a foreign land,
My home is far away, upon a golden strand."

IV. The Promise. Genesis 13:14-17.

Abraham became a very rich man. Lot shared in his prosperity. Here for the first time, though not the last one, wealth proved to be a source of trouble between relatives. When the herds were driven to the wells in the evenings, bickerings and quarrels broke out between the herdsmen of the two men. Abraham was too wise and too godly to permit such conduct to go on. He suggested to Lot that in the interest of peace they should separate in a manner becoming real men. He generously waived his rights, and cheerfully conceded to Lot whatever portion he chose to take. Glad for an opportunity to increase his wealth, selfish Lot took advantage of his generous uncle, when he made his choice, but it was to his own injury.

Lest Abraham might be disappointed, God said, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look" (v. 14). When he did so, God gave him a vision of eternal significance, and it

was far more glorious than any which Lot had received. God also gave him the blessed assurance that all of the land as far as he could see in each direction was to belong to him and to his family forever. He promised him a great earthly posterity, one that was practically innumerable.

The fulfillment of the God-given promises was long delayed. The story of his life as told in Genesis is one of weary waiting and long-deferred hope. He was called into a country which God had given him and his offspring, yet he wandered over it as a stranger, living in tents, while other men tilled its soil and built its cities. All that he ever possessed of that land was a sepulchre where his bones might be laid. He was promised countless descendants, and yet the frosts of a century fell upon his childless head.

The birth of the child of promise came at last, and the heart of Abraham must have been thrilled as he looked upon the long-expected heir. But just when faith seemed honored by promises fulfilled, the supreme test of his life came. When Isaac had budded into young manhood, and hope had blossomed into joyous confidence, to Abraham life seemed full and complete. It was at this time that God made His supreme demand upon the faith of His loyal follower.

It was evening at the oaks of Mamre. Evening in the Near East is always the delightful time of day. The yellow hills and sandy plains take on a soft and friendly color when night comes on, and the cool south wind begins to blow softly, refreshing the soul of man and the life of beasts. Abraham sat before the tent meditating on the past, the way in which God had led him, and thinking of the future and of the great promises that had been made to him. Reclining before the tents was the strong, handsome, and robust Isaac.

And what a word is this which Abraham heard God speaking to him! It was not concerning the greatness of the destiny of the race which was to spring from his loins. It was not concerning the starlike multitude who would constitute his seed. It was not concerning the blessing which he would bestow on all mankind. That was the way in which God had spoken to Abraham in times past, not on this occasion it was altogether different. God was calling upon Abraham to lay upon an altar the child of his love and offer him to God in bloody sacrifice. He said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

All that the inspired record tells us is that in the morning Abraham arose and did as the Lord commanded. One wonders how that long night passed with Abraham, and what thoughts and hopes and fears passed through his mind. Anyway, when the morning came Abraham was ready to do God's will. He told Sarah and Isaac that he was going afar off to Mount Moriah to make an offering. There was the bustle and stir of great preparation as they got ready for the journey. They left and on the third day they arrived at the base of Moriah. He told his servants to stay there while he and Isaac went up the mountain to worship. A bundle of wood was laid on Isaac's back, and Abraham carried a knife and the tinder with which to start the fire. As they went up the mountain, and rested on the way, Isaac said, "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham gave a tender and beautiful answer, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

In that crucial hour Abraham's faith in God had won for him the victory. He was still trusting in the immutability of the divine covenant. He stood then upon the

loftiest pinnacle which human trust had yet climbed. There and then he revealed the reach of his sublime faith and the spiritual grandeur of the man.

When Abraham lifted his hand to take the life of his son, and the blade flashed in the sunlight, he heard the voice he knew so well saying, "Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."

To understand the glory of Abraham's great victory, we must see the man in his environment. There was no long roll of heroes who had walked that way before him, in whose steps he might follow. There was no fellowship of saints to refresh his soul, when the way was tiresome and his heart was weary from waiting. Alone, without helper or companion, he made his lonely pilgrimage and fought his battles. There was no human helper, when he endured that soul-bruising test beside that altar of stone on Mount Moriah, but God was with him and greatly blessed him for his wonderful obedience to Him.