

Sabbath School Lesson #7 – The Covenant *With Abraham* – 7-13 May 2022

Christ would have us take lessons from the covenant with Abraham. In our memory text, Abram asked: “And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?” (Genesis 15:2).

Sunday: The Faith of Abraham – In Genesis 15, what is the meaning of the sacrifice that God had Abram perform? Abram asks: “Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” And here and now, in pledge to Abram that he shall inherit all that has been promised, God made a covenant with Abram: “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 turtle dove, 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. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him... And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Genesis 15:9-12, 17-18). Now it is a truth laden with meaning that in these animals and birds which he brought and offered, there was included every animal sacrifice that was ever allowed or commanded to be offered to God. And when Abram, as directed, had divided all these except the fowl, and had laid them in their pieces, one against another, “behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.” And “In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land.” The Lord did this because in ancient times it was the custom of those who entered into a covenant with each other to take a heifer and cut it in two, and then the contracting parties passed between the pieces. And the reason of this was that the contracting parties agreed, and thus expressed the agreement, that if either of them broke that covenant, he submitted himself to be cut in two just as was the sacrifice between the parts of which they passed. But *Abram did not pass between the parts of these victims*: only God passed through. This because this is not a covenant of agreement between two persons in which each is equally responsible; but it is a covenant of *promise* from God, in which *He alone* is the responsible party. Consequently, *God alone passed* between the parts of the slain victims, in the making of this covenant. And, in that act, God agreed, and thus expressed His agreement, that that covenant could no more fail than that He Himself could be severed in twain. Thus the Lord pledged Himself, in His very life, that all the promises which He had made to Abram should be fulfilled, and that not one of these promises could fail; that this covenant to fulfil the promises could not fail any more than that God should cease to live. Thus, that covenant of God with Abram was confirmed.

Monday: Abraham’s Doubts – In Genesis 16, what is the significance of Abram’s decision to go with Hagar, even despite God’s promise to him? In the sixteenth chapter of Genesis, “Sarai said unto Abram. Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. *And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai*” (Genesis 16:2). Hagar conceived and bare Ishmael. And we know, from the other scriptures, that this whole arrangement was altogether a scheme of the flesh, springing wholly from distrust of the promise of God, springing from unbelief; and Abraham had to repudiate it all, and bear the fearful test of the offering of his only son Isaac, on Mount Moriah, before he recovered his true standing in faith alone. It was an effort of themselves to fulfil the promise of God, which, in the nature of things, God alone could fulfil. It was an effort of the flesh to do the works of the Spirit, and so was a lapse by Abram from the true faith and work of God, into unbelief and the plans of self and the works of the flesh.

Tuesday: The Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant – In Genesis 17, what is the spiritual and prophetic significance of the circumcision rite? Abraham had received the promises of righteousness by faith without circumcision. After, Abraham was circumcised. Why then are we not circumcised? For the simple reason that circumcision was not in the original plan. If Abraham had *continued* to walk in the faith in which he walked before he was circumcised,

he *never would have been circumcised*. Why, then, was Abraham circumcised? It is very important to look at the record in the Bible; for it is all there, and it is all plain. Start from Genesis 11:29-32 where Abram is asked to leave his native country. Then read in Genesis 12 where God promises to give Abram the land and that in “all families of the earth be blessed” (Galatians 12:3; Galatians 3:8). Then after Abram’s father is dead, Abram had become separated from his kindred, God now shows to Abram the land (Genesis 13:14-18), which included “the world;” for this promise was “the promise, that he should be the heir of the world” (Romans 4:13). Then in Genesis 15 Abram asks and he is reassured and “he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (verses 3-6) – God had made His covenant with him, in which He pledged Himself: and all this by faith alone, utterly without circumcision, and with no mention or even hint of circumcision, or of any necessity for it. Thus the Lord had given to Abram, and by faith Abram had received. In Genesis 16, Abram doubted, fell into unbelief, when Sarai proposed a method of ‘flesh’ or ‘works’ to get a ‘heir’ for Abram, and “*Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai*” (Genesis 16:2). Because of the work of ‘flesh’, then *it was* that circumcision came in. And it was *because of this* that circumcision did come in. It was a mark made in the flesh as a reminder, a humiliating reminder, of Abram’s resort to the flesh; and thus also a reminder that every one who bore it must not make the same mistake that Abram did, but must remain true to the faith and work of God. Consequently, it is written: “Circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law, but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision” (Romans 2:25). And Abraham was “the father of circumcision” to them who are of the circumcision, *when*, and *only* when, they walked “in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised” (Romans 4:12). Thus it was “a token that God had cut them out and separated them from all nations as his peculiar treasure” {1SP 262.3}. This must be so until the seed should come in the line of Abraham, in whom alone all these things can be fulfilled. Thus it is perfectly plain that if Abraham had been faithful to that which he received from God by faith, he never would have been circumcised. And it is equally certain that when any one, receiving by faith in Christ alone, as Abraham received it, that which Abraham received, he needs not to be circumcised. Since the Seed has come who is the giver of all the promises, who is the pledge of the covenant, who is the one from whom must come all that was promised to Abram, and which Abraham received by faith alone, then, whosoever *believes in Him* and walks by faith alone in him, as did Abram before he was circumcised, in the nature of things he needs not be circumcised. For the fruit of this faith was, in Abram, and is in every one who believes, the keeping of the commandments of God (Genesis 26:5; Galatians 6; 1 Corinthians 7:19). We are told: “If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision” {PP 364.2}. Since the faith of Jesus brings to the believer in Jesus, and gives to the believer in Jesus, the perfect keeping of the law of God, the perfect righteousness of God, then “no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision.”

Wednesday: The Son of Promise – In Genesis 18 is a promise of God for when the son would be born. What is the significance that Isaac came by the promise of God and not by any effort of Abraham and Sarah? “In Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Genesis 21:18). And as Isaac was the child of promise, therefore those who believe the promises of God are the seed of Abraham. To the Jews who were self-satisfied because of their descent, John the Baptist said, “Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matthew 3:9). He could do that as easily as he could make man in the beginning from the dust of the earth.

Thursday: Lot in Sodom – In Genesis 18:16–19:29, how does Abraham’s prophetic ministry affect his responsibility toward Lot? Notice Abraham’s prayer for Sodom. First, he asked for just what he wanted, and second, he was importunate. He gained confidence as he proceeded. Prayer should be uttered just as one cannot help uttering it if he realises the greatness of the One whom he is addressing; but still the petitions should be such as would be made to a father. A great deal of the formality in prayer is due to the fact that people do not expect to have their prayers answered. In fact, all the formality in prayers comes from that source. The people who have the most faith will be the most careful in their petitions.