

Sabbath School Lesson #8 – The Promise – 14-20 May 2022

Christ would have us take lessons from Abraham. “And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things” (Genesis 24:1). As we read further in the chapter, we are struck with the deep solicitude which the father of the faithful felt for his son of promise in securing for him a wife – see Wednesday below.

Sunday: Mount Moriah – What does the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah say to you personally about your faith and how you manifest it? First, the faith of Abraham; he passed the time of test. When he left his servant down in the plain, to go up on Mount Moriah and offer his son, he revealed just how much faith he had. Said he, Wait here until we go up yonder and return again. Who was to return? – We. Do you think he expected to offer up his son Isaac? Well, how do you think he would have come out then? – Isaac would have had a resurrection. Abraham’s faith in God’s promise was so great that he was certain that God would raise his son from the dead, to fulfil His promise. We should have the same kind of faith. Second, the fight of faith. “Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:12). This fight is an individual affair, not a battle of armies, no other person can have faith for us. It is a dangerous thing, therefore, to learn to lean upon others and look to them for guidance in the Christian pathway. Jacob fought the good fight of faith when, on the night before his meeting with Esau, he was “left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day” (Genesis 32:24). None of the company he brought with him could have aided him in that conflict; they would have been a hindrance rather than a help. For that was a spiritual conflict, where faith and doubt were contending for the mastery. Jacob had the promise of God, made to him years before, and his faith grasped this, and he triumphed. Abraham fought this fight when, alone with his terrible secret, he went up with Isaac to the top of Mount Moriah. He had the promise of God concerning the seed that should come through Isaac, and his faith grasped this, “accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead” (Hebrews 11:19). The Saviour met the temptations of Satan alone in the desert, and His faith in the word of God won the victory. Again, in His last most terrible conflict, He was alone in Gethsemane; but His faith did not fail. If we win the prize of eternal life, we must certainly fight this fight, and we must fight it as those did who have been victorious before us, that is, by trust in the promises of God. We have His promises given us in rich abundance. We must know them so that we can say to the adversary, “It is written” (Matthew 4:4-6). Faith alone wins the victory, and faith is perfect trust in the Word of God.

Monday: God Will Provide – In Genesis 22 we all know the outcome. Isaac carried the wood to the appointed place. The altar was built, and he was bound and laid upon it. Here we have the likeness to the sacrifice of Christ. God gave His only begotten Son, yet the Son went not unwillingly. Christ “gave Himself for us” (Ephesians 5:2). So Isaac freely yielded himself as a sacrifice. He was young and strong, and could easily have resisted or fled if he had wished. But he did not. The sacrifice was his as well as his father’s. As Christ carried His own cross, so Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice, and meekly yielded his body to the knife. In Isaac we have a type of Christ, who was “led as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7). Abraham’s statement, “God will provide Himself a lamb,” was but the expression of his faith in the Lamb of God. “And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham; and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that 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 instead of his son.” The son’s life was spared, yet the sacrifice was as completely made as though he had been put to death.

Tuesday: The Death of Sarah – “Abraham had no possession in the earth, “no, not so much as to set his foot on.” Acts 7:5. He possessed great substance, and he used it to the glory of God When Abraham desired a burial place for his dead, he had to buy it of the Canaanites. His sole possession in the Land of Promise was that rock-hewn tomb in the cave of Machpelah” {PP 169.3}. When Sarah died, Abraham stood up from before his dead,

and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead. And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth” (Genesis 23:2-7).

Wednesday: A Wife for Isaac – As we read Genesis 24:1-7, we are forcibly struck with the deep solicitude which Abraham felt for his son of promise in securing for him a worthy wife. He does not leave this to Isaac but puts his most experienced servant under a solemn oath. All this looks right; yet how widely it contrasts with the customs of our times in leaving children at an early age to form acquaintances as they please, and to select for themselves. In matters infinitely less in importance parents tend to counsel. But in selecting companions for life, a matter upon children’s happiness for life, and perhaps of the parents, may depend, the children, moved by impulse, are left to take their own course. Not so with Abraham, of whom God said, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him” (Genesis 18:19). Selecting of a wife for Isaac was left with his aged father’s reliable servant.

Thursday: A Wife for Abraham – It is in Genesis 24:67-25:8 we find the narrative of a wife for Abraham. There are speculations as to the identity of the wife. Verse 1 says “again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah.” While in verse 1 she is called “wife”, 1 Chronicles 1:32 says “Keturah, Abraham’s concubine.” There is a speculation that Keturah is Hagar, the concubine mother of Ishmael, but it is difficult to substantiate this in Scripture. Hagar was not the only concubine, for Genesis 25:6 refers to “sons of the concubines, which Abraham had;” and notice that “concubines” is in the plural, which could include both Hagar and Keturah. Those who speculate that Hagar is Keturah tend to read this into 1 Chronicles 1 where it says, “the sons of Abraham; Isaac, and Ishmael” (verse 8), and they suppose the mention of only two sons means only two women: Sarah the mother of Isaac, and Hagar the mother of Ishmael (Genesis 16:15). Let us see how this is needless stretch of interpretation.

In Chronicles 1 the children of Keturah (verses 32-33) are distinguished from Hagar’s one son, Ishmael (verses 29-31). But broadly, in Scriptures “things were written aforetime were written for our learning” (Romans 15:4). The focus on two sons of Abraham is sufficient for our spiritual learning that the line of descent from Abraham which God recognises is not a natural line, but a spiritual one. He has never recognised any line but the spiritual one, even from the days of Abraham himself. When Ishmael was born, and Abraham desired that he might live before God as the heir of the promise (Genesis 17:18), the Lord said to him, “Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed, and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (verse 19). And when after the birth of Isaac, Sarah desired the son of Abraham by the bondwoman to be cast out because of his mocking, the Lord said to Abraham, “In all that Sarah hath said unto thee hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Genesis 21:12). Ishmael was the father of a great nation; and we read that Abraham had other sons beside Ishmael and Isaac; but to these he gave gifts and “sent them away from Isaac his son” (Genesis 25:6), and Isaac alone was his heir. So there were several sons of Abraham (Sarah’s son, Hagar’s son, Keturah’s sons), but only one heir; multitudes of natural descendants, but only a certain line of them whom God recognised as His children. Isaac was chosen as the heir because he was the child of promise. The Scripture commentary upon this is, “They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed” (Romans 9:8). So then the line of descent was reckoned from God Himself. Between God and the carnal nature there could be no possible union, and therefore no child of the flesh could be a son of God. Isaac was the child; that is, he was born through faith in the promise of God made to Abraham, and thus he became a son. No person was ever a son of God who did not become so by faith. It has been possible for all the fallen sons of Adam to become the sons of God by believing, as Abraham did, on “Him that justifieth the ungodly” (Romans 4:5). By so doing they are “born again,” into the line of the true descendants of Abraham, – into the family of God. Isaac and Ishmael are sufficient for the lesson of the two lines: natural/flesh and spiritual/promise line.