

# BIBLE STUDIES

"Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (Acts 17. 11)

A STUDY OF  
**ABRAHAM THE FRIEND OF GOD**

VOLUME 43

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# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11).'*

VOLUME 43

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## EDITORIAL

We welcome the wide interest expressed in the study of the life of Abraham, and only regret that because of space limitations we have had to cut out more from some papers than ideally we would have wished. Nevertheless there is a significant part of each paper submitted, and we would encourage regular contributions from all concerned. Papers have been arranged in alphabetical order. It is good to see variety of thought illustrated in the printed papers, reflecting careful study and spiritual exercise in the Word. *G. P. Jr.*

### **ABRAHAM'S CALL AND EARLY PILGRIMAGE**

Genesis 77. 26- 72. 9

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —Apart from the Lord Himself, and possibly Moses and David, the servant and friend of God receives greater coverage in the Scriptures than any other person. From a family who had sunk into idolatry, he was chosen and called of God. It was queried as to whether Josh. 24. 2 implied that Abram also served other gods. One line of thought was that the choice of this man was not haphazard, and he had already rejected his idols. Others felt that Abram was not exempt from the national custom of idol worship, but he might well have been dissatisfied with its futility [Comment 1].

The question was raised as to whether there is anything to

help us to know **why the Israel nation was so called from the progenitor Jacob and not from Abram** [Comment 2]. **We felt that perhaps the answer was supplied by the statement of Stephen in Acts 7. 8: "Jacob (begat) the twelve patriarchs". The title "The children of Israel" is obviously determined by the progeny of Jacob, later named Israel. This, however, in no sense annuls the promise to Abram that God would make of him a great nation.**

**G. A. J., E. B.**

**From Barrhead.** — Abraham was a direct descendant of the chosen line of **Shem** (see Gen. 9. 26). **The godly line of Shem had in the process of time corrupted itself by worshipping strange gods (Josh. 24. 2). The city in which Abraham was born was the centre of worship of the Moon goddess Hurlei.**

**In what way did Abraham receive a knowledge of the one true God? When Abraham was born Shem was still alive, and was contemporary with Abraham for at least a hundred years. It is more than possible then that Abraham gained his knowledge of God, and divine dealings with men first-hand from Shem, and those born soon after the Flood (e. g. Arpachshad and Shelah). While Abraham had a knowledge of the Lord he had as yet no personal experience or dealings with Him. This lack of a personal dealing with God came to an end when "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham" (Acts 7. 2). Scripture is silent as to the mode of revelation, but it brought forth a response from Abraham. Associated with that revelation was a call to separate from kindred and country.**

**At the oak of Moreh the Lord appeared again to Abraham; the land in which he was to wander would be given to his seed. This seed we take to be the Christ (Gal. 3. 16 comp. Gen. 13. 15) [Comment 3].**

**One of the things which would mark Abraham as a man of God was that he was the builder of altars to the Lord, God Most High (see Gen. 74. 22). The significance of the altars was that Abraham was a worshipping man; also each altar would be a testimony to his faith in a land of faithlessness although the iniquity of the Amorite was not yet full (Gen. 75. 16).**

**Abraham was a man of vision and looked for the city which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker would be God (Heb. 77. 10). It was wondered whether this city was the Heavenly Jerusalem or the city of Salem. Being a city-dweller**

by birth **and** upbringing it may **be** Abraham **had** a revelation from God concerning **the** future which would satisfy his aspirations [Comment 4].

*L. de Ville*

*From Birkenhead.* —From Gen. 7 7. 26 it appears **that** Abram **was** the eldest son, **but** by linking with this verse, 77. 32 and 12. 4 it **seems** likely **that** Abram **was** born when Terah **was** 130. So **Abram** appearing first in 77. 26 **suggests** his prime position in God's dealings.

Looking **at** the **map** in our Bibles it appears **that** Ur is south of **the** river Euphrates **but** in **Acts** it **states** **that** Ur **was** in Mesopotamia (Greek—**between** the two rivers), **hence** the reasonableness of travelling north to Haran before crossing **the** river **at** a suitable point [Comment 5]. Points which aroused discussion without producing definite conclusions were (a) **Was** it in God's purpose **that** others should **have** accompanied **Abram**? and (b) Should there **have** been a **break** in **the** journey **at** Haran? [Comment 6]. It is certain **that** God's promises **and** blessings were centred in Abram (Gen. 12. 1-3) **and** the ultimate object was **that** from him should come **the** promised **Seed** (Gal. 3. 16).

Abram "went out not knowing whither **he** went" (Heb. 77. 8). **We** contrasted this with "they went forth... to go into **the** land of Canaan" (Gen. 77. 31), and this **caused** **us** to propose **the** possibility **that** although they knew their destination, they did not know **what** it **was** going to **be** like. **The** alternative proposition is **that** **the** Genesis reference **is** history in retrospect [Comment 7].

It is evident **that** **as** the years passed **the** party **must** **have** grown and **Gen. 12. 5** mentions "souls", those born into **the** family or to **the** servants. **At** a **later** date **further** members of **the** family **must** **have** settled in Haran **because** it **was** **there** **that** **Abraham's** servant **was** sent for a wife for **Isaac** from among "his kindred" (**Gen. 24. 4, 10**).

*M. B. Turner. R. D. W.*

*From Bolton.* —*The Call of God*—**The** call came to **Abram**, who with his relatives **was** associated with idol worship in **the** land of Mesopotamia. **The** call **had** a particular importance chronologically, being about **half-way** between **the** lives of **Christ** **and** **Adam**. **The** principle of **the** individual **call** is emphasized **here** **and** **elsewhere** in **the** Scriptures. Neither **Terah**, **Abram's** father, nor **Lot**, his nephew **were** called, and it may **be** argued **that** **Sarah**, his wife, **was** also not called. **The** promises, however, in respect of **the** seed of **Abram** **must** **at** the outset **be**

fulfilled through Sarah.

**Separation.** —The outlines of separation are clearly seen in these early days. The "narrow way" was demanded by the call, becoming even narrower by each divine statement; first from the country, then from kindred, and finally from home. The corresponding blessings from the Lord were to be double the sacrifices involved. Abram heard the God of glory speak. He believed precisely what God said, and proceeded to do exactly what the Lord told him to do. Such elementary principles provide very precious outlines of divine truth and consequent blessing in every dispensation.

**God's choice.** —The choice of the youngest son of a family plays an all-important part in the purposes of God throughout the Scriptures. Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Ephraim, Moses, David were noteworthy in their choice and service. A great nation, the chosen people of Israel, the blessing of all the families of the earth including the Gentile nations was to come through Abram. He was to be "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4. 11).

**A tent and an altar.** —The fulfilment of the divine purpose was delayed due to Abram's association with Terah, who had never been called. How long they dwelt in Haran is not indicated, but eventually Abram left after his father's death. It is interesting to note his procedure when he arrived in the land of Canaan. First of all, he erected an altar to the Lord, and later pitched his tent near Bethel. The altar is associated with worship, the tent the dwelling of the pilgrim. *I. S., E. B.*

**From Derby.** —The first men on the purged earth are seen around the altar (Gen. 8. 20). Joshua wrote, "Your fathers dwelt of old time beyond the river, even Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods". Thus the descendants of Noah who had known the goodness and severity of God had departed from Him again. God having made a fresh start with Noah was about to start afresh yet again with another man, even Abram, to whom God was to communicate His will and promises. It would seem that Abram communicated this to his father and to his nephew Lot, "And they went forth . . . from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there". This did not seem to be according to the mind of God. Terah (whose name means "delay") also was the cause of some five years delay, during which period there is no record

of any word **from the** Lord or of any altar. Abram's separation **was** not complete [c. f. Comment 6]. Terah **died** in Haran; then **Abram with** Lot moved forward into **the** promised land, though Lot **was still** a hindrance to **the full** outworking of **the** divine purpose, **as we shall** see later on **in** our study. **The** divine principle of separation is vital to **the** testimony (**2 Cor. 6. 17-18**).

Abram's long **trek** from **Ur** to **Haran**, some **500** miles, **must have** been a trying ordeal, especially with his **aged father Terah**, who died in Haran. **Abram** and his company went forth to go into **the** land of Canaan and **he travelled as far as** Shechem. **The** man of faith **was** now in **the** land of promise and God spoke to **him** for **the first** time since His **call while** yet in Mesopotamia, saying, "Unto thy **seed** will I give this land".  
**A. G. Willis, S. R. W.**

**From Edinburgh.** —Regarding **the** physical features of **Abraham's** pilgrimage, **the** journey began at Ur of **the Chaldees**, a city of South Mesopotamia. The initial journey followed **the** course of **the** River **Euphrates**, **600** miles north west to **Haran**, where **Terah** died **aged 205** years. When **Abraham** was **75** he and Lot **left** Haran for Canaan, passing **the** plain of Moreh and pitching his tent on a mountain **east** of **Bethel** and **west** of Ai. **Later** they moved on to **Negeb** and Egypt.

**Acts 7. 2** makes it plain that God **called Abraham** in Ur. **It was suggested** that **perhaps** Terah **was** a hindrance to **Abraham** and **was the** reason for **the call** not being fully carried out, for having journeyed some **600 miles** by **the easier** course of **the Euphrates**, they **came** to Haran and "**dwelt there**" (v. 32). **Terah** died **there** and never **saw** Canaan.

**It** is interesting to note that Terah's other two sons, **Haran** and **Nahor**, **gave** their names to this city. Haran **was** its original name. **Later** it **became** known as **the** city of **Nahor** (Gen. **24. 10**). **Abraham** **was** not to **be** identified with an alien place [Comment 8].

Even Noah **was** alive for some **50** years **after Abram** was born, and so it **was** possible that **he had** been influenced by godly men in his younger days. **We** might say that **Abram** **was saved** in Ur, **called** by God and eventually **separated** unto Him. **The call** was to go to Canaan, **but** they **dwelt** in Haran. Haran **was** still within **the** boundaries of Babylonia; **the call** and separation **were** not fulfilled. **We** can **draw** a lesson from this in **the** Christian's experience. Many will **accept the call** of salvation, **but few** the subsequent **call** to separation. **That** is

not to say Abraham did not prosper in Haran. V. 5 makes it clear he was a man of substance, but he was a stranger and pilgrim in a foreign land. L. Burgoyne.

*From Galston.* —*Human Instrumentality*, (a) **Gen. 77. 31** "And Terah took Abram...". Josh. 24. 3 "And I (the Lord) took... Abraham". Both scriptures refer to Abraham's departure from Ur of the Chaldees. God used Terah. Compare Acts 13. 1-4, "... they (the brethren) sent them away" and "being sent forth by the Holy Spirit", (b) This thought is further strengthened by a comparison of Heb. 77. 8: "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out... not knowing whither he went" with Gen. 77. 31 "and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan". Terah was evidently in the mind of the Lord in his purpose to set out for Canaan, but in Haran (meaning "parched") his early zeal dried up. He saw the things that were near, things like "getting substance and gathering souls". He lost his vision and perished (as far as his Canaan ambition was concerned) [Comment 9].

*Fuller revelation follows obedience*, (a) Acts 7. 2 records the first command given to Abraham by God while he was in Ur of the Chaldees. Gen. 72. 1-3 appears to be a fuller revelation of God's purposes made to Abraham in Haran after the death of Terah. Verse 4, "So Abraham went as the Lord had spoken unto him... out of Haran", and verse 5, confirms this [Comment 10].

(b) Abraham evidently perceived that Terah had been in the mind of the Lord for "they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came". Noble pilgrim, father of all pilgrims! John H. Johnson.

*From Kingston-on-Thames.* —The call of Abraham is described in two ways in the book of Genesis. First (77. 27-32) there is the natural account of his lineage and early life, in which the name of God is not mentioned, and secondly (72. 1-8) there is the spiritual or divine point of view beginning "Now the LORD had said..." (AV). Superficially the first reads like ordinary narrative, but hidden in it are facts which the spiritual commentary (including that of Acts 7 and Heb. 77) reveals. Thus Abraham's generation was the tenth from the Flood, even as Noah's was the tenth from Adam, and some similarity is to be expected. Again, the steady rhythm of the genealogy is disrupted at Abraham, and although no definite indication is given, the comparatively early age of the onset

of fatherhood suggests that the named sons were the eldest or firstborn sons. Abraham was not (77. 32 and 72. 4), and has therefore been inserted into the lineage of the Messiah in place of his brother Haran. In the natural account the life of Haran is first given, then the younger brothers, and the intermarriage in Terah's house before the family group, with Terah as its natural head, emigrates westwards to Canaan, but stops in Haran till Terah's death.

The early part of chap. 12 is a recapitulation of this, because Stephen says that Abraham had dealings with God in Ur as opposed to Haran, thus agreeing with the AV rendering of verse 1. This is also implied in the expression "from thy kindred" which would be incorrect if spoken *after* he had left them behind in Ur. Similarly the expression "thy father's house" would have been inappropriate if spoken in Haran after the death of Terah.

When God chose Abraham against all natural predictability he shut out the rest, the tenth generation, and so **judged** them. From Abraham, in a spiritual sense, a new people descend whose chief inherited characteristic is eternal life received by gift from God upon faith in His Word (Rom. 4. 16-17). But the idolatry from which Abraham was apparently converted (Josh. 24. 2) had seeped into Terah's house and so Abraham had to separate from those who were closest to him. It is clear, however, that Abraham had passed the word to Sarah who obeyed (1 Pet. 3. 6). Lot too had heard (2 Pet. 2. 7), and it is worth noting that even Haran was an "enlightened" man, as his name implies, who had apparently himself made the westward journey. It seems clear that the family group that set out for Canaan had heard the message from God and that Abraham is singled out as the prime mover. Yet even fellow-believers can be a hindrance, for Abraham did not "come in" to the place of God's choice and build the altar until Terah had died.

One of many clear New Testament comparisons is to be found in Acts 2, when through Peter, the call of God came to those whose way of life God had rejected and consequently the hearers were to save themselves from their crooked generation. But reception of this word was not enough to please God, for those who did so were to declare themselves, in their baptism, also to have rejected their old way of life (and many of them were devout men), reckoning themselves to

**be dead to it**; so they broke **with** their kindred who **were** descended from **the** patriarch **after the flesh**, and **became** instead **added** to **the** number of **the disciples** of **the** One whom their countrymen **had murdered**. Having **entered** into **this** new position they continued steadfastly only **with** those who would **likewise** separate. And **it was this** group of people, **the** Fellowship, who **like** Abraham in **the** land, offered **spiritual** sacrifice in **the** breaking of **the** bread. *Ian E. Penn.*

*From Lagos.* — Gen. 11 brings **the Bible** student to a **stage** in God's revelation of **His** purposes **where he sees but** darkly **as** through a **glass** the out-working of **the will** of God in man (Gen. 3. 15). **It might well have** been **that the** voice of unbelief **was** current after **the** scattering at **Babel**, questioning **the** promise **as** to **the Seed** of **the** woman, a Saviour to deliver man from **the dust** of **sin** and death.

The outline of **the** generations of **Shem** (Gen. 11) **sheds light** on **the** words of our Lord Jesus, "My Father worketh even until now" (John 5. 17). And again, concerning **the** descendants of **Shem** **the** Holy Spirit by **the** mouth of Joshua **the** son of Nun said, "Your **fathers dwelt** of old **time** beyond **the** River, **even** Terah, **the** father of Abraham, and **the** father of Nahor: **and** they served other gods" (Josh. 24. 2). **We** suggest **that** godly men **ceased** and **the faithful** were failing among **the** children of men. Against **this** background **did** God, who quickeneth **the dead**, and **calleth** **the** things **that** are not, **as** though they were, appear to Abraham and **He called him** (Gen. 12): "**The** God of glory **appeared** unto our father **Abraham**, when he was in Mesopotamia" (Acts 7. 2).

**Did Abraham** communicate **the** vision of God to **his** brethren in Mesopotamia? **It** would appear **that** Terah, **Abraham's** father, **grasped** **the** vision by **faith**, and **with** **the** band of pilgrims **he** reached as far **as** Haran [Comment 11]. **After** **the** death of Terah, Abraham journeyed on. Gen. 12 is to be interpreted, **we** suggest, **as** **the** detailed outline of **what** Jehovah spoke to Abram when **he** was yet in Mesopotamia, **and** **the** resulting response of Abraham by faith.

*A. Beyioku-Alase, E. Bassey.*

*From Liverpool.* — Abraham, **the** friend of God, **the** only man so called (Is. 41. 8; 2 Chron. 20. 7; James 2. 23), **was** God's chosen instrument for **the** realization of **the** divine purposes of redemption. **The** God of glory appeared to **him** in Ur of

the Chaldees. We judge this visitation resulted in his conversion, just as the Lord's revelation to Saul did to him on the Damascus road. Then he was called to leave to go to a place he would receive for an inheritance, and he went out not knowing whither he went, that is, to what place he went. We sought to reconcile this statement with Gen. 77. 31. It was suggested that Gen. 77 is simply the narrative of what eventually happened, but when Abram left Ur, he went out in faith depending upon the Lord to guide his footsteps. Some thought he should have gone out alone with perhaps his wife only, but others thought a man of Abram's calibre would have an influence upon others to move. They stayed in Haran until the death of Terah his father. It was noted that there is no criticism of Abram for his stay in Haran, unless we make Stephen's word a criticism. "When his father was dead, God removed him into this land" (Acts 7. 4). There was a difference of mind as to the time of the call in chap. 72. Some thought it was the original call when Abram was in Ur. Others thought it was a call when he was in Haran [Comment 10]. Is there any significance in Abram pitching his tent between Bethel (the house of God) and Ai (a heap of ruins)? [Comment 12].

Separation is the outcome of the divine call from kindred and surroundings, always from sin and self-will.

By the altar he confessed himself a worshipper; and by the tent a stranger and a pilgrim.

In this great man we see traits we should seek to emulate:

- (1) The confidence of faith, v. 4, "So Abram went".
- (2) The obedience of faith, v. 5, "They went forth".
- (3) The influence of faith, v. 5, Others went with him.
- (4) The confession of faith, vv. 6, 7; He built an altar.
- (5) The endurance of faith, vv. 8, 9, He had no seed, no abiding place, pitching his tent. The Canaanites in the land prevented him from possessing an inch of the country.

*D. R., M. S. E., G. S. W.*

*From Macduff and Whitehills.* —That the call of Abram was divine, is clearly stated in Gen. 75. 7, "I am Jehovah that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees". That Abram was a marked man for the purposes of God is seen in Neh. 9. 7, "Thou art Jehovah the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees". "Choose" has the thought of "testing" in it. Abram means "father of heights". Some of us thought, possibly Abram had turned

from idol worship down in **Ur**, his conscience **bearing witness** of God (Rom. 7. 20). **He was possibly tested** somehow by God, and **in the midst** of idolatrous people, **came through high** in the estimation of God. **Others thought he was, as it were, plucked a brand from the fire.** **One thing is certain, he was brought up amidst** idol worship (Josh. 24. 2).

It would **appear** God spoke to **Abram twice**, firstly in **Ur**, which was in the region known as Lower Mesopotamia, west of the **River Euphrates** (Acts 7. 2), then in **Haran** on the east side of **Euphrates** (Gen. 72. 1). Some thought there was only one call (Gen. 72. 1), being spoken in **Ur** [See Comment 10].

It is very significant, that after almost **600 miles** of travel—some of it not too **difficult** (from **Ur** to **Haran**), some of it very **difficult** (**Haran** to the promised land)—the first place mentioned after the arduous journey is **Shechem**. **Shechem**, in Hebrew, signifies the **neck** (between the shoulders) as the place of burdens (Dr. Strong). The great **Burden-bearer** had been with **Abram** throughout his long, **difficult** journey. Then we read of him **setting up his first** recorded altar at the oak of **Moreh** (Heb. "teacher"). This was something vastly different from the surroundings in **Ur**. The altars there were for worshipping idols, but the mighty **Teacher** was gently leading **Abram** on, **revealing** the kind of relationship God **desired** man to have with **Himself**.

Journeying on, **Abram** comes to the place between **Bethel** and **Ai**. At this point in time, **Bethel** would be called "**Luz**" (see Gen. 28. 19). "**Luz**" signifies the almond tree, being the first tree to bring forth fruit in the season. "**Beth-el**" means "the house of God". "**Ai**" means "heap of ruins". God has on earth a place where He has set His special affections, and associates **Himself** with that place, where He seeks the first-fruits of our hearts, in contrast to the ruined condition we were once in.

Tent-pitching, removing, and **building altars** were to be the life features of this man, whom God lovingly and unashamedly calls "My friend" (Is. 41. 8). **Robert McKaig.**

**From Manchester.** —When the Genesis passage referring to **Abram's calling** is read, it seems to **establish an order of events** which **Acts 7** opposes. Whereas the **Genesis passage** reads as though **Abram** received the call in **Haran**, **Stephen** states and **emphasises** that the call was given when **Abram** was in Mesopotamia, "before he dwelt in **Haran**". However, the apparent contradiction can be disposed of when one considers

that although Genesis **seems** to infer, it never **states** any precise location. Consequently should one **assume** that the narrative of Gen. 77. 31 is the same as that of 12. 1 to "with him" of v. 4 and that the latter is an expansion of the former, that is that v. 1 of chap. 12 **resumes** the narrative at the end of v. 30 of the previous chapter and is not a **sequel** to v. 32, the contradiction no longer exists. **But there is** a further complication **with** the terminology of 77. 31. It **states**, "And Terah took Abram **his** son", seeming to indicate that the departure was not on Abram's initiative, **but rather** on his father's. Assuming that this is not so, could the exact meaning be explained? [See Comments 9 and 11].

The other seeming chronological inexactitude is this; in 77. 26 it is said that Terah was 70 years old when he "begat Abram, Nahor and Haran". Later it states that Terah was 205 years old when he died, by which reckoning Abram should have been at least 135 when he left Haran, whereas in 12. 4 Abram is said to have been 75 only at that time. Probably the most convincing explanation is that in v. 26 the sons are given not in order of birth, but of honour, and that therefore there was a gap of 60 years between the birth of the firstborn and Abram. *S. L. Prasher.*

*From Melbourne.* —The story of the life of Abraham the friend of God should **exercise** our hearts as to why he was brought into such close relationship with the God of glory.

As to Abram's background, his descent by genealogy is seen to be through the line of Shem, the firstborn of Noah. The line commences with the knowledge of God and the righteousness of His character as witnessed by the Deluge; but by the time that Terah is brought before us in v. 26, that knowledge had become corrupted, the ever normal tendency of fallen man through succeeding generations. Although Ur of the Chaldees was a well built city, and a place of culture and learning, as brought to light by the work of the archaeologist, it was given over to idolatry. It has been discovered that many of its houses were of at least two storeys, and with ten and 14 rooms; also many of them had their household gods. One of its main features however was a Ziggurat or worship tower, 70ft. high. The principal deity worshipped here was Sin or Nannar, the moon god, who according to Sumerian theology, owned the city. With the worship of this deity were associated ritual abominations. Out of the midst of the

**wealth, culture, learning and idolatry of Ur, where we judge he was born, Abram was called.**

Terah **was** evidently not prepared to permit **his** son and daughter-in-law to go alone. **It is said that he took them** together with his nephew Lot, whose father Haran **was dead**, and with their households and possessions **travelled as far as** Haran, which **is** generally **placed** by historians about **600 miles** north-west of Ur. Whatever **the** reason, and **we** would **judge** that this lay with Terah, they stopped short of **the place** to which Abraham **was called** to go, and there they remained until Terah died. After his **death** they moved onwards towards **the place and the land into which he had** been told to go.

*D. M., T. W. F.*

*From Nottingham.* —From a casual reading of Gen. **12** it would appear that Abram first **heard** God's **call** in Haran, **but a comparison** of v. 1 (A. V. ) with Gen. **15. 7** and **Acts 7. 1** reveals that it **was** in Ur of **the Chaldees** that this **call was** first heard. God's **call was** clear, it **was** to come out and come in. **The dual nature of the call** needs to **be** noted. **He was to leave that which was** not of God and enter into **that which was**; so, in our time **there is a similar call** to believers. Many **hear and obey the call** from **the world but fail to heed the call** into **the land, the Place of the Name.**

In Ur of **the Chaldees** Abram's thoughts seemed to **have** penetrated more deeply than those of his fellows. **The expression "God of glory" in Acts 7. 1** is interesting. **It seems that Abram was able** to look beyond **the** formal worship of idols, **the worship of the creature** (or of **the created**) to **the Creator.** **He appears to have** been impressed with **the glory of the divine Being, and thus moved, he gave heed when that God of glory** appeared to him.

The **call of God was a tremendous challenge** demanding implicit faith in God. **Abram went out not knowing whither he went (Heb. 77. 8).** **It is suggested that in the physical and geographical sense** this is true only in a very limited degree. Ur **was a city of commerce, and traders visiting must have** described often, **as travellers do, the nature of the terrain of the fertile crescent, the valley of the Euphrates, along which Abram's journey lay.** **It seems to be in the spiritual sense that these words apply fully.** Abram **was** accustomed to Ur and its ways. **But God was calling him to a place which he knew not and so he went out not knowing whither he was going.** With his **hand in God's he was led** into God's precious things.

Abram's **call was individual in character, but Sarai took her place with her husband**, evidently understanding something of **the significance of the call he had received**. They **were together in heeding God and doing His will, each in their proper place, doing service in their proper sphere, one the complement of the other**. The Scriptures give **us the parallel for to-day**.

*R. Hickling.*

**From St. Helens.** —In Gen. 7 7. 26 we saw that Abram was born of Terah when **he was 70 years old, the age normally allotted to present day individuals as the complete life-span (three score years and ten)**. [See answer to question from Edinburgh.]

**V. 31 tells us that Terah took Abram and his wife, Sarai, who was childless, together with other relatives, and left their homeland of Ur of the Chaldees and travelled to Haran in Canaan, but from Heb. 7 7. 8 we know that Abram himself obeyed the call of God. He lived there until Terah died at the age of 205 years.**

In Gen. 12 we read of **the direct communication, promises and instructions from God to Abram**. It is of interest to note **that Abram was in his seventies when he travelled from Haran, under God's instructions, with his family, relatives and "substance", to Shechem**. In Gen. 72. 2, 3, **the blessings promised by God to Abram are listed**. They were **made to one man at a time when he was childless and his wife was stated to be "barren"**. The ultimate blessings resulted from **the individual faith of Abram**.

Similarly, **we have promises through faith and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ if we respond to God's call and commandments**. By comparing **the "Old" with the "New", we saw that the blessings that Abram and his descendants received resulted from faith, and the carrying out of the instructions given by God to him**.

*K. J. G.*

**From Vancouver.** —The forefathers of **Abraham had lapsed into idolatry but Terah and his family had become worshippers of the true God**. All true prophets of God knew **a little of the value of the offering of an animal in sacrifice, as an approach to God, and that it foretold the coming Saviour of God's providing (Acts 70. 43)**. Abram obeyed and **was blessed for ever**. God **was especially interested in Abram's obedience and ability to help his family (Gen. 26. 5 and 18. 19), teaching God's Word**. Abram **seemed to be a lover of beautiful things**. He **seemed to appreciate trees**. Haran **was, we understand,**

a beautiful place, as also was Shechem. He had a beautiful wife. He looked for a glorious Saviour and a beautiful eternal city of God.

Although Abraham was inheritor of the great and precious promises in Gen. 12. 1-3, yet he still realized that the approach to God was by sacrifice, in view of the coming Saviour.

H. McL

### COMMENTS

1. (*Atherton & Leigh*). Josh. 24. 2 is admittedly inconclusive as to whether it was Terah and his forebears who served other gods, or whether "they" included Abraham and Nahor. But both this scripture and Is. 51. 1, 2 emphasize God's sovereign mercy in their choice as a holy nation. The implication seems clear that but for God's gracious intervention, Abram also would have been idolatrous.

2. (*Atherton & Leigh*). This is an interesting point, and the reason suggested merits consideration. It is of course evident from John 8. 31-40 and other scriptures that the Jews also took pride in referring to themselves as Abraham's children.

3. (*Barrhead*). I suggest the context usually determines whether the term "thy seed" refers to Christ or to the Israel race. Gal. 3. 8 links with Gen. 22. 18 as referring to Christ. But Gen. 13. 15 would refer to the Israel nation, v. 16 showing that they are to be as the dust of the earth, in which case it could not mean Christ Himself.

4. (*Barrhead*). If we regard Heb. 11. 13-16 as reverting to the theme of vv. 8-10 it is clear from v. 16 that the heavenly city (the New Jerusalem, I take it) is in view.

5. (*Birkenhead*). Would not Mesopotamia be a general term in Stephen's day describing the Euphratean area, including the accepted site of Ur?

6. (*Birkenhead*). It seems to me that God overruled for others to accompany Abram as part of His wider purposes. We can at least see some relevance to these purposes in that Rebekah was in due course available in Haran to be a bride for Isaac, and Leah and Rachel to be wives for Jacob.

In the absence of any scriptural criticism of Abram's stay in Haran, I suggest we may regard this also as a phase of God's leading. Assuming that Abram pursued God's call consistently (and the Scriptures all speak in this sense) he had nevertheless to cope with many practical problems—most likely in this instance the frailty of his father's terminal years. But as soon

as the way was open for him, when his father died, Abram pressed on.

7. (*Birkenhead*). The alternative proposition seems more likely to me.

8. (*Edinburgh*). It has been pointed out by E. Archibald (Glasgow) that the initial of the person **Haran** is **he** (**Ps. 119. 33**) but of the place Haran is *cheth* (**Ps. 119. 57**). This is a helpful observation, but one would assume the translators imply an affinity between the person and place since they have used the name Haran for each in our English version?

9. (*Galston*). The view that Terah had initially a strong spiritual exercise which later waned, accounting for the delay in Haran, is interesting, though different from the views of most contributors. I have thought that "Terah took Abram his son" is so expressed simply because Terah was the patriarchal head. All the emphasis of other scriptures is on the revelation to Abraham and on Abraham's faith. Would this be so if Terah had really been the spiritual driving force? See Comment 11.

10. (*Galston*). This view of a "second call" in Haran should be compared with points developed in para. 2 of Kingston's paper. While appreciating that the point is debatable, I personally favour the view that Gen. 12. 1-3 refers to the original call in Ur of the Chaldees.

11. (*Lagos*). It seems to me that Abram's experience when the God of glory appeared to him was so vivid that his testimony to others about God's call made a strong impact. Terah evidently accepted that his son had received a notable revelation from God, and was influenced as a result to journey from Ur to Haran.

12. (*Liverpool*). There is, I think, factual and historic significance in such details, for they give realistic background to the narrative, and often lend themselves to archaeological confirmation which has a value in this sceptical age. I must say that I feel great caution is needed in trying to read into such place names a spiritual significance, unless clearly indicated. But see Macduff's paper for a suggestion in this instance.

G. P. Jr.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*From Edinburgh*

Terah lived seventy years and begat Abram {11. 26}. Terah died in Haran aged 205 (77. 32). Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran (72. 4). How is this apparent discrepancy of 60 years explained?

The probable explanation is that 11. 26 should be regarded as a general statement regarding Terah's sons. The eldest of these would be born when Terah was 70, and the others later; in Abram's case 60 years later. Nevertheless Abram is first mentioned because of his precedence in divine purpose. See paragraph 1 of Kingston's paper for helpful discussion of this aspect.

*From Liverpool:*

Was Abram wrong in taking his family, seeing he was the only one to receive the call of God?

I do not think so. Scripture does not censure Abram for taking members of his family. This I would consider to have been divinely overruled. See also Comment 6.

Is there any significance in the term the "God of glory"? See also Ps. 29. 3.

I have thought of this expression as comparable with "the God of peace" or "the God of comfort". In each of these expressions a certain aspect of God's character or attributes is emphasized. That the glory of God should be stressed in association with His appearance to Abram seems in harmony with the dignity of the far-reaching purpose involved in Abram's call. See also paragraph 2 of Nottingham's paper.

*From Macduff:*

What would the River of Josh. 24. 3 be?

"The great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15. 18).

*From Nottingham:*

12. 4. "And Lot went with him". V. 5. "Abram took... Lot his brother's son". As the call appears to have been individually to Abram, and in view of later events, was Abram acting correctly in taking Lot with him?

In my opinion, yes. Lot's own father had died years before. Now his grandfather Terah was also dead. Did Abram's obedience to the call of God mean that he must opt out of family responsibilities? I hardly think so. Difficulties were to arise through Lot being with Abram, but in the resulting situations Abram's conduct glorified God. Pilgrims responding to the call of God are not absolved from responsibilities and problems in this life, but will be strengthened to glorify Him through them.

*G. P. Jr.*

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# BIBLE STUDIES

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## EDITORIAL

We have again this month welcomed a good number of papers and tried to include those parts of **each which** would contain **the** most original contributions of **the** groups, while avoiding too **much** repetition.

An understandable and commendable reticence **appears** in **several papers** to **judge a** man so great **as** Abram. When **we** find **we** must do so in faithfulness to **the** record of **the** events and their outcome, **we** do so in godly fear and **are** **left** wondering **at the** grace and faithfulness of God; and **at** our own responsibilities **in a day** of extended divine revelation. J. D. T.

### **TRIAL IN EGYPT AND SEPARATION FROM LOT**

Gen. 12. 10- 13. 18

**From Atherton and Leigh.** —Had not Abram's God intervened when Abram went into Egypt conditions for **the** man who **had stepped** out in faith from Ur of **the Chaldees** would **have** been disastrous. Deception and half-truths were not **the path** of faith. Abram **had** for a time gone away from God **as he succumbed** to **the** trial. **He** learned his lesson, never again going **back** into Egypt. Jacob, when an old man **was** told by God to go into Egypt, and **we** may **well** learn **the** lesson **that** if God says so **all** is **well** (Gen. 46. 1-4). **Abram was** himself **taught** three **valuable** lessons in relation to his personal faith: (1) **that** God **was** essential to his every **step**, and **that** nothing can **be** done **apart** from him; (2) **that** God **was** able —notwithstanding **the** famine God could **have** provided for Abram; (3) **that** God **was** faithful. **He** did not, and could not forget **the** promises **made** by Him to His servant. Happily **he came back** "unto **the** place of **the** altar, which **he had made** there **at the** first: and **there Abram called** on **the** name of **the** Lord" (73. 3, 4).

**Next we** turn to internal problems affecting Abram's kindred. Abram alone **had** been **called** (Is. 51. 1, 2) **but** evidently his influence **had led** Lot to believe in Abram's God. Lot chose **the best** land to his cost. **He saw the** land "like **the** land of Egypt" (verses 10, 11). Going away from Abram

he went away from God to join **the godless**. We note **the** extreme contrast in **the** two men. Abram looked not only to **the** promise of earthly Canaan, **but** to "**the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God**" (Heb. 11. 9, 10). Lot **saw the** city on earth, and **except** for **what is** recorded in 2 Pet. 2. 7, 8, **we** should **have** hardly credited him with any genuine desires towards God. Though accounted "righteous" **he was** living by sight. Abram **is** an illustration of **the** consecrated believer, who **puts God first** and to whom God's presence, God's will, God's way, mean everything. **We** contrast too Lot's attitude—"he lifted up his eyes" (v. 10), and Abram **after the** separation **was told** by God "Lift up now thine eyes". Looking north, south, **east, and west the** whole land **was** to **be** his including **what Lot** chose.

*H. Sands, G. A. J.*

*From Barrhead.* —It is difficult to understand how a man like **Abraham**, who **was** so strong in faith, could **get** himself into **such a** disastrous situation **as he was** in when in Egypt. **We** know **what** motivated his actions—fear for his life. **We** also know **that** it **was a** carefully prepared plan and not a hasty thoughtless **last** minute decision, which would **have been** more excusable. **We** were of **the** opinion **that** Abraham should not **have** gone to Egypt **at all**, even when **the** famine **was** severe. Can not **the** Lord prepare **a table** in **the** wilderness? Elijah **was fed** by God in a time of famine and **Abraham** could **have been** similarly supported. However, **the fact** remains **that he** did go to Egypt and his foolishness **was**, in our view, sinful. Sarah **was** his sister through a common father **but** for him to say "**she** is my sister" **was** wrong **because** it **was part** truth with intent to deceive. His action brought punishment on others, a reminder **that** error on our part may **affect** not only ourselves. Abraham should **have** stayed at **Bethel** for **he had** to **come back there to start all** over again. Sin in our lives can **set us back** spiritually and **cause us** to lose time in God's service. **We** may **be** restored **but valuable** opportunity **has** meantime been lost.

Regarding Lot, this separation **was** inevitable. How can two **walk** together **except** they **be agreed**? [See Comment 2]. Material possessions **had** become a source of dispute and **we** need to **watch** materialism in this day and **age** **because** it not only **can** hinder spiritual progress **but** can **be** **the cause** of bitterness and strife among **the** Lord's people. **The grace** of Abraham, and his trust in God **are** both **seen** in

his allowing Lot to make the prior choice. Once the separation was effective Abraham received a further revelation of the extent of the land. Separation may bring sorrow but further appreciation and revelation of the extent of the Lord's blessings to us can follow. *D. J. Kerr*

*From Birkenhead.* —Considering our study heading we felt that Abram's trial was really before he went to Egypt. It was to determine whether in affliction he would depend on God, or view things naturally and go where there was food. In fact it appears that Abram's experience in Egypt was favourable, and that he had many things bestowed on him by Pharaoh. Whether Abram was wrong in going into Egypt is not possible to determine directly from Scripture—on other occasions God spoke, "Go not down" (Gen. 26. 2); "Go down" (46. 3)—but there are points which may indicate that it was injudicious [Comment 1]. For instance, there is no record of him calling on the Lord whilst in Egypt and away from the altar in Bethel.

Abram's discussion of a plan of action with Sarah before reaching Egypt indicated some knowledge of the land. This may have been acquired from those who travelled the trade routes (see Gen. 37).

Plagues came upon Pharaoh which seem unfair, but they were used to prevent him sinning rather than as a punishment. Also a cameo was seen of future events when the children of Israel knew slavery, and the Pharaoh of the day experienced the many plagues.

Reviewing Lot's experience at this time it appears that he knew of God's dealings with his uncle and chose to go along with him into Egypt and out again and eventually let self-interest separate him from Abram and lead him towards Sodom and all the problems this brought. Abram as the older man should have had first choice. Certainly Lot's experiences with Abram left a lasting mark on him, because he is stated to be a righteous man even in wicked Sodom.

Note that Abram comes back to the altar where he had been at the first to commune with the Lord (13. 4). It is difficult to establish that Lot was a hindrance to Abram, and that in God's purposes this separation had to take place [Comment 2].

*R. D. W., R. L. S.*

*From Denmark Hill.* —The famines of Gen. 12. 10, 26. 1 and 41. 54 played significant parts in establishing the people of Israel as a nation, and though Abraham takes it upon himself

to move into **the** land of **Egypt he is blessed** by **the** Lord and comes out **a** very wealthy **man as far as** material goods **are** concerned.

Though **it can be said that Abram did not tell a lie** about Sarah **because they had the same father, it was** definitely a **deceptive** statement in **that he** intended to **mislead** and **he was successful** in doing so. It would appear **that** Abram followed **his** natural instinct of self-preservation and maybe in **his** own way—not forgetting God's promise to **him**—hoped by **his** action to see **the** fulfilment of **the** promises through **him**.

Lot's choice **as we look back on it, was a misguided** one, **but** how many more of **us** facing a similar decision would **have** chosen differently? Though **he was a** righteous man **it seems** God **was left** out of **his** reckoning, **because the** delight to **the** eye of **the** well-watered plains of Jordan **made him choose for himself** not only **his** destination, **but** also **his** destiny among **the** people of Sodom.

**Having** learned **his** lesson in Egypt, Abram **gives** Lot **the** right to choose **his** way and God **is able** to separate Abram from **his** nephew to further **His** purposes for **His** people. (Rom. 8. 28 "... called according to **His** purpose". ) And so Abram **is separated** to God and **is** directed "... Now... look..." Not until **he has** been **called**, found in **the** right **place** and separated to God **is the** extent of **the** land **revealed** and God says, "**Walk** through... **the** length... and **the** **breadth** of it". So Abram moves **in** to  **dwell** there. Again, **the** spiritual application today **is** clear. **G. Smith**

**From Derby.** —**After** possibly about three years in Egypt **Abram** returned to **the** **place** of **the** altar and **pitched his** tent there, between **Bethel** and Ai. Lot **went with** him. **We** are not told of any altar in Haran or in Egypt. Abram's separation **was** not in keeping **with** God's requirements; **it was** not complete. Abram would **have** done **well** not to **have left the** **place** of **the** altar. However **the** Lord graciously granted **the** patriarch eventual restoration after **the** strife of herdmen. **Abram had said, "Let there be** no strife between **me** and thee". Separation becomes **a must, and we felt this was** according to God's good pleasure.

**There seems to be** a link between Gen. 12 and Ex. 12, where **we** read of **the** 430 years. According to **available** chronological **data the** 430 years taken retrospectively bring **us** to **this** period **we** are considering (from **BC 1921** to **BC**

1491). **The 400 years of Gen. 15. 13 and Acts 7. 6 are said by some commentators to begin with Ishmael's persecution at the weaning of Isaac. Help here would be appreciated. Then there is the 450 years of Acts 13. 19 [Comment 9].**

**The famines remind one of the spiritual death in the religious world today. Many believers seem to try to satisfy themselves with so little, when God has provided so much. Is. 25. 6 suggests God's bountiful provision of a feast of fat things on the lees—the fat, a reference to Christ, and "on the lees", God's house of rest and shelter for His people today. "There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4. 9). God found pleasure in communion with His friend after Lot was separated from him.**

*G. Conway, S. R. W.*

***From Edinburgh.*—We would suggest that there is a connection between the famine in the land and Abram going down into Egypt. We would suggest that Abram had a witness and testimony there. Did he gain all his wealth in Egypt? We were of a divided opinion. Some suggested that he took most of his wealth down with him; others that Egypt was the only place (it being such a great and powerful nation at that time) to gain this wealth. Nevertheless, he was blessed by God, with cattle, silver and gold. We felt that he had learnt his lesson, for the silence which existed between Abram and the Lord was broken at the altar.**

**There is little doubt that Lot had been greatly blessed whilst in Abram's company, both spiritually and materially. However, when they separate, we see Lot falling. Was Lot called like Abram, or did he just follow? [See Comment 4.] We see that Abram was the wiser of the two, for it is he who intervenes when the strife begins. Abram gives Lot the choice, and if Abram was gracious to Lot, then how gracious God was to Abram. Whatever he appeared to lose there, the Lord fully made up to him later.** *R. E. Hawthorne*

***From Hamilton (Ontario).*—Abram reached Canaan (Gen. 12. 5) and when he arrived at the Plain of Moreh the Lord appeared to him and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12. 7). Abram was in the promised land, but he left after having built an altar unto the Lord at Bethel. He headed south and drew nearer to Egypt. There was a famine in the land and so he entered Egypt. Though going into Egypt may be viewed as a sign of lack of faith on the part**

of Abram **it** is worth noting **that** God did not condemn **him** for it. There is also strong evidence **that** God **was** with Abram in Egypt.

Abram **began** to **fear** that **he** would **be** killed by Pharaoh's men **because** of his **beautiful** wife Sarai on entering Egypt. **He** told Sarai to claim to **be** his sister "**that** it may **be** well with **me** for thy **sake**, and **that** my soul may live **because** of **thee**" (Gen. 72. 12-13). **It** is evident **that** Abram used deceit to **save** his life, **and** **as** it turned out, to obtain **the** favour of Pharaoh which contributed to his wealth. God **was** with Abram though, and **we** find in Gen. 12. 17-20 **that** the Lord **put** many **plagues** on Pharaoh and **his** house, and Pharaoh, on discovering Abram's deception, sent him out of Egypt with Sarai and Lot. The essential point is **that** God did **see** to it **that** Abram got out of Egypt. **We** might consider **whether** God wanted Abram to go into Egypt so **that** **He** could show **His** power to Pharaoh.

Lot **had** apparently **made** his fortune in Egypt independently of Abram, for **we** find **the** two men journeying separately in Gen. 73. 5, and Lot **had** flocks, **herds** and tents. Abram **had** returned to his first altar at Bethel and **called** on **the** Name of the Lord (Gen. 73. 3-4). **He** wanted to **be** close to God **after** the events in Egypt. The difference in **the** two righteous men **led** to their separation. *T. Molczan*

*From Kingston-upon-Thames.* — **The** account of Abram's actions in 12. 10-20 could **be** entitled "Failure", although it is interesting to note preceding and following actions. In 12. 5 **we** see separation ("went forth"); in 12. 10 failure ("went down"); in 13. 1 restoration ("went up").

Gen. 12. 10 is **the** first reference in Scripture to **the** land which **we** think of **as** being a type of "**the** world". To establish this teaching, scriptures **such** as Ezek. 20. 7, Joel 3. 19, Rev. 77. 8 and many others **have** to **be** taken into account. However in ch. 12 and 73 **we** see **that** Egypt **bears** **the** stamp of human achievement with no **apparent** acknowledgement of Almighty God. Abram **was** called unto a land **that** the Lord would show him. **Such** a land **had** defined borders which **excluded** Egypt; so **we** read **that** when Abram **travelled** from Egypt, **he** **travelled** neither northwards, nor eastwards, **but** "into **the** South" (73. 1). **Our** borders of separation from **the** world **are** not grey areas, catering for human convenience, **but** **are** clearly defined in Scripture

(James 4. 4) [Comment 10].

The declension of Lot is clearly seen in **ch. 13**. In **v. 10** he had eyes **that saw** no higher than **the** plains of Jordan. He "**beheld**" (**v. 10**); he "chose" (**v. 11**); he "journeyed **east**" (**v. 11**); he "**dwelt** in **the** cities of **the** plain" (**v. 12**); he "moved **his** tent **as** far **as** Sodom" (**v. 12**). These five steps display **the** dangerous practice of living close to **the** world rather **than** living close to God. In **later chapters** we read how ensnared **he** became in Sodom, **the** city which **even** today is a byword for immorality. However, despite his mistakes **and** **what** they led to, Lot is described in scripture **as** "righteous" (**2 Pet. 2. 7**). It was **the** position **he** put himself in **that** led to his downfall. Perhaps **he** thought, naively, **that** by his righteousness **he** could **be** an influence for good in Sodom. **He** had not learned **the** lesson from **ch. 12**. God **calls** us out to a life of separation (**2 Cor. 6. 17**) and if **we** would do His will and **be** right conditionally, **we** must **be** right positionally.

*P. J. Brennan*

**From Lagos.** —**The** time of famine (**Gen. 12. 10**), presented Abram with a cross-road in **his** life. **We** believe **that** this was in **the** purpose of God in dealing with His servant: "**Hath** not **the** Potter a right over **the** clay?"

When God **called** Abram, **he** was comfortably **placed** as to this life (**see** **Gen. 12. 5**). Perhaps Abram knew not **what** it was to **be** in want. **At** the breaking of **the** whole **staff** of bread, might it not **be** **that** God was ordering this circumstance to **teach** His servant **that** **we** have "**the** sentence of **death** within ourselves, **that** **we** should not **trust** in ourselves, **but** in God which raiseth **the** dead" (**2 Cor. 7. 9**).

From this crisis-time in **the** patriarch's life **we** may learn **that** **the** **best** of human decisions without God and His word to direct **must** fail **at** length. There was no word from God to guide Abram to Egypt and in **the** course of his sojourn there. **It** has been suggested **that** this is where Abram erred in his life of faith. The point was made **that** **we** are responsible to continue where God **has** revealed Himself to us.

Abram, though a sojourner in Egypt, could not build an altar there to **the** Lord [Comment 7]. **He** lost fellowship with God who **had** appeared to him **and** also **the** power of his testimony to others. The necessity of uncompromised separation from **the** world is underlined for us.

How **much** Lot **had** appreciated **the** call of God to **separa-**

tion **was to be seen at the time of strife between his herds- men and Abram's herds- men.** There **was** no reference to God nor to **His** word in Lot's choice of **the** plain of Jordan.

*A. Beyioku Alase, E. Bassey*

**From Leeds.** —History **has** provided **us** with many **characters** who, in **their time**, could **be** considered **great**. In our own day, **there are** men and women who come to **the** forefront in their own **specialist field** and who are considered **great**. **Such** men and women receive their position, reward, and **acclaim** from **their** fellow men. **Yet** those whom **we** may consider as **the** greatest **are** not **awarded** the most favoured of **all titles**, "The friend of God". It is God who **calls** Abraham "My friend" (Is. 41. 8), and it is James who **writes** of **Abraham** as "The friend of God". It is God who **calls** **Abram** "My friend" (Is. 41. 8), and it is James who **writes** of **Abram** as "The friend of God" (James 2. 23). Jehoshaphat, **whilst** standing in **the midst** of **the** congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in **the** house of **the** Lord, **speaks** to God, of "**Abraham**, Thy friend" (2 Chron. 20. 7).

The word "friend" (*ahab*, "lover") in **the Old Testament scriptures** is basically **derived** from **the** word to love. Love **characterised** Abraham towards God and towards **his** fellows. In **the New Testament** "friend" is **the** word *philos*, "primarily an **adjective** denoting loved" (Vine). Love and affection should form **the basic characteristic** of anyone **termed** as a friend. "**A friend loveth at all times**" (Prov. 77. 17). "**There is a friend (lover) that sticketh closer than a brother**" (Prov. 18. 24). The Lord Jesus **Himself** is our eternal lover. "My beloved is **white** and ruddy, **the chiefest** among ten thousand ... **This is** my beloved and **this is** my friend" (S. of S. 5. 10, 16).

Inasmuch **as we are** now **fast** approaching 2000 AD, our present consideration **takes us back** to **the** period close to 2000 BC, to **review the life** of Abraham. A century spans **the** Godward **life** of **this** man, **described** as "**the friend of God**". **Abram** was 75 years old when God **called him** (Gen. 12. 4) and 175 when **he died** (Gen. 25. 7).

*H. Ft. Dodge*

**From Liverpool.** —**We judge that time** spent in Egypt represents **wasted time** for **Abraham**, and **that it is** not until **he** returns to **Bethel** (Gen. 13. 3) **that he is** once again in **the** mind of God, and so walking by **faith** not by **sight** (see 2 Cor. 5. 7). The excursion into Egypt demonstrates **that he** who is uniquely **called** "**the friend of God**" **was subject** to **the**

**same** weaknesses of fear and doubt **that** characterise **us all**.

**The** famine **was** primarily sent by God to punish **those** who inhabited **the** land, **but at the same time it was to test** Abraham's **faith** in God. In commenting upon **Abraham's** performance, however, **we feel that care should be** taken to **see that we** do not **accuse him** of **failure** and sin, when **God Himself makes** no **direct** comment or judgement upon **this** incident [Comment 8].

**We** thought **it** strange **that the** one who **was** prepared to embark upon **a** lifelong journey in response to **a call** from "**the** God of Glory", should now **act** upon **his** own initiative to provide for **his immediate** and temporal needs. **This was at** great risk to **himself**, and to safeguard **his life he** concealed from **the** Egyptians **the fact that Sarah was his wife**. True **she was his** half-sister (Gen. 20. 12), **but** by keeping secret their **true** relationship, not only **was Sarah placed** in an untenable position and **her** honour and reputation **placed at stake, but** God's **revealed** plans to **Abraham** stood in jeopardy. Truly **the fear** of man bringeth **a** snare (Prov. 29. 25).

Although **with** hindsight **we** know **that** no **spiritual** blessing **accrued** to **Abraham** during **his** stay in Egypt, **we** wondered why God **Himself passes** no comment. [See Questions and Answers.] **Further, Abraham** does **the very same thing** again (Gen. 20), and not only does God not condemn **him, but tells Abimelech that Abraham** is **the** one who **will** pray for **him** to remove God's **curse** from **their families** (Gen. 20. 7, 17, 18). **Yet, if Abraham received** no **direct** condemnation from God for **his** actions, **there was a** penalty to **be paid**, for "whatsoever **a** man soweth, **that shall he also reap**" (Gal. 6. 7).

*G. S., M. S. E., G. S. W.*

*From Macduff and Whitehills.* —After receiving the call **Abraham** went south, reaching **Bethel** and building an altar. **He** continued south until **he came** to Egypt. **The** reason for **his** going **was the** famine in **the** land of Canaan. **It was** thought inconsistent **that a** righteous man, **such as Abraham**, should follow **such** a path. **His lack of faith was** unlike **his** previous **character** and reminded **us** of one of **later** days, **Elimelech**. God **had blessed him** and yet **we** find **him** leaving **Bethel (the House of God)** and going down to Egypt (**the** world). **This resulted** in **deceit** and deception.

**We** find in v. 12 **that he** thinks **that the** Egyptians **will kill** him. **This** comes shortly **after** God's promise to **him** of **his** seed. **The lesson perhaps is** **that** going away from **the** House

of God resulted in a **lack of** vision. Pharaoh realised **that the** judgement **that came** upon him **was the result of** wrongdoing and **he** sent Abraham and **all his** persons away.

**It was** mentioned **that** Lot is referred to **as** being righteous, yet hankered after **the** cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. **Perhaps it was the** influence of his wife, since **we** learn of Lot's **wife** later **that** her **heart was set on the** city [Comment 6]. Lot, during his stay in **the** city, drifted from his tent to a house. His position latterly **was** not one of a sojourner, **but** rather of one who **has** gained authority and a position of prominence. His desire to gain suitable land for his flock **was** to **cause** his downfall. **He** went in **full**, and **came** out empty, indeed fleeing for his life. **J. M. W.**

**From Melbourne.** —**Abraham's** faith rested in **the** faithfulness of God **but** there **was much that he had** to learn from experience. **He** knew **that** there were dangers **ahead** by going down into Egypt, where **he had** no **call** from God, and not **least was the fact that** his wife Sarai, notwithstanding her **age, was** fair to look upon. **She** co-operated with him in **the** deception which **had** appeared to him to **be the** way of safety. Abraham **must** learn **that** deception will not **be acceptable** with **the** God of glory who **had called** him into Canaan. **It** is evident **that** Pharaoh recognised certain standards concerning **the** primal **law** of marriage, and would not **have** taken Sarai **had he** known **the facts**. There is no record **that** Abraham **made** any **attempt** to build an altar or **call** upon **the Name of the** Lord while in Egypt. His **steps are** now retraced to **the place he had left, and** there **at the place of the altar, he called** again upon **the Name of the** Lord.

Some **have stated that** in modern times, apart from one portion in **the** vicinity of Jericho, there **has been** no evidence of well-watered plains, neither southward to **the Dead Sea**, nor northward to Galilee, **as stated to have been** seen by Lot in **the** valley of **the** Jordan, **much** of it being a jungle for centuries. Archaeologists, however, **have** pointed out **that** this **has** not always been so. **We** are informed by **such** men **as** Professor Nelson **Glueck that** on **the** eastern side of **the** Jordan between **the** **Sea of Galilee** and **the Dead Sea** there **has** been discovered evidence **that** there **have been** about seventy settlements in this area. About thirty-five of **these** **have** been identified **as** belonging to **the** Early Bronze **Age, 3000 to 2000 BC.** **It was** shortly after this period **that** Abraham **and** Lot lived around **Bethel, Hebron and Sodom.**

Professor Glueck translates Gen. 73. 10 as follows, "And Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the Plains of Jordan, that it was well irrigated everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah". Other Hebrew students have pointed out that the text can convey the thought of an irrigated area.

W. S., T. W. F.

*From Middlesbrough.* —This appears to be a period of failure in the lives of both Abram and Lot. There is no doubt that Abram was a faithful man (comp. Heb. 11), but in his action in going to Egypt he was showing a lack of faith in God and His protection. In turning to Egypt Abram was putting his dependence in this symbol of the world. He should never have been there at all. Often others suffer because of our failure to speak out. Yet despite apparent failure, God renewed His promises to Abram.

Lot chose the well-watered plain—"like the land of Egypt"; an apt description. Lot journeyed eastward. Symbolically, he journeyed away from God, as in the case of Adam and Eve. He became deeply involved in the cities of the plain, becoming accepted there and sitting as an elder in the gate. Perhaps his call was not as strong as that of his uncle.

Although Abram had as yet no son, God's promise was of seed as the dust of the earth, and His plan was that Abram's descendants should inherit the *whole* land. There was a need for identification with the land. "Walk through it," said God. So it is today, there is a need for God's people to identify with their inheritance, and to explore together the extent of God's promises in His word. W. C. Taylor

*From Nottingham.* —It was a serious famine which caused Abram to seek out his own salvation, to follow the instincts of the flesh rather than rest in the God who had brought him from Ur of the Chaldees. We compare and contrast him in this instance with Elijah. Abram, too, was a man of like passions with us (see James 5. 17) but in the time of drought and famine Elijah waited for the Lord's deliverance while Abram sought his own. God's Name and altar were not in Egypt and Abram's going there involved him in deceit. He sensed the danger of the famine but by engaging in deceit he brought himself into greater danger with Pharaoh. In God's mercy he was delivered and left Egypt a rich man. He *went up* out of Egypt (Gen. 13. 1) back to "where his tent was at the beginning" (Gen. 13. 3).

It seems clear from chap. 13 that Abram learned the lesson of his experiences in Egypt, for when the time came to separate from Lot he again exercised his faith in God. In one sense it was the riches gained in Egypt that caused the strife which resulted in the separation from Lot. But from another point of view, this separation was in the eternal purpose of God, because God's call was to Abram. It was to him God had given the land and to Abram's seed which was to become a great nation. Abram looked through the eyes of faith. He saw what God was going to give his seed in due time, but he saw more, he saw the Lord's day (John 8. 56) and looked for the city whose Builder and Maker is God (Heb. 11. 10). ft. *Hickling*

*From St. Helens.* —Abram built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord at Bethel, evidence of his strong faith and desire to have communion with his God. Then, self-motivated, he journeyed first toward the south, found a famine-stricken land, and forgetting God's promise to bless him, God's ability to sustain him in all circumstances, being weak in faith, **he went** down into Egypt. Here Abram thought it necessary to engage in subterfuge and deceit. God had to disentangle what Abram, by his self-choosing had done—first by plagues to recover Sarai, unharmed, from Pharaoh's household, for he had gracious purposes yet to be fulfilled in her, and then to cause Pharaoh to send Abram on his way "with his wife and all that he had".

Abram was still rich and had Lot with him. Having "flocks and herds and tents", their substance was very great. However, this abundance of flocks itself provoked dissension between Abram's and Lot's herdsmen, and while Abram acted wisely in proposing that they separate, and generously, in permitting Lot to have first choice as to which land he would occupy, yet this strife was witnessed by the Canaanites and Perizzites. Is it not imprudent for children of God to contend before a carnal generation? Better lose than strive. If we yield God will compensate. Abram yielded, but the question arises whether Lot should have been there at all, since God had instructed Abram to "get thee from thy kindred, and from thy father's house". Certainly Lot seems not to be included in God's purposes with Abram. Is it significant that "the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes", reminding him of His gracious promise that his seed should inherit the

land? **Great promises** are ours on separation. **We** too should "**walk up and down and make the land our own**" [Comment 4].

**At the oaks of Mamre** Abram built an **altar** unto **the Lord**. Meanwhile, Lot, attracted by **what** his eyes **beheld**—could **he have** chosen otherwise? [Comment 5]—chose **the Plain of Jordan**, later moved his tent **as far as Sodom**, and eventually **was found in that wicked city**. **J. H. R.**

**From Toronto.** —On first reading it would **appear that** Abraham's visit into Egypt **was** within **the** directive will of God. After **the Lord's** initial appearance to **Abraham** in **the land (12. 7)**, this visit **was to be a test** of Abraham's loyalty—a journey into **a hostile environment**. **But such** testing times are necessary and constructive (James 7. 2, 12). **The** famine in Canaan brought about **a crisis** and **the Lord** provided food in Egypt **as he did later with Isaac (26. 1, 2)** and Jacob (**42. 1**). **Isaac was** commanded not to avail **himself** of it (**26. 2**) **but we read** of no similar commandment to Abraham and in **fact**, Abraham is commended to **Isaac as** someone who obeyed God's voice (**26. 5**).

**But** should Abraham **have** gone to Egypt? **The Lord had** told him in Haran to go to "**the land**" (**12. 1**). Abraham arrived there and pitched his tent (**12. 5, 8**) **and the Lord** confirmed his arrival (**12. 7**). Egypt **was not "the land" that** Abraham **had been called** to. During Abraham's sojourn in Egypt there **was** no altar for God. Abraham first built an altar between **Bethel** and Ai (**12. 8**) **and he** returned **there after the interlude** in Egypt (73. 4). **But in the** meantime, no offering ascended. Even though **he** received **a vision of the entire land he was to be given** and **was** instructed to **walk through it all (73. 14-17)**, Abraham **was never able** to possess it. **He was a sojourner**, dwelling in tents (**Heb. 77. 9**), constantly moving and **thus** erecting new altars (e. g. **12. 8, 73. 18**). For **the place of the altar to be fixed** there **must be a covenanted people in the land**. Abraham **was in the land but was just** an individual. Not until Israel were in **the land a few hundred years later could the place of the altar be fixed at Jerusalem**.

Egypt **left** its mark on Lot. Lot **appears to have** been restless for his independence rather than to **be** in subjection to his **uncle**, and **at the** decision point **he** chose Jordan **because it was "like the land of Egypt"**. And so **the separation was** both inevitable (**because Lot's treasure was** on

earth) and necessary (**because he was not the seed** of Abraham, who were to inherit **the land**). Lot is never mentioned in connection with **the altar**. **Despite** his family heritage and his righteousness (**2 Pet. 2. 7, 8**), **he** died spiritually in Sodom. **But Abraham had left the trials of Egypt and the people of Egypt behind, that he might claim the promise of God.**

**From Vancouver.** —**Abram** was called to leave his own country and his father's house. **He had** definite promises from God. God would **bless** him. God **would make** him productive. God would curse anyone who tried to **harm** him or his family. **The promises of God did not mean** things would go easily. **Abram was to have** many trials. **Trials** should only strengthen faith in God and His promises.

When they **came** near to Egypt, **Abram begged** Sarai to denounce their status **as husband and wife**. **He even suggested that she** lie to Pharaoh. Sarai lived in Pharaoh's **palace**, not for one night **but for a very much** longer period of time. Sarai lived in **the palace** while **her legal** husband lived in **a tent**. **Abram was treated** as Pharaoh's brother-in-law. How **must he have felt** having to live in this manner, **apart** from his wife, and for so long **a period**? Meantime **he became** very rich in **cattle**, in silver and in gold. Then **there was the plague** which God brought on **the** royal household. This did not **appear** in one day. Although **Abram lacked** faith in God's promises, God by sending **the plague as a curse** proved that **He** never forgets His promises. Those whom God **has called** will **have** trials to prove faith in God. **We** can learn from **Abram's** mistake.

Regarding **the** separation of **Abram and Lot**, **we have** generally been **taught that** Lot chose **the city**, which speaks of **the world**. **Let us** consider their separation from **a different angle**. Lot **was** always under **the** guidance of **Abram**. Maybe this prevented him from standing on his own **feet**. **He would be** too dependent on Abram. **A person will never grow up or learn to be** independent under **these** circumstances. Can **a lesson be** seen **here** in how to **treat** our young ones in **the church**? They should **be** allowed to **take up** responsibility in His work. **The** separation of **Abram and Lot was a** wise and necessary thing. **It gave** Lot opportunities to **have** experiences of his own **and** to grow to maturity. **No child will be able to walk** if **he** is always **carried** in his parents' arms. Lot however, **must have** been only **a few** years

younger than Abram yet **he was** overshadowed by **Abram** [Comment 3].

*Jo Wong*

### COMMENTS

(1) (*Birkenhead*). While, as our friends indicate, there is no **direct** rebuke recorded of **Abram**, "injudicious" is **perhaps** being a little generous to Abram. Doubtless many will agree **that, as suggested** in other papers, **the case** against Abram is clear and **such blessing as he** received in Egypt **bespeaks** God's **grace** and constancy of purpose in Abram's **call and destiny**.

(2) (*Birkenhead*). I would in general agree with this observation and **suggest that the** separation which **seems to have** been indicated by v. 6 **was** one towards wider pastures **for both**, where physical separation need not **have** implied any estrangement; a positive move with its spiritual counterpart today. The subsequent strife between **the** herdsmen, and Lot's yielding to temptation in selecting **the** Jordan plain, might surely **have** been avoided.

(3) (*Vancouver*). This is a very interesting and constructive suggestion, and I think very **much** in line with Comment 2 above. Clearly our friends would **accept that** an appropriate degree of maturity **and** dependability should precede a "positive" separation in service and this is perhaps in mind in their pointing out **the** relative closeness in **age** of Abram and Lot.

(4) (*St. Helens*). The question of Lot's part in Abram's **call, and** therefore **the** meaning of "separation" in this instance, is interesting. Normally those willing to embrace God's will and **law** were welcomed among God's people (**see Ruth 7. 16**), **and** this would **suggest that**, if Lot **had** been wholeheartedly with Abram in divine things his continuing partnership would **have** been **acceptable** in God's purpose (**see** Comments 2 and 3). That **he was** not, is indicated by his **carnal** selection of **the** Jordan plain and so Abram **was**, in **effect**, separating from a hindrance.

(5) (*St. Helens*). Are our friends **here** thinking in **terms** of predestination? **We** could hardly **tackle that subject** here! **But** perhaps it is a question of whether Lot's choice **was** limited to one of two **places**. I do not think there is any indication of this. **It was** right **hand** or **left** **that** Abram offered, of "**the** whole land", not **east** or **west**. Surely **the** land could **have** contained **them** both without incursion into **the** Sodom area? **It seems** unthinkable **that** Abram, **after the**

**sad lesson of Egypt**, would **have** chosen **the** Jordan plain wherever Lot **had decided** to go.

(6) (*Macduff*). Perhaps, in fairness to Lot's wife, we could observe that her ultimate folly and love of the city, might equally well have been the result of Lot's original unwise decision.

(7) (*Lagos*). It would certainly seem that he *did* not, whatever might have been the result (see Question from Liverpool).

(8) (*Liverpool*). While appreciating the caution here expressed, are we not often left to judge circumstances by scriptural principles and in recognising sin and error, learn to avoid it? I would agree with the group in so far as exercising caution in apportioning degrees of guilt at this relatively early stage of divine revelation. It was this same great man who himself later said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 78. 25).

(9) (*Derby*). It seems clear that the 450 years of Acts 73. 19 is a period in the land, after the wilderness wanderings. Gen. 75. 13 and Acts 7. 6, on the other hand, indicate the period of affliction as 400 years; whereas Ex. 12. 40 indicates the total sojourn in Egypt was 430 years. Gal. 3. 17 speaks of a similar period of 430 years from the confirmation of the Abramic covenant. As illustrated by discussions on pages 87 and 100 of 1944 B. Studies (Volume 12) there are different suggestions to explain these scriptures, but the various interpretations have in common that the periods involved include the sojournings of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Canaan as well as the period of about 215 years in Egypt (i. e. from Gen. 46. 27 to the Exodus).

(10) (*Kingston-upon-Thames*). It is true that Jas. 4. 4 is very salutary plain speaking on friendship with the world and the term "adulteresses" is strong language, be it used in a literal or figurative sense. Yet is it not true that there are real difficulties sometimes in the borderland of being in the world and yet not of it? Difficult situations often need careful and prayerful judgement before the Lord. I am not suggesting that Abram was in one of these in Gen. 12. J. D. T.

# BIBLE STUDIES

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## EDITORIAL

The passage under study this month is interesting for **the** variety of people with whom **Abram was** involved, and it is **sad that** Lot **was** so little changed by events. This **first** mention of warfare (Gen. 14) brought **defeat in the** first instance to those who were **later** destroyed in divine judgement and can **be read as a** divine warning, **but** one Lot **did** not take. **Abram was** involved because of Lot's wilfulness **but** later events were to show **it was** to little purpose. Once liberated, Lot **was** not impressed with Melchizedek, **and all that passed** between his **uncle** and **the** Priest of God Most High did not lift his heart above **the** plain. **He was a** carnal man who could **agree** his captors were Abram's enemies too, **but was** unable to **see that Abram's refusal** of the King of Sodom's offer pointed to enemies more **subtle** and more dangerous. **Abram's** victory in refusing **the** riches of Sodom **was** greater **than** his success in **battle** and Melchizedek **takes the** honours here. **Sad** it is **that** Lot did not **share** in **the** divine blessing. **"I am** thy shield, **and** thy exceeding **great** reward" (75. 1). Lot never learned **"Blessed is the** man **that trusteth in the** LORD, **and** whose hope **the** LORD is" (Jer. 77. 7).

A. B. R.

## ENCOUNTERS WITH KINGS

(Gen. 14. 1-24)

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —After the separation of Abram and Lot, **both became** involved in unexpected warfare **as** powerful armies from **the east** invaded **the** land of Palestine. **As a** consequence Lot **became a** prisoner of war when Sodom and neighbouring **places were defeated** by **the** invaders. Having chosen to **be a** citizen of Sodom, **he** now **had to** share **the** city's danger and conquest. Abram's involvement arose **because** of his love for Lot, and his determination to **effect a** rescue.

Melchizedek's intervention prior to **the** meeting of Abram and **the** King of Sodom **was** timely, **as the** weary warriors returned victoriously from **the battle**. In **the** light of **the** com-

plete recovery of **all the** plunder, **as well as all the** prisoners, including Lot, this kindly king-priest **was able** to give sustenance **as well as** spiritual strength to Abram in **what he** did and said. Abram **was thus** equipped to **meet the** challenge of **the** kings of Sodom; and in his refusal to **accept the smallest** reward **he** declared his complete faith and trust alone in "God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth".

**We** commented **as to the** position of Lot, now delivered and free from **the** environment in which **he** "**vexed** his righteous soul from day to day with their **lawless** deeds". Apparently no effort **was made** even **at** this critical **stage** to **take full** advantage of **the** situation by **a** complete withdrawal from Sodom's wickedness (**See** Gen. 13. 13).

*R. A. J., E. B.*

*From Barrhead.* —**Abraham had** nothing (personally) to do with **the** revolt or consequences of **the battle** of four kings against five. His tent and **altar** testified to his pilgrim character, amidst **all the** carnage, turmoil and strife. So it is today with **the** people of God, surrounded by wars and rumours of wars, and constant violence. **If God be for us** who can **be** against **us**? **Thus we** can truly say **we are** more than conquerors through Him **that** loved us.

**It was** different with Lot, who **became** personally involved **because he had** taken **up** his abode in **the** plains of Sodom, and **thus became affected** by **the** wars of Sodom. Lot failed miserably in regard to **the** truth of separation. Personal and family interests **seemed** to govern his life.

**We** noted **the act** of brotherly love on **the** part of Abraham, in rescuing his brother's son Lot from **the** power of darkness. There is **a** lesson for **us**, "**Ye** which **are** spiritual, restore **such a** one in **a** spirit of meekness. "

Melchizedek, royal priest, **blessed** Abraham with **the** beautiful benediction containing **the** divine title of **the** Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. Abraham **gave** Melchizedek **a** tithe. **It must have** refreshed Abram after his return from **the** slaughter of **the** kings (perhaps bodily **weak** after being engaged in **such** fierce conflict) **that** bread and wine **were** given to him, bread to strengthen, wine to cheer.

Abraham could not **be** enticed from his **steadfast** faith. His rewards were not from men of **the** world. **He** looked to God alone who is **a** rewarder of **them that** diligently **seek** Him (Heb. 11. 6).

*W. Fullerton*

**From Birkenhead.** —As far as can be determined Amraphel, Arioch, Chedorlaomer, and Tidal came from Elam, east of Mesopotamia. Having crossed the Syrian desert they headed down the east bank of the river Jordan to make war with the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and their confederates. Chedorlaomer achieved victory and the vanquished served him for twelve years before rebelling.

As a result of the battle in the vale of Siddim Lot and his goods were among the captured. This news was received by Abram and his response sheds useful light on his character. There was no feeling that Lot was receiving his just reward for his foolish behaviour, rather loyal, loving friendship which prompted him to plan with God's help to pursue Lot's captors and successfully rescue him.

Abram, returning with Lot, is met by Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, a character who breaks upon the pages of Scripture and about whom we know little. Heb. 7. 3 tells us he is "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God." We have in Melchizedek a preview of the one who in Ps. 110. 4 is "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"—our Lord Jesus Christ who is King of kings (see also Heb. 5. 10 and Heb. 7).

Melchizedek received of Abram a tithe and in turn Abram was strengthened physically and spiritually in preparation for his meeting with the king of Sodom.

Bera presents Abram with a temptation but he does not succumb to it. Abram refused the king of Sodom's offer so that it would not be possible for him to say that he had made Abram rich. It is also to be noted that Melchizedek declares something of the character of God—"God Most High (El Elyon), possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14. 19). After his exhausting experiences it is interesting to see that the Lord reassured Abram concerning the future (Gen. 15. 1).

*M. B. Turner, R. D. Williams*

**From Bolton.** —1. **Conflict with kings.** In the battle of the nine kings, the kings of the five towns in the Vale of Siddim were defeated, their lands ravaged, their goods plundered and many captives taken.

Among these was Lot, the unfortunate nephew of Abram, who plotted the course of his life by what he saw by the eye. He saw the well-watered plain of Jordan, made that

his dwelling place, and was soon to find the sorrow of such a choice. He was set free again by Abram, who with his small army of trained men followed the victorious armies of Chedorlaomer, and in the victory that followed he freed all the prisoners and retrieved all the goods.

2. *The comfort of blessing.* As Abram returned home from the distant conflict with his battle-weary band of warriors, he was approached by two very different kings. First the king of Sodom set out to congratulate Abram and to claim his people back. The other king, Melchizedek, intercepted Abram, and his timely intervention was divinely appointed to strengthen Abram at a time of physical weakness. He strengthened him with the bread and wine just when he was in need, then he blessed Abram and finally received from him a tenth of all.

In this there is a clear picture of our Great High Priest, who also in His priestly work succours and blesses, and receives of the offerings of His people to give to God the Father. The tithe was what God demanded in the old dispensation, but while in the day of grace God does not state what we must give, this does not lessen our responsibility, but rather would seem to increase it, lest we be found lacking.

3. *The contempt of gain.* The victory having been revealed as God's victory (v. 20) (in the priest's blessing), Abram saw the trap into which he could have fallen. The priest's intervention revealed all and Abram looked with contempt on the plunder and he accredited all the glory to God Most High.

**S. G. S., I. S.**

*From Brantford.* —The Bible's first mention of war is instructive. Neither Abram the Hebrew nor Melchizedek, King of Salem, were a part of the conflict between the world and its religion (Shinar) and the world and its wickedness (Sodom). Righteous Lot's worldly propensities led to his religious enslavement also. It took trained men under a godly leader to dispel the invader, and rescue men so caught. The world's troubles will not claim the vitality of those who follow Him whose kingdom is not of this world, yet through us God would seek to snatch those enslaved by the turmoil around (Judg. 5. 2; Eph. 6. 12).

The flush of victory and the laying down of arms often leaves the victor vulnerable to other forms of attack. The King of Sodom had most to gain by meeting Abram at this

point. **We** hear **the** words of Satan echo through his request, "**Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself**", (comp. Luke 4. 5-7; 2 Kings 5. 26).

**At such a time the** Priest of God **Most High** reminded **Abram of his** vow, **blessed** him and strengthened him. **Melchizedek was made** like unto **the** Son of God; it is fitting **that this should be the** first Scriptural association of bread and wine. Mention here of Melchizedek's humanity would only **have** weakened **the** type of Christ **that he** is. His meeting with Abram revealed **the** mind of God and His interest in this man of faith. His presence shows **the** excellence of Abram, **but the less** is **blessed** of **the** better. Great indeed is **the** blessing **we have** received, who **have** been **met**, strengthened and **blessed** by **the** great Antitype.

*David Neely*

*From Derby.* —Chap. 14. opens **with the names** of four kings, apparently of **the descendants** of Shem. Their leader **was** Chedorlaomer king of **Elam**, a city named after, and probably founded by **Elam** the firstborn of **Shem the eldest** son of Noah. Amraphel **was** king of Shinar, **the locality the** descendants of Noah **settled** in prior to their dispersion. Although it **was** formerly peopled by Cushites, **these** may **have** been **superseded** by Shemites. Tidal **was** king of Goiim (Nations, **RVM**) and from **these** it may **be the** Assyrians sprang. Many centuries **later** God **had** to bring **Elam** to judgement (Jer. 49. 34-39). **The five** kings of **the** Plain, having been in subjection to Chedorlaomer, **rebelled** and **war was the result**. These five kings and their peoples **seem** to **have** descended from **Ham**. The king of **Elam**, despite **all** his **success**, **was defeated** by **Abram** who **had the** God of **Abram** as his **Helper**. Thus **Abram** recovered **all** including his nephew Lot.

**We** thought **that the three** brothers who **were** confederate with Abram, **who had** his tent and **altar** in **the** neighbourhood of Hebron **where** they also lived, did not in any way defile **Abram's separated** position in relation to God. **Mamre** and his two brothers may **have** volunteered their services, having learned something of **Abram's** God. They **were** greatly honoured and received their **share** of **the** spoils of victory which **Abram refused**.

**Abram was met** by one who **had the** priestly authority to **bless** God's valiant servant and to sustain him with **bread** and wine. To him **Abram gave** a tenth of **the** chief spoils

(Heb. 7. 4). In the Hebrews the priestly office of **Melchizedek** is stressed, rather than his manhood. It is in his office as a priest that we see him as a type of our **Great Priest** whom the Psalmist speaks of as "a Priest for ever after the order (or manner) of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110. 4); see also **Zech. 6. 13**, "He shall be a Priest upon His throne." The priest of God Most High (**El Elyon**) had the dual office of priest and king. As priest he was his people's representative with God; as king, God's representative with the people of Salem. Unlike the Aaronic priesthood the priest of Gen. 14, had no recorded genealogy, or beginning or termination of his priestly office. Our Lord was made a Priest. He did not belong (according to the flesh) to the tribe of Levi, but to the kingly tribe of **Judah**. Being born of the seed of David he was the rightful Heir to the throne of Israel.

**G. Conway, S. R. W.**

*From Kingston - upon - Thames.* —Abram encountered the kings of Shinar, Ellasar, **Elam** and the king of Nations as they travelled back towards the east with Lot whom they had captured as a result of the battle with the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, **Admah**, Zeboiim and Bela. The first kingdom mentioned in v. 1 is Shinar, the place where men endeavoured to reach heaven by building the Tower of **Babel** (Gen. 11. 2-9), while the first kingdom mentioned in v. 2 is Sodom which was evil in the sight of God (Gen. 13. 13). As Lot was caught up in this conflict between these two forces so it is today that men are caught up in the conflict between those who try to serve God in their own way, and those who refuse to acknowledge the existence of God. As Abram's responsibility was, so it is ours to save souls who are ensnared by these evil forces.

Abram's servants were "trained men" who would be trained to care for Abram's flocks and herds and also to kill. Similarly in the Churches of God today, God needs men who are able to care for His flock (1 Pet. 5. 2) and also to fight the spiritual war (1 Tim. 6. 12). In Deut. 2. 10, those who were defeated by Chedorlaomer are referred to as being "great and many and tall", and this shows the remarkable victory that Abram's small force achieved over Chedorlaomer and his allies. As in Abram's liberation of Lot from apparently overwhelming power, so today the task of rescuing those who have been enslaved by the Devil is not easy and victory only comes when given by the Lord (comp. v. 22).

As Abram successfully rescued Lot **with the strength of his household so we in God's household, if strong in the Lord can (in God's will) save those who have strayed from the truth (James 5. 19, 20).**

When **Abram** returned from **the slaughter of the kings, he was met** by Melchizedek, king of **Salem**, who fortified him with **bread and wine, blessed him and then blessed God** for delivering Abram's enemies into **his hands**. Melchizedek **was also the "Priest of God Most High" (v. 18) and a type of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 5. 6).** Here **we can clearly see the significance of Abram giving Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had gained during the battle with the kings (Heb. 7. 2).** On **the Lord's Day we come to give to "our Melchizedek" and we should be like Abram** who did not **meet Melchizedek empty-handed. We should give to the Lord both spiritually and materially.**

**The name of Melchizedek is firstly interpreted king of righteousness and then king of peace (Heb. 7. 2). We can parallel this with the kingdom of God which is first a kingdom of righteousness and then of peace (Rom. 14. 17).**

**After being fortified and blessed by Melchizedek, Abram was tempted by the king of Sodom, "Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself". But Abram was able to resist this temptation: "I will not take anything which is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (v. 23, A. V. ).** By refusing **the gifts Abram separated himself from Sodom's rule and Sodom's riches and so it is with us. We should not seek after tangible riches or power of this world, the more especially when we are trying to rescue our fellows from worldly entanglement: but should lay up our treasure in heaven. "For where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also" (Matt. 6. 21).**

**A. Bowler**

**From Lagos. —Abram was yet in Hebron when one that escaped came and told him of Lot's captivity and the loss of all his possessions (Gen. 13. 18, 14. 13).** Love constrained **the patriarch to risk his life for Lot, and thus Abram pursued the kings as far as Dan with his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen (Gen. 14. 14).** With him also **were Aner, Echol and Mamre his confederates. In the night Abram pursued his enemies to Hobah. "He brought back all the goods... his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also and the people" (Gen. 14. 16).** The fame of **Abram spread at the slaughter of Chedorlaomer**

and the kings with him. The man of God, Abram, was returning from this slaughter to fight a yet more subtle battle with the king of Sodom. But before they met, God introduced a scene which reflects His way with His servants down the ages: "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12. 9). God sent His servant Melchizedek, king of Salem, and priest of God Most High; and he spoke words from God to strengthen **Abram**. "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth. Blessed be God Most High, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hands" (Gen. 14. 19, 20).

Melchizedek as a minister of righteousness and peace was a lovely type of our Lord Jesus. Abram saw the things of earth in the light of the sanctuary, and being humbled by the vision of God he lifted up his hand unto the Lord (he vowed unto Jehovah).

When the king of Sodom came with his plea: "Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself" (v. 21), Abram replied "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take... aught that is thine... nothing for me; only that which the young men have eaten and the portion of the men which went with me..." (Gen. 14. 22-24 R. V. M. ). But what was wrong in Abram taking the spoil which he brought back? Because of Abram's separation at the call of God, he rejected Sodom and her riches, and now the very riches which he turned his back on were offered to him in a very subtle way "All things are lawful for me; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor. 6. 12).

S. A. Beyoiku-Alase, E. Bassey

*From Leeds.* —Abram's only apparent martial activity demonstrates the outworking of his faith in that he was victorious over a strong manifestation of worldly power, the four kings, amongst whom was the king of Shinar (Babylon-type of the world) from which he had been called out. With 318 men he gained the victory in a night attack setting free just (righteous) Lot (2 Pet. 2. 6-8) who was a captive of those worldly powers.

Sodom was doomed to destruction, and Lot was then dwelling there (14. 12), setting down his roots, committing himself and all his goods. Out from Jerusalem (Zion—city of the Great King) Melchizedek ("My king is righteous")

came to **bless** (Ps. 733. 3), and **Abram**, wearied from the hardness of the long night's **battle**, received from the king and priest of God, sustenance and joy.

From Melchizedek, Abram received and took **up the name** (title) **EI Elyon (the Most High God)** (comp. v. 19, 20 with v. 22). **He** refused anything offered by the king of Sodom, **but** acknowledged the right of Melchizedek to receive the tenth of **all**. **We** need to exercise **care** in the five things similarly expressed in Moses (**Heb. 7. 25-27**): refusing, choosing, esteeming, respecting and enduring. **We** also **have** another title accorded to Abram (v. 13), "**Abram the Hebrew**". **It** is the first occurrence of the word Hebrew, the last being in Rev. 16. 16 related to Armageddon.

The term **Hebrew** appears to **be** descriptive of Abram as an emigrant (from beyond the river). Abram **the Hebrew** was a foreigner in the land into which God **called** and brought him (Acts 7. 5; Heb. 7. 9). Later, when the children of **Israel** were the more established in the land, God **gave** commandment (Lev. 25. 23) "**The land is Mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me.**"

Whilst **Abram** was involved in physical **warfare**, our weapons **are** not of the **flesh** (Eph. 6. 11, 12, 17; 2 Cor. 10. 4, 5). **Let us** contend earnestly for the Faith, once for all delivered unto the saints (**Jude 3**). *H. R. Dodge*

**From Liverpool.** —Chedorlaomer king of **Elam** seems to **be** supreme over the other kings. Then five of **them** rebel after **twelve** years' subjugation. Lot, who previously **had** moved **his tent as far as** Sodom, **is** now dwelling in **that** wicked city, and when the **war** comes **he** is among the captives taken. **Abram** hearing **that** Lot is taken prepares to **rescue** him and is successful. No root of bitterness is here. **He** did not say, "**It serves** you right". Note "**Abram's** brother's son" (v. 12) and "**Abram** heard **that** his brother was taken" (v. 14). A lesson in brotherly love is to **be** learned **here** (see Rom. 7. 10, Heb. 7. 1, 2 Pet. 7. 7). **Abram** is **seen** as a man of **skill** and bravery.

Lot's choice, **alas!** was still for Sodom, and **what he** regained through the intervention of **Abram** he eventually lost through fire. **In this there is** a warning for **us all** not to **keep** company with an idolator (1 Cor. 5. 11; see also 1 Cor. 15. 33; Ps. 7. 1; 2 Cor. 6. 14),

No Aaronic priest **was** a king and no king **was** a priest **But** Melchizedek **appears** both as a king and a priest, fore-

shadowing **Christ who is now a king and a priest, but who will wonderfully fulfil the Melchizedek pattern when "He shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne" (Zech. 6. 13). As king He will administer the affairs of men. As priest He will represent them before God.**

**Ps. 12 sets forth the coming dominion of the Son of Man: "In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace, till the moon shall be no more" (v. 7). "His name shall endure for ever; His name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him happy" (v. 17).**

*D. R., M. S. E., G. S. W.*

**From Macduff and Whitehills.** —In chap. 13 we have examples of **sight** governed by **the flesh** and **sight** governed by **faith**. Lot **was a** man influenced by **the things** visibly seen. **He became** so involved in Sodom **that Gen. 14. 12 tells us he "dwelt"** there. **"Dwelt"** is **"to sit down"** as opposed to **the "dwell"** of **Ex. 8. 22** which means **"standing up"**. **The children of Israel were almost ready to leave the land that was not theirs, but Lot settled down to take his part amongst a sin-loving people.**

**In the battle of the kings, Sodom and Gomorrah with their allies were defeated. Lot was taken, together with his gathered wealth (Gen. 14. 12). Abram dwelt by the oaks of Mamre (strength) where his altar was (73. 18). To Mamre came the news of Lot having been taken captive, and Abram displayed the love and affection he had for his nephew by going out after the victorious kings, defeating them, and bringing him back. Abram's great concern was not for the people of Sodom, but for Lot—as is borne out in v. 14, though all of the people were beneficiaries of the grace of God.**

**Lot was now given an opportunity of turning his back on Sodom, but his eyes had affected his heart, and he turned to Sodom only to be more deeply involved in its way of life (79. 1).**

**Abram's remarkable victory displayed proof that God was El Elyon, and must have been brought home in all its truth with regard to the promised son. Sarah laughed when told she would bring forth a son in her advancing years (18. 13), but the reply of El Elyon stilled the laughter. "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?"**

**Melchizedek was priest** (note not **"a priest"** but **"priest"**)

of God Most High, that is on behalf of the people to God, and he was king of Salem, indicating rule, an exact type of our Lord Jesus Christ who is "named of God a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5. 10).

We felt that chap. 15. 1 would be included in this experience of Abram. He refused the gift of the King of Sodom (v. 23), the treasures of the earth, and God honours his testimony (ch. 15. 1), "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward".

*Robert McKaig*

*From Manchester.* — There is a lesson to be gained from the circumstances surrounding the battle. This is that Lot (who had allowed himself to be involved in Sodom) did not have the power to avoid the crisis, while it was Abram who was not involved who helped him.

An interesting question is whether Heb. 7. 3 is figurative, or whether Melchizedek actually was the Son of God. The verse reads "... made like unto the Son of God". If made like unto the Son of God, he cannot be the Son of God. Jesus Christ is the priest continually, so this verse must be figurative.

One of the main questions rising from the study of Gen. 14 is why Abram took nothing. There are two possible reasons for this: 1) he did not want to place himself under obligation lest it should bring him into a future involvement, 2) the possessions had an evil origin from Sodom. If anything pertained to some evil, Abram would have declined to take a part in it. If the possessions had not had an evil origin Abram would still not have accepted them, because he would not have wished to be brought under obligation to such rulers as the king of Sodom.

It is important to understand the meaning of the word "tithes", used in Heb. 7. 8 "And here men that die receive tithes; but there one, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth". The meaning is dedication of a portion of substance to God. This verse refers to Abram in Gen. 14. 20.

There are three possible reasons why Abram rescued Lot: 1) for honours and possessions: 2) after their rescue, to remove the evil from the cities with which Lot was associated: 3) for the sake of Lot. The reason is obviously not 1) and he recognized that the cities would never be free from evil. The reason he did plan Lot's rescue was purely for Lot's sake as Gen. 14. 14 indicates, "And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive..."

*M. Tennyson*

**From Melbourne.** —The "higher critical" theories of the past century have, in the light of archaeological discoveries, been discarded as unfounded and completely astray with regard to Biblical history. Such discoveries have repeatedly brought into prominence the historical accuracy of once questioned details concerning persons, places, customs and events referred to in the book of Genesis. Chap. 14 is one of the portions which was once assailed. One treatise by a German professor, was entitled "The unhistorical character of the Fourteenth Chapter of Genesis". The professor stated that the names of the kings referred to were unknown outside the Bible, but the historical character of the narrative has long since been confirmed. Competent Assyriologists accept its historicity. It was in the early years of the present century that the now famous "Code of Hammurabi" was discovered amid the ruins of Susa. The date of Hammurabi, the Semitic founder of the first Babylonian dynasty has been placed somewhere around 2000 B. C. In addition to his "Code", many of his "letters" and other documents have been discovered and translated. The Amraphel, king of Shinar of Gen. 14 is Hammurabi. Few kings of the ancient world are now better known. The late Professor Sayce has conclusively stated in one of his works, "Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies", that the names of the other kings mentioned in this chapter have also been identified.

Abraham's encounter with the kings of Canaan would never have developed if Lot had retained his place as a sojourner in the land. Abraham was living in separation from the nations, in humble dependence upon the One who had called him out of Mesopotamia. Lot was making his home in Sodom amongst those who had no fear of God before their eyes.

It would appear to us that as the king of Sodom went forth to meet Abraham, the Lord looked down upon His servant, possibly wearied and faint from the effects of anxiety, pursuit and battle, and in His loving kindness and mercy, before the king made his offer of increased possessions, He sent forth Melchizedek (who had been in His presence), to succour His faithful servant and friend with bread and wine. With this renewal of the knowledge of the God of glory before Abram, the goods of Sodom, of whatever value, made no appeal to him. The God who had called him to come into this land was the Possessor of heaven and

earth, and **was able to meet his** every need out of **His** abundant wealth. **Indeed, had He** not promised to **him** and to **his seed all the** land wherein **he dwelt**? **With these** considerations, **he had lifted up his** hand unto the Lord **that he** would **take** nothing of **that which had** been offered. Henceforth **he** would continue to tread **the path** of a sojourner and pilgrim, and separation unto **the** God of glory.

*T. L. F., T. W. F.*

*From Methil.* —In Gen. **14** we are given an account of the **battle of the kings, five kings** against four kings. There **had** been a long-standing enmity **which flared up** again and **this time** Lot **was** involved. **His** earlier choice of **the well-watered plains** led to his living in Sodom, and now **he had to share** in their trouble. Abraham **himself was a** powerful man and treated **as an equal** by kings (Pharaoh in Gen. 12 and **the king of Sodom** in Gen. **14**) yet from **such strife he kept himself** separate and **lived at peace with his** neighbours (Rom. **12. 18**) and they were happy to **be confederate with** him. Although Lot **had** chosen **his own way** Abraham **still went to his rescue** (James **5. 20**). Abraham **was his** brother's **keeper!** When **he** learned of **the plight** of Lot **he set out with his** personal army—men trained in **his** own house, fully **equipped** and **used to defending** Abraham's property. Abraham knew how to **rule** his house well.

After routing **the** enemy, Abraham returned **with all the** spoil—the people, **the** booty and Lot. **The** king of Sodom, although so recently soundly **beaten had the** effrontery to **tell Abraham what** portion of **the** spoil **he could have!** **Like the Devil,** he wanted **the** souls (people) and Abraham could **keep the** goods. **It was well that** Abraham **had** been sustained (bread and wine) and fortified (**blessed in the Name** of God Most **High,** possessor of heaven and earth) by **Melchizedek,** priest of God Most **High;** so when **he did speak** to **the** king of Sodom **he was** not **tempted** by **his** paltry offer—for **himself he** took nothing, **but for the men who went with him, he claimed** their fair share.

It is interesting to note **that** Abraham, who **was** not under **law as we are** not under **law,** gave a tenth of **all to Melchizedek** the king-priest of **that** day. **What of us** today?

From **the** opening **verses of the next chapter** it is evident that God approved **Abraham's** actions. *Neville Coomer.*

*From Vancouver.* —Here **is the** first reference to war in Scripture. **The** rebels were routed and Lot, **the** righteous

man, shared in the calamities of the Sodomites. Abraham heard about **this** through an **escapee**, and **his** military action **was** against Chedorlaomer. **His** rescue operation **was** purely motivated by love; unlike most wars **which** are prompted by **avarice** or ambition. Perhaps **Abram** went **further than was** necessary by liberating **the** Sodomites who **were** later exposed to worse judgements.

**The** king of Sodom **was** a **defeated** king. Abram performed **him** a great **service** when **he** rescued Lot. **He** tried to **reward** Abram by suggesting **that he keep all the** property and **spoils of the** war. To whom **did** they belong **at this** point? Abram **was** very **rich** in **his** own **right** and **the** offer **was** **refused**. Abram **did** not want **it** to **be** said **that the** king of Sodom **had** enriched him.

**The** king of **Salem** **was** also a priest. **Was** Abram also a priest? [Scripture nowhere says so—Eds. ] **The** provision of **the bread** and **wine** **were** provided **as** refreshments for Abram. **The** king of **Salem**, as a priest **blessed** Abram and received **tithes** from him. **The** outstanding victory, **Abram** **was** told, **was** **achieved** by God. To God should **all** glory **be** given.

Abram **gave** one tenth. **Was** **this** from **his** own property, or from **the** spoils taken? [From **the** spoils—Eds. ] **The** **tithe** was given voluntarily. Afterwards tithing **became** a commandment.

*John Robinson.*

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. *From Barrhead: Melchizedec's* Priesthood—**did he** function **as such** in relation to a **special sphere, realm** or **rule**, or connected in any way to **the** people of God?

Nothing is known of **Melchizedec**, **his** priesthood and kingdom **apart** from **the few scriptures which** speak of **him**, and comment on **this** question can only **be** suggestive. **It** seems to me **that since** **Shem**, for instance, **lived** on into **Abram's** time **it is** not improbable **that** knowledge of **the** God of Noah and **matters** associated with **the** Flood could **have** influenced Melchizedec. **He** **was** plainly a God-fearing man to whom God **gave** special revelations. **He** **ruled** in **Salem** and **must** **have** **established** **the** worship of "God Most High", and while **his** geographical **sphere** of influence **was** plainly **limited** **all** who knew **him** would know of **the** God **he** worshipped **and would** know of **his** priestly **as well** as **his**

royal activities.

2. *From Bolton:* Is the king of Sodom a type of Satan—interested in persons and not material gain?

I would support **this view**.

**We** wondered whether Abram possibly knew **Melchizedec**?

I think so, for **Abram** certainly **treated Melchizedec** with great respect **as the** priest of God Most **High**.

See vv. 18, 19, 22.

Without father, mother, genealogy—is **this literal** or does it refer to **the** priesthood?

Not literal. **Melchizedec** is introduced **as the** order of priesthood in **which the** Lord **Jesus** would serve—no genealogical disqualifications, and in **His** priesthood **the** Lord **has** no successor.

3. *From Liverpool:* Are **we** right in assuming **that** there was nothing wrong **with the** spoils, seeing Abram **gave** a tenth of **them** to **Melchizedec**?

I think so. **We** also **give** to **the** Lord of **what we** have earned honourably.

Hebrews **7** **gives** us additional information about Melchizedec. **We** are told **that he has** neither beginning of days nor end of **life—have we** to **take this** literally or simply **that there is** no recorded genealogy?

No recorded genealogy.

**He abideth** a priest continually—**please** explain.

There **is** no record of **Melchizedec's** death, and no record of **a** successor, so apparently "**he abideth** continually", **but this is** only to present **him as a** type of **the** Lord and **the** words apply to **Him** and **His** priesthood.

4. *From Manchester:* In reference to Heb. **7. 7** "**the less is blessed** of **the** better", **what** does **it mean** when **we** **bless** God in Ephes. **7. 3**, "**Blessed be** **the** God and Father of our Lord **Jesus** Christ"?

In **each** of **these** passages **the** word **used** **gives** us our word "eulogise" meaning to **speak well** of, or invoke a benediction. Another word for **blessed** means "happy", "fortunate". (See Strong or Vine for **this** interesting study.)

**Can we have help** in understanding whether **such** priests as Melchizedec and Jethro (Ex. 3. 1) were ordained of God for a **separated** service?

The knowledge of **the** true God must **have affected** many men (e. g. Job), and their devout manner of life would **have** drawn others to them. "God is no respecter of persons: **but** in every nation **he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is acceptable** to Him" (Acts 10. 34, 35). God must **have** instructed men like Melchizedec, and in their sphere **of** influence (family, tribe, etc.) they would **act** for others, **but I** doubt if many were separated from **all** other activities to **be** priests (Melchizedec **was** also a king). Incidentally, **I am** not sure whether Ex. 18 shows Jethro's long-held views or is evidence of his conversion!

**5. From Vancouver:** Why did Abram and Melchizedec not join forces? Why did Abram **have** his own ceremonies of worship and of sacrifices, and yet did not identify with Melchizedec?

God's purpose for Abram **had the seed** in view and involved separation from, and not amalgamation with others. **He** was to "**walk through the land**" (73. 17) **that** his **seed** might later possess it. Melchizedec was honoured by Abram, nevertheless, **as** they **had** different roles to fill. **A. B. R.**

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**From Liverpool:** (1) Why **does** God not comment upon Abram's activities in Egypt, **and** did **he** sin in concealing **the fact that he was** also married to Sarai?

**See** Comments 1 and 8 (February issue).

(2) **Is** it significant **that** there is no mention of Abram building an **altar** whilst in Egypt?

This point too is touched on in **papers** and comments. **The silence on the subject** would **suggest, at the very least,** ineffectiveness of witness in Egypt. **J. D. T.**

# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)'*

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## EDITORIAL

Our study portion this month includes one of Israel's great "title-deeds" to territory of which **at** present they **seem** precariously to hold only **a** very **small** proportion. It is fascinating to **the** Bible believing student **that** God **watches** over His word to perform it through **all the** involved labyrinth of historical changes. "Why do **the** nations rage, and **the** peoples imagine **a** vain thing?" (Ps. 2. 1). God **has set** His King upon His holy hill of Zion, and Messiah will in **due** course ensure Israel's occupation **of all** her territorial entitlement. God's majestic purposes march on! **A** special article **held** over from **last** year through **lack** of **space** is now included, and it deals thoughtfully with **the** projection of those purposes into eternity future. Abraham **and all** his **seed** of faith will **then** enjoy **the** fulfilment of divine promise which they **saw** and greeted from afar. **G. P. Jr.**

### **PARADISE—EDEN AND ETERNITY** *A Comparative Study*

**The** word "Paradise" does not occur in **the** English Text of **the** Old Testament in either **the** A. V. or **the** R. V. Scholars **tell us that the** translators of **the** Septuagint version **use the** name **as** equivalent to "garden" rendering Gen. 2. 8: "**The** **LORD** God **planted a** Paradise eastward, in Eden". Paradise is **used** three times in **the** New Testament viz: **Luke 23. 43**; **2 Cor. 12. 4**; **Rev. 2. 7**. It is **the** **Rev. 2** scripture which provides **the** link between Eden and Eternity by its reference to **the** "tree of life". "To him **that** overcometh, to him will I give to **eat of the** tree of life, which is in **the** Paradise of God" (**RVM—garden of God, as** in Gen. 2. 8).

Paradise is **a** name reflective of blessedness consistent with **that** which existed in Eden before human rebellion destroyed it. In **the** beauty of an undefiled creation in which everything **had** been appraised by divine eyes and seen to **be good** (Gen. 7. 31), man's home **was** established in a garden—"the **LORD** God . . . **put the** man whom **He had** formed" (Gen. 2. 8). In this perfection **man was set over the**

work of God's hands (Ps. 8. **6, 7**) and appointed to **have** dominion over every other living creature (Gen. **1. 26**). **He was** endowed **with a** discerning intelligence **capable** of designating **each** of **all** other living **species** according to **their** nature (Gen. 2. **19**), and **his** duty within **the** garden **was** to dress and to **keep it** (Gen. 2. **15**)—implying **that its** cultivation and protection **were delegated** to **him**. Here too in Eden **was the** beginning and foundation of family **life** in **the** crowning **act** of **the** divine provision for man when God **said** "**It is** not good **that the** man should **be** alone; I will **make him** an **help meet** for **him**" (Gen. 2. **18**). **Thus the** institution of marriage **is** traced **back to the** beginning (Mat. **19. 4**), and **the bliss** of Eden **was** augmented by **the blessed** relationship of **the** divinely ordained union of man and **wife**.

Evening and morning, day and night, sunshine and darkness, **the established** created order defined in Gen. **7. 14-19**, would prevail in Eden. **The** phrase "**the cool of the day**" **suggests that it was subject** to varying temperatures. **Eden itself was** also **the** source of **the** river **which** flowed through **the** garden to water it (Gen. 2. **10**). **Yet despite its** perfection **it was** not immune from **the** intrusion of **evil as** represented by **the** adversary of God.

This present study **must** include **a** consideration of **the** pre-fallen nature of man. **This is a subject which calls** for careful comment for **it** risks **the** possibility of unwise conjecture. Man and woman, **as** to their nature, **were** created **in** God's **image** and after **His** **likeness** (Gen. **7. 26, 27**). **This must** mean **that the** man and **the** woman **were** created rational, moral and spiritual beings, and **as such**, distinguished from **all** other creatures in **the** sea, on **the** earth and in **the** air. **As** to **his** moral being, **the** clear statement of scripture **is**: "God **made** man upright..." (Eccles **7. 29**). **The image** of God, in **which** Adam **was** created, **was a gift and** not an attainment. **Being a** man, and not **a** machine, **a** person and not **a** puppet, **he was** given **a** will of **his** own, **a** will **which he himself** could direct towards obedience or towards disobedience of **the** divine commandment. **As** man's body **was** strengthened by work (Gen. 2. **15**) and **his** intellect **by the exercise** of **his** mind (Gen. 2. **19, 20**) so **his will was** brought into action relative to **a** **specific** command (Gen. 2. **16, 17**).

**The** tragic **sequel** to **this** test **is the** tragedy of **all the** human race and **made** necessary **the** coming of **the** last Adam, **the** Christ of God, **the** Redeemer of mankind, to restore **that**

which Adam by transgression forfeited (**cp. Acts 3. 13**). It is the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, that unfolds to us the glory of that restoration. Genesis reveals the beginning, the creation of the first heaven and the first earth. Revelation presents the consummation in glory of the new heaven and the new earth (**Rev. 27**). The invasion of sin marred the bliss of the former, but the glory of the latter is that it is that "wherein dwelleth righteousness" (**2 Pet. 3. 13**). Whereas God commenced with a garden, the final vision is of a city (**Rev. 21. 2**). The communion between God and man in Eden, broken and marred by sin, finds its restoration in fulness in the Holy City the new Jerusalem, for we are told then—"the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them..." (**Rev. 27. 3**).

The delights of this City will more than recapture the bliss of Eden, for that terminated with the intrusion of evil. Such an invasion into the new Jerusalem is not possible, for evil is excluded from the heavenly City—"there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean..." (**Rev. 21. 27**). Here there is no possibility of Satan gaining victory as in Eden (**Gen. 3. 1-7**) for Satan is defeated (**Rev. 12. 10, 11; 20. 10**). From man outcast from Eden the divine face was hidden (**Gen. 3. 8**), but the blessedness of the ransomed in eternity will be that "they shall see His face" (**Rev. 22. 4**).

The description of this City depicts not only its beauty but its preciousness. Pearls are its gates (**Rev. 21. 21**); gates which are opened wide, giving undenied access to those made meet to enter thereat. The precious stones mark its structure for it represents those who are blood-bought (**Rev. 5. 9**). As from Eden flowed a river through the garden, so from the throne of God will flow the river, the water of life (**Rev. 22. 1**). The tree of life, in the midst of the garden of Eden, and from which Adam was barred because he transgressed the divine commandment, is in Eternity in the Paradise of God, and here the ransomed will find restored access to it (**Rev. 2. 7; 22. 2**). Upon man in Eden death descended, but in the New Jerusalem death is destroyed (**Rev. 21. 4**). The conditions of Eden of morning and evening, day and night, each needing the illumination of sun and moon (**Gen. 7. 14-19**) no more prevail, for "the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon... for the glory of God did lighten it" (**Rev. 27. 23**).

The eternal nature of ransomed man is best defined in the

expressive utterance of **the wide** range of Scripture. **How vast** is **the** intelligence which knows even **as we have been fully** known (1 Cor. 13. 12)! How great **the** revelation which affirms **that "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly"** (1 Cor. 75. 49)! How glorious **the** prospect envisaged in **the truth that "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"** (1 Cor. 15. 53); and how amazing **the** grace which **has** determined **that when we see Him we shall be like Him!** (1 John 3. 2). There in **"the Paradise of God"** no rebellion or transgression will forfeit **the bliss** of the ransomed, for **"His servants shall do Him service"** (Rev. 22. 3).

It is **the** vision of **that city—as Abraham** by **faith** viewed it (Heb. 11. 10)—**"the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God"**, which is and always will **be the** inspiration of **all** who long for its eternal joys, awakening in their **hearts the** cry, **"Amen: come, Lord Jesus"** (Rev. 22. 20).  
**L Shattock**

### **ABRAHAM'S FAITH AND ISRAEL'S FUTURE**

(Genesis 15. 1-21)

**From Barrhead.** —**"The Lord came** unto Abram in a vision. **"**The word translated "vision" in this verse is **used** in three other **places** in **the O. T.**; twice concerning **Balaam** whose eyes **were** opened (Num. 24. 4, 16), and once of Ezekiel **when** facing **the false** prophets (Ezek. 13. 7). So this is not like **a** dream, **but the** vision **was the** occasion of God revealing His will to **Abram**.

Abram received **the** promise, **"Fear not, Abram"**, a promise which is open to **all** who believe (Ps. 34. 7). With this assurance Abram then **asked** concerning an heir, for **he was** childless; so **he** received from God, first **the** promise of **a seed** (an heir) then of **seed (a multitude)** and, looking to **the** multitude of **stars he accepted** God's word by faith. **It was such a** staggering promise yet **"he believed in the Lord"**. It is interesting to note **that** in v. 6 **we have the** first recorded instance in **the** Scriptures of "justification by faith". Abram believed and God counted it to him for righteousness **after** Abram's response of faith.

"I am the Lord that brought thee out" (v. 7): God can save wherever a person is, and then God moves the person to the place of His choice. The Lord brought Abram from Ur to give him this promised land. "Whereby shall I know?" asked Abram, but he was to know in the next act of the parted animals. We see the weakness of Abram in trying to keep the vultures from devouring the carcasses. Then came the divine presence to pass through the flame. Finally there came the promise, "I have given thee the land". It came as a gift, not by any effort on the part of Abram. *Ross Green From Birkenhead.* —At this time of crisis in Abram's life he was reassured by the Lord's promise of protection in enemy territory (a shield), and also of God's compensating provision after his refusal of the offer of the king of Sodom (thy exceeding great reward). Obviously Abram's greatest wish was for an heir and it seems that to him this would have been a great reward. Presumably Dammesek Eliezer, who would have inherited all Abram's possessions, would be deposed from his honoured place after the birth of Isaac (Gen. 24. 2). God stated that a true heir would be born, and Abram's implicit faith in this promise causes him to be marked out in Scripture as a man of faith to whom are linked those who display a like character (Rom. 4. 22-24; Gal. 3. 7).

The mention of animals of three years old was considered to indicate that they had reached full maturity. It appears that a covenant was being made between the Lord and Abram, and that the passing of a smoking furnace and a flaming torch between the pieces foretold some of the sufferings of Israel. Certain points as to the future are discernible. The birds of prey speak of Israel's enemies who would endeavour to destroy the covenant. The 400-years period of slavery in Egypt is clearly foretold, being suggested in the phrase "an horror of great darkness". [It will be noted from Comment 9 in February issue that the period from Gen. 46. 27 to the Exodus was about 215 years; the earlier phase of this period would not of course entail slavery —Eds. ]

*M. B. Turner, R. D. W.*

*From Derby.* —Concerning the land Abram asked "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (v. 8. The Lord then entered into a covenant with his servant through sacrifice. This brings to mind the saints of God in Ps. 50. 5, "Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice". We compared this with the great New

Covenant sacrifice of Christ, told out in **the** words "**This cup is the new covenant in My blood**". God instructed **Abram** concerning **the** clean animals **acceptable** for **sacrifice**, a heifer, a she-goat and a ram, **each** of three years old, a turtle-dove and a young pigeon. **Abram divided the animals in the midst, laying each half over against the other, apparently with a passage between them.** When **the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram** similar to that of **Adam** (Gen. 2. 21), this **sleep** being a figure of death. The horror of great darkness **seemed to suggest the afflictions his descendants were to experience in Egypt.** We noted a **passage** of Scripture on covenants in **Jer. 34. 15-19, but here it was men who are said to have passed between the pieces, whereas in Gen. 15. 17 it was not Abram, but a smoking furnace, and a flaming torch that passed between those pieces.** In **the tense of the words "have I given" (v. 18), we discern the omniscient One speaking of things that are not, as though they were (Is. 46. 10).** In v. 19-21 **three tribes and seven nations are named. Of the three tribes, only the Kenites are mentioned again in the Scriptures, and these are noted no less than thirteen times. There seem to be different branches of peoples by the name of Kenites. Perhaps the most familiar is in 1 Sam. 15. 6 where King Saul said to the Kenites, "Get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them". A. G. Willis, S. R. W. From Edinburgh.**—The occasion of **the promise to Abram** is pointed out in **the phrase** which opens **the chapter, "After these things". It was after Abram had returned from the victorious battle with the kings when he refused the spoil. The spoil meant nothing to Abram. He was dealing with God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth. Whilst Abram is pondering these things, the word of the Lord comes to him, "I am . . . thy exceeding great reward". God would not allow him to be the loser.**

In his **appeal** to God **Abram** touches on **the matter** which **must** naturally concern him most, **whether the possessor of his house would be a son by adoption.** Not only **was Abram's concern for his house, but surely also for his seed and the land which God had promised (Gen. 13. 15). A depth of meaning appealed to Abram when God brought him forth to look toward heaven and tell the stars. God's purpose was not only that he should behold the work of God in creation, but that there should be a vision also of the heavenly seed. We read, "And he believed in the Lord; and**

He counted it to him for righteousness". This **verse does** not mean **that** instead of righteousness **Abram** offered faith. **Abram's** faith **was** not **here** regarded **as** another form of righteousness, **but** it **was** to **be** the means **whereby** a man **might** attain unto righteousness (Rom. 4. 3).

**At the** basis of any covenant which God **makes** is His character and it is to this **that** God refers when **He** begins with this affirmation of His name, "**I am the** Lord". **We** wondered **at the** significance of **the** dividing of **the** animals and **the** fire. There **was** reference **made** to **the** ancient custom of contract. Here **Abram** is seen to prepare **the** sacrifice and God **seals** it with **the** fire.

*David B. Renfrew*

*From Kingston-upon-Thames.* —To Abraham, by now an old man of over eighty, further material riches could **be** of no consolation when **he knew that** one of his servants would inherit them. So for **the** fourth **time** **the** Lord promised Abraham **that he would be the** father of a great nation; and for **the** first time Abraham is directly recorded **as** having believed although immediately after this manifestation **he asked** for proof **that** God's promise of **the** land **was** true.

**The** precise significance of Abraham's sacrifice is obscure' **but** its similarity to **that** referred to in Jer. 34. 18 may indicate **the** ratification of a covenant between God and **men**. Hence **the** birds of prey could represent evil influences intent on upsetting **the** covenant.

In **the** light of Gal. 3. 17 and Ex. 12. 40 it **seems** likely **that the** oppression of Israel by Egypt **was** reckoned from Abraham's visit **there** (Gen. 12) rather than from **the** time of **the** "new king over Egypt which **knew** not Joseph" (Ex. 1. 8). In this connection **the** four generations from then to Moses (Ex. 6. 16-20) tally with Gen. 15. 16.

**The** Lord's promise to **Abraham** concerning **the** area to **be** occupied by **the** people of Israel is reiterated in Ex. 23. 31, where **the** boundaries are **set as the** River Euphrates and **the** Red Sea indicating **that** this is **the** "river of Egypt" [see Answer to Question from Liverpool]. Joshua is recorded **as** having **defeated the** Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites (Josh. 11. 3) and Solomon's empire **stretched** from **the** Euphrates to **Gaza** (1 Kings 4. 24). However Is. 27. 12-13 indicates **that the** prophecy may **have a future** fulfilment.

*Graham Riley*

*From Lagos.* —"Considering **the** issue of their manner of life,

imitate their faith" (Heb. 13. 7, R. V. M. ). Abram saw the glory of God and he obeyed His revelation to go out (Gen. 12, Heb. 11. 8); and by faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise (Heb. 11. 9). The will and purpose of God were not revealed to Abram all at once. God gave to him as he was able to receive through faith. He received further revelations in Gen. 15. God Himself and the word of His grace go together in all His revelations to man. This is the principle underlying the revelation in Gen. 15, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (v. 1). The vision focuses first on God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, His glory and majesty and greatness; and following that is the word of His promise.

The words of Abram: "O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless...?" reveal to us the great sense of reverence and grace of spirit with which the patriarch ordered his life before God. He never showed an irreverent familiarity before God—a very necessary lesson to us!

The promise of the land in which Abram sojourned was first given in Gen. 13. 17, "Unto thee will I give it". In Gen. 15. 7 God confirmed His word, saying, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it". Like the request of Rahab for a true token (Josh. 2. 12), Abram said, "O Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (v. 8). In answer to this request God made the covenant with Abram, defining the boundary of the land, but showing also that 400 years lay between Abram's day and the actual possession of the land by his descendants. *E. Basse, S. A. Beyoku-Alase*

*From Leeds.* —Directing Abram to the stars of heaven, God repeats His previous promise (Gen. 13. 16) that he would not be able to count the vast numbers of his descendants. Abram desires some tangible proof, a sign (as did Gideon, Hezekiah and Zacharias) and is told to prepare an offering. As the sun goes down, God causes Abram to go into a deep sleep. We understand the word implies a trance or deep sleep, being that used in Adam's case (Gen. 2. 21). God unfolds the events that will befall Abram's seed as a great nation. The 400 years of affliction we considered to be an approximation as the full time period was 430 years (Ex. 12. 40, 41; Gal. 3. 16, 17). [Please consider Comment 9 of February issue—Eds. I. In the fourth generation (Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph) a return is to be made to Canaan

(Gen. 50) when **Joseph** returns **there** to **bury his** father, Jacob [Comment 1], The furnace and the torch signify Gods presence, **passing through death** (see Jer. 34. 18). God **makes the** covenant firm, through **death**, that **He** would give **the** land to Abram and **his** seed. This covenant is entirely in God's keeping—no conditions of obedience were required of Abram or his seed. On their part faith alone **was** necessary to **accept what** God promised.

The river of Egypt (v. 18) might **be** taken to **be the** Nile, **but** on examination of various **maps**, it would **appear** more likely to **be the** river (brook) of Egypt, the Wadi El Arish, **the** present southern border of Israel. **The** northern border, **the** Euphrates, **has** not yet been reached and **we assume that** this is still future to **us**, possibly in **the** Millennium? [Comment 2].

*H. R. Dodge, P. M. Jefferson*

**From Liverpool.** —Even though Abraham **trusted** God both for **the** present and **the** future **he** still needed assurance on **the** matter of his promised heir. The questioning of v. 2 does not arise from **lack** of faith, **but** rather from **the** desire to know **just** how God intended to fulfil His promises to him. It could not **be** anything **else**, for v. 6 **tells us**, "**He** believed in **the** Lord; and **He** counted it to him for righteousness". Reference is **made** to this incident in Rom. 4. 13, Gal. 3. 6, and James 2. 22, 23; from which **we gather that** Abraham **was** not accounted "justified" on this occasion only, **but that** his whole life **was** one of continuing faith in God. **The** root meaning of "believed" comes from a root whence **we** derive our "**Amen**", and **we** might paraphrase it by saying **that** "Abraham said Amen to **the** Lord" (Griffith Thomas). Amen is always a strong assertion of faith ("**It shall be so**", or "**It is so**"). **Abraham** believed God when **he was** told **that** his **seed** would **be as the** number of **the** stars of **the** heavens **but** wanted some further assurance **as** to how God **was** going to **make** provision for his inheritance of **the** land (v. 18). **The** ensuing covenant **that** God **made was** confirmed by a sacrificial ritual culminating in a **deep sleep** falling upon Abraham and a horror of great darkness; after which God spoke to **him** and told him exactly of **His** future purposes. **The** sacrifice is similar to one described in Jer. 34. 18 **but** with one significant difference. In Jeremiah it **was the** men who **had passed** between **the** parts of **the** sacrifice and **had** subsequently broken **the** covenant. In Gen. 15 God **Himself**, in **the** form of a smoking furnace and a flaming torch **passed**

between **the parts** and so **made a** covenant with **Abram** which **was** unconditional and would never **be** broken. **The** language of **the passage** is both solemn and frightening and it **was** no doubt an experience which Abraham never forgot.

D. J. Webster, M. S. Elliott, G. S. Webster

*From Macduff and Whitehills.* —Chap. 15 opens once again with God appearing to **Abraham**, "**I am** thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (v. 1). God **was** not giving him a reward, God Himself **was the** reward. **The** promises of God in **the past**, great though they may **have** been, **paled** into insignificance beside **such a** blessing. Abraham says "Lord God" (v. 2). Here **we have the** title which **was** to become so **well** known, "Jehovah". God **speaks of Abraham's seed** (73. 16) being like **the dust of the earth** for number, yet Abraham refers to his **lack of seed** again. To **Abraham a** greater promise **was** then given. In Rom. 4 **we** find him referred to **as the** "father of many nations". Again **he** is addressed **as the** "father of **the faithful**".

Verse 9 **was** found to **be** an interesting **subject** since different thoughts were offered on **the** matter of **the** offerings. **The law** of **the** offerings **had** not yet been given and it **was** interesting trying to **place the** offerings into types. **The** difference seen in three-year-old **as** against year-old offerings **was** thought to express maturity **as well as** purity. **It** appears **that** when **a beast** of **the** land is three years old, it is considered ready for slaughter, perhaps a vision looking forward to Is. 53. **Each** offering **has** its own thought—heifer for purification, goat for cleansing, ram for consecration, turtle dove and pigeon for acceptance

**The** prophecy of v. 12 **seemed** to indicate impending doom, "**A** horror of great darkness **fell** upon him". **It** indicates only too clearly **the** future of Israel whilst in **the** land of Egypt. **Of the** many scenes which God could **have** displayed, **He** chose **the** bondage of Egypt. **The** majesty of David's reign or **the** glory of Solomon's **Temple** would **have** filled **the** patriarch with joy, yet **we** find **the** solemn and foreboding scene of 400 years of bondage being unfolded.

J. M. Whitelaw

*From Manchester.* —In v. 1 two important points **are made**; firstly Abram is afraid **lest** King Chedorlaomer and his allies demand revenge on him. God realises his fear and gives

comfort by a vision in which **He makes** clear **He** is his shield and **will** protect **him** always. This is a **great** comfort to Abram, and indeed to **all** believers who allow God to **be** their protector and shield. Secondly, Abram is told "**I am** thy exceeding **great** reward". **Abram had** been offered part of **the** spoil from their victory **but he refused** it. Here God removes any shadow of doubt from Abram's mind: His reward will **be** far greater than mere material goods.

**The** verse, "and **he** believed in **the** Lord; and **He** counted it to him for righteousness" is one of **the** most significant in **the** Scriptures **as** illustrated by Rom. 4. 3. In Rom. 4. 19-22 **Abram's** faith in God is shown once again in his acceptance of **the** promise of God. In Rom. 4. 23-25 **we have the** important **parallel** with **the** Lord **Jesus**, assuring **us** that God will **accept us** in **the same** way **as** Abram if **we** believe in **the** promise of God, who raised **the** Lord **Jesus** from **the** dead.

In v. 17 there is an important significance in **the** words "smoking furnace" **and** "flaming torch". The "furnace" signifies affliction, **the** affliction his **seed** were going to know **in the** future. This showed **Abram** that it **was** not going to **be just a** simple **walk** into **the** land. **There** would **be much** suffering. **The** "flaming torch" signifies **the** promise of God which would **be as a** torch to sustain **them** through **the** affliction, **as a** symbol of hope from God. **K. E. T.**

*From Melbourne.* —It is evident **that Abraham**, **subject** to like passions and frailties **with** other men, **was at** times **affected** by despondency. **He had believed** the word of **the** Lord concerning **future** possession of **the** land by his **seed**, **but** from **the** standpoint of human experience, his only expectation of an heir **was** through one born in his house, **the** child of an adopted **slave** or freeman. From a clay **tablet** library discovered **at** NuZi, in **Iraq**, over **2, 000** documents (of clay) **were** discovered, some of which describe customs **referred** to in **the** Book of Genesis. When **a man** did not **have an** heir, it **was** customary for him to adopt **a slave** or freeman with heirship in view. Apparently Eliezer of **Damascus**, **the** **steward** of his house, **had** been **thus** adopted. **Abram** nevertheless grieved over **the fact** that **Sarah** had borne **him** no children, **but the** Lord **assured** him **that the** **seed** of which **He had** spoken should **be** of his own body.

**The** covenant which followed **has** never been, neither can it **be**, revoked. **Several** centuries **must elapse** before his

descendants could sufficiently multiply to possess **the** land, **their** promised inheritance. Canaan **was** now occupied by nations who **had** descended from Noah. They **had** commenced **with a** knowledge of God **but had** gradually **put that** knowledge from **them** and become corrupt. **It was** God's purpose **that** they should eventually **be** dispossessed and **replaced** by **Abraham's** descendants who would **be subject** to **His** revealed **will**. **His** reference to **the** iniquity of **the** Amorite, **which was** not yet **full**, **emphasises the fact that while there is** sin in men and nations **which** merits divine retribution, yet **the** longsuffering of God **passes over much that** provokes **Him** to anger; and **because** sentence against an **evil work is** not speedily **executed**, the hearts of **the** sons of men are fully **set** in **them** to do **evil**, until iniquity **is** come to **the full**, and judgement can no longer **be** withheld. In **the case we** are considering, **the climax** of iniquity would **be** reached by **the** Amorite **at the time** of **the** invasion of **the** land by Abraham's descendants, God's instruments for **that** purpose,

*T. W. F.*

*From Nottingham.* —It is always a moving experience to **gaze** into **the** heavens on a **clear** night and **see the** stars, **the** work of **the great** Creator. **As Abram** looked **and was** "unable to **tell them**" **he was** promised **that** so would **be his** seed. In our favoured position of being **able** to look **back we** can **see the** fulfilment of **this** promise. After Abram's anxiety about an heir and **his** acceptance of God's word, **the** reference by God to **the** land (v. 7) **seems** to bring out again an element of human frailty on **the** part of Abram, and **he asks** for a sign in confirmation of **the** promise. Abram **was a** great man of **faith but he was** also a man of **like** passions to ourselves.

**The** grace of God **is** demonstrated in **the** ready way in **which the** sign **is** given, **and the** words **used** are to **be** noted, "Take Me an **heifer...**" (v. 9). **It seems that it was a** custom between covenanting parties to **divide a** sacrifice in **the midst** and **pass** between **them**. Abram **sat all** day waiting for God to **act** (v. 12), although **it seems** doubtful **that** Abram knew **what** God **was** going to do. **The** intrusion of **the** birds of prey **which** were driven off by Abram would remind **us** of **the** importance of our driving away those thoughts **and** influences **which** would **detract** from **the** ways of God. Abram **waited** God's **time**, sometimes one of **the** most **difficult** things for **us** to do. God **caused a deep sleep** to **fall** on Abram and a horror of a great darkness. **It was at**

**this** point, **the** darkest moment, **that** God spoke to **Abram** making **a** covenant and speaking of **the** future experiences of Israel. **The deep sleep** of Abram **speaks** to **us** of **the death** of **the** Lord on **the** cross. **We are** reminded **that** through **this death came** a greater covenant, and through **it, too, we have** experienced a greater exodus.

*R. Hickling*

**St. Helens.** —**Abraham's faith** was being tested. **He had** been promised from God **a** considerable land for **his** occupation, and for **his** many descendants (**see** Gen. 13. 14-17). **The** future again **seemed bleak** for Abraham, for **at that time he had** no descendants and **had** great **difficulties** in understanding how God **was** to fulfil **His** promises. **The** Lord **was** aware of Abraham's depression and **He** reassured Abraham **that He** would protect and **shield him** from dangers, and **his** reward would **be** "exceedingly great". Abraham **was** not fully reassured by **the** Lord's statement, and in v. 2 reminded **the** Lord **that he had** no **direct** descendants.

Through Abraham, **the** future of **the** nation of Israel **was** assured. **The** Lord then spoke to Abraham and instructed **him** to **take** one heifer, one she-goat, one ram, one turtle dove and one young pigeon; **this** Abraham **did** without delay and carried out God's instructions. **It** would appear from v. 11 **that Abraham was** continually chasing away **the** birds of prey from **the** animals and birds **that had** been **killed** in observance of God's instruction, so **much** so **that** partly **as** a result of Abraham's exhaustion God **caused** "**a deep sleep**" to come over **him whilst he** communicated **with him** by **means** of **a** dream. **This was** to **be** **the** revelation of **the new** covenant between Abraham and God, in **which he was** informed **that** before **Israel** could inherit **the** "promised land" they would **be humiliated**, and even become slaves. **It** would **be** four generations (four hundred years) [**see** Comment 9 in February issue and Comment 1 in this issue—Eds. ] before **the** children of Israel would **be freed** from captivity, leaving Egypt **with** "great substance" to **settle** in **the** promised land. **Alas this was** not to **be** **the** lot of Abraham, although in v. 1 Abraham **was** told **that his** reward would **be** exceedingly great.

*K. J. G.*

**From Vancouver.** —**Had it** not been for **the emphatic** truth contained in v. 6 of **this chapter, we might** wonder if Abraham's **faith** regarding **the** promised **seed had** begun to **waver, with** God's pronouncement of **a** reward rather than **a** son; **as**

he says "**What wilt Thou give me?**", not "**Whom?**", and **seems to be resigned to the idea that his inheritance would go to Eliezer. A new confirmation of the vastness of his seed is given in the stars of the heaven, a heavenly testimony to stand alongside the earthly one of dust, bearing out the two natures of the man who puts his trust in God. As repeated in James, how clearly v. 6 declares that it was Abraham's faith, exercised long before his works of sacrificing Isaac ever took place, which justified him and made him righteous before God.**

Abraham's question (v. 8) would indicate **that he wished this promise of a land for his people confirmed through a covenant. Jer. 34. 18 indicates that the dividing in pieces of animals, and passing between the pieces was a procedure carried out by covenant-makers in those days. How condescending God was in confirming this covenant pertaining to Abraham's seed and the land, in a manner with which he was conversant. The awesomeness of what actually took place is not easily comprehended in our simple reading of these verses, and only a man who fully trusted in his God could go on believing, when told of the adversity that lay in store for the people whom he must have hitherto associated primarily with the great promises and blessings of God. And true to the character of God, His promises never fail, although it was not until Solomon's day that the children of Israel were to occupy the land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates.**

**A. Stewart**

### COMMENTS

**Comment 1 (Leeds).** The expedition from Egypt to Canaan to bury Jacob would hardly satisfy Gen. 15. 16. The alternative explanation in paragraph 3 of Kingston's paper is commended for further thought.

**Comment 2 (Leeds).** Solomon's dominion extended "over all the kings on this side the River" (1 Kings 4. 24). Ps. 72. 8 describes Christ's world-wide dominion as "from sea to sea, and from the River unto the ends of the earth". It therefore seems that historically Gen. 15. 18 found an application in Solomon's reign, and that prophetically there remains fulfilment in the Millennium. Ps. 72. 8 would imply Israeli possession to "the River", but extension of Messiah's dominion to the ends of the earth.

**G. P. Jr.**

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**From Barrhead:** Gen. 15. 16. **Is the iniquity of the Amorite yet full?**

I would understand **that the iniquity of the Amorite was full** when **Israel** invaded **the** land of Canaan under Joshua.

**From Derby:** Gen. 15. 16- "in **the** fourth generation". **What four generations are indicated?**

**Please see** Comment 1.

**From Edinburgh:** In **the** sacrifices prepared by Abram (Gen. 75) **do we have the** basis of **the** burnt offering **and the** peace offering?

**Please see** answer to question from Leeds.

**From Leeds:** **Is there** any significance, other than sin offerings, in **the** sacrifices ordered by God in Gen. 75?

I find it difficult to establish **a** clear relationship **with** any particular Levitical offering. Representatives of **herd**, flock, and birds later **used** in Levitical offerings are found **here**, and **the** emphasis may **well be** on **the** foundational importance of **the** ultimate sacrifice of Christ **as the** basis of **all** God's covenant dealings with men. **See** also suggestions in paper from Whitehills and Macduff.

**From Liverpool:** **Was** Abram right to question God **as he did** in Gen. 75. 2, 8? Did it signify doubt?

It did not necessarily signify doubt **in** God's basic promises, **but** could reflect concern **as** to how they **were** to **be** implemented. Rom. 4. 20 **states that** Abram "**wavered** not through unbelief".

**Is there** significance **in the** type of animals and birds **used** for sacrifice?

**See** answer to question from Leeds.

**What is the** meaning of "an horror of great darkness" (v.

This conveys to **me a** nightmarish sense of being plunged into dense darkness, with resulting feeling of

terror—presumably to convey an impression of **the** fearfulness of Israel's later experience under **the** Pharaohs.

**What is the river of Egypt (v. 18)?**

I think it is **the Wadi el Arish**, marked on many **Bible maps as a** relatively **small** river on Israel's southern border. Kingston's paper (**last** paragraph) **suggests that the** river of Egypt is **the Red Sea**. I have difficulty in accepting this deduction when in so many contexts **the Red Sea** and **the river of Egypt** are distinguished.

**Is there any significance in the fact that Abram was told that his seed would be as the stars of heaven (75. 5), whilst in ch. 13 it is likened to the dust of the earth?**

Both similes convey **the** thought of numbers humanly uncountable. **The** suggestion **has appealed** to many **that the dust of the earth** illustrates Abram's natural **seed**, and **the** stars of **the** heaven those who are spiritually of like faith. However admissible this may **be**, I think **that** beneath **the** stars **that** night Abram would think of God's promise in terms of natural descendants.

*G. P. Jr*

# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)'*

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## EDITORIAL

The events of our study chapter this month underline further to us the prolonged severity of the test to which Abraham's faith was subjected in the matter of the promised successor nation. First in 12. 2 the word is "I will make of thee a great nation". We might understand Abraham thinking that this could just possibly have been capable of fulfilment through Eliezer (75. 2, 3). Then in 73. 15 we have the word "seed" mentioned. In 75. 4 this is definitely confirmed as meaning the fruit of Abraham's own body. Only in 77. 16 is Sarah marked unmistakably as the mother of the son of promise. This slowly progressive revelation of the method of out-working of the divine promise should give us caution in criticising the patriarch for some of his actions along the way.

Inevitably most papers this month refer to the Galatians teaching on the two covenants in relation to Sarai and Hagar. Yet, of course, the crucial "casting out" of Hagar on which important parts of the allegory depend, does not occur until chapter 27 and doubtless there will be further allusion to the subject then.

J. D. T.

## **SOME TITLES OF THE LORD IN "REVELATION"**

### **"Son of Man"**

The expression "son of man" in its simplest use in Scripture means "human being", as opposed to other orders of creation, or a person divine, as we see in Is. 56. 1, 2: "Keep ye judgement, and do righteousness... Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that holdeth fast by it". The term acquires a lowly, insignificant note, when Balaam says "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent" (Num. 23. 19), or the poet asks "LORD, what is man, that Thou takest knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that Thou makest account of him?" (Ps. 74. 3) or Bildad exclaims "How much less man, that is a worm! And the son of man, which is a worm!" (Job 25. 6). But when the Son of God took the form of a servant and in grace called Himself the Son of Man, He made these words a title that recalls for us both the dignity of man seen in his full spiritual stature, and at the same time the place of

rejection **that the Perfect Man was** given by **His** people. Note how **the** contrast between **the** sinful nature of our race as **Balaam, the psalmist** and **Bildad** knew it, and man **as he** becomes when **he** finds favour in sight of God, **is set forth in** Gen. 4. **Eve** said at first in her early hope, "**I have** gotten a man with **the help of the LORD**", **but after the sad** experience of **what man's** begetting brought **she** said, "God **hath** appointed **me** another **seed** instead of **Abel**; for Cain **slew** him".

**The** salutation of **the** prophet **as** "son of man", in Daniel and many times in Ezekiel, gives **the** expression **a further** significance, **as** describing **a** messenger suited for communication with men **because** of his kinship with **them**; and when one like unto **a** son of man enters Daniel's vision of thrones being **placed** and **the** ancient of days, it **seems** remarkable to **the** beholder, in Dan. 7. 13, **that** someone having human form should come so near before **the** throne-sitter, till it is realised **that** this Son of Man is most worthy of dominion, glory and **a** kingdom. **The** glory of His **Father** will **be** seen by every eye when **the** greatest Messenger to men comes in divine power, attended by **the** angels **that** belong to Him, and renders to every man according to **their deeds (Mat. 16. 27)**, with "authority to **execute judgements, because he is the Son of Man**" (John 5. 27). **As the** sign of **the** clouds is linked in Daniel 7. 13 with **the** likeness of **a** son of man, so **the** Lord **Jesus** according to His own word **will** return to earth "on **the** clouds of heaven" (Mat. 26. 64)—two features of **the** Son's coming **that will** also **be** granted to His servant **the** first angel sent forth with sickle to reap **the** harvest of **the earth**, so **that** John **saw** (Rev. 14. 14) "**a** white cloud; and on **the** cloud... one sitting like unto **a** son of man".

**These** themes, which **we** have suggested are evoked by **the** words "son of man" may **be** found together in **the** manner of **the** Lord's appearing to His servant John, being especially impressed upon **us** in **the** detail of Rev. 7. 13-16. **The** perfect humanity of **the** One who tabernacled amongst men is recalled in **the** brilliance of His countenance and **the** garment **that** clothes Him down to **the** foot; from His mouth **that made** faithful witness to men comes **the** power of **a** voice **as** of many **waters** and **the** sword of His Word; and **this** person, whose **head**, hair, eyes and **feet** are resplendent in purity, is **the same** Jesus, once rejected of men, who is ordained to **be** their judge.

*M. Archibald*

*HAGAR AND ISHMAEL*  
(Gen. 76. 1-16)

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —In the opening words of **the** chapter, Sarai is seen as a disappointed woman, for it seemed apparent that she was not to be the bearer of children. With this blessing withheld, she pressed Abram to take her handmaid, Hagar, to wife in order to have children. Such action was obviously of the flesh, and could not be justified. We noted that similar action took place in the cases of Leah and Rachel, involving corresponding disaster. Sowing to the flesh is condemned by the apostle Paul, as such action could only reap corruption. Impetuosity is contrary to patient waiting upon God; for in the next chapter God reveals that the fulfilment of the promise was to be through Sarai and not Hagar (see 77. 16-17).

Abram in condoning the arrangement revealed an element of weakness, and shrank from its outcome by leaving Sarai to deal with the handmaid. Such harsh treatment he would hardly have expected, but Hagar's pride and provocation brought about an intolerable situation. The principles of relationship, as indicated in Eph. 6. 5-8, between employer and employed were intended to convey the mind of God in all dispensations.

The meeting of Hagar and the Angel seems to indicate one of the theophanies, i. e, the appearing of the Lord Jesus prior to His incarnation. The definite article preceding the word "angel" is distinctive, *and* such appearances were normally associated with times of difficulty and corresponding revelation. The angel's form of address. "Hagar Sarai's handmaid" (not "Hagar" merely) implied responsibility of position even in her distress, and the further remarks did not condone her rash action. Verse 10 shows the personal importance of the precious promises of the Lord in such appearances throughout the Old Testament.

"Return" and "submit" imply the great lessons of humility, repentance and reconciliation in keeping with the divine purposes.

As to the promised blessing upon Ishmael, what can be deduced from verse 12? It was felt that this indicates a prophecy relative to the enmity which would arise between Arab and Jew, as seen throughout the ages even unto the present time.

*J. C. M., E. B.*

**From Barrhead.** —The divine arrangement of marriage was that one man and one woman should dwell together and become one flesh (Gen. 2. 24). This concept was first transgressed by Lamech when he took two wives (Gen. 4. 19). By Abram's time the practice had become firmly entrenched in the culture of the land in which Abram was raised; a man would often take another woman in order to get children. It was to this practice that Sarai resorted when she suggested to Abram that he take her handmaid Hagar in order to obtain children (v. 2-3) for herself. It was noted that Hagar became a wife of Abram (v. 3) suggesting that what took place was legal in the eyes of men (but not in God's eyes) [Comment 1]. Although there was no rebuke from the Lord, the unhappy consequences of that union were soon made manifest. It was considered a great reproach for a woman not to be able to bear children (see 1 Sam. 7), and when Hagar conceived, Sarai was despised by Hagar and may have been in danger of being displaced by Hagar. Sarai by her action had put herself in an inferior position. As in Eden so in Canaan the man bears the responsibility (v. 5). Abram according to the law of Hammurabi delivered Hagar up to Sarai. Sarai dealt so severely with Hagar that she ran away (being true to her name which means run-away) into the wilderness.

In the wilderness the angel of the Lord found Hagar and commanded her to submit herself to Sarai. In obedience and submission there are blessings, and Hagar was to be blessed with a son. It was considered that the Angel of the Lord could have been a theophany because of the authority in the way the blessing is given in v. 10-11. Hagar's son was to be a noble man, "a wild ass among men", and yet he would be against his fellow-men and they against him; he would have a wild untameable nature.

By her experience in the wilderness Hagar gained an insight into an attribute of God who found her; she named the Lord the God of Seeing. There are implications in this incident which the apostle Paul brings out in Gal. 4. The son which was to be born to Hagar typifies bondage to the law and the works of the flesh. The son which would be born to Sarai typifies those born after the Spirit. L. deVille

**From Birkenhead.** —God's promise to Abram was that his wife should bear him a son. Evidently anxiety mounted as the years rolled by until in a moment of human frailty Sarai

proposed that Hagar should be taken by Abram to raise up an heir. Abram was wrong to heed his wife's counsel and a sequence of unhappy events followed. The command of the Lord (Gen. 2. 24) was for a man to have one wife, but legislation for the fruits of polygamy is given in Deut. 27. 15-17 suggesting that it was tolerated.

When Hagar conceived, animosity developed between Sarai and Hagar. The latter considered herself to be superior, and, because of this, Sarai's behaviour toward Hagar led eventually to Hagar running away. It seems that Abram did not involve himself in the resolution of the problem as he should have done [Comment 2].

In her difficulties Hagar received promises concerning the son to be born. This first reference in Scripture to the angel of the Lord arouses interest because it subsequently appears to be the Lord himself (v. 13). The true descendants of Ishmael are the Bedouins, and a prophetic description of them is given (v. 12). Hagar heeds the counsel of the Lord and returns with a submissive spirit having learned much concerning the Lord (vv. 13, 14).

The episode here recorded is taken up by Paul when writing to the Galatians (4. 21-25) concerning the old and new covenants. He pictures the Jews as those who are in bondage under the law which was given at Sinai, and which was observed so scrupulously by those whose faith was centred on Jerusalem. Contrasted with this is the day of grace, when the promises of God are towards us in Christ Jesus. Romans 8. 32 assures that with Him, God will freely give us all things.

The lesson taken from our study is that of David—"My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him" (Ps. 62. 5).  
*M. B. Turner, R. D. Williams*

*From Derby.* — Abram was tempted to accept Sarai's suggestion to take Hagar his wife's hand-maid to be his wife. At a later date, Rachel did the same and gave her handmaid Bilhah to Jacob, who bore for Rachel two sons which she considered to be hers, for she named them Dan and Naphtali. Such was the custom in those days and such ways were not regarded as adultery. "Where there is no law, neither is there transgression" (Rom. 4. 15).

Hagar conceived and foolishly began noticeably to despise her mistress. This caused trouble in Abram's life as well as

Sarai's and Hagar's. Verse 5 seems to convey the thought that Sarai was thus led to see her wrong action but blamed her husband. Nevertheless she said, "The Lord judge between me and thee". In Ps. 79. 9 we read, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether'.

We are told by the apostle Paul that this whole affair was of the flesh, not of faith. There is no record that Abram or his wife Sarai sought the Lord's will in this matter. Hagar fled from her wrathful mistress and found herself in affliction, but the Lord had His eye upon her. He knew perfectly all the circumstances and had compassion on her, perhaps for Abram's sake. Hagar was bearing Abram's firstborn, though Ishmael was not to be his heir. The Lord sent His angel to her with the command, "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands". He further promised her, "I will greatly multiply thy seed, that it shall not be numbered for multitude". The angel also named her unborn child Ishmael (God heareth). God in his grace had better things in store for His friend. Ishmael was born when Abram was 86 years of age, and Isaac 14 years later, when Abram was 100 years old. How God tried the patience of His servant! The angel further said to Hagar in connection with the name Ishmael, "The Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he shall be as a wild ass among men". Untameable, the Ishmaelites seemed to be a law unto themselves. They had no settled country, no city, no king, but travelled up and down the territories from Havilah in the north to Shur in the south. At a later date they are seen to be travelling to Egypt with spicery, and in the will of God were the means of saving the life of Joseph. The angel's words to Hagar regarding the future of her son by Abram had their fulfilment. Ishmael had twelve sons who are named in Gen. 25. 12-18; he also had a daughter, named Mahalath, who became a wife to Esau. She was the sister of Ishmael's firstborn Nebaioth (Gen. 28. 9).

G. Conway, S. R. W.

*From Kingston - upon - Thames.* —In chapter 15 God has established a covenant with Abram, shown him a unique vision and promised him a seed. In chapter 76, however, Abram succumbs to domestic pressure and makes a premature attempt to obtain the promise, assuming the child will be his heir. Abram had faith, but wavered in patience and acted before God's set time. It was wrong for him to compromise his separated position with an Egyptian woman

who **was** probably unsaved [Comment 3]. **He reaped the consequences of his mistake** (Gal. 6. 8), for **Ishmael's descendants hated Abram's** (see Ps. 83. 4-6).

**At first**, Sarai's suggestion appears unselfish, **but its consequences brought guilt** upon Abram and herself, rejection of **Hagar**, and involved polygamy. Sarai **was** ambitious for **self**, could not **take** her punishment and showed a vengeful spirit. Hurt by Hagar's pride, Sarai shared **blame with Abram**, who **expressed** indifference about **Hagar's future**. **This incident exposes weaknesses in all three characters** [see Comment 2].

**Ishmael** means "God heareth". Although **he was** not born in the desert, **his adult life was** spent in N. E. Sinai (Gen. 21. 21) and **he is** referred to in **Ps. 83. 6**. His "**wild-ass**" character **is** analogous to our old nature; **he dwelt** amongst his brethren, and **Esau**, who **gave little value** to spiritual things, **married** one of **Ishmael's** daughters (Gen. 28. 9). In contrast **Isaac was** born of God's purpose, **lived a separate life and had** descendants who **became** God's worshipping people. **The Jews descend from Isaac, the Arabs from Ishmael, and the conflict continues 4, 000 years later.**

In Gal. 4. 21-31 **Paul uses** contrasts between Hagar and Sarai to **teach us that as the Jew was to the Arab under the old covenant, so the Christian is to the Jew under the new covenant. The old covenant, with its spirit of bondage and fear (Rom. 8. 15) applied only to the Jew, but the new covenant, with its spirit of adoption and acceptance, is offered to the whole world. The new covenant brought the favoured status of sonship, here contrasted with the legal status of a minor under the old covenant. Ishmael was born of the will of man after the flesh, as Isaac was born of God in faith (John 7. 13; Gal. 3. 29). Redeemed people look forward to inhabiting the heavenly Jerusalem, as opposed to the earthly (Gal. 4. 26; Phil. 3. 20; Heb. 12. 22) [Comment 4]. The crucial lesson of this story is taught by Paul at the climax of the Galatians passage: "with freedom did Christ set us free... be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5. 1).**

**Paul Merchant**

**From Lagos.** —The faith of **Abram is** brought to the test in Gen. 16. The temptation comes from **his own flesh**, from Sarai **his wife**. "Go in," **she says**, "**I pray thee**, unto my handmaid: **it may be that I shall be builded** by her" (v. 2. R. V. M.). **Sarai was** looking for an heir to their house; and

concerning **this the Lord had made** uncompromising promises and **a covenant with Abram** in Gen. 15. In this close encounter **with Sarai we would have expected Abram** to overcome the temptation **with the word of promises made to him by the Lord** (Gen. 15. 4-6, 13-16). **Abram's** sorry silence **had sad** consequences (see Gen. 21. 9-14). In the tenth year of **Abram's** sojourn in Canaan, **Hagar the hand-maid** of Sarai conceived by Abram. **The Lord gave to Abram** no vision and **spake** not a word concerning the matter. "**The just shall live by his faith**" (Hab. 2. 4); and again, "whereunto **we have** already attained, **by that same rule let us walk**" (Phil. 3. 16). **Hagar the Egyptian is suggested to be a type of the world—"this bruised reed... whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it"** (Is. 36. 6). **Hagar was puffed up because she** conceived. "**The vain glory of life**" was her besetting sin **which** brought judgement upon her and **she fled** (v. 6). **This was a crisis in Abram's household which could have brought Abram's faith and his testimony for God into great reproach. It would become known that Hagar had conceived by Abram and that she was banished to the wilderness. God's mercy in the situation is seen in verse 7: "The angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur".**

**The angel of the Lord who appeared to Hagar has been identified with the Lord Jesus who is "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3. 14). He alone could see at the time the nation in Hagar's womb and speak of it (Gen. 76. 10; 27. 18). She called the name of the LORD that spake unto her "El roi" (Hebrew), a God that seeth (v. 13).**

**The command of the Lord to Hagar, "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands" (v. 9), underlines for us a divine principle in God's dealing with fallen man as to his regeneration—humility and faith on the part of the sinner before God's blessings. Because Hagar responded to the Lord, she received the promises concerning her son Ishmael (vv. 10-12).**

*A. Beyioku-Alase, E. Bassey*

**From Leeds.** —Yielding to the motivations of the flesh can result in nothing but trouble, for the Spirit and the flesh are entirely separate and in no way compatible (Rom. 8. 5, 8). The direct contrasts are clearly seen in this chapter (Gen. 76). We can contrast the two sons, born under two

different covenants, **Ishmael**, born **after the flesh**, born under bondage, and **Isaac**, born through promise, **the son of the freewoman**.

Although **we may** consider that **Sarai was the prime instigator in suggesting that Abram take Hagar**, as though to **hasten the fulfilment of God's promise**, **we recalled that Sarai had her part in the action of faith** (Heb. 7. 11; Rom. 4. 19). However, **we must wait God's time** and not **be impatient** (Rom. 8. 25). By taking **the action she did**, **Sarai was left desolate (deserted)** for when **Abram went to Hagar**, **Sarai had** neither husband nor son; **she was alone**.

Nothing happens by chance (Sarai acknowledged **that the LORD had** restrained her, v. 2) and **the story of Gen. 16 is used by the apostle Paul in Gal. 4 where, by means of an allegory he contrasts children of God (by faith) with children of Abram (born under the law)**. Again **we see the direct contrast between the law and grace, not co-existent either in time or in practice**. **Jehovah was the great Provider of both—the Law-Giver and the Grace-Giver (John 7. 17)**. **Paul, as guided by the Spirit, refers the Galatians to the Book of the Law, the Pentateuch, Genesis being the first of the five books**.

Hagar (wandering) would appear to **be the progenitor of the Hagarenes, linked with Edom, Moab and Ishmael (Ps. 83. 6) and the Hagrites (1 Chron. 5. 10, 19, 20; 27. 31)**. They **were nomadic Arab tribes who roamed the deserts east of Jordan**. **We noted that angel (messenger) occurs here (v. 7) for the first time**. Messengers often appear in **the form of men (Gen. 18. 2) but generally our attention is drawn to their function (actions and message) rather than their nature**.

**Abram called the name of his son Ishmael—God heareth (v. 15)**. **It is the prerogative of the father to name the child (Gen. 4. 1, 17, 26, etc.)**. **"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3. 1)**.  
*H. R. Dodge*

*From Liverpool.—*

For **Abraham, the great burden he had to carry was that God had not yet fulfilled His promise of Gen. 15. 4**. **There was nothing in that promise to suggest that the one who would come out of his own bowels would be born to Sarah, and therefore he felt able to concur with his wife's sugges-**

tion that he should take Hagar as his second wife (Gen. 76. 3). **We judged that** Abraham would **have** no knowledge of the principle of Gen. 2. 24. Indeed, although the principle of monogamy **is stated** in Gen. 2, throughout the **Old Testament** polygamy **was** practised, and **it is** not until the Lord Jesus spoke of marriage that monogamy **is** once again **stated** and **taught to be** God's will for us today (see Mat. 79. 5, 6 and Mark 70. 6-9). **We thought it strange that** God would **state** a principle in Gen. 2 not to **be** enacted until **New Testament** days [Comment 5].

The children that would **be** born to **Hagar** would **have the same rights as** those born to Sarah, and **this is emphasised** by **Sarah's** words in Gen. 76. 2. A similar expression is found in Gen. 30. 3. **If, however, Abraham did** nothing wrong by taking a second wife, Galatians 4. clearly shows that in doing so **he was** relying on **his** own efforts, and not waiting for a definite **lead** from God. Indeed Gen. 76. 2 states "And Abraham hearkened to **the** voice of Sarai". Commenting on **this** incident the apostle **Paul** shows how **the two wives** represent two covenants, **Hagar** answering to "Jerusalem that now is" and Sarah to **the** "Jerusalem that is above" and their two sons to **the two** natures that **all believers** have. Once again, **as** when Abraham **deceived** Pharaoh in Egypt, **we have** no divine comment or **rebuke** upon **his** activities.

**We agreed that it was** wrong of Hagar to **despise** her mistress, for although **she was** now Abraham's wife, **she was still** Sarah's servant and **as such,** Sarah **had** every right to punish **such** arrogant behaviour. **Yet we did** wonder **whether** the punishment **meted** out **was** too severe and **whether** Abraham should **have** offered some protection to Hagar **as she was** now **his** wife. Hagar **was** wrong to run away and **was** instructed to return to her mistress. **Ishmael's** birth **was** a part-fulfilment of **the** promise of God that Abraham's **seed** would **be** more than **the** number of **the** stars of heaven or **dust** of **the** earth, and **like** Jacob, **Ishmael** would **have** **twelve** sons and become a great nation (see Gen. 77. 20; 25. 13-16).

The angel of the **LORD** is revealed to **be** the "God that **seeth**" and so Hagar **calls** the place Beer-lahai-roi, "the well of **the** living one that **seeth** me". The angel of the **LORD** **seems** to **be** a manifestation of **the** divine presence (Judges 73).

*M. S. Elliott, G. S. Webster*

*From Melbourne.* —A decade has passed since Abram departed from Haran. During **the** intervening years promises **have** been made to **him** by **the LORD,** concerning both **his**

**seed** and possession of **the land** (in perpetuity) into **which he has been called**. **What period of time has elapsed** since the covenants of **chapter 15** we do not know; **but the righteous of all succeeding ages have** been reminded of the statement found in **v. 6 of chapter 15**—"He believed in the **LORD**; and **He counted it to him** for righteousness". **This belief in the LORD was** in the face of the human impossibility of fulfilment. **As yet there was** no evidence that the promise of an heir would materialise. **Abraham was 85 and Sarai 75** years old. Doubtless Abram had made known to his wife the fact of the promises made, and that the fulfilment rested upon the word of the **LORD**. Prior to the making of the covenants **Abram had seen** in Eliezer, the steward of his house, the possible hope of an heir; **but following upon the confirmation of the covenants and in the light of chapter 15. 6, Rom. 4, and Gal 3, we are inclined to judge that he had accepted the word of the LORD as being applicable to an heir born to him through his wife Sarai** [Comment 8]. **But the years were passing and there was a natural impatience. As Sarai pondered over the problem, her thoughts turned to the customs of the land of Canaan. The Nuzi tablets referred to in our contribution on chapter 15, reveal the fact that a childless wife could provide a subsidiary wife through whom her husband could obtain an heir, provision being made that if the true wife should later bear him a son, this son would become heir and replace the former heir. In the Egyptian handmaid Sarai saw a legal way of providing such, and she reasons, "It may be that I may obtain children by her". Abram hearkened to her reasoning, and Hagar became his subsidiary wife. Plurality of wives has led to troubled households, and the household of Abram was no exception. Ere long Sarai was despised in the eyes of her handmaid, who was forced to flee from the face of her mistress. As Hagar, in apparently friendless circumstances, is found by the angel of the LORD beside the fountain of waters in deep despondency, the LORD brings to her words of comfort in the naming of her unborn son Ishmael (God heareth). Then He indicates his characteristics, and the multitude of his descendants, with their geographical location. She is moved to call the One who has spoken to and comforted her, "a God that seeth", and the fountain of water where He has found her, "The well of the living One who seeth me". This may well have been the first great revelation to Hagar of the God of her master Abram.**

**W. H. F., T. W. F.**

*From Nottingham.* —In contrast to the bright light of Abram's faith recorded for us in chapter 15 we have the impatience of Sarai in chapter 76. Whatever was in her mind at the time, whether it was over anxiety for motherhood, lack of faith, or the idea that she must aid or even accomplish God's promise, she yielded to the energy of the flesh. Yet Abram's faith remained constant (Rom. 4. 20) although Satan, through Sarai, appears to have won a temporary victory, because Abram listened to her voice and acted as she suggested (Gen. 76. 2).

It is most difficult for us by nature to wait for the fulfilment of God's promises. At this time Abram was 85 years of age and had lived in Canaan for ten years (Gen. 76. 3, 16). So Sarai gave Hagar to Abram her husband to become his wife and in due time Ishmael was born. It was a union of the flesh and the fruit of the union was also fleshly. Of the son that Hagar was to bear the divine declaration was that "he shall be as a wild ass among men; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him..." v. 12. How completely the word of prophecy has been fulfilled!

The events that followed these unhappy circumstances led to Sarai "dealing hardly with her" (v. 6) and Hagar fled into the wilderness. She appears to have had no idea where she was going, but was striving to be rid of the trial and suffering. Sometimes it happens that we try to escape from similar circumstances, or perhaps through some experience one would feel tempted to leave the Fellowship. But where or to whom should we go? Hagar had no place to go; she was wandering. Then the command of the angel of the Lord reaches her, "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself" (v. 9). Returning and submission were the way of God. The mercy of God is also manifested in this portion. He gave Hagar a promise concerning her seed. God had both heard and seen her. Ishmael means "God heareth" and Hagar declared "Thou God seest me" (v. 13, A. V. ); and the well was called "the well of Him that liveth and seeth me".

*R. Hickling*

*From St. Helens.* —Sarai, impatient for the fulfilment of God's promise to Abram that his heir should be "he that shall come out of thine own bowels", suggests that Abram take Hagar —"it may be that I shall obtain children by her". It seems strange that neither Sarai nor Abram consulted God. This action of the flesh had disastrous consequences as is usually

the case; a lapse of faith by Abram, a cause of bitterness in Sarai's heart, and hardship for poor Hagar who had simply obeyed her mistress's command. Then, seeing that, having conceived, Hagar despised her, Sarai asks that "my wrong be upon thee" (Abram) and pleads that "the Lord judge between me and thee". Abram reminds Sarai of Hagar's relationship to her as maid and tells Sarai to deal with her as was her right. Sadly lacking compassion, dealing harshly, Sarai dismisses her servant from her household and Hagar flees to the wilderness [Comment 6]. God is ready to succour Hagar in these straitened circumstances and the angel of the Lord instructs her to return and submit herself to the hand of her mistress. He tells her that she will bear a son and shall call his name Ishmael ("The Lord hath heard thine affliction"). The angel of the Lord outlines to Hagar the wild character of Ishmael—one who will be continually feuding with others, but not subdued. Over 4, 000 years this has proved true—Ishmael's seed, the Arab nations, have been, and are, a plague and nuisance to the nations around them, whose common interest has been to suppress them. This they have failed to do—a remarkable fulfilment of God's promise. If God can do this for wrongdoers, what will He not do for the salvation of His people—His chosen, the Jewish nation, and us who are saved by the blood of Christ? Ishmael, we read, would dwell in the presence of his brethren, suggesting, we thought, that he was not called to be separate as Abram was "called out". Ishmael, the flesh, resents separation [Comment 7]. Children of Hagar are bondservants, whilst those Abram-like in faith, by the grace of God, bom of the Spirit, new creatures in Christ, are free men. The two women represent two covenants (Gal. 4. 24). Yet what lovely words from a full heart are spoken by Hagar: "Have I even here looked after Him that seeth me?" Have I duly considered, thanked Him and sought Him in return? In our weakness the best of us at times transgress, and are often accused by our tempters. Yet knowing that God is ready to succour, let us mark with wonder His kindness, and Hagar-like ask ourselves, "Have I here looked after Him that seeth me?"

J.

H.

R.

### COMMENTS

1. (*Barrhead*): As is to be expected, the question of polygamy arises in several of the papers this month. Many rightly point to Gen. 2. 24 as indicating God's original, and doubtless abiding, purpose for a one-to-one relationship in

marriage. **Yet it is true that, from the days of Lamech, we find polygamy practised by men in the Old Testament, including the patriarchs themselves. This is uncondemned and in Deut. 21. 15-17 it is accepted that a man may have more wives than one. Though still uncondemned, the generally unsatisfactory nature of the situation emerges in the safeguards enjoined for the son of the wife who was "hated". Different status ratings also appeared to apply in the marital relationship with wives, wives' handmaids, and concubines. Abraham was involved with all three (see Gen. 25. 6) although, as is pointed out in this paper, Hagar is referred to as "wife" (v. 3). There is no clear indication in Scripture of the detailed relative privileges of women in these relationships, though clearly concubines were less privileged than wives, and in cases like Solomon's, constituted what eastern potentates would call a "harem". We can only conclude, I suggest, that God tolerated a development which fell short of His ideal, over a long period of the progress of divine revelation. I wonder if we can speak of this situation not being "legal" in God's eyes when He had not legislated against it? Of course, this general comment on polygamy in no way detracts from the revealed truth (Gal. 4. 23) that Ishmael was "born after the flesh" in contrast to Isaac who was born "through promise".**

2. **(Birkenhead): This naturally tends to be one's first impression of the situation and our present study portion presents Hagar as a run-away with the angel of the Lord sending her back into submission. Yet we must remember that "chanter two" of the story of Hagar and Sarai has still to come in chanter 21 and it is clear there that the Lord supports Sarah's insistence on the expulsion of Hagar. So perhaps we should be cautious in judging Abraham here.**

3. **(Kingston-upon-Thames): Presumably by "unsaved" here is meant one not sharing Abraham's faith in the God of the covenant. It would be impossible to tell just what Hagar's position would be in this respect but it does cast our minds back to ch. 12 and leave us wondering whether Hagar came up with Abraham's household from that unhappy sojourn in Egypt.**

4. **(Kingston-upon-Thames): It seems debatable whether we should primarily regard the "heavenly Jerusalem" of Heb. 12. 22 as a place to be inhabited hereafter by redeemed people. Insofar as it is part of the heavenly scene, the state-**

ment **may well be true but the** thought of **the** "heavenly Jerusalem" **as the** heavenly centre of worship **is put** forward helpfully by Mr. J. Miller in his **Notes** on Hebrews. **This** commentary on Heb. **12. 22-24 will** repay study and thought.

5. (*Liverpool*): **See** Comment 1. **That** God in His wisdom and patience allowed **the** prevalence of something short of His own ideal, and for so long, may strike **us as** strange. However, perhaps **we can at least see that the** overwhelming privilege of those who **partake** of **the** new covenant, associated **as** it is with **the** supreme revelation of **the** Son of God incarnate, very reasonably **makes the** highest demands. **Is the** emphasis and insistence on monogamy in **New** Testament times related to **the** unveiling of **the** "mystery of Christ; which in other generations **was not made** known unto **the** sons of **m e n . . .** " (Eph. 3. 4, 5), i. e. **the** Church which is His Body?

6. (*St. Helens*): **Actual** dismissal by Sarah, or "casting out" **came** later (27. 10).

7. (*St. Helens*): **Ishmael was to dwell** in **the** presence of, or "over against", **all** his brethren. **I take it that** this indicates **a** proximity to, yet permanent distinction from, **the** Israelites. True, **Ishmael's** descendants **were** not to share **the** spiritual separation of Israel.

8. (*Melbourne*): Since Rom. 4. 19, 20 **seems to have a** direct relationship to Gen. 77. 15-19 it would **seem** difficult to definitely establish **that** Abraham **here** understood **the** Lord's promise to **be** focussed on Sarah. Nevertheless, like Melbourne friends, **I feel** this is indicated by Abraham's implied reluctance to **accede** to Sarah's suggestion about **Hagar**.  
J. D. T.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. *From Kingston-upon-Thames*: In view of Gen. 77. 17 were Keturah's sons born before or after **Isaac's** birth? (Gen. 25. 1-4).

While it may not **be** possible to establish exactly **the** chronology of Gen. 25. 1 **the** thought conveyed, **I suggest**, is **that** Abraham took Keturah **as** his wife **after** **Isaac's** birth and probably after Sarah's **death**. Abra-

ham's apparent incredulity expressed in 77. 17 about further fatherhood was proved unfounded in God's good time, and although Sarah had no further family there seems no reason why Abraham should not. We have no certain knowledge either about the historical setting of the concubines mentioned in 25. 6.

2. *From Liverpool:* Gen. 2. 24 teaches monogamy, yet polygamy is practised throughout the Old Testament. Does this mean that, before the Lord's New Testament teaching, God condoned the taking of more than one wife?

See Comments 1 and 5.

3. *From Liverpool:* What affliction of Hagar had God heard? I should think the reference is to the affliction Hagar had been suffering at the hands of Sarah. Her son's name would be a constant reminder that, while God's primary purpose could not be fulfilled in Ishmael, He was not indifferent to the painful part Hagar had been caused to play. Perhaps the reference to "hearing" is especially significant in relation to 21. 17?

4. *From Liverpool:* What form of the Divine Presence did the angel of the Lord take?

There is wide agreement among commentators that the angel of the Lord does indeed represent an appearance of deity. In the present passage He says, "I will greatly multiply thy seed...", and Hagar "called the name of the LORD that spake unto her...". In view of the messenger character of this Person, and the fact that He speaks the words of Jehovah it has been deduced that this is the Son of God in a transient, so-called "theophany" as distinct from His subsequent incarnation.

J. D. T.

# BIBLE STUDIES

'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)'

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## EDITORIAL

Abraham's faith has brought rich blessings to many generations through the covenant of Gen. 17. It is noteworthy that it is God who "gave" and "established" this covenant, and that it secured God's promises unconditionally. The promise concerning the land remains, as also God's place for Abraham's seed through Isaac, as will be seen so marvellously in the Millennium. But Paul is clear that these promises reach further when he says: "That upon the Gentiles might come the blessings of Abraham in Christ Jesus... to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3. 14, 16). Gen. 17 has therefore great importance for those who are Abraham's seed, whether through Isaac or Christ.

The token of the covenant was circumcision, and this was the mark on men who stood in special favour with God. God noticed and blessed Abraham's circumcised descendants, as He noticed and blessed when He saw that other sign (same word *oth*) of the blood in Egypt at the passover. Zipporah (Ex. 4. 24-26) showed dramatically that blood and death were associated in circumcision, as in the death of Christ which brings us covenant blessings. Plainly circumcision was to be matched by commitment to the God of the promises (e. g. Sinai, baptism) and refusal puts one outside the fulness of God's covenant blessings. Men may refuse them, but God's promises remain.

A. B. R.

## GOD'S COVENANT AND ITS SEAL

(Gen. 17. 1-27)

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —Thirteen years had elapsed since the birth of Ishmael. This might have been for Abraham a time of waiting for and upon God. In an intensely personal interview with His servant we note a sacred familiarity between the Almighty God and the man whom the divine Being had deigned to call His friend. "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (v. 1). God was calling on His servant to live and move in the divine presence, and to be sincere,

genuine, and true-hearted. **The covenant mentioned was the renewal of the covenant earlier referred to, but this time with distinct obligations, and a detailed revelation of what was to take place. Whilst the covenant is between the two parties, God gives it. It must be so. The initiative is always with Him. God is the Giver, man the receiver, not the equal. The truths connected with the sign of circumcision seem to include at least four ideas (a) designation, as belonging to God; (b) separation unto Him and from the world; (c) purity unto Him; (d) possession by Him.**

**God made it clear that He had a main line of purpose in Abraham, Sarah and Isaac, but He also revealed a subsidiary line in Ishmael (in our discussion we noted present trends in Israel and the Arab countries) and the rest of the nations. About Sarah God says, "She shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be of her" (v. 16).**

**Rom. 4 is most enlightening, revealing Abraham's great faith in God, a faith which began in uncircumcision, and proving that circumcision does not save the soul. Col. 2. 8-15 gives further help as we review the sign of circumcision as seen in New Covenant times. We read of the circumcision of Christ involving for ourselves new life from Christ through His death and resurrection, and seen in the outward and visible sign of baptism in water.**

*H. Sands. G. A. J.*

**From Barrhead. —We believe this chapter deals not with a new covenant, but rather the token or seal of the unconditional covenant given in ch. 15. The seal is conditional and the benefits would not be received and enjoyed unless circumcision was applied. We discussed the question, "What answers to circumcision today?" Most felt it was the new birth, although some held the view that it was baptism [see Comment 2]. Circumcision was to be on the 8th day for the children. The numeral 8 speaks of a new beginning, and we noted that Zacharias the father of John the Baptist was of the 8th order.**

**Because of the weight of scriptural proof regarding Abraham's faith we felt that his laughter at the promise of God regarding Isaac was an indication of his joy rather than of mockery or disbelief. Regarding Ishmael, we noted that God did not neglect him and "12 princes" shows a balance against 12 tribes in the nation of Israel.**

*D. J. Kerr.*

**From Birkenhead.** —The Lord appears to Abram and declares **Himself to be God Almighty, the One who is the source of all power. It has also been expressed that the idea of one who tenderly nourishes is implicit in this title of the Lord.**

In Gen. **15** God **made a covenant with Abram based on faith** (v. 18). **Here the covenant is established (77. 8) and stress is laid upon the fact that obedience to God's will is required. Abram was to walk under God's all-seeing eye and "be perfect" (display wholeness of conduct). A parallel situation exists with God's people under the New Covenant—their position is maintained by obedience. As a sign of the covenant the males of the people were to be circumcised (v. 11). Failure to carry this out was to break the covenant (v. 14). It is something prompted by obedience from the heart. It is evident that the practice departed from this high ideal (see Deut. 10. 16; 30. 6). It was considered that Rom. 2. 29 was relevant to the above point, and should not be interpreted as concerning those of the New Covenant. According to 1 Cor. 7. 18, 19 and Gal. 5. 6; 6. 15 circumcision is of no virtue today. In Col. 2. 11, 12 and Phil. 3. 3 the context appears to relate to the putting off of the flesh.**

**The laughter of Abraham was considered to be that expressing delight. To confirm this we were directed to the meaning of Isaac's name "laughter". To dismiss the idea that the laughter may have been scornful we turned to Rom. 4. 18-22.**

Although **the covenant was with Isaac, the Lord heard Abraham's cry on behalf of Ishmael, and gave him a blessing (v- 2°)-**

*R. D. Williams.*

**From Bolton.** —God **made a covenant with Abraham** in Gen. **15**, in which there was no walk or worship involved. **This covenant is associated with the truth of justification by faith and can be summed up by the words "I will", because the keeping of the covenant was entirely in the Lord's hands. Abraham had waited many years for the seed (Isaac) to come and yet (Rom. 4. 20, 21) he wavered not through unbelief. However, in this present chapter we see that it is Abraham's walk, not his faith that would keep the covenant, and this keeping was passed on to Abraham's seed [Comment 12]. The word "walk" is used figuratively covering the whole life and conduct of a person, and should not be confused with "faith", since we are freed from condemna-**

tion by one **act of faith** in Christ and no amount of good **walk** could save us from condemnation. Salvation is through: —

One Man—Christ **Jesus**

One **act of righteousness**—Christ's **death** on the cross

One **act of faith** in Christ—by the sinner

Abraham's **walk was to be that** of a perfect man, **but this** does not imply **that he** was either **sinless** or **faultless because that** would **be** impossible. Abraham **was to be** upright sincere, wholehearted and a man of integrity, and **his seed** would also **be** devoted to their God. **Whilst we** are **glad** to think of God **as** our **Father**, having been **delivered** from the Egyptian bondage, **we must remember the rest** of God's purpose **in that** deliverance, "**Let My people go, that they may serve Me**" (Ex. 7. 16).

*The meaning of the covenant* is contained in v. 7—it **was to be an everlasting** covenant **between** God and **Abraham with his seed**, and God would **be** a God unto **them**, One who **is served** and worshipped.

*The outward mark of the covenant* is clearly shown in v. 10—"every male among you **shall be circumcised**".

*The seal of the covenant*—It **was** God's covenant and **He** said to **Abraham** "thou **shalt**" as opposed to "**I will**" of Gen. 15, and the basic condition **was** obedience to God's word **that all** descendants **were to be circumcised**, and in **this way** they **were** then **able** to **fulfil the** command of v. 1, "**Walk before Me, and be thou perfect**" [Comment 12].

*Present Day Applications*—In Gal. 5. 3; Rom. 2. 25, 26 **Paul** shows clearly **that** circumcision **has** no **value** in **itself** **except where there** is obedience to the law [Comment 1]. Rom. 8. 9 and Col. 2. 11 fully demonstrate **that it is** not circumcision in **the flesh** made by hands **but the** circumcision of Christ. Christ **has circumcised** every one of **His own**, **the truth** of the cross having **cut** away completely **the body of the flesh**. **Thus we are** under **the** obligation of keeping **His** commandments **and** of walking before our God. **It is** only in **this way** **that the** worship of God is open to us. **The** disobedient could not worship collectively, they **were cut off**. **A similar line is seen in** 2 Cor. 6. 14-7. 1, **the call** of God to **believers** to **separate** (see also Heb. 8. 10, and Heb. 10. 15-18). **We are** under a **New Covenant**. **IS., W. P.**

*From Derby.* —Spirit-given words bearing on **the subject** are: **the** covenant of circumcision (**Acts 7. 8**), **the** sign of circum-

cision (Rom. 4. 11), and Christ, "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that He might confirm the promises given unto the fathers" (Rom. 15. 8). When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said, I am God Almighty (El Shaddai), this being the first time the Lord revealed Himself by this great name. Under this name He said, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly". The Lord then exercises His prerogative and changes Abram's name to Abraham. God thus claimed him as His own. Great despots of the Gentile nations often changed the names of their personal captives whom they chose to serve them in their empires, as is seen in the book of Daniel. The Lord repeats His promise of ch. 15. 18, but now adds a further token of His ownership of Abraham's seed by the seal of circumcision. The Lord named Ishmael and Isaac before they were born, and Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and his posterity became known as the children of Israel and Israelites. There were very many other peoples (nations) who could claim descent from Abraham, but were not related to God by covenant. We assume that circumcision was not obligatory to them. However, individuals wishing to be linked with the Israel nation would need to be circumcised. We noted how quickly Abraham obeyed the Lord's command ("in the selfsame day", v. 23—firstly himself then Ishmael his son), reminding us of the psalmist's words "I made haste, and delayed not, to observe Thy commandments" (Ps. 119. 60). All male children were to have this operation on the eighth day. In New Testament times under the New Covenant converted Jews were not encouraged to continue the practice because it became a mere fleshly rite. Circumcision of the heart, of the spirit not of the "letter", was stressed in the apostles' teaching. In Rom. 2. 25-29; Gal. 5. 2-6; 1 Cor. 7. 19; Col. 3. 11 Paul deals with the will of the Lord relating to circumcision, summed up in the words in Gal. 5. 6: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love".

A. Smith, S. R. W.

*From Edinburgh.* —This was obviously a great climax in the experience of this remarkable patriarch. It was now some 13 or 14 years since the liaison with Hagar and the subsequent birth of Ishmael. It seems clear that Abraham was

satisfied that God's promises would **be fulfilled** in the latter (see v. 18). God is about to intimate to Abraham news **which** will radically alter his plans and ambitions for his firstborn and involve Sarah in a role which both **Abraham** and **she had** now completely discounted. **As a** precursor to doing so God **uses the** divine title "**EI Shaddai**" (**used** six times in Genesis) and this reminds Abraham of **the** power and all-sufficiency of Almighty God to accomplish **the** apparently impossible. In recognition of this important change which is to **take place** in their **status** both Abram and Sarai are to **have** their **names** changed; his from "high or **exalted father**" to "father of a multitude of nations", and **hers** to "princess" or "queen", a title which indicated **her** importance in **the** formation of this new nation. **We** understand **that** in eastern countries a change of name indicates some radical alteration in **the** rank or circumstances of **the** individual concerned.

**The** Lord's command **that he walk** before Him and **be perfect**, with other considerations, **led us** to conclude **that** although **Abraham had led a separated life he had** not yet fully yielded to God's will. **The** institution of circumcision with its present-day **parallel** in speaking of our subjugation of **the flesh** [Comment 2] **seems** to indicate God's determination **that there was** yet scope in **Abraham's** life for a closer conformation to His will and purposes, particularly since **the** all-important covenant **was** now to **be** ratified **and** implemented.

*J. M. Lindsay.*

*From Kingston-upon-Thames.* —Gen. 17. 7, 8 shows **that** God requires His people to worship Him (see also Ex. 20. 1-7).

"**I am** God Almighty; **walk** before **Me**, and **be** thou perfect. And **I will make** My covenant between **Me** and **thee**" (Gen. 17. 1). God **made** His unconditional covenant with **Abram**, which **was** complete in God's giving, **but** without **the** submission to God's will **there** could not **be the fullest** blessing. **Abram had to be perfect** in his **walk** before God, **as also was the case** with Job and Noah (Job 7. 1; Gen. 6. 9). Obedience and submission **are the** two things **that** stand out in **the chapter** as being of **great** importance, both to **Abram** and **his** descendants, if God is to **be** worshipped (**verses 7, 8**). **Thus** while God's **grace** and **Abram's** faith **are** seen clearly in ch. 15, in ch. 17 **Abraham's** obedience and **walk**, and **the** worship of his God **are** seen to follow. This sequence is **parallel** to

the order of the blessings of the New Covenant (Heb. 10. 16-18).

The preceding promises, "I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 72. 2; 15. 5) and "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12. 7), are established in the covenant. God refers to the covenant as "My covenant which ye shall keep between Me and you", and circumcision would be the sign until the covenant was sealed (Rom. 4. 11) [Comment 3]. The people of Israel, showing an obedience to God's will and similar acceptance of the covenant were made debtors to keep the whole law (Gal. 5. 3). And Rom. 2. 25-29 shows with clarity that the action of circumcision was only outward, showing reliance on itself alone and counting as nothing, for it was the separation in the heart that counted (Deut. 10. 16; 30. 6), and was required by God of His people.

Through the new covenant the circumcision of our hearts occurs at salvation (Col. 2. 11), and should show in the outworkings of our lives by obedience, and its privilege, worship. The seal of circumcision shows a similarity to that of baptism as they are both outward signs of covenant dealings with God, and of the consequent debt to obey His commandments, but is not the antitype of it.

G. J. Ackers.

*From Lagos.* — "Who is like unto the LORD our God, that hath His seat on high, that humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?" (Ps. 113. 5, 6). Abraham fell upon his face, humbled by the surpassing glory of Jehovah who said to him: "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 77. 1). Abraham lying low before the Lord presents us with an awe-inspiring scene of profound contrast between the El Shaddai (God Almighty) and himself, the weak thing of this world, and yet a trophy of grace through divine love and choice, to the intent that He might put to shame the things that are strong (1 Cor. 7. 27-30). "And God talked with him saying, As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee" (v. 4; see also 7, 9). The covenant which God made with Abraham is like an exceeding precious jewel with many lustrous sides to it. God called it "My covenant" (see verses 2, 4, 7, 9, 19 and 21). The great effusion of divine blessings which the covenant offered carried with it responsibility of obedience on the part of Abraham and his posterity (see verses 9-14). There is a dual fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham under the

covenant with **the** emphasis: "Thou **shalt be the father of a** multitude of nations" (v. 4); "I will **make nations of thee**, and kings **shall come out of thee**" (v. 6); "I will **bless** her, and **she shall be** a mother of nations; kings of peoples **shall be** of her" (v. 16).

(1) **The** natural physical blessings **are** envisaged in **these** promises (see Gen. 77. 20; 25. 1-7).

(2) **The** spiritual blessings **which** embrace dispensations of divine dealings with man (see Rom. 4. 1-25; Gen. 17. 21).

When Elijah stood in **the** midst of an apostate people at Mount Carmel and prayed saying "O Lord, **the** God of Abraham, of **Isaac**, and of Israel", **he called on the** living, covenant-keeping God who answered him by fire (1 Kings \*\*\*) •

S. A. *Beyioku-Alase, E. Bassey.*

**From Leeds.** —**The** covenant in this chapter is a covenant in **the** true sense of **the** word, being a **mutual** agreement [Comment 4], and it differs from previous covenants in **that** it is conditional on **the** obedience and circumcision of Abram **and** his **seed**. **The** covenant **was made between** God and **Abram**, and **because** of his faith and obedience Abram **was** "counted righteous". This **was** not from keeping God's **law** (Rom. 4) **but** by faith, for **there was** no **law at the** time of **the** covenant making. **We** do not need to **keep the law** in our covenant relationship with God. **We** are Christ's and therefore **Abraham's seed**, "heirs according to promise" (see Gal. 3. 16, 29). **Abram was** physically **the father** of nations through his other children, as **well as the great nation (ch. 12. 2), the nation of Israel**. **Abraham** is, in **the** spiritual sense, **the father** of **all** believers. **The** promise **was** through faith "**that he might be the father of all them that believe**" (Rom. 4. 11). It is interesting to note **that the law**, which **came after the** covenant and did not **supersede** or **replace** it, does not provide in any way for eternal salvation. "**The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ**" (John 1. 17).

**The change** of names of **Abram** and Sarai marks a new relationship with God **because** of **the faith sealed** by circumcision. **The** margin gives **the** name **Sarah** as meaning "Princess". **We** thought **that the change to "Abraham"** could **be** associated with his close **walk** with God, **the AH** inserted in "**Abram**" being a possible derivative of JAH [Comment 5].

Abraham's move in v. 18 to secure the line of succession through Hagar is not in accordance with God's plan; thus we have preserved the picture of Egypt as a type of the world. This is the first instance in which God includes Sarah in the promise. God provides for Ishmael as He had promised. Ishmael becomes the father of a great nation, a nation which was instrumental in a later generation in protecting the line of Abraham (the Ishmaelites bought Joseph into slavery).

P M Jefferson, H. H. Dodge.

*From Liverpool.* —The covenant of ch. 17 stands in contrast to that of ch. 15, the covenant of ch. 15 being completely unconditional, and that of ch. 17 conditional upon obedience to the revealed will of God. The key words (in ch. 15) are "I will", and (in ch. 17) "Thou shalt" [see Comment 12]. God reveals Himself as El Shaddai, God Almighty. A similar expression is found in 2 Cor. 6. 18, "the Lord Almighty" where the subject is, significantly, separation from unbelievers.

Abraham's walk is important in relation to the covenant. It has to be the walk of a sincere, genuine and true-hearted man. Verses 6-8 contain details of what God promised to do and includes the promise of nations, kings, and the land of Canaan. Verses 9-14 contain what Abraham had to carry out and included nothing less than a full commitment, which was to be confirmed by circumcision. All the males in his house including those bought as slaves were to be circumcised. This was the outward mark of the covenant entered into by Abraham. Abraham laughed when he heard that a major part of the promise would be fulfilled through a son born to Sarah. God does not in any way condemn him, whatever caused the laughter. God emphasises the fact that the covenant would be established with Isaac and his seed. From v. 20 it seems that Ishmael is excluded from the covenant and from v. 21 that Isaac alone was specifically included.

The New Testament parallel to circumcision is partly explained in Col. 2. 11, 12, regarding the circumcision of Christ. The cutting off of the flesh is a truth applicable to all believers through the Cross-work of Christ and so we are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit (Rom. 8. 9). This being so, we are under obligation to keep His commandments and to walk before God well-pleasing to Him. Note the words of Heb. 8. 10 regarding God's covenant with

**Israel in a future day, and the same words as applied to the people of God in Heb. 10. 16. He would put His laws on their heart so that they can lovingly serve Him, and upon their minds so that they can intelligently serve Him.**

*M. S. Elliott, G. S. Webster.*

*From Manchester.* —If perfection had been necessary to the continuance of God's purposes with regard to Abraham, then those purposes would never have been fulfilled, but since perfection is implicit in the Godhead any acceptance of lower standards was impossible. And this was the basis of the words "be thou perfect" [Comment 6]. Although the standard was unattainable, these words were a reiteration of God's will. This command would lead to fulfilment of the order which preceded it, "Walk before Me".

The establishment of a covenant which was conditional (v. 14), by its provision for its contravention, states God's recognition that it would be broken, His knowledge that this was man's nature. It indicates divine tolerance towards the frailty of humans, and the practical outcome of "be thou perfect", is that failure and obedience, and their respective results, exist without destroying that which stands on perfection.

Verse 6, acknowledging the ultimate presence of kings in Israel, demonstrates that God recognised also a nation's ability to commit an error collectively, since it was not God's desire that Israel should be ruled in such a way (1 Sam. 8. 4-9).

The superficial reversal of God's plans is inevitably reversed to His credit—an obvious principle which allows reliance on and confidence in the Godhead's control over the outcome of all things, but should never permit lethargy with respect to practical Christianity, "Be thou perfect".

*S. L Prasher.*

*From Macduff and Whitehills.* —The Lord (Jehovah) appears to Abram when he is 99 years old and Sarai is 90 years old. It is made clear to Abram just how the nations of the earth are to be blessed in him, for Sarai, now called Sarah (Princess) is herself to bear a son and "be a mother of nations". Abram is called Abraham "the father of a multitude of nations". Would Abraham have realised the profoundness of such words? Implied in the word "nations", are Gentile nations, revealing that it was not only his seed according to

the flesh who were to benefit from God's salvation, namely the Jews, but also the Gentiles, the heathen nations (Gal. 3. 8).

**Abram** and Sarai thought that they could help God in His plans by allowing **Hagar** to conceive through **Abram** (Gen. 16. 1-4). His plans are not to be fulfilled by this means. God's power is to be shown, and although **Sarah** is long past child-bearing, and **Abraham** himself considers his own body as good as dead (Rom. 4. 19), God appears to him as God Almighty (**EI Shaddai**), the all-powerful One, well able to create life from death. He makes it plain to **Abraham** too, that what is to happen is all of God. God makes a covenant with **Abraham** ("My covenant", v. 2). A covenant is normally a compact between two parties, each one setting out the terms and agreeing. In this case, although both parties are in agreement, the terms are all of God (77. 2): "And I will make My covenant between Me and thee". Note that God comes first. The covenant is made with **Abraham**, who has been selected from amongst his brethren because of that characteristic quality, faith. It was not circumcision (Rom. 4. 10), nor his adherence to the law (Rom. 4. 13) which commended **Abraham**, only his faith.

Circumcision speaks of cutting off, and we thought this would speak of death to the flesh or the old self. One thought we had as to why it might be the eighth day was that this would be the start of another week, and this covenant speaks of something new.

R.

Wood.

*From Melbourne.* —As the years advance in the life of **Abraham**, the time for the fulfilment of God's promise draws near. The Lord appears again to **Abraham**, revealing Himself as **EI Shaddai** (the all-sufficient One), who could meet all his need. Then the word is spoken to him, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect". This does not convey any thought of sinlessness but the consistent laying of his whole life bare before Him, concealing nothing—his shortcomings, his frailties, his desires and aspirations, but it is evident that it was characteristic of him to lay all before God (and acknowledge Him). The Lord continues, "Behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations". Until now he has been known as **Abram**, but henceforth it is to be **Abraham**, father and head of a chosen race of people who would serve God. In God's plan for the beginning of the

chosen race, **He is** going to do **the** humanly impossible, of **which** succeeding generations of Abraham's descendants **are** going to **be** reminded in **times** of emergency and extremity. **He** would **be** to **them** unfailingly **El Shaddai**, if they would only **walk** before **Him**. The covenant **is** now to **be ratified**, **the** external **seal** of **which** was to **be the** rite of circumcision.

God now reveals **His** purposes concerning Abraham's **wife** Sarai—**her** name **will** no longer **be** Sarai, **but Sarah** or Princess; **and she will** become **the** mother of nations. **As** Abraham pondered **the** implications of **this**, **he** fell on **his** face and **laughed**. **Was** Abraham's **laugh** one of incredulity, or **was it a laugh** of faith and pleasure in anticipation of **such** a prospect, or **was it a combination** of **all these** emotions, **as he** considered **the** promise of **a son and heir**? [Comment 7]. Again **his** thoughts turn to **Ishmael**, **but the** assurance **is** given **that he is** not forgotten; **but** God's covenant **will be** with **Isaac**, the yet unborn son of Sarah. **Abraham** now confirms **the fact that he has believed** God, being fully assured that **what He has** promised, **He is able** to perform. **He sets his seal** to **the** covenant, and **the rite** of circumcision **is** performed on every **male member** of **his** household—a **seal** of **the** righteousness of **the faith** which had been **his** in **the** faithfulness of God. *W. S., T. W. F.*

*From Vancouver.* —**Abram** is now **99** years old and it is **13** years since **Ishmael** was born, yet **there is** no record of **the** events in **Abram's** life during **this** period. God's promises given in **chapters 12** and **73** pertaining to **his seed** and **the land** were consolidated and became a covenant confirmed by **sacrifices** in **ch. 15**. God **has made** many promises to **believers as well as unbelievers which are** unconditional (Gen, 9. 11). When God makes covenant promises **with** those who **are** nearest to **Himself**, invariably they **are** conditional, having **a dual** responsibility by God and **His** people [see Comment 4]. **The** covenant **which** God **is** about to **make** in **ch. 17** outlines **what** God **will** do for **Abram** and **his seed**, then goes on to outline **their** responsibility: "**As for thee**, thou shalt **keep** My covenant, thou, and thy **seed after thee**".

The **seal** of **the** covenant God **made** with **Abram** and **his seed** was circumcision. **The** word in both **Hebrew** and **Greek** implies "to cut around" or "to cut off". **The** spiritual import in **this** act was not in **the flesh** but in **the heart**. **The** recipient

**must** know the cutting off of all that was displeasing to the **Lord** [Comment 8]. Acts 7. 51 says "uncircumcised in heart and ears"; also (Rom. 2. 28, 29) circumcision is not outward but inward—of the heart.

It is significant that in the early churches some Jewish leaders sought to impose circumcision upon all males who believed in Christ as Saviour (Acts 15. 1), going so far as to say they could not otherwise be saved. In a similar sense our baptism in water is a symbol of our covenant with the Lord to walk in newness of life, that we will "cut off" the things of the flesh and the world and be obedient to the Lord. The fulfilment is in our heart and spirit, not merely that our body was immersed in water. *J. B.*

*From Victoria, B. C.*—We think of the covenant that we enjoy as being "of grace", but grace was shown in God's earlier covenants with men. The first one, with Noah, had the seal of the rainbow. Here Abraham had experienced God's abundant grace after trying to interfere with the promise: "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee". This covenant was to be sealed by the arrival of a son by Sarah, to be called Isaac. A seal, like a signet ring, is a special mark indicating permanency and possession. It is a private mark, not to be imitated. God had decided on the seal, and Ishmael could not take Isaac's place [Comment 9].

Circumcision is associated with the flesh. God can do nothing with the flesh, so it has to be cut off. The covenant could not be executed until circumcision was carried out, so Abraham was circumcised immediately. It was thought that this was a sign to set Abraham's and Israel's children apart from other nations—as we should be set apart after cutting off the flesh. However, another source indicates that this was a rite among contemporary peoples, signifying introduction to adulthood. Can we have help here please? [Comment 10].

Gen. 13. 16 and 15. 5 show the two aspects of the covenant. Abraham's name means father of many nations (dust of the earth), and this covenant was not restricted to Abraham's seed, for provision was made for the stranger and those that were bought. The whole human race therefore had the same opportunity. People today who belong to Christ (and we know this is for all men) are "heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3. 29) [Comment 11]. Abraham looked forward by faith to heavenly things (stars of heaven), even the city which hath the foundations. *K. Smith.*

### COMMENTS

1. **Bolton.** Gal. 3. 10 shows Paul reckoned "as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse", and in Phil. 3. 2, 3 he shows those who were teaching circumcision were wrong, calling them "the concision", meaning mutilators.
2. **Edinburgh.** Others think circumcision has its parallel in salvation, which is done for us, as in the case of the child of eight days. Certainly we should live in the knowledge of what has been done for us. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8. 5).
3. **Kingston.** For Abraham circumcision was the sign when the covenant was sealed, and was the seal on his earlier faithfulness, as in Rom. 4. 11. Are Kingston friends throwing our minds forward to Sinai and the Mosaic covenant which retained circumcision, or the New Covenant which set aside circumcision?
4. **Leeds.** God's covenants can hardly be compared with men's agreements, which are certainly mutual in terms and responsibilities. See Gen. 6. 18 Noah before the Flood, Gen. 9. 16 the rainbow, 2 Sam. 7. 16 David, and in Abraham's case God made the terms and promises. I like to think of the token of circumcision as something which only God saw, and He longed to bless men so marked as His.
5. **Leeds.** This is new to me—could it be HA or AH? The reason and meaning seem clear from v. 5, 6.
6. **Manchester.** See Birkenhead paper re "perfect", as applied to Abraham.
7. **Melbourne.** See Rom. 4. 19, 20.
8. **Vancouver.** Apart from the adult males in Abraham's house, circumcision was practised on babes of eight days. They would only learn in later years, and after instruction, what had been done for them, when presumably they were meant to show the effect in their lives. This is how I read Col. 2. 11-15 in this context.
9. **Victoria.** My understanding is that God sealed the covenant in Gen. 75, and that circumcision is the token, more appropriately fitting the comments of Victoria friends regarding a "seal". The birth of Isaac is the result of a divine promise, and his birth is all-important in the matter of seed, but I do not think of him as a "seal".

10. **Victoria.** An encyclopaedia **will** explain **these** points about circumcision **as a** rite amongst certain tribes and nations. **The** difference for **Israel is that it is practised** on eight-day-old boys, whose initiation to responsibility followed some years of instruction to **age twelve** (e. g. Luke 2. 42-47).

11. **Victoria.** Most students consider **13. 16** to **speak of Abraham's earthly seed**, Israel, and **15. 5** to **speak of the seed** through Christ **as** in Gal. 3. **8, 16.** **A. B. R.**

12. **Bolton.** I find difficulty in a rigid contrast between the covenants of ch. **15** and ch. **77**. **Is it** not overstating the contrast to **suggest that "I will"** of ch. **15** is opposed to "thou **shalt**" of ch. **77**? For **we have** God's "I will" repeated four **times** in ch. **77** (vv. **2, 6, 7, 8**) before any mention of "thou **shalt**" (v. **9**). **Is it** not also artificial to over-emphasise "faith" in ch. **15** as against "walk" in ch. **77**? **It seems to me that the basic** elements of the covenant **as** given in ch. **15** are renewed in ch. **77**, **but in the** latter God also develops the answering responsibilities of Abraham and **his seed** through **Isaac**. **If faith is** especially prominent in ch. **15** **it is** also clearly **implied** in **ch, 77**, where **walk** and obedience **are** introduced. **This view** would not invalidate the two **aspects** of **teaching as** to "a circumcision not **made with hands**" resulting from our **initial faith** in Christ (Col. **2. 11**), followed by responsibility to **walk in** obedience to **His claims there-**  
**after-** **G.** **P.** **Jr.**

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**From Atherton and Leigh:** Was the covenant given to Abraham, and **that** to Israel through Moses (Ex. **19. 5, 6**) one and **the same**, or rather an extension of **the same** covenant?

The covenants of Abraham and Moses are plainly **related** through God's promises concerning land and people, and I agree one develops from **the** other. **But there is a** universal and eternal quality in **what** God says to **Abraham** about **his seed**, and I agree **with** those who find circumcision a type of **what the** Cross **has** done for us. **The** Mosaic covenant **was with a** redeemed, **separated, baptised** people.

**From Bolton:** Can we liken circumcision in any way to baptism, as an outward sign of intended service, **as some sects use** this argument to substantiate infant sprinkling, in **that it was the eighth day?**

I support **what** Bolton friends say in their own **paper** and think **that** Col. 2 likens circumcision to **what** is done for us **at** Calvary. More **than we** knew was done for us when **we were saved**, and this **fits the picture of the** unknowing child of eight days old. **It is the work of Christ that is pictured**, not our own or our parents'.

**From Edinburgh:** In covenanting to **be a God unto Abraham** and **his seed** did **the Lord have** in view **the glorious days** when **there** would come of **the seed of Abraham** the darling of His bosom?

This is an interesting thought, and **the** passage would not contradict it I think. Certainly God **the Father** looked forward to **the day when** His Son would **be** born.

**From Leeds:** Ishmael was circumcised and **we** wondered if his **seed** continued with this. **There are** other nations practising circumcision in **the East**, and **we are told (25. 6) that Abraham sent the** sons of his concubines eastwards.

Many **Arabs are** Mohammedans and their practice of circumcision may come down from Ishmael. Encyclopaedias give **a** surprisingly long list of peoples who practise this, and it **was** apparently done before Abraham's day, **and** before Mohammed. **ABR**

### EDITORS' NOTE

Those purchasing **the 1974 Volume** of "Bible Studies" will **have** noticed **that the subject title on the front cover has** been wrongly printed **as "Studies in the Minor Prophets"** instead of "Studies in **the Book of Revelation**". Editors greatly **regret the inconvenience caused** by this error.

# BIBLE STUDIES

'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)'

VOLUME 43

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## EDITORIAL

"The **LORD shall rise up . . . that He** may do His work, His strange work, and bring to pass His act, His strange act . . . for a consummation, and that determined, have I heard from the Lord, the LORD of hosts, upon the whole earth" (Is. 28. 21, 22).

Bible-wide study is important if we are to arrive at a balanced appreciation of God's ways with men. God's judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah illustrates this, for it highlights abiding principles of divine judgement. His toleration so long of a condition so degraded is typical of His merciful attitude—slow to anger, plenteous in mercy. Similarly "the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah". His concern also to deliver Lot from the overthrow further magnifies His mercy. The visitations in judgement described in Is. 28. 21 are described as "His strange work", "His strange act". Three times in Ezekiel's prophecy (78. 23, 32; 33. 11) it **is** emphasized that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Yet when the moment of retribution finally comes, His acts of judgement have been sudden and in overwhelming power. "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place". It was so with Sodom, as it had been in the flood of Noah's day. We may well marvel in our time at God's forbearance in the face of human affront to divine holiness. But Isaiah foretold "a consummation, and that determined . . . from the LORD of hosts upon the whole earth". So it will be "at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance . . ." (2 Thes. 1. 7, 8). "For the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, finishing it and cutting it short" (Rom. 9. 28).  
G. P. Jr.

### JUDGEMENT ON SODOM AND GOMORRAH

(Genesis 18. 1-19. 29)

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —There was very clear evidence as to the identity of the three persons who appeared to Abraham by **the** oaks of Mamre. They were not men except in appearance, and One was unquestionably the Lord

**Himself.** The Lord's appearing is indicated in **verse 1**, His speaking to **Abraham** in **verses 13, 17, 20** and **26**, and His departure in **verse 33**. The question was raised whether we can be sure that this was one of the theophanies of the Son, as is often suggested. References were made to the following scriptures in support of this theory: **Prov. 8. 31**—the Master Workman's delight was with the sons of men; to **Judg. 13. 18**—His Name is "Wonderful"; and **Mai. 3. 1**—the Messenger (or Angel) of the covenant (see also **Is. 63. 9**). The Lord and the two angels were treated honourably and received with great joy, and Abraham, Sarah and the servant each hastened to prepare a feast for these great guests. Such actions indicate salutary lessons for us as the Lord seeks to speak with us from time to time.

As Abraham was to be the means of blessing to all nations, it seemed to the Lord fitting that He should take His servant into His confidence regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (**78. 17-18**). Thus divine revelation supplies many instances of intimate friendship and consequent exchange of secrets; compare **Ps. 25. 14** R. V. M, and **Amos 3. 7**. Such revelations are highly conditional, as emphasised in connection with the Lord's disciples, in matters which He did not disclose to others.

We asked why Abraham stopped at the number of ten persons in his appeal. One suggestion is that there could have been a remote possibility of ten righteous persons in Sodom, namely Lot, his wife, his two daughters, his two sons-in-law and their four parents. The lessons for ourselves as to intercession for others are clearly outlined in the New Testament. We would understand that the Lord prayed for His brothers in the flesh for their salvation, and we have "kinsfolk strangers to Him". In **1 Tim. 2** we are called upon to supplicate on behalf of all men, because God's desire is that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. **G. A. J., EB.**

**From Barrhead.**—Abraham enjoyed sweet communion with the Lord, the sphere being in the plains of Mamre, to which reference is made in **Gen. 13. 18**. Here we see Abraham in three stations.

(1) He is affording refreshment to the Lord Himself, being given to willing hospitality, and being accepted. Thus he illustrates the beautiful exhortation in **Heb. 13. 2** for the people of God today.

(2) Then comes **the Lord's message** in reference to **his** own personal interest and also to **the destinies and judgement** of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Sarah **shall have a son**" elicited **a laugh** from Sarah. **We had** two opinions on this incident. Some thought it showed **Sarah's** unbelief, **but** others thought **that Sarah's faith was** active too, citing Heb. **11.11.** [Comment 1].

(3) Abraham interceded before **the Lord** on **behalf** of those who were **mixed up in** Sodom's defilement, and in danger of being involved in Sodom's judgement. **Abraham** emerges **as a beautiful type** of the Lord **Jesus**, our Great High Priest, who **ever** lives to **make** intercession for **us** (Heb. 7. 25). **Abraham** stopped short in his intercession when **he reached** the figure 10. Not so our Lord Jesus, who is **able** to **save** to **the uttermost all that** come unto God through Him. Lot's testimony did not **match up** to **Abraham's**. **Thus we read**, "By faith **Abraham** sojourned..." **But Lot's name** does not **appear** in **the** great cloud of witnesses mentioned in Heb. 11. **Reference was made** to **19. 6, 14** indicating how resolute **he was** and **his great** concern for **the** safety and well-being of those **dear to his heart**. Lot went out to **the men at the** door, and to his sons-in-law. **The** final doom of Sodom and Gomorrah (**19. 24**) brings to mind **2 Pet. 3.** from **verse 7** till **the warning to us in verse 17.** *W. Fullarton.*

*From Birkenhead.* —With the severe judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah in prospect **the Lord** evidently decided to **keep Abraham** informed. **In the heat** of the day **Abraham** was **shaded in the tent door**, and at this unusual time **saw three men** approaching. **Abraham** bowed low before his visitors, who, **as we** proceed through **the** narrative **are** identified **as the** Lord Himself accompanied by two angels. **We** referred to other occasions **when the Lord appeared** to His **servants**—to Gideon in Judges 6, and Manoah in Judges 13. **Abraham** provided **rest and** refreshment near his **tent**, which **was a** sign of his continuing pilgrim character. In this **peaceful** setting, **far from the bustle** and sin of **the city**, **the message** concerning a son who would **be an heir** was re-affirmed, and then **the Lord revealed the plan** for **the cities of the Plain.**

**Abraham's deep** concern for **his** nephew is displayed in **the way** in which **he pled** for **him** and **his** family. **Abraham** had more prevailing power with God, and **was able** to **exert** more influence from outside **the city.** Within Sodom **the**

angels **had** great difficulty in persuading Lot and **his** family to leave. **Lot's** sons-in-law mocked **him**—an **evidence** that **he** exerted **little** influence for good upon **them**. **The** final count of four persons were hurried out by **the** angels. Lot's **wife** ignored **the** angels' warning not to look **back** and **was** turned into a pillar of **salt**—a warning to posterity (**Luke 17. 32**).

**It** appears that Lot **had** been deeply **affected** by **his** move into city life. **He** was **reluctant** to **leave** everything behind **him** and further **pleaded** for **the** opportunity to **live** in another city not wishing **the** life in **the** mountains. In contrast stands Abraham who **had** stayed away from **the** city life, maintaining **his** life as a pilgrim, and who **had** abundant blessings from **the** Lord.

*B. M. Turner, R. D. W.*

**From Derby.**—Abraham **was** dwelling by **the** Oaks of Mamre, **at** the **place** of **the** altar, where **he** pitched **his** tent when **he** returned from Egypt (**Gen. 13. 18**). Abraham **was** visited by three "strangers" and **he** displayed **the** humility and hospitality **characteristic** of **him**. **This** is noted **briefly** by **the** writer of **the** epistle to **the** Hebrews: "Forget not to show love unto strangers, for thereby some **have** entertained angels unawares", **thus** showing that **Abraham** did not know of **the** **high** honour accorded when they **first** appeared.

**The** **three** men proved to **be** **the** Lord and two of **His** angelic servants, who graciously **accepted** **the** offered hospitality. **We** are not told **at** **what** point in **the** proceedings **Abraham** became aware of **the** **high** dignity of **his** guests—perhaps when **the** Lord asked, "**Where** is **Sarah** thy wife? . . . I will certainly return unto **thee** . . . and, lo, **Sarah** thy wife shall have a son." In **77. 17** **Abraham** laughed; now **Sarah** laughed inaudibly, **but** **the** omniscient One knew. **The** **LORD**, remembering **His** covenant with **Abraham**, said, "**Shall** I hide from **Abraham** that which I do?"

When **the** **LORD** said, "**The** cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and . . . their sin is very grievous", **we** suggest **the** cry to **be** that of **the** victims of **cruel** and abominable **practices**, as later **the** **LORD** heard **the** cry of **the** people of **Israel** in Egypt (**Ex. 2. 23**).

**The** **wicked** men of Sodom soon proved **themselves** to **be** worthy of divine judgement. **The** wickedness of **the** city **was** **widespread**, involving young and old, **all** **the** people from every **quarter**, **small** and great. Lot **was** given **the** opportunity to collect **such** of **his** relatives as **he** could find, **and** **was** told to **bring** **them** out of **this** place. **It** **was** thought

possible that Lot had other daughters who were married, because he speaks of sons-in-law, but Lot may not have found them. When the morning arose the angels hastened Lot, saying, "Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters which are here ("are found"—Newberry margin) lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city " [Comment 2].

We are to "remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17. 32), who looked back desiringly. The command she disobeyed conveys the thought "Look not with desire or expectancy" (Newberry margin). She became a pillar of salt, revealing the seriousness of disobedience. **G. W. C., S. R. W.**

*From Edinburgh.* —It is instructive to contrast the events of Gen. 18 and 19 as they are presented first to Abraham and then to Lot. The pastoral setting of the Oaks of Mamre is set against urban Sodom. Three men appeared to Abraham in the heat of the day; while two angels came to Sodom at even. Abraham instructed Sarah to prepare three measures of fine meal to make cakes, and hastened to dress a calf "tender and good", these speaking preciously to us of the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. By contrast, unleavened bread was set before the two angels by Lot.

There is evidence of joyful reverence in Abraham's attitude towards the three men. "When he saw them he ran... and bowed himself to the earth" (78. 2). He addressed one of them as "My Lord". We could only conclude that here was the Lord Jesus in person accompanied by two angels. At Sodom, Lot's words to the two angels were "My lords". The divine one had departed.

In 18. 17 it is as if the Lord was reasoning within Himself whether to divulge to Abraham the impending judgement on the cities of the Plain. Abraham, however, was informed and thus had and took the opportunity of beseeching the Lord to show mercy to Sodom, initially if only fifty righteous persons could be found there, coming finally to ten. It is likely that Abraham knew of the wickedness of Sodom. He would reckon there would be at least four righteous souls in Lot, his wife and two daughters, and perhaps his prospective sons-in-law, [see Comment 2]. It shows how far this city had sunk in evil that a further six righteous souls could not be found and thus prevent its destruction. The grace and mercy of God are seen here in all their wonder as He allowed the righteous Abraham to supplicate Him.

The Lord said in 18. 21, "I will go down now, and see... "

It is noteworthy that at other times when men **have sinned** grievously before him, e. g. at the Tower of Babel, the Lord has come down and witnessed it for Himself. Two angels, presumably those that visited Abraham, went to Sodom and appeared to Lot. Where the Lord Himself was we cannot say, but in 79. 17 we read, "When *they* (the two angels) had brought them forth abroad... He (the Lord) said, Escape for thy life". Thus He reappeared on the scene.

L. Burgoyne

*From Galston.* —Who were the three men? One was the Lord (Gen. 78. 1, 9, 13, 15, 17); the other two were angelic messengers (79. 1). The expression, "lifted up his eyes and looked, and, I o . . ." (78. 2), is used in 22. 13, 33. 1 and 37. 25 (and other places) and suggests that Abraham looked intently. He had not noticed anyone there previously. Now three men stood opposite him. His first reaction might have been to "rub his eyes", as we say, but these three men were very real and also, Abraham knew, very important, so he ran to meet them and bowed himself to the earth. Evidently One was greater than the other two for Abraham addressed Him as "My Lord" and offered hospitality but it appears that the One whom he addressed did not reply directly to him, for verse 5 says, "they said"—they mediated the reply to Abraham. Doubtless Abraham discerned that it was the Lord speaking in verses 10 and 13.

It has been alleged that verse 22—"but Abraham stood yet before the LORD" is one of 18 passages altered by Jewish scribes because they felt that the original was not seemly, namely, "and the Lord stood yet before Abraham, " i. e. waiting for Abraham to plead [Comment 3].

The two "men" moved on towards Sodom but Abraham supplicated the Lord on behalf of the righteous and the Lord waited. Should Abraham have continued pleading? We judge that he should not. Righteous Abraham's prayers "availed much in their working", since "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow... " (79. 29). The Sodomites were on a course of no return, "as a horse that rushes headlong in the battle" (Jer. 8. 6).

While Lot lacked the spiritual discernment of Abraham yet the use of the word "angels" or "messengers" (79. 1) may be an indication that Lot at least recognised them as messengers of the Lord. Compare v. 3—"He urged them greatly". He only bows his *face* to the ground, in contrast

to **Abraham**, who bowed *himself* to the ground. Nor does Lot exhibit the same haste as Abraham. He greets them as "My lords" (plural) in contrast to Abraham's "My Lord" (singular). He only sees two but the Lord is there—invisible to Lot as we see from verse 16—"The Lord being merciful unto him", and again in verse 17—"When they had brought them forth abroad... He said, Escape for thy life..."; and although Lot only sees the "men" in verse 18 it would appear that he discerns the voice of God through them for he uses singular forms of address, and verse 21 reads "He said..."

"But he lingered": although "he vexed his righteous soul" every day with the lascivious life of the wicked, yet the comforts of Sodom and the wealth he had accumulated almost meant more to him than the voice of God. He had declined spiritually and "Get out of this place" was nearly too hard a saying.

*J. H. Johnson*

*From Hayes.* —Our portion begins with a scene of peace and kindly hospitality. Most of us thought that Abraham did not know the identity of the three men at first and was showing hospitality to strangers, as referred to in Heb. 73. 2. The scriptures mention a number of instances where men and women have been blessed because they showed hospitality—for example, the widow of Zarephath, the Shunammite, and the two on the way to Emmaus.

After Lot made his decision (Gen. 73), apparently without seeking divine guidance and based upon material gain, he was never in the current of God's purpose for him. He moved his tent as far as Sodom (73. 12), he dwelt in Sodom (74. 12) and he sat in the gate (79. 1), the place of the elders in authority. He vexed his righteous soul (2 Pet. 2. 8) but could not extricate himself and his witness produced no result (79. 4). The one-time nomad tent-dweller was afraid to go up to the mountain at the word of the angel and pleaded to go into the little city.

Lot like Abraham, offered hospitality, but what a different scene from Mamre! On the scene of depravity we do not need to dwell. As a result of the long reign of sin in the human race, there are those who are attracted unnaturally to the same sex. There have always been those who give way to this desire, but in our day when the moral authority of the Bible is being denied, this is condoned and even justified by some so-called "advanced intellectuals". God has made it very plain, in both Old and New Testa-

ments, that the realisation of this unnatural desire is utterly abhorrent to Him and brings judgement.

*From Kingston-upon-Thames.* —Abraham had association with the altar at Mamre for many years, during which his experience with God had grown deeper in fulness of separation. After instant recognition of the superiority of his visitors Abraham promptly and willingly took the servant's place, although this meant inconvenience to him. He had gained spiritual "eyesight" by his nearness to the **LORD**, and his trained heart sought to serve acceptably. Therefore he is seen bringing the calf, tender and good, which would speak to us of Christ. In thus responding to the visit by the **LORD**, Abraham was to enjoy communion with Him, as we also can (Rev. 3. 20),

The natural mind could no more see the possibility of an heir yet being born to Abraham than conceive that the cities of the Plain would be consumed in one day. On the first matter Abraham had already believed God, but Sarah questioned such an event. From a natural standpoint her time had passed. Her faith wavered and she was rebuked, but God's purposes will be fulfilled in His strength and in His time (Is. 40. 28-30). The purpose, reason and sequence of the **LORD'S** plan were revealed to His faithful friend. We need to learn these things in our time. Abraham was allowed to see them because of his relationship with God (Ps. 25. 14) and he responded to the revelation. The humble tent-dweller's pleadings, even for the unrighteous (see 1 Tim. 2. 1), are an excellent example of intercession and importunity. He wielded great influence. In contrast, the cry that went up from Sodom emanated from the wicked, and Lot's anxiety reached no further than himself (2 Pet. 2. 7-8) although he sat in the gate—the place of wordly influence.

The Lord's words in Mat. 10. 15 and 11. 23 give clear warning to this dispensation. Those who ignore the claims of the Redeemer do so at their eternal peril. There are, however, always those like Lot who knowing God's salvation linger or turn back in the matter of separation. At the judgement-seat of Christ these shall be seen to be "saved; yet so as through fire". Our responsibility is to pray, as Abraham did, for such people. God hears and answers such supplication by His grace (79. 29). *G. M. Hydon*

*From Lagos.* —Established in the divine order of things is His

revelation, "Righteousness and judgement are the foundation of Thy throne: mercy and truth go before Thy face" (Ps. 89. 14).

The life of Abraham and that of Lot are brought under scrutiny in God's balances at the time of the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah. We believe that the Holy Spirit wishes to underline for us in the lives of these righteous men the importance of separation to God and the effect of such a life. Of Abraham the LORD spoke saying, "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do? . . . for I have known him" (18. 17-19). The LORD showed him His purpose (see 18. 20-22; Amos 3. 7; John 75. 15).

Lot entered into the city of Sodom with great possessions (see Gen. 13. 5-13). With such influence he soon gained his seat among the elders at the gate (79. 1, 9). But in the words of our Lord Jesus, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12. 15). "Hast thou here any besides?" was the question which probed the effectiveness of Lot's life and witness in the Plain. "He seemed unto his sons-in-law as one that mocked" despite the presence of the two angels and the pronouncement of judgement upon the place (19. 11-13). Nothing was said about Lot's servants! "But he lingered", wondering what to take out of all that he possessed. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also" (Mat. 6. 19-21). "They set him without the city" in the mercy of God with instructions for his life (19. 17), a solemn picture of a righteous man "saved; yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3. 15).

*S. Coker, A. Beyioku-Alase, E. Bassey*

*From Leeds.* —God speaks to His people through His sent messengers, and thus we see the three men, who, although strangers to Abraham, were afforded hospitality in the traditional eastern manner (as with Lot in 19. 1). We linked this with Heb. 13. 2. From the words "The Lord appeared" (78. 1) and "The Lord said" (18. 13) some infer that God Himself was one of the three men. We recalled, however, God's words to Moses in Ex. 33. 17-23 and the statement "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 7. 18), and felt that these were three men who were messengers from God [Comment 4]. In 78. 23-33 we see Abraham the Intercessor and we marvelled at the strength of his faith

to continue pleading **that if** even ten righteous **be** found, **the cities might be** spared. Only righteous Lot, however, **was to be saved (with his** two daughters). Even **at the** total destruction of **the cities** "God remembered Abraham" (**79. 29**), so Lot **was saved**, literally "a brand **plucked** out of **the burning**" (Amos **4. 11**). **The general view** of Lot **is** of one more influenced by **the** world than by God. After **a** tent in **the** Plains, **he** took **a** house in **the** city, taking **his place** amongst **the** elders in **the** city **gate** (**79. 1**). Lot **was a** "righteous man" and **he** may **have** hoped to influence others in **the** city, remaining **active** until **the** very end, concerned **that he** should not **leave**—until **he was** dragged away (**79. 16**). **He** **pled to be** allowed to go into Zoar, **thus** preserving **that little** city, referred to in **Isaiah** and **Jeremiah as a place** of refuge. God's judgement of fire and brimstone reminds **us** of volcanic action, and scientific methods **have** confirmed **that** about **1900 B. C.** violent volcanic action took **place** in **the** area of **the Dead Sea**. **It is said that the Vale** of **Siddim** extended further into **the sea** than **at present** and **a consequence of the eruption was an earthquake** (common throughout **the Rift Valley**) and **the** subsidence of **the land**.

*H. R. Dodge, P. M. Jefferson*

**From Liverpool.** —Abraham **was** favoured again **with the** appearance of **the** Lord to **him**. Three men **came** and one of **the three was** understood to **be the** Lord, **the** other two **being the** two angels of **the** next chapter. Some of our study group thought **that while the** Lord may **have** been one of **the** three, **the** other two were simply two men contemporary **with** Abraham, "two angels" being simply another way of telling **us that these** men were **the** Lord's messengers. **Verse 22 at least** would confirm **that the** Lord **was** one of **the** three [Comment 5].

**It is** wonderful to **see the** intimate relationship between Abraham and God: "**Shall I hide** from Abraham **that which I** do?" Sarah **is** reminded of God's power (**78. 14**) and God's knowledge (**18. 15**). God's friends are permitted to know **His** secrets **because** they are **His** friends (Ps. **25. 4**, Amos **3, 7**). God now **tells His** servant of **the** terrible sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, and **His** divine determination to **deal with** it. Servants do not know their master's purposes, **but** friends and intimates do. Our Lord **taught this** plainly to **His disciples** (John **15. 15**). **The** divine announcement concerning Sodom **led** Abraham to intercede for **the** doomed city. **He**

knew **he was** in the presence of God (78. 22), and **realized God's** nearness (78. 23). It is remarkable **that while he pleads for the city he** does not mention Lot by name once. **Nevertheless Lot must have been very much** on his mind. **Abraham was** perplexed by **the fact that the** destruction of Sodom would involve **the** righteous within it, so **he lets** God know his difficulty. Problems **thus** brought to God **will** either **be** resolved, or **else** sufficient **grace** will **be** given to wait for **the perfect** solution. Abraham **had** learnt **the truth that the** righteous **are the salt** of the earth, preventing surrounding corruption. **It has** often been said **Abraham ceased** asking before God ceased giving. **He** commenced at fifty and ceased at ten.

*D. Reid, G. S. Webster*

*From Macduff and Whitehills.* —In our consideration of **the** first three **verses** of **ch. 78** we find **the use** of the word Adonai (v. 3). This **appears** to give some indication of **the** importance of **the truth** of Deity. **The same** thought is supported in verses **27, 30, 31** and **32**.

**We** are again **faced with the** righteousness of **the** Lord in **that there is blessing**, salvation and mercy for **the** righteous, although **a** great destruction amongst **the** unjust, making an **example** unto those **that afterwards** should live ungodly. It would **seem that in** God's early dealings **with His** people, **He** is laying great stress on this important **truth** of separation to Himself **and** from this filthy manner of **life** of **the** wicked. **What a** privileged man **Abraham was**, for God **the Son** **appears** unto him **with** two angels, and **Abraham makes great haste** to **prepare and give** unto **them** of **his** very best. **The Lord reveals His** thoughts in **78. 18, 19** concerning faithful and godly **men and** women who **walk** not **after the lust** of the flesh.

Lot like **Abraham** recognises **the** two angels **that enter the gate** of evil Sodom, and **he** also **seeks** to give **them** of his best. **But the** news for Lot who **seems** to love **the** cities of **the** Plain—speaking to **us** of **the** world—grieves him. **As** evil men encompass him even to **the** point **that he** would **have** encouraged **great sin (19. 8)**, **the** angels **save** him by smiting **his** enemies with blindness. Unbelieving men today mock. No doubt **the men** of Sodom and certainly Lot's sons-in-law mocked, **but the** messengers of God **were** urgent and **the** prophecy **true**. Although righteous Lot failed to **grasp the** urgency of it, God's mercy to him **as a half-**

repentant **backslider** is wonderfully seen, **as the angel took them by the hand and brought them forth.** *J. Mitchell*

**From Melbourne.** —The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was great and reached unto heaven; their sin **was** grievous **in the sight of the LORD.** **It was, we** would understand, predominantly **the** complete setting aside of primal **laws** of moral behaviour in natural **sexual** relations, and **the** substitution of unnatural relationships—a wickedness **which has** characterised decadent nations and peoples throughout **the ages.** The thought appears to **be** conveyed to **us that the LORD had heard the cry, and had** come down to investigate.

Some of **us saw the** execution of **judgement** from **heaven,** by forces stored **up** therein for **the** destruction of ungodly men. There are however those who **have** been **impressed** by **the** weight of geological evidence which in comparatively recent years **has** been brought to light and confirms **the** possibility, if not **the** certainty, **that the LORD used** for the overthrow of **the** cities materials **which** were in **abundance** both **under and** around Sodom. T. C. Reed in his book, *Geology of the British Empire*, gives the following details. "**Asphalt and petroleum are found in many parts, but especially on the east side of the Dead Sea at Ain el Hommar, beds of salt and gypsum occur... but the most important deposits are at Jebel Usdum at the south end of the Dead Sea.**" In Gen. 14 we are told **that the Vale of Siddim (the Dead Sea) was full** of bitumen pits. Professor Kyle **states that at the** foot of Jebel Usdum **there is a** layer of **salt** extending for miles along **the** shore and "**that** ghastly yellow marl overlying **the salt is the** natural home of **sulphur,** whence **came the** burning brimstone **that** destroyed **the** Plain. **It also rained salt** from heaven together with **the** fire **and** brimstone. Any person **caught** in **such a** catastrophe would **be** in **much the same** position **as a** person **caught in** a snowstorm. In **the** cataclysm which occurred at Sodom, a person delaying and not securing refuge would **be** overcome by **gases** and covered with **salt** so **as** to become a pillar". The Professor also **states,** "The hills close by **the** south end of **the Dead Sea** are covered with **salt** which **has** been precipitated upon **them**" [*see answer to Question from Birkenhead*].  
*T. L. F., T. W. F.*

**From St. Helens.** —Lot was a believer, **but he was** not living by faith—he was living by sight. By contrast, Abraham was

a believer who **lived** by **faith** in the promises of God. In **18. 1**, the Lord appeared to Abraham **as he sat** in the tent door **in the heat** of the day. **Abraham** demonstrated **his** humility by washing **the feet** of **his** visitors **just as the** Lord **Jesus Christ** performed a **similar task** many years later. **Abraham** was by no means perfect, and **failed just as** many **believers** do, **but he was** not **set aside**, as **his** shortcomings do not **appear deliberate**. While Lot mainly sought **his** own **pleasure** and profit, **Abraham** sought to **please** God above all else.

Lot **was** sitting in the **Gate** of Sodom (a position of great importance) when **he was visited** by the two angels. Recognition **was immediate**, and Lot bowed **himself** to the earth and implored **them** to stay **with him** overnight. Lot **attempted his** own pleadings (**79. 7**) without avail. **His own life** was in jeopardy (**19. 9**) and **it was** only **as a result** of the intervention of **the** angels, striking **the** men outside the house **with** blindness, **that the** situation **was** relieved. Lot **was** given the opportunity of saving **his relatives**, **but because** of the reputation **which he had** acquired by **his** own actions within Sodom "**he seemed** unto **his** sons-in-law as one **that** mocked". **That** very evening **he had attempted** to "do a deal" using **his** daughters as barter material, and so **his** sons-in-law would not **believe his** story of the impending judgement. Lot **had** no testimony amongst **his** family, and many present-day Christians **are similar**. **K. G.**

### COMMENTS

1. (**Barrhead**): To me the narrative of Gen. **78. 10-15** gives the clear impression that when she heard the promise of v. 10 Sarah's **immediate** reaction **was** to **laugh at** the physical impossibility of **such a** thing taking place. The Lord's rebuke (vv. **13, 14**) seems to confirm this. Are we not only too familiar **with** similar momentary reactions of unbelief (**after the** mind of **the** flesh) **despite a basic** faith in God's purposes? Heb. **77. 11** testifies to Sarah's **basic faith**, which would doubtless rest on **the** Lord's word (Gen. **18. 14**) from that moment forward.

2. (**Derby**): It is an interesting suggestion that by recourse to the marginal reading of Newberry's Bible in **19. 15** ("are found" instead of "are here") we may conclude that Lot **had** daughters other than **the** two mentioned in **19. 8**. An

alternative explanation of **the** apparent conflict between **19. 8** and Lot having sons-in-law (**79. 14**) is to **adopt the marginal** reading of **19. 14**, i. e. "were to marry **his daughters**". **But it does seem that 19. 12** may support **the** possibility of Lot having **had** other daughters and sons **besides the** two daughters who were under **his** own roof **that** night. **If this** were so, v. **14** could refer to Lot's vain **attempt** to influence **his** sons-in-law during **the** course of **the** night. **He** certainly found and spoke to **at least** two of **them!** "When **the** morning arose" (v. **15**) only **the** two daughters who **lived with him** were **available** to **be** constrained by **the** visitors out of **the** city. **Did Abraham's** lower **limit** of ten righteous persons **when** interceding for Sodom strengthen **the** possibility **that he knew** of members of Lot's family living there in addition to father, mother and two daughters?

3. (*Galston*): **Is it not a little** disconcerting to **suggest that the** Hebrew text should **have** been **meddled with** by copyists to **this** extent? Perhaps our contributor (or others interested) could further substantiate **this** suggestion? **If the** allegation **is well** founded, does **it not seem** odd **that** neither A. V. nor R. V. should hint **at** any variant translation for **this** verse?

4. (*Leeds*): This touches **an** important **and** rather **difficult aspect** of scriptural interpretation. **It is true that** no man can **see** God's **face** and **live** (**Ex. 33. 20**), and **that** no man **hath** seen God **at any time** (**John 1. 18**). **But "the** only begotten Son, **which is** in **the** bosom of **the** Father, **He hath declared Him**", and **"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"** (**John 14. 9**). Clearly then, in incarnation God **the** Son perfectly expressed **the** Father, and **men** looked **full** in **the** face of Jesus Christ. **In that** sense they **beheld** God, though Christ's divine glory **was veiled** in flesh. **Several** contributors **have** expressed **the** view **that** one of **the** three **"men"** who **appeared** to Abraham in **Gen. 18** **was the** Lord Jesus Christ. **This view implies that the** principle of **John 7. 18** **had** an application in **the** Old Testament appearances of One who **is** referred to **as** God, and who spoke **face to face** with men. The only begotten Son **was** ever "in **the** bosom of **the** Father", **but** from Eden onwards **His** **delights** were **with the** sons of men. **It is** relevant to notice **that 1 Tim. 6. 16 alludes** to **the** Lord Jesus **as** "dwelling in **light** unapproachable, whom no man **hath** seen, nor can **see**"—i. e. in **His** heavenly **dwelling** place. **Yet as the** resurrected Lord **He**

could **appear** to the apostles, and **at a later date He was** revealed to John on Patmos **with a modified expression of His** intrinsic glory (Rev. 7. 17).

5. (*Liverpool*): I personally share **the view** of most contributors **that the three "men" of 18. 2 were the Lord and two angels, each appearing as men to human observation. The translators evidently took the view that the two who went to Sodom were heavenly beings (19. 1). For a helpful example of interchangeable reference to "angels" and "men" in narrative context please consider Mat. 28. 2-5, Mark 16. 5-7 and Luke 24. 4-7, 23. Is it not clear from these scriptures that the angels at the tomb appeared to human observation as "men". Are not the persons under discussion in Gen. 18 and 19 to be viewed similarly? G. P. Jr.**

### QUESTION AND ANSWER

*From Birkenhead*: In the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah **we** wondered whether **the Lord used** natural means understood by **us**, e. g. volcanic eruption, or something descending from heaven **itself?**

**There is a school of biblical interpretation which attempts to "explain away" any reference to miraculous intervention by God in His dealings with men, whether in blessing or in judgement. As Bible-believing students we would of course deplore this approach, for we accept that God has often chosen to work miraculously. But having stated this, the question raised is a valid one, for God may have chosen to destroy the cities of the Plain by one means or the other.**

**We read that God "rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (19. 24). Whether He used "natural means understood by us" is not explained in Scripture. It is evident that discussion has arisen on this point among contributors, and some have favoured the view that God acted directly by means beyond our ken. Others have quoted specialists' views that judgement was effected by means of geological disruption and resultant chemical reactions through locally situated deposits of inflammable agents. Those with knowledge of the relevant scientific disciplines are best equipped to evaluate the evidence offered, as for instance in Melbourne's paper. From a scriptural viewpoint I do not think that such possible explanations should be**

lightly dismissed. In connection with **the miraculous** crossing of **the Red Sea**, God **used** a "strong east wind" (**Ex. 14. 21**). In **the** book of Jonah **He** "**hurled** out a great wind" (7. 4 R. V. M. ), prepared a great fish (**7. 17**), prepared a gourd (4. 6) and prepared a worm to destroy **the** gourd (4. 7). Through co-ordination of **these** "natural" factors **He effected** His remarkable working. While Gen. 19. 24-25 does not disclose **the** means God **used** to **effect** His judgement, **we** may nevertheless conclude **that** there is significant evidence to **suggest** co-ordination of certain "natural factors".

**G. P. Jr.**

**From Liverpool:** 1) Why **was** there no provision **made** for **the** women to commit **themselves** using some other token?

2) Since **the** children were only **eight** days old when they were circumcised in **what** way did they consciously agree to **the** covenant?

3) If **Ishmael** had been fully obedient would **he** have received an **equal** blessing to **that** given to **Isaac**?

4) **Please** explain Rom. 2. 25.

1) In some primitive tribes a form of circumcision is practised by women. I can only **suggest that the** divine order **that the** man is **head** of **the** woman applies here.

2) Children of eight days cannot know or agree to circumcision. Parents **had** responsibilities to instruct children so **that** later they would order their lives to conform to **the law and the** covenant. "**I speak** not with your children which **have** not known... **teach them** your children, talking of **them**..." (Deut. 7 7. 2, 19).

3) Not an **equal** blessing, **such** is **the** sovereign nature of divine selection **and** election. **The** allegory **that** **Ishmael** is a type of **the flesh** may explain **the** apparent inequality?

4) This **has** to do with **the** sort of **Jews** **Paul** had in mind in **the** Galatian letter, and is argument or polemics. "Circumcision indeed profiteth, if thou **be** a doer of **the law**" means if you can **keep the** whole **law** of Moses **then** circumcision is relevant; **but**. "if thou **be** a transgressor of **the law** thy circumcision is become uncircumcision" shows **that** failure to **keep the** whole **law** makes circumcision meaningless. **See** Gal. 5. **A. B. R.**

# BIBLE STUDIES

'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)'

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## EDITORIAL

The narrative of **the** spiritual pilgrimage of Abraham presents, **as we have** already seen, questions **about** human relationships in **the** context of **the** unfolding divine purpose. Polygamy is one relationship which **we have** considered and debated. In **the** matter of near-kinship unions **the law** of God **had still to be** enunciated, **but few** would question **the** sinfulness and **squalor of** Lot and his daughters. God will Himself, however, **judge the** young women righteously in **the light of** their apparently **desperate** plight **the** victims of long-term parental folly.

**We** wonder about **the** strains which Abraham's **agreement** with Sarah, revealed in Gen. **20. 13**, might **have put** upon their marriage over **the** years. **That** God in grace prevented it from wreckage in Gerar, and His own purpose from frustration, is amply brought out in **the** papers this month. **The** world today defies **at** its grave peril divine order in human relationships, and our study **passage** warns unmistakably of **the** temptations in this **matter** besetting **the** most God-fearing of men and women.

**J. D. T.**

## SOME TITLES OF THE LORD IN "REVELATION"

### **"The Bright, the Morning Star"**

**The star** of Rev. **22. 16** is described by **a word which** before **New Testament** times meant "early in **the** day" or "of **the** dawn", and **came** also to mean "early" in general. **The** morning star is also referred to **as the** day-star (literally "light-bringer"), both terms being **used** in antiquity of any **star** or **planet** prominent in **the** Eastern sky **just** before dawn. So Peter contrasts **the lamp** "shining in **a dark place**", which is **the** word of prophecy (**2 Pet. 7. 19**), with **the** day-star, which is **the** Lord, **the** Word Himself, showing **that** when **the** bringer of light **shall be** manifested, **He** will **draw** so **near** to

us as to arise in our hearts, as the shadows flee away and we apprehend the glorious substance, no longer knowing in part, but even as also we have been known.

To John it is given to reveal the title "the bright, the morning star", which portrays the Lord as our sure hope of an early dawn—our meeting together with Him, before the great and terrible day. Whereas His coming as Son of Man is with the clouds, swift and sudden, the vision that He leaves with us at the end of the Omega-book of His revelation, when we have read of constellations deflected from their courses, depicts Him as a steady, unmoved hope, {like the faithful witness in the sky to which Ps. 89. 37 compares the security of God's covenant with David and his seed.

Thus the Creator, whose laying of earth's foundation made the stars of dawn sing together, expresses Himself in the qualities of things created; and He who is David's Lord yet was willing in emptying Himself to become David's son (Rev. 22. 16). His birth on earth was marked by His star in the east; we shall have at His return for us a heavenly sign indeed to answer the signs of the times that the Master called us to discern.

Now the Word of Truth, whose name is Jesus and who has sent His angel to testify these things for the churches, offers in Rev. 2. 28 to him that overcomes amidst the foul prophecy of Jezebel, nothing less than something shining clear and bright like Himself—the morning star, that surely speaks of truth pure as the fire-flaming eyes of the rewarder.

*Af. Archibald.*

### **DIVINE ORDER IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS**

(Genesis 19. 30-20. 18)

*From Atherton and Leigh.*—The sordid story of the "end" of Lot reveals the danger of contamination with the extreme sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot failed in the sin of drunkenness which led to his two daughters sinking into the gross sin of immorality. Lot passed away into the spiritual darkness that was his due, and so his death is not recorded. He was a backslider, a failure indeed, his soul saved but his life lost—"saved; yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3. 15). Two more nations came into being, Moab and Ammon. Sadly we think of these nations as being the implacable foes of

**Abraham's** descendants. We noted the attitude of **Balak**, Moab's **Leader**, towards **Israel**. Yet the Lord graciously overruled for the good of **His** people, blessing them despite the **bitterness** of these opposing nations. By contrast we mark **David's** concern for his parents' **welfare**, seeking refuge for them in the land of Moab (**1 Sam. 22. 3, 4**). **Ruth**, one of the "mothers" of the promised seed, was a Moabitess. So that **grace** reigned where sin had abounded.

The reason for Abraham's sojourn in **Gerar** is not stated as it was when he earlier went into Egypt. It might have been his desire for a continued pilgrimage with no settled habitation in the land of promise (**Heb. 11. 9**). Was it also prompted by a desire to remove from the painful surroundings caused by the events of ch. 19? We may be surprised that **Abraham** should fall into the same error that he made in Egypt, but it is true that many slip and fall where they have fallen previously. God's people are so often saved from themselves by God Himself. In **Abraham's** and **Sarah's** case this happened shortly before the birth of **Isaac**. Thus **Sarah's** position as **Abraham's** wife was graciously preserved. She was to be the human instrument divinely chosen, and nothing must be allowed to check or circumvent this achievement. Thus we marvel at the ways of God that despite human weakness, often caused through the fear of man, God's power is known and His will is done.

The king of Gerar, perhaps a God-fearing man, was stayed from committing a great sin. He was innocent, as God Himself says. It is very sad when a man of God must bear the rebuke of a man of the world. *R. Hyland, G. A. J.*

*From Barrhead.* —From Gen. 19. 30-38 we see the effects of Sodom upon Lot and his two daughters. From the relationship between Lot and his Sodom-tainted daughters began the nations of the Moabites and Ammonites, who were constant objects of denouncement by Israel's prophets. They remained like thorns in the flesh to the children of Israel. Lot had the same opportunities as Abraham; both were righteous men, but Lot had his eyes on the temporal things while Abraham looked to the Lord and the future kingdom (**1 John 2. 15-17**). Lot's separation from Abraham meant his separation from the covenant kingdom and blessing.

In ch. 20 we read again of Abraham stating this half-truth

concerning Sarah as **his** sister (Gen. 12. 13) to **Abimelech** king of Gerar (apparently a believer in **the true God**) who then took **Sarah** into **his** own house. **Abimelech's act was a threat to the promise Abraham received**, so the Lord intervened to protect **the** royal line. **The Lord will not allow a believer to be overcome but will provide a way of escape.** There are **times in the lives** of believers when God intervenes to stop **the believer** going too deeply into sin (1 Cor. 10. 13).

Behind **this** experience of Abraham and Sarah was the Adversary **trying** to destroy **the** promised **seed**, but the Lord **stepped** in to **deliver as He** does in **the lives** of all His children.

*R. Green*

*From Birkenhead.* —**The evil scheme** of Lot's two daughters to **have** children by their **father saw its** conclusion in **the birth** of Moab and Ammon. **The attitude** of the Lord to **this event is** outlined in **Deut. 2. 9-19; 23. 3-6** where the **Israelites are** told to adopt an **attitude** neither **aggressive** nor conciliatory. Troubles **came** to **Israel** through **the years** when **the Moabites and Ammonites came** against God's people (Judg. 3. 12-14; 10. 6-9), and yet **the appearance of Ruth the Moabites** in **the** genealogy of our Lord in Mat. 7. 5 shows **the** sovereignty of God.

Lot, **at this time** an old man (19. 31), **falls** into **sin** and demonstrates **that at** no **stage** in our **lives are we** immune from **the attacks** of **the evil** one. **It is** not only in **the full** vigour of youth **that** sin overtakes. **Further it is** a salutary lesson **that the** ramifications of **this** event play **such a** significant **part** in **the** history of **Israel's** difficulties. **It warns us that the** consequences of an isolated sinful **act may be** great.

**Abraham**, seemingly displaying **the truth** of Prov. 29. 25, **"The fear of man bringeth a snare"** entered into an agreement **with Sarah** that they should say **that she was his sister.** **This is a warning that even great men can fall in the same way twice,** and **as before Abraham** soon found **himself** in difficulties. **A warning also comes that** human reasoning **can lead us astray—as Abraham** reasoned **that the fear** of the Lord would not **be** in **the place where he** journeyed.

**The Lord** intervened to prevent **Abimelech** sinning—a **step which would have** interfered with **the** promise given to **Abraham and Sarah**—making **clear** to **Abimelech** in a **dream** **the true** situation, **and also that the** Lord **had** prevented **the**

women of **the** house of **Abimelech** bearing children. **It** is interesting to notice **the** times **at** which God **uses** dreams **as** a means of revelation, and also uses **His** power to interfere **in the** normal course of nature to **speak** to men and women.

**B. M. Turner, R. D. W.**

**From Derby, —It seems clear that in spite** of Lot's protestation and fear to **flee** to **the** mountain and his expressed choice to **take refuge** in **the** little city of Zoar, **the** command of **the** angels of God to Lot and his wife and two **daughters** to **flee** to **the** mountain **was** eventually complied with by Lot, for **a deeper** sense of safety (79. 17-21, 30). The two daughters conspired together to preserve **seed**, concluding **that their father was the only man left** alive on **the earth**. **The** situation **these** two women found **themselves** in **seemed** to **dull all** sense of moral rectitude. Although living in **a wicked** city, they **had kept themselves** pure, **as** their own **father** could testify (79. 8). Since they knew **that** Lot himself would not **have** consented to **such** an illicit arrangement they resorted to intoxication, which demonstrates **the** degree of insensitivity possible. **The** two boys **that** were born both **became** nations, namely **the** Moabites and Ammonites, who **became** a trouble to God's people Israel. **Yet** God would not allow **Israel** to **vex them**: "**Vex** not Moab... **because I have** given **Ar** unto **the** children of Lot for **a** possession" (**Deut. 2. 9, 19**). God's **statutes** in regard to human relationships **came much** later. **These** are recorded in **Lev. 18. 6-17**. **The** patriarchs **all** erred in **these** matters, yet were not **held to be** guilty, for God **had** not in their days **revealed** His will. **It** is most likely **that** Cain took to wife one of **the daughters** of his father **Adam** [Comment 1]

Abimelech observed **the** comeliness of **Sarah**, **as** the king of Egypt also **had**, **a** notable statement considering **Sarah's** **age**. However God intervened **and** protected His handmaid by appearing to Abimelech in **a** dream of **the** night (**see Job 33. 14-17**) with **the** startling words, "Thou **art but a dead man**". In v. 12 **Abraham** explained **the** truth, part of which **had** been withheld to deceive Abimelech. However God did not reprove Abraham.

**We** wondered **whether the** translations of v. 16 in either **the AV** or **the RV** are **as helpful** as they could **be**. **We** thought Sarah **had** suffered **a** measure of indignity which

called for some **redress** or compensation from **Abimelech**, namely **the thousand pieces** of silver. **Abraham had a large household comprising hundreds of men and women servants.** **Thus it was before all this great household and before all men** (margin) **that this great lady must be righted.**

*A G. Willis. S. R. W.*

*From Galston.* —In Gen. 19. 29 we see that God was merciful towards Lot **because of the intercession of Abraham, and but for God's intervention Abimelech would have sinned** (in ignorance) **against Abraham** and would also **have sinned against God** (comp. Ps. 51. 4, "**Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned**"). God told **Abimelech**, "Now therefore **restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live**". We see the same order in Job 42. 8 where Job had to pray for **his three friends** in order that they **might be forgiven, for the Lord said, "Him will I accept"**. "**The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working**" (James 5. 16). "**If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous**" (1 John 2. 1).

We also noted that not only **were** those interceded for **blessed but the intercessors were also blessed.** "**And Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife...**"; "**And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said...**" (Gen. 20. 17; 21. 1). "**And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before**" (Job 42. 10). **With these verses compare Mat. 5. 44: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you"**.

*Jo Johnson, J. H. Johnson*

*From Kingston-upon-Thames.* —**This episode of Lot and his two daughters in the cave is the end result of his first decision to live in the Plain (73. 12).** Separation from **Abraham was separation from the covenanted kingdom. A life spent without enough regard to God led to his impoverishment in the cave where he was destitute of the pleasures he had sought in the cities.** Tainted by Sodom's morality, Lot shows contempt for **his daughters (79. 8)** and **fails in his duty as a father in not finding them suitable husbands.** Consequently, **the two daughters, acting upon the mistaken assumption that they were the last people alive, decide to commit incest.**

**A comparison of Deut. 29. 23 and Gen. 14. 8 reveals that only four of the five cities were destroyed. Therefore there were still men on the earth, for Zoar still stood; yet to the daughters, isolated in the cave, their hope of bearing children seemed lost.**

Every Christian **faces the problem confronting Abraham: the problem of working out specific actions in everyday situations which are in accord with a previous commandment given by God (72. 1). Abraham's move to the city of Gerar was not in God's purposes as seen in Heb. 77. 9-10. He does not seem to have learnt from his experience in Egypt and continues in deceit. He had no answer to Pharaoh's anger (72. 18-19) but attempts a weak self-defence against Abimelech. In giving his defence, Abraham shifts the blame to God (v. 13), and mistakenly presumes the nation was ungodly (v. 11). The consequences of Abraham's deceit brought sterility to the women and some affliction to Abimelech ("dead man").**

Adultery by **Abimelech** would have accomplished Satan's intention of corrupting the genealogy of the **Messiah**. However, God's **immediate** intervention **preserves Abimelech** and protects **Sarah's** honour **with the gift of silver which weighed about 26 lb.** The favourable outcome for **Abraham** was due entirely to the sovereignty of God, and in **this** incident it appears that **Abimelech** showed **greater fear** of God than the patriarch.

*Paul Merchant*

**From Lagos.** —Lot "feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters" (Gen. 19. 30; 19. 19-23). "Abraham journeyed from thence (the oaks of Mamre in Hebron)... and he sojourned in Gerar" (Gen. 13. 18; 18. 1; 20. 1).

We note with interest the exodus made by **Abraham** and that made by Lot after the judgement of God upon the cities of the Plain. In that move from the oaks of **Mamre**, **Abraham** broke off his association with **Aner**, **Eschol** and **Mamre** (Gen. 74. 13, 24).

Lot forsook the city life and chose the cave. It was not a step back to God, but the last resort of Lot in his remorse and defeat, having lost his life for God. He feared the judgement of God (Gen. 19. 30). Thus the scene is set against the background of life in a cave and in the city of **Gerar** for

our study. **"The work of the law written in their hearts" set a divine standard in the dispensation of conscience in which Abraham and Lot lived. The daughters of Lot were conscious of the wickedness which they were about to commit. They excused their conscience with the deceit that "there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth" (Gen. 79. 31). Lot must have acquired the appetite for wine while he sat at the gate of Sodom (Gen. 19. 1). "All things are lawful for me; but not all things are expedient" (1 Cor. 6. 12). His daughters caught him at his weak point and succeeded in making him drunk on two consecutive days (Gen. 19. 32-35). Lot wrought grievous offence which in a sober mind he would not have done.**

**"A garden shut up is my sister, my bride; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (Song of Songs 4. 12). Such was Sarah to Abraham by divine ordinance. No authority on earth could violate that law without punishment. Abimelech erred exceedingly in taking Sarah with a view to entering into a relationship with her when he could not establish the legitimacy of it. "Said he not himself unto me, She is my sister?" (Gen. 20. 5). Abraham told Abimelech the truth. It was the truth which should have provoked more enquiries from Abimelech. But in covetousness he rushed on to take the stranger (Gen. 20. 2) [Comment 2].**

Abraham was careful to see the fulfilment of the purposes of God in his life. We sense some anxiety in the patriarch when he comes to a new place in his sojourn (see Gen. 12. 10-20; 20. 1-18). The Lord was watching over His word to perform it, and so He intervened to sanctify Sarah for the fulfilment of His will.

The divine Law given through Moses outlines in a broader perspective the divine order in human relationships. We believe that these principles are binding under the new covenant, (see Lev. 18. 6-30; Heb. 13. 4).

*E. Bassey, S. O. Coker, S. A. Beyjoku-Alase*

**From Leeds.** —Although Lot had pleaded to be allowed to go into Zoar, he was now fleeing to the hills and seeking refuge in a cave. We feel that the judgement of God upon Sodom and Gomorrah had caused Lot to realise God's righteousness, and it appears that he wanted to cut himself off from all human contact. His daughters considered that there was

no time to be lost if seed was to be preserved: "Our father is old, and **there** is not a man in the earth" (v. 31). Possibly they concluded that God's righteous judgement had come upon **the** world and that all had been destroyed. Certainly, as far as they could see from the mountain-side, all around them had been made desolate and waste; there was nothing, no-one left. We contrasted this section with the last Old Testament mention in Zeph. 2. 8, 9: "Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah... a perpetual desolation". Their union with their father brought about the issue of Moab ("seed of a father", or "issuing from a father") and Ammon (Ben-Ammi, "son of my race, or people"). Although such union is not permitted in our day, nor yet by any edict of the Law (given later), God's overriding will is clearly evidenced in that the line of Moab was to preserve the Abrahamic (and Davidic) line of the Messiah when Ruth the Moabitess married Boaz (Ruth 4; Mat. 7. 1-17) [Comment 3]. The Ammonites, though not destined to so great a role, are shown in Deut. 2. 19 to be protected by God for Lot's sake. The story of Abimelech, the King of Gerar (in Gen. 20), is almost parallel to the story told in Gen. 12, except that God spoke to Abimelech and not to Pharaoh. Abimelech realised that some wrong had been done and God spoke to him in a dream. His immediate repentance and acts of reparation show his belief in God's power, either through Abraham's witness or the remembrance of the judgement meted out to Sodom and Gomorrah. Only after his repentance were the wombs of his people opened once more, again through Abraham's intercession (v. 17) [Comment 4].

We note the first mention of the word "prophet" in the Scriptures occurring here (v. 7) and attributable to Abraham (the only time he is so called), who well showed his ability to intercede with God here, and earlier, for the righteous in Sodom (ch. 18). Despite the communion and fellowship which Abraham had with God, his own free will is also seen in the story by his resultant actions, yet he again acknowledges God's call and God's direction (v. 13). Righteousness is reckoned unto those who walk in the steps of Abraham's faith (Rom. 4. 11, 12). *P. M. Jefferson, H. R. Dodge*

*From Liverpool*—It was fear that had caused Lot to request that he be allowed to escape to Zoar after leaving Sodom

and Gomorrah, and now it was fear that found him sadly living in the squalor of a cave. His present experience contrasted with all that he had when he was with Abraham and enjoyed the rich blessings that his uncle received from the bountiful hand of God. True are the words of Gal. 6. 7, 8, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."

The final act, initiated by his daughters, resulted in two sons being born to him, Moab and Benammi. It was to be through these two lines that the children of Israel were grievously to fail their God (see Num. 25 and Lev. 18. 21); yet God had a special regard for Moab and Ammon, and issued definite instructions regarding the attitude of His people when possessing the Promised Land (Deut. 2. 9, 19). Thus Lot made his final exit, and once again the attention focuses upon Abraham. It is strange to contemplate that the one who in complete faith left Ur of Chaldees to embark upon a lifetime's journey, should yet again resort to human endeavour to preserve his own life, and place in jeopardy the future blessing through Isaac. Gen. 20. 13 clearly indicates that this was no hurriedly devised plan, but one that had been carefully thought out, and seemingly the incident recorded in Gen. 12 had made no real impact upon him. Yet it must be stated that in neither case is Abraham in any way condemned by God for what he did. Indeed, it is the innocent party, Abimelech, who is required to go to the "prophet" (v. 7) to request his blessing. This is revealed to Abimelech in a dream and we wondered how he knew it was God that was speaking to him [Comment 5].

Having had the true situation revealed to him, Abimelech wastes no time in calling together his servants and then confronting Abraham with what he knows. The situation, which had evidently existed for many months (20. 18) is righted, the curse is removed from Abimelech and his people, and never again does Abraham commit a similar act. Rom. 75. 4 states, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning"; and we feel this is particularly true of the present study, for it shows that even the greatest of God's servants fail, but that such events serve to refine them and bring them nearer to God. *M. S. E.*

*From Macduff and Whitehills.* —The passages this month

expose human **attributes** in Lot and Abraham that were **reprehensible and offensive**, yet we had difficulty about **definite** opinions through **lack of divine** condemnation in the passages. Where Lot was concerned we had to bring later scriptures like Rom. 7. 24 to bear on the circumstances—"Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts unto uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonoured among themselves. " We wondered when incest had become the sin so plainly indicated in Lev. 18 and we accept that in the beginning of human history such relationships were not so proscribed, though time has certainly shown that incestuous relationships do not produce good healthy descendants. We noted that the history of Moab and Ammon was one of trouble and danger to Israel, although exceptionally Ruth was of Moab [see Comment 1].

Consideration of Abraham's behaviour in Gerar and earlier in Egypt made us wonder at the grace of God and His mercy towards him, and that it was upon Abimelech and not Abraham that the judgement of God came. Abraham said of Gerar, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place", yet Abimelech speaks otherwise of himself and his nation. He addresses God as *Adonahy* as do Abraham in ch. 18, Moses in Ex. 4. 10 and Gideon in Judg. 6 (an expression said by Strong to be used only of God) implying knowledge of God and how to address Him. We thought that in this matter Abraham was like Elijah in 1 Kings 79. 14, "I only am left", whereas God said there were 7, 000 in Israel that had not bowed to Baal. Abraham was not walking by faith here. There was no need for dissimulation, for God was protecting him for His own purposes.

1 Pet. 3. 5-6 speaks of Sarah as an example of the holy women "who hoped in God... being in subjection to their own husbands", and we wondered if this explained her attitude in Gerar and other incidents. God makes it clear that it is wrong to take another man's wife, and that breaking the marriage bond is against the law of God for all mankind. We thought Abimelech was rebuking Sarah in the gift he made—"I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, it is for thee a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee"; and the AV finishes the verse, "thus she was reproved". Had she been wearing a veil or other indication that she was Abraham's wife Abimelech would not have taken her, and so brought judgement on himself and the nation. God as

sovereign **has laws** for **all men** in **their** relations **with each other**, **and** infringement **brings** trouble **even** to **succeeding** generations. **His grace is greater** than our waywardness, and **we fall** into error by self-choosing **and lack** of faith.

*From Melbourne.* —Prior to **the** giving of **the law** through Moses, certain relationships **were permissible** as in **the case** of **Abraham** and **Sarah**. **Where there is no law there is** no transgression. **Yet we judge** that from **the** creation of our **first** parents **there were** relationships **which were** abhorrent to **the** consciences of **men** **apart** from any given law. **The law** of God **was** written on **their hearts**. When **the** consciences of men **became** hardened **and such primeval laws were** violated **there** were disastrous consequences.

Lot **had** chosen to **leave** **the** God-fearing environment **created** by **his** uncle **Abraham**; **he** moved **his** tent as far as Sodom. **Later** **he** and **his** family **became** **dwellers** therein. From **the** words **used** by Peter concerning Lot, **it is** evident **that** **he** knew only too **well** **the** abominations **practised** in Sodom, yet **he** ignored **the** risk to **his** daughters by dwelling **there**. Warned of **the** impending destruction of Sodom, **he** **pleaded** to **be** **permitted** to **make** **his** abode in Zoar. **We** would **judge** that **his** plea concerning **this** city, "Is it not a little one?" implies that to **his** reason **its** degree of iniquity would not **be** so **great** as that of Sodom, and **might** **escape** **the** judgement of **the** other cities of **the** Plain. However when **he** **reached** Zoar **he** began to fear for **its** safety and possibly **the** moral safety of **his** daughters. **He** **had** not realised **that** they **had** become deeply infected by **the** moral depravity of **which** they **had** been witnesses in Sodom, and possibly now too in Zoar. **His** decision to  **dwell** in a cave cannot eradicate **the** seeds of depravity sown in **their** hearts by contact **with** evil-doing. Through causing **the** drunkenness of **their** father, **the** incestuous union **which** followed **was** **the** beginning of two races **which** **were** to **be** **the** perpetual enemies of **the** people of God.

Notwithstanding **the** severe prohibitions and divine curse upon Ammon and Moab, **we** find **the** sovereignty of God overruling in mercy and **grace** in **the** case of **Ruth** the Moabitess, who **became** **the** great-grandmother of **David** the king, **thus** finding an honoured **place** in **the** royal line through **which** **He** would bring **His** only-begotten Son into **the** world.

In ch. 20 we are reminded of **Abraham's dual** relationship with Sarah. **As** Abraham journeyed south to **Gerar**, he again had recourse to the half-truth concerning **Sarah**. He had misjudged the king and people of **Gerar**, assuming that the fear of God was not in that place. Part of **Abraham's** fear was realised when **Abimelech** sent and took Sarah. **But Abimelech** had a knowledge of God and **His** requirements in human relationships. **He was** unconscious of wrongdoing in taking Sarah to **his** house as the result of **Abraham's** deception, yet the God whom he feared would not permit him to commit this great sin.

*W. H. F., T. W. F.*

*From Methil.* —Isolation does not mean security. The sad incident of Lot who moved out of Zoar (**little**) and dwelt in the mountain **did** not mean he was beyond temptation. This man who vexed his righteous soul while living in Sodom was now made drunk by his daughters and involved by them in incest. God **did** not intervene. Yet even in this the long-term purposes of God are to be fulfilled—the lands of the Moabites and the Ammonites together with that of the Edomites (descendants of **Esau**) will prove a haven for godly Jews in the time of "Jacob's trouble".

With the deceit of Abraham God **did** directly intervene by speaking to **Abimelech** in a dream, and at the same time prevented him from sinning. In this case sin was restrained by God. **Isaac** was to be the son of **Sarah** as well as being indisputably **Abraham's** son. God was watching over **His** word to perform it and therefore **He** intervened. **Ps. 105. 14, 15** includes this incident—this king **Abimelech** (father-king) was reprov'd for **Abraham** the prophet's sake. **Abraham** should have known better, for he had tried to deceive Pharaoh in Egypt (**Gen. 12**) in the very same way, when he went down to that land in the time of famine. His son **Isaac** was to try the same ploy (**Gen. 26**) with a succeeding **Abimelech** (this is a title as is Pharaoh). The reason offered by **Abraham** was: "Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake". His eyes were temporarily off God and **His** promise, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward".

**Abraham** was very wrong in his assumption that **Abimelech** did not fear God: in fact **Abimelech's** fear of God was wisdom and health to him and his household.

We could not agree whether **Abimelech's** words to **Sarah**

were to underline **her** connivance in the deceit, or as a "face-saver" to **her** good name (in the presence of his Court) [Comment 6]. Certainly **his** gift and his actions completely cleared **Abimelech** in the whole matter. God neither **accused** nor **excused** **Abraham** to **Abimelech**, but indicated that the **latter** would benefit from **Abraham's** prayer. God deals graciously with **His** erring children (see Ps. 37. 24).

*Neville Coomer*

*From Nottingham.* — Far-reaching consequences followed Lot's wrong choice. Having been attracted **first** of **all** by the **sight** of the well-watered plains **he** then **became** associated with the **wicked cities** of the Plain, and **later** being **saved** through the mercy of God from the **great** destruction of **these places**, **he** exchanged the questionable comforts of Sodom for the rigours of the **life** of a cave-dweller. Surely the way of a **backslider** is a hard one!

One downward **step** led to another and **we** leave the story of **this man** with a picture of his committing incest. **Yet** as **we** consider the **birth** and development of Lot's descendants, **we** are **caused** to marvel at the ways of God, **which** are **past** tracing out. The Ammonites and Moabites were a continual **grief** to Israel, and yet the **day** will come when in the **time** of Jacob's trouble **these** lands, Moab and Ammon, will **give** some **relief** to the sorely **persecuted** Jews. **Israel** was forbidden by God to dispossess Moab and Ammon, **but** no **member** of **either** nation was **permitted** to enter into the Assembly of the Lord (Deut. 2. 9-12, 19-21). [Is this not too **definite**? Deut. 23. 3 banned **them** until the tenth generation. Presumably **their** descendants **might** then **have** access. **What** about **Ruth**? Eds. ]

The experiences of God's judgement on Sodom, of the **rescue** of Lot and of God's **faithfulness** to those who trusted **Him** must have made a **great** impression on **Abraham**, and it **seems** likely also that **this** had **extended** to others round about and may **have** been a factor in the understanding of and **fear** towards God that **Abimelech** showed. **What** it was that made **Abraham** think that the fear of God was not in the **place** is undisclosed, **but** evidently **he** was wrong.

Several years had **passed** since **Abraham's** experience in Egypt (Gen. 72), yet **here** he was, making the same mistake in regard to his relationship with his wife. **Abraham** does not seem to **have** been at fault in journeying toward the land of

the south, for he was still within the extent of the promised land; but he was going very near to Egypt and perhaps leaving himself open to temptation. One thing is certain, Abraham's failure affected others, and it was only in the mercy of God that Abimelech was saved from committing grievous sin.

This was the second time that Sarah had been taken into captivity away from Abraham (Gen. 72. 15; 20. 2), but after her restoration to him Isaac was born. This would remind us of Israel's experience. Twice they were taken into captivity, but after the restoration from the Babylonian captivity the promised Messiah was born.

*R. Hickling*

*From St. Helens.* —Children of Lot by his two daughters were the Moabites and Ammonites, who afterwards were a thorn in Israel's side for many years. This could be divine retribution for sin committed.

Awaiting the promised birth of a son, Isaac, his parents jeopardised God's purpose by deceiving Abimelech in saying that Sarah was Abraham's sister. Abimelech was warned by God of the consequences of taking Sarah to wife, and after counselling his servants not to harm her and chiding Abraham for cheating, he restored Sarah together with many presents. Upon Abraham's intercession God removed the plague which had been inflicted upon Abimelech and his family as punishment for his affair with Sarah. This was another occasion when God caused men to regret the arrangements which they themselves made for their safety and obliged them to return at last to that which He first prescribed. "The fear of man bringeth a snare". "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Let us commit ourselves to God in all things, for we have no need to resort to Satan's wiles or evasive arts to shelter us from danger. It behoves us to be careful after receiving favours from God not to fall into sinful unwatchfulness. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Let us also be careful lest we become tempters to the ungodly as Abraham to Abimelech.

We note how God, who abhors uncleanness, gives extraordinary warnings, even to heathen; "Thou art but a dead man". It was a pitiful excuse which Abraham made to cover his wrongdoing, "I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place". Ought he to have made this assessment alone?

It would have been better far to consult God, as we too ought in all matters.

We see God's infinite mercy, having put a faltering Abraham to shame for his folly, taking care for his honour, and the honour of His own promises. J. H. B.

### COMMENTS

1. (*Derby*). While it is true that marriages took place among the patriarchs which did not observe some of the clear prohibitions of Lev. 18. 6-19 relating to near-kinship unions, the point is well made in other papers that the principle of Rom. 2. 15 would seem applicable. Conscience doubtless did arise in the case of Lot's daughters but they silenced this in their extremity and engaged in the squalid abominations of the nations, such as Israel was warned against in Lev. 18.

2. (*Lagos*). I doubt if this view of Abimelech's action can be sustained in the light of v. 6, "Yea, I know that in the integrity of thy heart thou hast done this". God prevented Abimelech from sinning.

3. (*Leeds*). Would it perhaps be a little more appropriate to speak of God's sovereignty and grace, rather than His "will" in this context?

4. (*Leeds*). As suggested in Comment 2 it seems doubtful if repentance as such was called for from Abimelech — reparation, yes, for a wrong done in innocence.

5. (*Liverpool*). As pointed out in the paper from Macduff, Abimelech's address of God suggests a definite recognition of His Person. Either this was God's initial but unmistakable revelation of Himself to Abimelech, or the latter had some previous knowledge of God and reverence for Him.

6. (*Methil*). Both, I suggest. I detect a certain subtlety in Abimelech's reply. J. D. T.

### QUESTION AND ANSWER

1. *From Birkenhead*: As the true relationship between Abraham and Sarah was made clear to Abimelech, why does he refer to him as "thy brother" (20. 6)?

Our friends themselves suggest that there was a note of irony in Abimelech's words, and I agree. See Comment 6 on a similar point raised from Methil on this verse.

J. D. T.

# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)'*

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## EDITORIAL

Abraham had learned that to trust God and obey Him brought outstanding blessings, but nothing matched the thrill of fulfilled promises in the birth of Isaac. Abraham learned to trust God in areas where his instincts might have chosen another course, but the God he served was sovereign over all mankind, and "there was no searching of His understanding". God looked for obedience from Abraham concerning **Isaac** so that divine purposes would have fulfilment in years to come and bring blessings to generations unborn. He had to give his full attention to Isaac and trust the Everlasting God of all men to care for Ishmael.

This passage (Gen. 21) shows something of the extensive reach of God's care for all His creatures and their welfare, but the later revelation that the history and experience of Sarah and Hagar could be shown as an allegory certainly shows His ways are higher than our ways. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is an everlasting rock. " (Is. 26, 3, 4).

A. B. R.

## A STUDY OF THE WORDS "BEHOVED", "MUST" AND "OUGHT" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Greek word so rendered is "dei". It signifies a logical necessity of a moral obligation (Vine). What is more remarkable is that a word rendered "must" 64 times, is also rendered "ought" nearly 30 times, being a translation of the same Greek word "dei" in both cases.

In **Acts 5. 29** the **A. V.** reads, "**We** ought to obey God," where the **R. V.** says "**We must** obey God". The **weakness lies** in the present-day **usage** of the word "ought". It is used today as a word giving **latitude**, whereas there is an **imperative** necessity in the word "**must**". The town **clerk** of **Ephesus** who **said**, "**Ye** ought to **be quiet**, and to do nothing **rash**", well knew that the uproar would really **have** to stop.

In the Gospel according to **Luke** the Lord says, "**Wist** ye not that **I must be** in My **Father's** house?" (**Luke 2. 49**). **Each** moment of **His** life was voluntarily and consciously directed into the pathway of divine counsel. **He** knew the necessity to preach the kingdom (**Luke 4. 43**), and the burden was upon **Him** of accomplishing the **Father's** work (**John 9. 4**). The gathering of **His** flock was part of God's counsel (**John 70. 16**), and even abiding with **Zacchaeus** was not to **be** postponed (**Luke 19. 5**). Moreover **He** did not **delay** in making preparations for the day on which the Pass-over **must be** sacrificed (**Luke 22. 7**).

The Lord had this sense of necessity as the prospect of **His** cross lay before **Him** (**Mat. 16. 21**, **Mark 8. 31**). The fulfilment of Scripture was of particular importance to the Lord, both in **its** types and in **its** predictions. **His** words to Nicodemus, "**Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up**" (**John 3. 14**) show how real and how imminent was the fulfilment of the type for **Him**. **Likewise He Himself** is faithfully recorded by the Gospel writers as setting **His** seal upon the fulfilment of Scripture; "**This which is written must be fulfilled in Me** (**Luke 22. 37**: see also **Mat. 26. 54**). They in turn realised the necessity of **such** fulfilment (**John 20. 9**).

**John the Baptist** also subjected himself to God's counsel. "**He must** increase", he said, "**but I must** decrease" (**John 3. 30**). The word "**dei**" is used in **Acts 3. 21** cf God's counsel concerning the Christ. **Paul** uses it while unfolding the mystery of resurrection (**1 Cor. 15. 53**).

The absolute force of the word **will be** readily appreciated from the way in which the writer to the Hebrews declares **faith to be** the only avenue of approach to God: "**He that cometh to God must believe that He is**" (**Heb. 77. 6**). Concerning worshipping God the Lord said, "**They that worship Him must** worship in spirit and truth". The same word "**dei**" is used concerning prayer in **Luke 78. 1**.

The new birth was said by the Lord to be essential for salvation (John 3. 7), and Peter stressed that it is the name of Jesus wherein we must be saved (Acts 4. 12). This word "**must**" is also used by the jailor in Philippi in acknowledging his **need** (Acts 16. 30).

"These ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone" (Mat. 23. 23) is a verse spoken to those born under the law. It expresses a standard of requirement which must be attained by the one who will live thereby. In view of Israel's failure it is a real necessity for us to give more earnest heed and not to neglect our great salvation (Heb. 2. 1).

The necessity marks the only pathway for the obedient disciple. Such a disciple knows that in it lies all the blessing which God could wish for those who love His Son. As man's Maker God knows what is necessary for the true well-being of His creature. That necessity governed the labours of the apostle Paul (Acts 20. 35); it was to govern the thinking of each saint (Rom. 12. 3; 1 Cor. 8. 12); it controlled his preaching (Eph. 6. 20), and his testimony (Col. 4. 6).

Peter uses the word to express the inevitability of a reckoning day (2 Pet. 3. 11) and indeed the prospect of judgement is the alternative if the required standard of behaviour is not maintained in the Church of the Living God (1 Tim. 3. 15).

The following of God's counsel was all-important in apostleship (Acts 9. 6), for oversight (1 Tim. 3. 2, 7), and also in its exercise (Tit. 7. 11).

A different Greek word is frequently used to express necessity where one is indebted or obliged. This word is "opheilo" and is translated by "ought".

It is used of the gratitude which the saints in Corinth owed to the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 12. 11), and of the obligation of husbands towards their wives (Eph. 5. 28). What is owed to parents is shown by Paul to be first and foremost the return of love (2 Cor. 7. 14).

The word "opheilo" is used to speak of what is owed to Christ as honouring Him who is the Head of every man in Christ (1 Cor. 7. 7). It also speaks of what the woman

owes to **the man (1 Cor. 11. 10)**, since **she is his glory**. **She owes it because the absence of a sign of authority occasions failure to give a true reflection of the image of God, and thus causes disquietude in the angels who guard God's glory.** In 1 John 2. 6 it **speaks of what is owed to Christ so that the honour of the testimony will be maintained.**

**What we owe to fellow-disciples is to minister to them (John 13. 14) because of what we owe to their Master and ours; to bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15. 1); to teach, as having ourselves received teaching (Heb. 5. 12); to show love (1 John 4. 11); and if called upon, to lay down our very lives for them (1 John 3. 16).**

**It is important to know exactly what our obligation is, as two errors will show. As to the Jews, the law laid no obligation on men to secure the death of Christ, since there was in fact no foundation in the accusation of blasphemy brought against Him (John 19. 7). Concerning the Gentiles, no man owed it to his Maker to cultivate a sense of bondage to a golden idol, imagining that the Godhead was in some way represented in it (Acts 77. 29).**

**So far as the Lord was concerned what He ought to do He must do. If the law of love said "I ought", He said "I must". The word "behoved" (Luke 24. 26) is "dei" (must).**

*Eric Archibald.*

**(Based on Notes communicated by A. G. Jarvis. )**

## ISAAC BORN; ISHMAEL DEPARTS;

## ABIMELECH'S COVENANT

(Genesis 21. 1-34)

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —The early part of Gen. 21 seems like a series of prophecy fulfilments. The Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and did as He had spoken. She conceived "at the set time of which God had spoken". In addition, the child was named Isaac as God had said (Gen. 22. 19) and circumcised "as God had commanded". Twenty-five years had elapsed since Abraham received the promise, "I will make of thee a great nation", and he believed that this would be realised (Rom. 4. 17). Sarah too counted upon the Lord's faithfulness, and rested on His promise (Heb. 11. 11). Their respective ages and her ability to feed Isaac indicate facets of his miraculous birth. We were reminded of the miracle of the Lord's birth which had so many more facets, including the wonder that He was born at all, and that of the virgin.

Ishmael's mockery aroused in Sarah wrath and action that naturally speaking would be difficult to understand, although this perplexity appears to be resolved by a reference to Gal. 4. 29-30, for this command was the word of the Lord. He was the One competent to meet the needs of both, and the divine purposes in respect of Ishmael would not be nullified by such expulsion.

The allegory revealed by the Apostle presented a difficulty in referring to Hagar as mount Sinai. It was suggested that the discovery of the Sinaitic Manuscript settled a point which was previously doubtful, and it appears that the true reading is simply this; "for mount Sinai is in Arabia" (R. V. M. ) [Comment 1]. It was also submitted that the true reading of Gal. 4. 28 should be "ye" (R. V. M. ) and not "we", thus making the application much more emphatic.

Abimelech's expressions in this chapter as well as in Gen. 20. 5, caused us to wonder if he was a God-fearing man. It

may **well be** for this reason more **than** from mere diplomacy **that this** covenant **was** proposed by **him**. The agreement took **place at Beer-Sheba, which became the** southern boundary of **Israel's** territory (**Judges 20. 1, 1 Sam. 3. 20, 2 Sam. 3. 10, and 2 Sam. 24. 2**), The revelation of God to **Abraham** is further developed in the use of the title "**the Everlasting God**".

*H. S., EB.*

**From Barrhead.** —**Isaac was a son of promise** conceived not in the strength of the flesh, but when **Sarah was past age**. There sprang **multitudes** from one **as good as dead** (Heb. 77. 11-12). **We have here** an application of the principle that no **flesh** should glory before God (**1 Cor. 7. 29**). **Abraham's** patient waiting **was a trial of his faith** in God, but in the fullness of time God **gave him the son he desired so much**. The **birth of Isaac** brought **great joy to the house of Abraham**, and the **surprise and delight of Sarah** is evident at this demonstration by **Him** who "only doeth wondrous things". The **laughter of unbelief was replaced by laughter in a promise fulfilled**. The joy that **Isaac** brought is **but a faint picture of the joy that the Lord Jesus** brings to those that believe.

The joy and **pleasure were soon to be** overshadowed by a cloud. **At a feast to celebrate the weaning of Isaac** (who would **be** about **2 or 3** years old) **Ishmael (aged about 16-17 years)** was seen by **Sarah** mocking in a provocative manner, and **she demanded that Hagar and Ishmael should be put out of the household**. **She thus ensured that covenant blessings would be Isaac's alone and that he would be pre-eminent**. **Isaac is a type of Christ** (Gal. 3. 16) and thus he foreshadows the pre-eminence of **Christ** (Col. 7. 18). Some wondered **whether Ishmael was a type of the Antichrist** [Comment 2].

The events **described** in Gen. 21. 10-21 are used by the Apostle **Paul** to convey **spiritual** lessons for those who **still** hankered **after the law**. The two women typify two covenants; **Hagar** typified the **law** of Moses and **has** children who **are** in bondage (to the law). **Sarah** typifies the covenant of **grace and truth** giving **birth** to children who **are free**. The two covenants **are** incompatible and cannot **exist** together; new wine cannot **be** poured into old wineskins.

It is clear from the text that Abimelech was afraid of Abraham. He recognised that Abraham was the recipient of divine favour. Abraham was far-sighted enough to see the advantages of having friendly relations with his neighbours not only for himself but also for Isaac. L DeVille

*From Birkenhead.* —God's longstanding promise to Abraham and Sarah saw its fulfilment "at the set time" (27. 2). God watched over the couple and prevented the thwarting of His purposes. The child was named Isaac, meaning "laughter", indicative of the happiness of the parents at this time. Hebrews 77 assures us that this was the culmination of Sarah's faith in spite of any other conclusion we may reach from our Genesis study.

Ishmael was born when Abraham was 86 years old and Ishmael was 14 when Isaac was born. When Isaac was weaned Ishmael was mocking him. His conduct resulted in him being cast out at the request of Sarah. She seems to be more in tune with God than Abraham because he had to have the word confirmed by the Lord before he would act (27. 12). Attention was drawn to the fact that the words of Sarah in Gal. 4. 30 are preceded by "What saith the scripture?" indicating that this was a word from the Lord. The fact that "in Isaac shall thy seed be called" is taken up by Paul in Rom 9. 7 in his treatise on divine sovereignty, whilst Heb. 77. 18 makes it clear that this truth supported Abraham when he faithfully offered up Isaac. The Lord promised to bless Ishmael and this eased Abraham's task of sending the lad and his mother away; the promise was confirmed to Hagar (27. 18).

We questioned whether Abraham's covenant with Abimelech was compatible with his pilgrim character but examination of the incident leads to the conclusion that it was a practical arrangement to avoid conflict between their two sets of servants. Although we read of Abraham in the land of the Philistines this is still within the bounds of the promised land. M. B. Turner, R. D. Williams

*From Derby.* —We are told in Heb. 7 7. 11 "By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed when she was past age, since she counted Him faithful who had promised". So Sarah bare Abraham a son at the set time of which God

had spoken. Abraham then obeyed the commands of the LORD, both in the matter of circumcising and naming his son Isaac. We had difficulty in determining the age of Isaac's weaning; we thought of the weaning of Samuel who needed to be able to do many things for himself before being left in the charge of aged Eli. Isaac, however, would have plenty of servants or handmaids to look after him, so we suggested the age of four years for Isaac but a little older for Samuel. Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian mocking (described in Gal. 4. 29 as "persecuting"). This demanded that Hagar and Ishmael should be cast out of Abraham's encampment, for, said Sarah, "the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son". This caused sorrow to Abraham, who could not bear the thought of such harsh treatment towards his son Ishmael. God made known to His friend that Sarah's wishes and proposed action were according to His will and as soon as Abraham heard the word of God in the matter he acted promptly: "And Abraham rose up early in the morning".

Ishmael may well have been 16 or 17 years of age by this time, as he was thirteen when he was circumcised. In their extremity in the wilderness Hagar wept and maybe also the lad, for "God heard the voice of the lad". God was with the lad and he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran. He eventually married and became the father of twelve sons and a daughter.

At that time Abraham was contacted by Abimelech, who had discerned that God was with Abraham in all that he did. Maybe Abimelech, king of the Philistines, and his chief of staff, Phicol, had learned about Abraham's victory over the kings as recorded in Gen. 14. Abraham was a peaceful and wise man, so in the matter of the well he offered him seven ewe lambs, and Abimelech's acceptance of them was to be a witness, an acknowledgement that he agreed and believed that Abraham had a right to the ownership of a well his servants had dug. A well was a great asset, and often became the focal point in any community. So they both made a covenant wherefore that place was called Beer-Sheba, "The well of the oath". This name has figured largely in the history of God's people Israel, and occurs some thirty-four times in Scripture until in Amos 8. 14 its circumstances make sad reading.

G. Conway, S. R. W.

*From Kingston-upon-Thames.*—Abraham learned by experience **what we** may know by revelation namely **that**, "**He giveth** power to **the faint**; and to him **that hath** no **might He** increaseth strength. **Even the youths shall faint and be weary**, and **the young men shall utterly fall**: **But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength**; they **shall mount up with wings as eagles**; they **shall run**, and not **be weary**; they **shall walk** and not faint" (Is. 40. 29-31). **Abraham's strength was renewed** in his hundredth year and **Sarah's womb was quickened after** her life-long barrenness. **The birth of Isaac, marked by great happiness and rejoicing, marked also a new phase in Abraham's life**, for henceforth his life **was** one of triumph, conforming to **the pattern of the purposes of God**. **If in the birth of Isaac may be seen a picture of the gift of the Son whose goings forth are from everlasting**, then **the following account (Gen. 22) of the events on Mount Moriah may depict the death and resurrection of the Son**. Similarly **the death of Sarah (Gen. 23) may represent the demise of Israel and the bride for Isaac (Gen. 24) may depict the winning in this dispensation of the Bride of Christ**.

**Ishmael, too, was to learn of the same character of God. At the weaning of Isaac he was some 19 years old because the events of Gen. 72-75 took place, to an accuracy of three months, some 430 years prior to the Exodus (Gal. 3. 17, Ex. 12. 40-41) and hence the 400 years' bondage (Gen. 15. 13) began with Ishmael's persecution of Isaac (Gal. 4. 29). The weaning of Isaac therefore took place when Isaac was 5, Ishmael 19 and Abraham 105 (Gen. 12. 4, 16. 16 and 21. 5). [See Comment 9. B. S. Feb. 1975—Eds.] Despite his years Ishmael is called a child (vv. 14, 15 and 16), a word which appears to denote weakness, helplessness and lack of maturity. But God heard his voice—and as well as the Everlasting God renewing his strength with water from the well, it appears (Gen. 25. 17) that Ishmael, as a person, was a possessor of eternal life and this may be the significance of his being described as a "wild ass" (see Job 39. 5-8), son of an Egyptian bondswoman (see Rom. 7. 14) warring against that which was spiritual (Rom. 8. 7), and was an archer, so to be compared with Esau (Rom. 9. 10-13). Hence Abraham, one of the richest men in all the earth, behaved correctly in giving only bread and water to**

Ishmael and Hagar so depicting the command "make not provision for **the flesh**" (Rom. 13. 14). And again Ishmael represents a whole race (**the Jews of Paul's day and all who rest on their first birth** for salvation) who **persecuted and persecute such as are** born of God and children of promise (Gal. 4. 21-31).

Abraham's triumphant **pilgrimage** continued in his second dealing with Abimelech. **This time there was no subterfuge and deceit but rather** openness and frank speaking, for the excellence of **the provision of the Everlasting God** in far more than **water to sustain earthly life had** gone before Abraham. On this occasion Abraham **came to terms with the opposition just as** those who are in **the world but not of it must use it and not abuse it in what is** lawful.

Ian E. Penn.

*From Lagos.* — "At the set time of which the Lord had spoken" the birth of Isaac took place. For this seed, Abraham had waited for about 25 years (Gen. 12. 2-4). From the human standpoint, it seemed hopeless to expect the fulfilment of the promise of a seed of which the LORD said "I will establish my covenant with him" (Gen. 17. 19). But "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen", and its unshakeable foundation is the Word of God. He is faithful who promised saying "I will certainly return unto thee when the season cometh round; and, lo, Sarah, thy wife shall have a son" (Gen. 18. 10). And having patiently endured, Abraham obtained the promise. From Abraham's experience we see the glory of the greatness and faithfulness of the self-existent God who challenges our hearts to faith in the certainty of His Word in all matters; for, "is any thing too hard for the Lord?". "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 27. 12) was the word of the LORD to show the place which Isaac must have in His purposes. Wherefore He said, "Hearken unto her voice" to "cast out this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." The Lord knew the sacrifice Abraham was making and He promised the recompense to him saying, "the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed" (Gen. 27. 13).

It would appear that the phrase "at that time" of Genesis 27. 22 refers to the time of separation of Hagar and Ishmael

from Abraham. **We wonder why it should be at this time that Abimelech asked Abraham to swear to him by God to guarantee that "thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned"** (Gen. 21. 23). Two schools of thought **suggest themselves** for consideration. 1. After one year of **Abraham's** sojourn in **Gerar** the fame of this man of God **had** become **well** known to Abimelech, particularly, in reference to **the** slaughter of **the** kings (Gen. 14.) In **fear** of **Abraham**, Abimelech **came** with Phicol captain of **his** host to **seek** security with **the Hebrew**. 2. On **the** other hand, it might **be that** those who **met Hagar in the wilderness of Beer-Sheba** brought news of **grave** injustice done to **her** in **her** expulsion. **Hagar's** story, no doubt, would **be** connected with **that** of Genesis 16. Granted **that** this **was** so, Abimelech would **be** disturbed with **the** thought **that** if **Abraham** could **deal thus** with his own wife and son, **he** himself would **be** worse off should **Abraham** turn against **him**. **5. Coker, A. Beyjoku-Alase, E. Bassey**

**From Leeds.** —Although Gen. 21. 3 indicates **that Abraham named Isaac, we noted that** in Gen. 22. 19, God **had** given **the** name. **The** circumcision of **Isaac**, in fulfilment of Gen. 17. 9-14, **was** done when **he was** eight days old, and **he was** weaned probably when **he was** one or two years old. **We** understand **that** it **is** still customary today to hold **a feast** when **a** child is weaned. **Abraham was 86** when **Ishmael was** born (Gen. 16. 16) and **100 when Isaac was** born (21. 5). Allowing for **the** period to **the** weaning of **Isaac**, this would mean **that Ishmael was** about sixteen years old on being **cast** out again with Hagar.

**The** covenant between **Abraham and Abimelech was established at Beer-Sheba (well of the oath), the** southernmost point of note in **the** land, **as we have in the phrase "from Dan to Beer-Sheba"** (1 Sam. 3. 20). **The well at Beer-Sheba had** been violently taken by Abimelech's servants and probably **filled** in. **Water was** vital in **desert** surroundings, and **Abraham dug** it out and re-established it, setting **apart** (sanctifying) **seven ewe lambs as witness** (Gen. 21. 30). **We are** not told **that these lambs were** sacrificed nor **that**

Abraham prepared an altar at Beer-Sheba at this time. Later Isaac also re-dug this well (Gen. 26. 23-25) and built an altar there. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree. We could not trace the word "tamarisk" but noted that a contracted form of the word, used as a name, "Tamar", indicates a date-palm. Such a tree, near a well, would provide welcome shade and pleasant fruit to a traveller in the desert. Men who plant trees do not themselves reap the true benefit from them—later generations find pleasure in them. We thought of the Blessed One who Himself was raised up and hanged on the tree of Calvary and the generations who have so benefited as a result of His great sacrifice.

*H. R. Dodge, P. M. Jefferson.*

*From Liverpool.*—The birth of Isaac was for Abraham the fulfilment of a promise made to him by God some twenty-five years before and confirmed from time to time during the passing years. At times it seemed as though Abraham's acts of self motivation, both to safe-guard his own life and to make provision for the promised son, would thwart God's plans. Yet God was in control and each incident served to refine His servant and prepare him for the supreme blessing of a son and also for further trials. The fulfilment of that promise depended upon the faith of Abraham as both Heb. 11. 10, 11 and Rom. 4. 16-22 show. It was also "the set time of which God had spoken to him". A similar thought is contained in Gal. 4. 4 which deals with the birth of the Lord Jesus. We assumed that Sarah's laughter in Gen. 21. 6 reflected her joy at knowing the rich blessing of God and stands in contrast to her scepticism in 18. 12.

The day on which Isaac was weaned was a happy one for Abraham and he made a great feast to celebrate the occasion. From Gen. 76. 16 we learn that Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was born, and from 21. 5 that he was 100 years when Isaac was born. Assuming that Isaac would be at least 3 years when weaned, Ishmael was about 17 years when it is recorded in Gen. 21. 9 that he mocked. Clearly he was at an age of understanding and the punishment meted out by God could in no way be thought to be unjust. The idea of casting out Hagar and Ishmael was "grievous" to Abraham, yet once he realised it was the will of God, he obeyed without delay (see Gen. 21. 14).

We noted that it was the "voice of the lad" (Gen. 21. 17) that the angel responded to although the instructions were given to Hagar.

It seems that the Abimelech mentioned in Gen. 21 is the same person referred to in Gen. 20. This would explain how Abimelech knew that God was with Abraham (Gen. 21. 22). Integrity and frankness on both sides resulted in a covenant being sealed at Beer-Sheba. M. S. E.

*From Macduff and Whitehills.* — "By faith even Sarah herself counted Him faithful who had promised. Wherefore also there sprang of one so many as the stars of heaven in multitude. " We emphasised the words "as He had said" and, "as He had spoken", for until this time the outlook seemed impossible, and a great miracle was needed. Yet Sarah and Abraham believed God, and were now seen rejoicing at the birth of the Son of Promise. "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise", not under bondage but free.

In all generations the words are true, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit" (Gal. 5. 17), for these are contrary and "he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit" (Gal. 4. 29). So Sarah saw and understood God's mind that the son of Hagar, the lad that mocked, could not grow up with, nor be heir with Isaac, and she commanded Abraham to cast them out, again driving home to us this important truth of separation. The thing grieved Abraham so much that God spoke to him confirming Sarah's words, and also promising him that through Ishmael there would arise a great nation. Abraham's obedience to God in this unhappy incident is certainly very noticeable and we next see this lad of 14-15 years remembering the example of his godly father. He, in his great need, cried to God, and the loving God of mercy answered; then it is remarkably recorded, "And God was with the lad, and he grew".

Abimelech and Phicol recognised that God was with Abraham. Although these Philistines asked this godly sojourner to swear by God, it is not recorded that this was done, and we had two thoughts on this—first that Abraham sought to verify this covenant, as it were, by repeating himself seven times, and secondly that he gave the seven ewe

lambs as a living witness to verify his innocence in his dealings.

Godly Abraham **was** now **left** in **peace** having been **blessed** by God. **He had** a portion of land to sojourn in, and **a well** with plenty of water. **Thus he seemed to get** a new sight of his God and **called** there on **the** name of **the** "Lord, **the** Everlasting God". **It was** a remarkable realisation to know God **as the** Eternal God over mysterious eternal things.

*James Mitchell*

*From Melbourne.* —In previous chapters **we have** seen how **the** promise of an heir **was made** and **a** covenant ratified by **a** covenant-keeping God. In **the face** of **the** humanly impossible, Abraham **had** believed God, **that what He had** promised **He was able** also to perform, his faith being reckoned unto him for righteousness, **thus** establishing for succeeding generations of **the** human race **the** principle of righteousness by faith. **As the** years advanced for Abraham and Sarah, so from **the human** viewpoint **had** prospect of **the** fulfilment of **the** promise receded. The waiting time **had** been long **and a test** of faith. **We have seen** how **at** Sarah's suggestion **he** resorted to one of **the laws** of Canaan regarding **a** barren wife by taking her Egyptian handmaid with **a** view to obtaining fulfilment of **the** promise in his own way. God **had** His purpose in keeping **them** waiting. **The** nation which **He had** in view **as** **a** people for Himself would begin with **a** miracle, **just as** its preservation throughout **the** succeeding **ages** would **be** **a** continuous miracle.

In Gen. **18** Sarah herself **was** given **the** assurance of **a** son. Now in Gen. **21** **the** long wait of faith **has** come to an end. The time of joy **at the** birth of **a** son **had** come, and **he was** given **the** name **Isaac** for Sarah said "God **hath made me** to **laugh**", Abraham having reached **the age** of **a** hundred years **and** Sarah ninety. **The** day of weaning, which is usually considered by Abraham's descendants to **be at the age** of five years, **was** also **a** day of rejoicing; **but** to Abraham it **became** **a** day of sorrow, **as the** son of Hagar mocked. Sarah's impatience of fourteen years earlier **was** now bearing bitter fruit, especially for Abraham **and** Hagar. According to Nuzi **tablets**, **the** birth of **a** son to **the** true wife dispossessed **the** son who **had** been born to **a slave** or handmaid. **The** son of **a** bondwoman could not **be** heir with **the** son of **a** freewoman.

Although grievous in **the** eyes of **Abraham**, God's promise concerning **Ishmael** enabled **him** to **send Hagar** from **the** home. Abraham's **grief was surpassed** by that of **Hagar sent** homeless, **destitute** and apparently hopeless into **the wilderness** of Beer-Sheba. **She** found **that the future was** not hopeless for God **had** heard **their** cry of **distress**. **Because Ishmael was the seed** of Abraham, **there was a place in** the purposes of God for **him**, and **we** refer especially to **Isaiah 60. 6, 7** where **Ishmael's** descendants are seen serving **in the** Messianic kingdom.

Notwithstanding **Abimelech's** earlier **experience** in **the** incident concerning Sarah, **Abraham's** life Godward and manward **made deep** impressions, and **it was fitting that the** former, **with a high** standard of righteousness, should **seek a** covenant of friendship **with Abraham** concerning their descendants. **A well** of water in **either** Gerar or Canaan **was** a prized possession and Abraham **had** been offended by **the** servants of **Abimelech**, though **their** action **was** not condoned by **the** king. **The** covenant **made was** evidently a solemn agreement **that** they would **each respect the** possession of **the** other **and** their offspring would **be** instructed accordingly.

**It was at** Beer-Sheba **that Abraham** first called on **the** name of Jehovah, **the** Everlasting God (*El Olam*) whom **he** **had believed** could **meet his every** need, however impossible to **the** thoughts of men. Nothing **was** too **hard** for **the** LORD.

*D. McF., T. W. F.*

## COMMENTS

1. (*Atherton and Leigh*): Whatever **the** preferred translation it should **be** noted **that the RV text has "this Hagar"**—that is of **the** allegory introduced in v 24. **It is** not **the** lady herself. **The** allegory **uses** known differences to prove **the** dissimilarities between **the** covenants—geographical, one woman free, **the** other **a** bondmaid, one superior to **the** other.

2. (*Barrhead*): **Ishmael** might fit 1 John 2. 18 "now **have there** arisen many **antichrists**" **but** nothing of **what** God says in Gen. 21 would support **that Ishmael is** a type of **the** Antichrist. **See** Kingston's reference to Gen. 25. **A. B. R.**

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**From Birkenhead:** Usually in connection with the calling on the name of the Lord we read of an altar being built. Here it is a tree being planted. Is there any significance? Is there any information available to identify a tamarisk tree?

The Lord was in this agreement of Abraham with Abimelech but it was not an occasion for an altar—there were no sacrifices. Ewe lambs that would found a flock and trees that would grow over the years were the witness of the covenant between these men.

The New Bible Dictionary says of the tamarisk—"a stunted bush or knarled tree of desert regions with very small scale-like leaves and usually pink flowers. Three species of tamarisk occur in the desert areas of South Palestine and Beer-Sheba. "

**From Liverpool:** What does weaning mean in the context of the Scriptures and at what age was Isaac weaned? Does Gen. 21. 14 indicate that Hagar carried a 17 year old boy? Is there any significance in the fact that it was the "angel of God" that called to Hagar in Gen. 21. 17 when in Gen. 16. 10 it was an "angel of the Lord" that spoke to her?

1. Plainly Israelite children of the Old Testament were weaned at a later date than we are used to, and contributors favour 3 to 5 years of age. Weaning is when a child's diet is no longer exclusively milk and solid food is taken. See Heb. 5. 11-14 which shows Christians must progress in doctrinal knowledge, i. e. from milk to solid food, for growth.
2. I think it means she was responsible for him. It was the water bottle that was put on her shoulder.
3. The sense of the passage is to show the sovereignty of God and so the angel is "of God".

A. B. R.

# BIBLE STUDIES

'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)'

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## EDITORIAL

This month we consider the great crisis in Abraham's life when God put him to the test in the offering up of Isaac. God knew that his faith was equal to this test, but the quality of that faith could only be made manifest to us through his actions. Abraham's actions not only reveal to us the greatness of his faith they also present us with a unique type of the sacrifice of Christ. We do not know how much Abraham was able to appreciate of that remarkable foreshadowing, but we are greatly enriched by the record of his experience.

In this study portion we have the first mention in Scripture of the words "love" and "worship". This has been commented upon by some of our contributors.

Abraham loved Isaac with a great love, but he loved God with a greater love that expressed itself in implicit obedience to the divine command. His confidence that eventually all would be well was based on his trust in the divine promise, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called", as Heb. 11. 17-19 clearly shows. The obedience of Abraham was more precious to God than a sacrifice for "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 75. 22).

In naming the place Jehovah-jireh Abraham acknowledged God's ability to see the need and to make provision for it.

J. K. D. J.

### THE OFFERING UP OF ISAAC

(Gen. 22. 1-24)

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —Christian life is a succession of tests, for character is produced through discipline. In many lives there is some supreme test to which all others are secondary and preparatory. It was so with Abraham as we now consider the crowning event of his remarkable

life. For **him it was the** avenue leading to **his** closest fellowship **with** God, and **his** greatest **spiritual** blessing, **and** in Abraham's outstanding **example we trace the secret of the** Christian's spiritual power and victory.

Abraham's **faith was** outstanding in **the** extreme and **he** is rightly named **as the** father of **all** who believe. By **faith he claimed** fully **the** promise of God regarding **the** birth of Isaac. **He** knew **that the** all sufficient God would **keep His** word. **He staked his all** on **the** word of God, and **thus** in type **Isaac was** offered **up**, telling **us** of **the** only-begotten Son who **Himself** loved **us** and "**gave Himself up** for **us**, an offering and **a sacrifice** to God for an odour of **a sweet smell**" (Eph. 5. 2). **Thus** in **the** story of **the** father and **the** son **we trace the** infinitely greater story of **the** eternal Father and **the** eternal Son. When God **said**, "**Take** now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even **Isaac**", **the** Father **had** before **Him His** only begotten Son (John 1. 14, 16, 18; 3. 16), and **it is** not without **cause that the** writer to **the** Hebrews **was led to use this** identical wording about **Isaac**, "**his** only begotten son". **Ishmael** for **the** moment **is** forgotten. "**In Isaac shall thy seed be called**". Again are **we** **caused** to think of God's pointed promise, "**He saith** not, And to **seeds**, **as** of many; **but as** of one, And to thy **seed**, **which is** Christ" (Gal. 3. 16). Plainly **we** observe **the** father and son relationship, **as** once and again **we** read, "**They** went both of **them** together" (vv. 6 and 8). There **was** between Abraham and **Isaac a sweet** communion bespeaking **the** far richer communion between **the** Father and **the** Son culminating in **that** final **act—the** death of **the** Cross. **It** is good when **the** worshipper today traces in **the** death of **Christ the** burnt offering aspect. In **the** offering of **Isaac** no sin **was** involved, **but a** burnt offering. **J. C. M., G. A. J.**

**From Barrhead.** —**We** already **saw** in Gen. 15 that **Abraham was justified** by **faith at which** time **he** received **the** promise, **but** now in ch. 22 **we** find **that Abraham is justified** by works and **receives the** oath. **The** three words "prove", "love" and "worship" are mentioned for **the** first time in **the** Bible in **this** chapter, and **we** noted **that the** love **was the** love of **the** father for **the** son to **be** later followed by **the** love of **the** son for **his** bride. **These** things **all** have a **spiritual** significance in addition to **the** four types so **well** known in **this** chapter.

The relationship which existed between Abraham and God appears to have been most harmonious. This relationship and the haste and care with which he carried out God's will hold lessons for us today. Abraham could have gathered wood on the way to the mountain but he carried it with him—nothing being left to chance in the things of God.

From this final test Abraham virtually passes out of the narrative. He departed out of Haran at the age of 75 and died at the age of 175.

*D. J. Kerr*

*From Birkenhead.* —Abraham offered up Isaac and thereby proved his faith in God. Such was Abraham's faith that he believed God would (if necessary) raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 77).

The death of the Lord Jesus Christ is foreshadowed in this event, but care is needed in the extent to which details of the story are applied. Parallels which we notice were: (i) father and son act together in perfect harmony; (ii) it was the offering of the only begotten son; (iii) it was a burnt offering—a sweet savour to God—the sweetness being brought out by the fire; (iv) the son was submissive to the will of the father; (v) the father slew the son (in type here) with the knife, speaking of judgement falling; (vi) in both cases the sacrifice was at "the place", mount Moriah (vv. 3, 4, 9, 14; 2 Chron. 3. 1; John 19. 17); (vii) the offering was an act of worship; (viii) the offering was placed upon the wood (the cross).

It was considered that Abraham's words, "God will provide himself the Lamb" (v. 8) and, "In the mout of the Lord it shall be provided" (v. 14) indicate his looking forward to the event of which this is a shadow.

God's delight with Abraham's faith resulted in God confirming the covenant with an oath (vv. 16-18).

*R. D. Williams*

*From Birmingham.* —By his works Abraham has revealed to us a degree of faith that is truly astonishing, not only in offering his son, but also in his firm belief that God would return Isaac to him, "accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead".

The place of sacrifice was at a distance of three days' journey as in the case of the children of Israel (Ex. 3. 18). Before worship could take place there was to be specific preparation and ultimately complete separation.

As the ram was caught in the thicket, love held the Lord at the place of sacrifice. Concerning the horns, we considered the meaning of "the horn of salvation" in Luke 7. 69 with reference to the Lord. From Josh. 6. 4 we thought the horn signified triumph, and linked it with 1 Cor. 15. 55, 57, 'Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Once severed, the horn could be used as a receptacle for anointing (1 Sam. 16. 13). It was also for sounding out the note of warning "from the wrath to come" or the notes of praise and triumph as in Joshua's day, "Blow your rams' horns".

*R. J. Wood*

*From Bolton.* — Abraham accepted with unflinching obedience God's demand (v. 2) for the most costly offering. God's description of Isaac, "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest", emphasizes the magnitude of the request and the greatness of the sacrifice. However whether Abraham recognised, by divine inspiration, the need for the offering, or acted in simple faith in obedience to God's will is debatable [Comment 1]. We do know from 1 Cor. 10. 13 and other passages, that no man is tempted above that he can bear. Since Abraham was a man of great faith, the tempting or proving had to be equally great [Comment 2]. The passage (v. 3) demonstrates the will with which Abraham accepted the instruction of God. The land of Moriah was greater than three days' journey, yet Abraham rose early, cleaving the wood himself for the burnt offering in his eagerness to please. The two young men (vv. 3 and 5), typifying those who stood afar off (Luke 23. 49), were left behind, and father and son proceeded to the place of worship. The wood of the offering is perhaps a shadow of the cross borne by the Lord Jesus (John 19. 17), "And He went out, bearing the cross for Himself". The fire and the knife were taken by the hand of Abraham (the father). "And they went both of them together", presents us with a wonderful picture of the harmony which existed between the father and son and reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus in John 8. 29 and John 16. 32. It also presents a

fitting opening for **the** heart-searching words of **verses 7** and **8**. **The** poignant question, **which is the central theme of the passage**, and **the calculated** and controlled answer, when coupled **with the** well-known words of **John 7** **cause us to meditate** and wonder **at the** magnitude of God's plan of salvation. **The** words "And when they **came to the place...** Abraham **built the altar there**" wonderfully **centre** our minds on **the** experiences of **the** Lord recorded in **Luke 23. 33**, "And when they **came unto the place... there** they **crucified Him**". **His** obedience to **the** Father's **will laid Him on the altar at** Calvary. Abraham stretched forth **his** hand for **the** knife to slay **his** son and here **the parallel ends**. One only **was** righteous and therefore **a** fitting offering (Eph. **5. 1, 2**). Abraham took **a ram caught in the thicket** and completed **the act of sacrifice**.

Finally **the faith** of Abraham **is** rewarded (vv. **15-18**) **with a** confirmation of **the** promises given in chapters **13** and **15**. **The** additional promise **that his seed** shall possess **the gate** of **his** enemies, **will be** ultimately **a** blessing to **all** other nations through **the** work of **the** Lord Jesus.

*J. V. T., I. S.*

*From Denmark Hill.* —**The** offering of Abraham's "only son . . . even **Isaac**" **was** indeed **the deepest and** most significant **test** of Abraham's **faith** and obedience. **What** greater sacrifice could **he be asked** to offer than **the** son of **his** old **age**, **that** one through whom God **had** promised **the** blessing.

Abraham's readiness to obey and serve God **is reflected** in **his** response to God's **call**, "Here **am I**" (**repeated** in **v. 11**), and throughout **the** episode **we see that at** no point **did that** great man of **faith** question God's command; nowhere **did he hesitate** or doubt **that this** mission "to **the** land of **Moriah**" **had a** purpose; **his faith was steadfast**, and **his** remark to **Isaac** that "God **will provide Himself the lamb**" **was** indicative of **his** hope, although ironic in **itself**.

The journey to **Moriah** **must have** been tiresome to **the** old **pilgrim**, who **was** now over **120** years old, and even on **the** third day **the place was** yet "afar off". The episode in **its** entirety took about seven days, again an **example** of Abraham's complete **faith** in God.

God **did** provide **the lamb** and **Isaac was** spared. **We** can contemplate **the** relief, yet joy **which Abraham must have** experienced in **the** knowledge **that** not only **had he** carried

out God's command, **but that God stepped in at that vital moment and Isaac lived.**

*Derek Fulfarton*

**From Derby.** —According to one **system** of chronology **Isaac was born in the year 1892 B. C., and the year of Abraham's obedience to God's command "Take now thy son" was the year 1872 B. C. Thus Isaac would be 20 years of age. It is remarkable how Abraham ruled his house and received obedience therein as God foretold he would (Gen. 78. 19). Abraham himself had rendered obedience to God in several important matters, but the command to offer up his loved son Isaac was his most severe test.**

On the third day Abraham saw the place afar off. The place mount Moriah was to figure greatly in the history of Abraham's seed and God's dealings with them, especially in the important matter of worship. "I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come again to you". It would seem that the Spirit of God caused Abraham to utter these words. The same Spirit inspired the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 11. 17-19) to write that Abraham to whom it was said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 27. 12) accounted that God is able to raise up even from the dead; from whence he did also in a parable receive him back. Isaac said to his father, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?", and Abraham was inspired to say, "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering". We thought of the Lamb of God (His own dear Son); for the Father and the Son were together at Calvary. Abraham took the knife to slay his son, and the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven. Then Abraham saw behind him a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. This ram Abraham took and offered him up for burnt offering instead of his son. A divinely provided substitute, it was a wonderful type of our blessed Saviour who suffered for the sinner on the cross at Calvary. The angel again spoke and said, "By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, because thou hast done this thing.... That in blessing I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven ("If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed"), and as the sand that is upon the sea shore (through Abraham's descendants); "and thy seed (the people of Israel) shall possess the gate of His enemies" [Comment 3].

**This will be fulfilled when the seed of Abraham (the Christ) comes to earth again to reign.**

Abraham loved **his son Isaac but his love for God was greater. Such love for God was embodied in the first and great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mat. 22. 37).**

**S. Wymer, S. R. W.**

**From Hayes.** —Abraham's faith had been tested by God many times in the past, particularly in the long wait for the promised fulfilment of a son in Isaac, but here we read of the supreme test of Abraham's faith—the offering up to God of Isaac.

Abraham knew the voice of God and showed a reverential obedience in his reply, "Here am I". The test in v. 2 showed increasing relationship and dearness to the heart of Abraham. It was Isaac his only and dearly loved son that was to be the sacrificial victim. Such sacrifices were commonly made by the peoples round about to their gods; and now Abraham knew the anguish of the consequences of his obedience. Heb. 77. 17-19 shows the marvellous extent of Abraham's faith, in his belief that God would raise up Isaac from the dead.

Although Abraham described his son as a lad (v. 5) some commentators suggest that he was at least 20 and perhaps 25 years of age at the time of this incident. It makes Isaac's trust all the more remarkable, as Abraham could hardly have bound his son without his compliance.

It has been suggested that this hallowed spot is the same site where Solomon built his Temple (see 2 Chron. 3. 1) and where the Lord at a later time was also crucified.

At the very moment when Abraham showed his tremendous faith in his work of obedience by taking the knife to slay his son, God stayed his hand and a substitute was found. Isaac was restored to him and received as though from the dead.

God through the angel of the Lord spoke to Abraham for the second time (vv. 15-18) and reaffirmed the covenant blessing to Abraham. It is seen here perhaps in its widest and fullest extent.

Abraham returned to Beer-sheba with Isaac and the young men, no doubt immensely strengthened in spirit by the test which he successfully underwent.

**R. F. Robertson**

**From Kingston-upon-Thames.** —The maturity and completeness of Abraham's trust in God is again shown in **this chapter**, in the immediacy of his response (starting early in the morning); in his preparation (he cut wood to take with him, and hence could have no excuse should there be none in Moriah); and in his confidence that both he and his son would return (v. 5; Heb. 11. 19).

The offering of Isaac is typical of the death and resurrection of Christ in many ways, with the major difference that whereas Isaac was merely offered, Christ was given. It was accomplished by the father and the son working in concert (vv. 6 and 8). Isaac was Abraham's only son, whom he loved (v. 2). After v. 13 the type is changed and the ram signifies Christ's substitution for us. The exact import of the choice of animal is to us unclear, but it may (with its resurrection association) be related to the ram used to consecrate Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (Ex. 29. 15-18).

Following this test of his faith God repeated His promise concerning the nation which was to be made of Abraham's descendants, and added that they would possess the gate of their enemies [see Comment 3]. This promise is continually repeated throughout the Scriptures (Gen. 26. 3; 28. 13; 50. 24; Ex. 13. 5, 11; 33. 1; Luke 7. 73, 74) and it is at the heart of all that is promised to David in Ps. 110.

In addition to the faithfulness of Abraham this story illustrates the trust of Isaac in his father (v. 8) and also in God; for although it is not apparent at what stage he realised that he was to be the sacrifice, he would almost certainly have been able to prevent his aged father from binding him to the altar had he resisted. In this connection the closing verses, telling of the birth of Rebekah, indicate the movement of divine purpose towards Isaac following this supreme triumph of his father.

G. Riley

**From Lagos.** —'The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart' (1 Sam. 16. 7). It was known to God that Abraham had grown to know Him intimately. Abraham had shown great faith and love and obedience to his God. The evincing of these gems is basic to the revelation in Gen. 22. "God did prove Abraham, and said unto him . . .

take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of (vv. 1, 2). Abraham did not debate with God on His command although he grasped in measure the implications of the divine command to him as bearing on the covenant made (see Gen. 77. 19 and also Gen. 77. 17; 18. 11, 12). He left Beer-sheba early in the morning with saddled ass and with two of his young men and before them lay a three-day journey to Moriah. "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come again to you". In Abraham's reckoning: (i) Isaac was a yielded sacrifice to God; (ii) that the covenant of God might stand Isaac must of necessity have a resurrection; (iii) the resurrection of Isaac must take place that same day. For a parallel study see Heb. 77. 17-19; James 2. 21, 22.

"They went both of them together" (v. 6). These words summarised the lofty scene of a father and his only son ascending the mount towards the place of sacrifice. It was only a foreshadowing of the sublime scene: "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me" (John 8. 16: see also John 8. 29; 16. 32). In this togetherness, there is mutual understanding and intimacy of love coupled with subjection; we can see it existing between Abraham and Isaac and the more so between our Lord Jesus and His Father.

S. Coker, E. Bassey

*From Leeds.* —In this chapter we have the culmination of God's tests and times of proving of Abraham's faithfulness, and we marvelled again at his complete willingness to obey, based on that which characterised him throughout his life: "Abraham believed God" (15. 6. cf. Rom. 4. 3) through faith (Heb. 77. 17-19). This statement in Gen. 15. 6 is the first occurrence in Scripture of the word "believe", and it is said of Abraham whose life was so completely bound up to faith. The two things, belief and faith are inseparable, for without faith it is impossible to please God, and he that cometh to God (in faith) *must* believe that He is (Heb. 77. 6).

Drawing progressively nearer to the place of divine choice (verses 3, 4, 9, 14) we draw nearer again to Calvary (Luke

**23. 33).** The journey of three days reminded **us** of the three years **which the** Lord Jesus spent in **His public** ministry culminating in **His** death. **The** journey, presumably from **Beer-sheba** (27. 33 with 22. 19) to the land of Moriah would **have** been very **difficult**, travelling about **18 miles each** day. **Nevertheless**, they went "both of **them** together".

**The** relationship of **the** father to **the** son, **the** love expressed, **the** obedience of **faith**, remind **us** so preciously of God **the** Father and **His** only-begotten Son. **Isaac himself** is spoken of **as the** only son (v. 2) "whom thou lovest" (see John 3. 35 with v. 16; John 77. 24).

**It is in** Gen. 22 **that we have the** first mention of **the** word "love" when close on **2000** years of **the** world's history **had passed**. God's great love embraces **the** world: **it** embraces **us**.

In **Heb. 77** where men and women of **faith** appear as portrait miniatures, Abraham's **life** of **faith** is reviewed, culminating in **the** offering **up** of Isaac. **Faith** is clearly seen in:

- (1) Obedience (v. 8).
- (2) Pilgrimage (v. 9).
- (3) Vision (v. 10).
- (4) Power (verses 11, 12).
- (5) Patience (v. 13).
- (6) Declaration (verses 14-16).
- (7) Surrender (Offering) (v. 17).

Therefore, brethren... Rom. 12. 1, 2.

*H. R. Dodge, P. M. Jefferson*

**From Liverpool.** —We now reach **the climax** of Abraham's experience **with** God, and one **which was** to demand **his** complete and absolute obedience to **the** revealed **will** of God. Indeed, there **was** no delay on **the part** of **Abraham** to carry out God's **will**, nor any discussion **with** any other party, **but** an **immediate** and early start to complete **the** task.

Heb. 77. 17-19 shows **that such was his** trust in God **that he believed** God **was able** to raise **Isaac** from **the** dead. Not **that** Abraham's **task was made** any **easier**, for **Isaac was his** only son whom **he** loved, **but his faith**, and **the** subsequent outworking of **that faith** in works, **justified him** before God and earned **him the** unique **title** of **the** "friend of God" (see James 2. 21-23) [Comment 4].

Further, this experience was one which was to draw him to God and so inspire worship of the One who would fulfil all his needs (see v. 5). True indeed are the words of Ps. 18. 30, "As for God, His way is perfect... He is a shield unto all them that trust in Him". We too must learn that those things which we cherish most may be those by which God will test our love and trust in Him, and thus draw us closer to Himself. Worship is an attitude of heart, and life's experiences all serve to cast us upon our God and to teach us to acknowledge His keeping power and greatness.

We saw a clear parallel between the offering of Isaac and that of the Lord Jesus. It was suggested that Isaac was between 17 and 25 years, and if this was the last great test for Abraham, it was the first for Isaac, and his absolute subjection to his father is clearly demonstrated. Yet this falls far short of that subjection which the Lord Jesus willingly submitted Himself to when He was here upon the earth (see Ps. 40. 8; Rom. 7. 5; Heb. 5. 7, 8).

For Abraham the result of his faith was the provision of a substitute and the reaffirmation of God's promise concerning his seed.

*M. A. Sands, M. S. Elliott*

*From Macduff.* —No reason was given to Abraham; his faith was tried and he was justified *by* his actions (James 2. 18). Faith, that hidden quality which justifies all in the sight of God, is dead without works in the sight of men.

Abraham typifies the Father, the great Provider. He clave the wood (v. 5) which was carried all the way. Only the father and the son went on the last of the journey, the wood having been placed upon the son. "He went out bearing the cross for Himself, unto the place called The place of a skull" (John 19. 17). With Abraham's words, "God will provide Himself the lamb" compare 1 John 4. 14, "The Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world".

The faith of Isaac also was wondrously displayed, for although he was by this time a young man, there was apparently no struggle, but rather absolute subjection. The Son of God said many years later, "Not my will, but Thine be done". In Isaiah we read, "I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward". There was to be a way of escape for Isaac, for a ram was indeed provided. The ram speaks

to **us** of **the** maturity and magnificence of Him who **is the** chiefest, **the greatest** of all sacrifices. **Isaac was the** type of Him who would come, for whom there would **be** no escape. **It is significant that the** House of **the** Lord **was later** built by Solomon **at this place**, and **we felt too that** Golgotha would **be** nearby.

God reiterates His promise to Abraham (vv. 16-18), "In thy **seed shall all the** nations of **the** earth **be blessed**", and this **we felt speaks** of Christ (Gal. 3. 16). The sons of Abraham are of one **seed** (those of faith)—Christ. **Is the seed** of v. 17 speaking of **the same**? [See Comment 3.]

*R. J. Wood*

*From Melbourne.* —The final **test** of **Abraham's** faith **came** when **he was called** upon by God to offer **up** his son **as** a burnt offering. Human sacrifices were **well** known among **the** people of **the** surrounding lands, **but** they were not **acceptable** to **the** God of heaven, they were offered to pagan gods. **But** here **was** something different. God's promises to Abraham surrounded Isaac. From **the** human viewpoint those promises were to **be** broken by **the** One who **had made** and confirmed **them**, and Abraham **had** come to know Him **as the** covenant-keeping God. **As we** try to enter into **the** thoughts of **Abraham**, **we** are inclined to **the** view **that much had** been revealed to **the** friend of God of which **we** are not told, including **the truth** of resurrection of and from **the dead**; and **as he** pondered **that** which lay before him in taking his beloved son to offer him **as a** burnt offering, his faith rose to heights hitherto unknown. God's promises concerning **Isaac** and his **seed** would **be kept** by **El Shaddai** (God Almighty or God All-sufficient). Abraham **rested** upon His word. **It** appears to **us** from **the** narrative **that complete** confidence in God arose above **all** his fears, strengthening him for **the task** which lay before him in **the** sacrifice of his son; and anticipating **what** no mortal man **had** witnessed, resurrection from **the** dead.

With complete confidence in **the** covenant-keeping God, **he** arose early in **the** morning to wend his way, together with **Isaac** and **the** two young men, towards **the** appointed **place**. **As it came** within view, and still afar off, his confidence begotten of communion with God is revealed in his words to **the** young men, "Abide ye here with **the ass**, and

**I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come again to you". It is evident that he had not revealed to Isaac the significance of the absence of the lamb for the burnt offering. The fire, the wood and the knife were necessary items therefor, but the lamb was missing. Josephus informs us that it is estimated that Isaac was then about the age of 25 years. We would suggest that Abraham's reply to Isaac as recorded in vv. 7 and 8, was a prophetic utterance, arising from communion with God. We do not think that he had any anticipation of an immediate substitute for the sacrifice of Isaac, and that the lamb that God would provide or see for Himself was a reference to the still far off Lamb of God at Calvary. As Abraham raised his hand to slay his son, such words as were spoken to him by the angel of the Lord have never been heard by other human ears. With what joy he called the place Jehovah-jireh. In God's sight the sacrifice had been offered; and it had meant much to Him, not only because of the faith of Abraham but also because of the foreshadowing of the sacrifice of another Son, many centuries later, who Himself carried the wood, His cross, to the place of sacrifice, but for whom no substitute could be found.**

It does not appear to have been definitely established that the Moriah of Gen. 22 is the Moriah upon which Solomon built the Temple of the Lord [Comment 5].

*Archie Sneddon, T. W. F.*

**From Nottingham.**—Gen. 22. 1 tells us God proved Abraham. The word "proved" seems preferable to "tempt" as in the A. V., particularly in view of James 7. 13. But God did not prove Abraham until Abraham had proved Him. All the rich experiences of Abraham's life were but a preparation for this hour and this trial. With implicit trust in the One who called him from Ur Abraham obeyed, and in faith could say to his servants, "I and the lad will go yonder... and we will come again". "Yonder", said Abraham, and to him it meant the place, afar off at first and then right at hand. In the place of God's appointing there was to be the altar and the sacrifice. Did Abraham see more in this "yonder" than might at first appear to be the case? Was he, by divine enlightenment, able to bridge the centuries and see that which one day would be built there, the Temple, the House of God? Maybe his spiritual vision took him still

further, yonder **still** more, to **the place, the place** of Calvary **the scene of the great Sacrifice**. In **this connection we might consider John 8. 56**. That "yonder" is **sweet indeed to us** who are believers, **as in Isaac we see a type of the One who was sacrificed for us**. No voice **came** from heaven to stay **the** slaying of God's beloved Son. **The stroke must fall if we were to escape the judgement**.

This incident **is** referred to in **James 2. 19-26**. **Here we have presented the justification of Abraham by works, as displayed in his offering up of Isaac**. **This was the manifestation of Abraham's faith by his action before men**. **But he also had that hidden precious faith in God and His word, seen only by God Himself**. In **Rom. 4. 1-3 we have his justification by faith, the inward aspect known and marked by God**.

To Abraham **came the most solemn confirmation possible as God swore by Himself** (cf. **Heb. 6. 13**) **that in Abraham's seed shall blessing come to all the nations of the earth**. God **did not allow Isaac to be slain on the altar**. In **the Scriptures we have examples of human sacrifices such as the case of the King of Moab offering his son to avert defeat (2 Kings 3. 27) and there are references to the heathen who made their children pass through the fire (2 Kings 77. 31)**. **This practice was carried out by idolatrous Israel and King Ahaz (2 Kings 16. 3)**. **These were monstrous and cruel practices and were forbidden by God through His prophets (cf. Amos 2. 1)**.

**While the tremendous events related in vv. 1-19 were taking place, God was overruling in other places and ways in order to bring about His divine purpose**. Verses **20-24 tell how the news was brought to Abraham of the birth of children to Nahor and Bethuel**. **To the casual reader this may appear to be an aside of little significance, but ch. 24, which forms the basis of a future study, shows that it was of great importance in the fulfilling of God's purposes through Abraham**.

*R. Hickling*

## COMMENTS

1. (*Bolton*). —Primarily **this was a test of Abraham's faith as Gen. 22. 1** and Heb. **11. 17** show.

2. (*Bolton*). —It has been often pointed out that God proves **but** Satan tempts; **the** former to bring out **the best** in a man, **the** latter to bring out **the worst**. In **Abraham's case it was** proving **at the** hand of God. Temptation by Satan **is**, of course, often permitted by God **subject** to **the** provisos in 1 Cor. **10. 13**.

3. (*Derby*). —See comments by J. M. in **Bible Studies** Volume **21, 1953, page 64**. Christ **is the Seed** of Abraham who **shall** "possess **the gate** of **His** enemies". Note **the use of the** pronoun "His". It may **be that the** reference to **the** stars of heaven and **the** sand upon **the** seashore indicate a spiritual **seed (believers in Christ)** and a natural seed (Israel). **The** language of Scripture **is** rich.

4. (*Liverpool*). —God can see **and evaluate faith** in a man's heart, **but that faith is** only **made** evident to others by **his** actions. **He is justified** before God by **his faith** and before men by **his** works. **This is dealt with** in **the paper** from Nottingham.

5. (*Melbourne*). —**This is true, but** many thoughtful **students** are of **the** opinion **that it was the same place, and Jewish** tradition supports **this**. This viewpoint **is** taken in **the** papers from Hayes, **Macduff** and Nottingham. **J. K. D. J.**

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**From Atherton and Leigh:** Would **it be** proper to think that **Isaac** knew **that he was** to **be** offered following **his father's** answer to **his** question?

I am of **the** opinion **Isaac did** not know until **the altar** was ready and **the wood laid in** order. When **that** moment **came**, however, **he submitted** to **his father**.

*From Atherton and Leigh:* Is the ram of substitution a **type** of Christ in substitution?

**It seems to be a valid** viewpoint and is **the** one taken in **the** paper from Kingston-upon-Thames.

*From Hayes:* When Abraham called the place Jehovah-jireh **did he see** beyond **that** of the ram to God's **further provision** in Christ as **stated** in John **8. 56**?

*From Lagos:* Would **the** reference in John **8. 56** not look **back** to **that** day when **the** Holy **Spirit** spoke by **the** mouth of **Abraham** the prophetic words of Gen. **22. 8**, and again when **he** called the name of **that** **place** Jehovah-jireh, Gen. **22. 14**?

Abraham's answer to Isaac's question is indeed a prophetic utterance. **We** do not know, however, **if he** fully **appreciated its** significance, nor can **we** know **with** any certainty **if he saw** beyond the ram when **he** named the place. **It is** plain, however, **that further** unfoldings of God's purposes **were revealed** to him when **the angel** of the Lord **called** unto **him** the second time, and a **due** consideration should **be** given to **such** Scriptures as Gal. **3. 8** and John **8. 56**.

*From Lagos:* What took **place** on the mountain between **Abraham** and **Isaac** was **veiled** from the servants. Would this not answer to **the** hours of darkness when, "**He made** His soul an offering for sin?"

There **were** **practical** reasons for excluding **the** servants. **A parallel** could **be** drawn **but the knife** **did** not **fall** on **Isaac**, the ram was **required** to complete **the** picture.

**J. K. D. J.**

# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)*

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## EDITORIAL

At the time of writing, study groups will be considering the first subject of the 1976 Syllabus, having completed the study of Abraham in readiness for submission of papers by the due date. It therefore seems appropriate to express editors' appreciation of much thoughtful study undertaken by regular contributors. There has been considerable variety of thought in treatment of some subjects, and it is good to see the bringing out of the treasure of Scripture things both new and old.

This year a large proportion of the available space has been allocated to contributions from study groups. Editors wish to encourage maximum participation, so with the start of the new subject other groups may wish to submit papers regularly.

We would also remind fellow-students of the Word that correspondence on current aspects of study is welcome, and any who are interested to offer general articles of a study nature are encouraged to do so.

*Eds.*

### *THE PROBLEM OF THE UNJUST STEWARD*

(Luke 16. 1-13)

In response to the suggestion that questions of general interest to students of Scripture might be discussed, apart from those directly related to the year's syllabus, the following question has arisen. Alternative suggestions have been discussed in reply, but any readers wishing to offer further comments are invited to do so. It will be appreciated that if any comments are received promptly it helps to stimulate interest and gives desirable continuity.

*Question:* Does not the parable of the unjust steward appear to condone unrighteous dealings, in that "the Lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely" (Luke 16. 8)?

*Answer:* A superficial reading of this portion might indeed give the wrong impression that unrighteous principles were

condoned, because **the steward's clever but** unscrupulous method of currying favour **with his** lord's debtors **was** commended **as** wise. **But the Lord Jesus is the Truth**, and none of **His** teachings rightly construed could **ever** justify **evil** on grounds of worldly wisdom or **clever** expediency. So **we** must look **at the parable** and its associated teaching more closely for **the true** interpretation.

The facts of **the story are clear** (vv. 1-7). So are the teachings **derived** from it in vv. 10-12. **These latter verses affirm with** utmost clarity **the disciple's** responsibility to **be faithful** even in very **little**, to **be faithful** in **that which is** another's and to **serve** one **Master with** singleness of purpose. The unprincipled actions of **the unjust steward** stand in stark contrast to **the Lord's** teaching: **He uses the steward of the parable to highlight the** contrast between worldly expediency and Christian principle.

**What then of vv. 8, 9?** How **are** they to **be** understood? **Several difficult** questions **emerge, e. g. —**

1. Why should **his** lord commend **the steward** for wisdom so unprincipled?

2. In **what** sense **are the** sons of **this** world for **their** generation **wiser** than **the** sons of **the light**?

3. **What** does it mean to **make** to yourselves friends by means of **the** mammon of unrighteousness?

4. And how can such friends **receive** one into **the** eternal tabernacles when **the** mammon of unrighteousness **fails**?

**There are** two basically different approaches to **these** questions—

**(A)** It is suggested **that** vv. 8, 9 should **be** understood as an incentive to **the** "sons of **light**" to copy **the greater** diligence of people **dedicated** to worldly **pursuits**. In addition, friendships should **be made** by means of earthly **riches with** a **view** to helping others spiritually, so **that** when **this life is** **past** those who **have** been **helped will receive their** benefactors into **the** eternal tabernacles.

**(B)** A contrasting approach **which attempts** to interpret vv. 8, 9 in **terms** of **the** Lord's condemnation of any **use** of **the** mammon of unrighteousness by **His** disciples.

This **view regards the** wisdom for **which the** unjust **steward was** commended as "earthly", not a wisdom coming down from above (James 3. 15). **The** commendation **was based** on a worldly-wise assessment, not a **spiritual** assessment. The second **part** of **v. 8** is then seen **as** an analysis by **the**

Lord Jesus of the true character of worldly wisdom. The sons of this age are *for their generation* wiser than the sons of fight. That is, as far as the limited vision of the worldling is concerned, "seeing only what is near" (2 Pet. 7. 9), they *think* that they are wiser than the sons of the light: in reality they are certainly not! In harmony with this v. 9 is seen as an ironic statement by the Lord Jesus. In effect He is saying, "Just you continue to make friends by unscrupulous business dealings; and when temporal riches no longer afford any advantage, see what good such friends can be to you in terms of eternal values".

### *Conclusion*

It should in any case be made clear that the Lord Jesus did not in any sense condone unrighteous dealing in this passage. Whatever interpretation of verses 8, 9 may be preferred this does not affect the plain teaching of the Master in condemnation of unfaithfulness. *Eds.*

### A BRIDE FOR ISAAC (Gen. 24. 1-67)

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —Abraham was about 140 years old, and Isaac 40 years old when he was exercised to find a wife for his son. Abraham's desire to obtain a wife from his own kindred was in keeping with the mind of the Lord, his motive that of separation from the nations around. In this he was exemplary in seeking the welfare of his immediate family and his household (see Gen. 18. 18-19). We felt that in spite of the call of God to come out from his kindred, Abraham's design for Isaac to take a bride therefrom did not involve a breach of separation, or a choice from *an* idolatrous kindred. The expressions of 24. 31 and 50-51 imply their acknowledgement of the Lord and His divine purposes. In the servant's response to Abraham's call a full and large-hearted obedience was apparent, and his service reflected an attitude of worship. He was wholly devoted to the will of his master as well as sharing with him the Lord's leading throughout

The detailed fervent prayer of the servant and the meeting at the well were outstanding. We noted other "well" experiences, of Jacob (Gen. 29), Moses (Ex. 2), and even of

the Lord Himself at Sychar (John 4). All were significant meetings of a man and a woman, with attendant blessings. The readiness of Rebekah to respond to the servant's request as she "hasted" to give him a drink, as she "ran" with her message, and as Laban "ran out" to the fountain were indicative of kindness and welcome. The joy of the realisation of answered prayer, and their acknowledgement that "the thing proceedeth from the Lord" must have thrilled the heart of the servant. We recalled the words of the wise man: "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Prov. 76. 9).

The servant's duty was finally fulfilled in the reiteration of the story to Isaac, resulting in the union of Isaac and Rebekah in the highest bond of love, as indicated in the closing words, "And he loved her."

We suggest that the anti-typical teaching of the chapter is that of the Father sending the Holy Spirit to procure a Bride for His Son. There does, however, appear to be a deviation from complete precision in that the servant said in effect "Let this happen to guide me", whereas the Spirit is omniscient [Comment 1]. It is sometimes said that the Church the Body is not seen in the Old Testament, but in this narrative and elsewhere (see Gen. 2. 21-24 etc.) the outlines of this mystery are evident, though direct revelation was reserved for the days of His flesh and later times. It was also asked whether the servant's errand was unknown to Isaac until he saw Rebekah. We felt, however, that the full and shared knowledge of the divine purposes of the Father and the Son (as well as the Spirit) is typified in the passage [Comment 2].

G. A. J., E. B.

*From Barrhead.* —The death of Sarah and Abraham's advanced years brought concern to Abraham to seek a wife for Isaac, who was heir to the covenant blessings of the land, the main point being that the bride must not be a daughter of the Canaanites or of any nation resident in the land. These nations were later to be driven from the land, so much confusion would arise should Abraham's descendants be inter-mixed with the Canaanites [Comment 3].

The servant was a faithful and God-fearing man, the elder of Abraham's house who ruled over all that he had, so in this we see the principle of the elder ruling. It is interesting to note that Abraham's last recorded words are the charge

given to **the servant which** contains **the covenant of the Lord**. The servant **was to be cleared of the charge** should the woman **refuse** to come, an illustration of **the gospel preacher** today. The servant also brought many things before **the intended Bride** showing **the claims of Isaac**; **here also is a lesson to the gospel preacher** to present to others **the claims of Christ** showing **all His worth**. In **the gifts to Rebekah** we saw **the Saviour's gifts to the Church**.

**Rebekah** was willing to come, an **act of faith**. The Lord **had worked** in answer to **the servant's prayer**, and moved **the heart of Rebekah** to respond. On **the long journey back** the servant would **be** telling more of his master, reflecting **the believer's engagement with Christ** on his heavenward way. **Rebekah's** question, "**What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?**" holds a precious **picture** of Him coming to **meet us**.

**Abraham** emphasised **that** Isaac was not to **be taken back** to his former people, for **he was the one** chosen to **be the inheritor of the covenants**, thus showing **further Abraham's faith** in God's promises.

*R. Green*

**From Birkenhead.** —**Abraham**, the friend of God, **reached** another crisis in his life when **the time came** to choose a **wife** for his son, Isaac. This was **a matter** in which **Abraham was** conscious of **the importance of correct action**, for **the issue** of this proposed partnership was eventually to produce **the One** from whom blessing would flow to **all the nations of the world**. A wife was not to **be taken** from among **the Canaanites** for **Abraham knew the curse on Canaan** (Gen. 9). Therefore Abraham's servant was sent to his own kindred, of whom **he** evidently **had** some knowledge (Gen. 22. 20). Isaac was not to go (24. 6), **but the Lord** promised angelic **help** (v. 7).

Two important principles **were** noted. **As** people whom God has **called we** should **be careful** to maintain our **separated** position and **take heed** to **the loss** suffered by those who fail to do so. Secondly, in **the matter** of choosing a partner **in marriage** the words of Laban **make a valuable motto**: "**The thing proceedeth from the LORD.**"

Considerable thought was given to **the proposition that** this **chapter** is a picture in type of God **the Father** sending His Servant (**the Holy Spirit**) to **seek a Bride** for His Son. Points **put** in support of this **were that the Father's wealth**

is not **revealed** until **the heart has** been won by **the work of the Holy Spirit**. **Ahead there** is a wilderness journey and **at the end a meeting with the One** whom, not having seen, we love. There is also **One** waiting for **His bride**. The absence of **the servant's name** (thought to be **Eliezer**) is also indicative of **the hidden work of the Spirit**.

An alternative **view** of **the work of the servant** was **that it is a picture of the way in which we as servants of God may labour for Him** as instanced by **Paul** in **2 Cor. 7. 2**: "**I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ**" [Comment 4]. **R. D. Williams**

**From Bolton.** —**Abraham** clearly understood **that the marriage of Isaac was** absolutely essential to **the fulfilment of the** divine promises. Hence in **the choice of a bride he** must know divine guidance. The **character and conduct of the Caananitish daughters was** forbidding; **but the news of a family increase in the home of his sister-in-law in Mesopotamia enabled him** to formulate a plan whereby **his son could take a wife** from his own kindred - in accordance **with the** divine purpose. The principle of marrying "only in **the Lord**" (**1 Cor. 7. 39**) indicates a choosing from among **the Lord's own people as well as submitting it to His will**.

In **the directions of his servant, Abraham declares that the** angel of **the Lord** would go before to **guide** and control. In **this knowledge, the mission was** completely confidential, **with corresponding action and word**. In self-effacement **he extolled his master and his master's son, speaking of his wealth, honour and glory**. The work of **the divine Spirit** is not to **speak** of Himself, **but rather to magnify the Son** (John **16. 13-15**). **Of Him it is written that the Father hath given all things into His hand; and the precious gifts bestowed by Him exceed by far all the jewels of gold or silver from the hand of Isaac**. The servant's words of **appeal and tenderness were** such as to **draw** and win **the heart of Rebekah** completely. **She was prepared to leave all** immediately, to go to **him** whom **she had** learned to love. **The servant was** equally persuaded **that there had been a clear demonstration of beauty of character and kindness on her part, and was in no doubt whatever that she was the bride whom the Lord had appointed for his master's son**. The presentation of **the Son of God by the blessed Holy Spirit has** been so **effective** as to cause some to **leave** home, parents and friends - to **leave**

all for the sake of the One whom they have learned to love (1 Pet. 7. 8).

While we in our day look forward to meeting Him, the Holy Spirit delights to portray His excellence and worth to us through the Word. The "little while" will thus appear to pass more quickly until He comes forth to meet His Bride for whom He has waited so long. He will see her in all her beauty, having neither spot nor wrinkle as she is presented to Him. To some extent at least the words of Isaiah will be applicable: "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

We asked whether we are quite sure that the servant was a type of the Holy Spirit. We thought that this is clearly seen in the servant bringing before Rebekah the person of his master and the riches and glory that were his. The servant kept himself in the background and sought only to magnify and to speak of his master [Agreed. Eds.]. *E. B., I. S.*

*From Derby.* —The story of Isaac's bride is an outstanding example of divine guidance. It also proves the value of concerted action of prayer (by Abraham) at the base, a faithful, purposeful servant at the fountain of water, and the divine Spirit at work in the minds of the unnamed servant and his first contact, Rebekah.

Abraham knew the persons who made up the family of his brother Nahor (Gen. 22. 20-23), among whom there was only one likely candidate, Nahor's granddaughter, Rebekah. The trusted servant of God's friend had fully received the mind of his master as to where he should go, in the twice repeated, "Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again", in answer to his servant's question "Must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou earnest?" In Heb. 77. 15 are the words "If indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return." God hath prepared for them a city. The test as to the fitness and the willingness of this young woman was quite demanding, but brought a remarkable response: "Drink, my Lord: . . . I will draw for thy camels also, until they have done drinking." It was remarked that a camel can drink up to nine gallons of water and there were ten camels, making no mean task for a young woman. However the unlikely thing happened, to the joy of Abraham's servant; He faileth not. The fitness of Rebekah

thus proved, her willingness **and the** consent of **her** people **were the next** problems.

The servant brought forth jewels and raiment, and **gave them** to **Rebekah** even as **we have the** earnest of **our** inheritance, **the** Holy Spirit, **that we** may rejoice in **the** hope **that** is set before **us** in **the** promises of God. In **the** morning **the** servant said, "Send **me** away unto my **master**... Hinder **me** not, seeing **the LORD** hath prospered my way" - having his master's interests **at heart all the** while. They **called the** damsel and said "Wilt thou go with this man?" **The** decision **was Rebekah's** responsibility even **as the** reception of **the** Saviour is ours. **Rebekah** was, in **the** will of God, to **be** joined by marriage to **a** family **that** God **had** already **blessed** and to whom **had** been promised still **future** blessing. And they blessed **Rebekah**, who was to become an important link in **the** chain of divine testimony.

The servant said when **he saw** Isaac, "**It is my master**". As **Abraham** was, so also was **Isaac**, for **the father** and **the** son **walked** in **the** fear of **the** LORD. The servant told **Isaac all** **the** things **that he had** done. As Laban and **Bethuel** had been convinced **that the** thing proceeded from **the LORD**, so also was **Isaac**, who received his wife in **a** sweet conclusion to **a** perfectly planned arrangement. **S. Wymer, S. R. W.**

**From Lagos.** —To win in **a** relay **race the** runners **must** maintain **a** close co-operation in **the** **race**; they must show an **earnest care** when **the** baton is passed to **the** next **person**. From **the** day **the** LORD of glory **appeared** to **Abraham**, **he** pioneered **the** **race**, keeping **the** baton of **a** life of faith in separation to **the** divine will **and** principles. Now **he** is well stricken in **age**, and **that** baton which **Abraham has kept he must** pass on to Isaac. **We** note Abraham's utmost **care** in his words to his servants: "**Put, I pray thee**, thy hand under my thigh **and**... swear by **the** LORD. " The oath **made** it binding upon **the** servant **that** Isaac's wife was not to **be** taken from **the** daughters of **the** Canaanites. **Abraham** had discerned **that the** choice of **a** bride for **Isaac** belonged to God and **she** must **be** sought for in fellowship with **God** (see **24. 7**). **There** is **a** principle **here** which is carried into **the** new economy as emphasized to **us** by **the** Spirit for an abiding standard in **the** house of God - "**free to be** married... only in **the** Lord" (**1 Cor. 7. 39**). **We** cannot ignore this guideline without incurring God's displeasure as **we see** in Gen. **6. 1-8**.

Abraham's servant holds for our hearts some salient lessons in the matter of seeking a bride for Isaac. The servant knew that he was insufficient in himself to carry out the task given to him. He began by seeking the God of his master in earnest prayer. And so felt the Apostles when they declared, "We will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word" (Acts 6. 4). And again, our Master enjoins upon us to "pray... the LORD of the harvest, that He send forth labourers" (Mat. 9. 38). We note that grace was given to Abraham's servant to recognise whom the Lord had appointed for Isaac (see 24. 14). "He that is wise winneth souls" (Prov. 7. 30). When they said to Abraham's servant "Speak on", he was able to show the greatness, the glory and the blessings which God had given to his master. When it says "Ye shall be my witnesses" it is envisaged that "we show forth the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2. 9). The objective of the servant's witness was to cause a decision for Isaac in all who heard him (see 24. 49-51 and 57-58). We must pay particular attention to this point in our gospel witness, to provoke a decision for the only Saviour in those who hear us.

"What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant said, It is my master: and she took her veil, and covered herself" (24. 65). The point was made of the touching example of Rebekah in subjection to her bridegroom. "House and riches are an inheritance from fathers: but a prudent wife is from the LORD" (Prov. 19. 14). The parallel scriptures are worthy of note: 1 Pet. 3. 1-7, Eph. 5. 22-33. The Holy Spirit underlines for us that "he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (v. 67). "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. 53. 11).

S. Coker, E. Bassey

*From Leeds.* — "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21. 12). To fulfil this promise, reaffirmed in Gen. 22. 16-18, it was necessary for Isaac to take a wife. Abraham, now approaching 140 years of age, charged his servant, the elder of his house, to secure for Isaac a chosen bride, who was to come from the kindred line of Shem and must not be taken from among the daughters of Canaan. How well the servant undertook the task is seen in his not flinching from the long and perilous journey over wilderness terrain, having confi-

dence that God would prosper **his way**. Before he had finished praying (24. 15), **Rebekah**, (great-niece to **Abraham**) came out and was revealed. We see that **Isaac is**, in type, identified **with the** only begotten Son (Heb. 7. 17) and that **Rebekah** foreshadows **the Church, the Bride of the Lamb**. **This Church is still** "in building" and **will not be** completed until **that** moment when Christ comes "to present **the Church to Himself** a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any **such thing**" (Eph. 5. 27). **The servant speaks** to **us** of **the Holy Spirit, still at work** convicting **the world** "of sin, **because they believe** not on **Me**; of righteousness, **because I go to the Father**, and ye behold **Me** no more; of judgement, **because the prince of this world hath been judged**" (John 76. 7-11).

During **the** desert journey from Nahor, Mesopotamia, **back to the South** (Beer-lahai-roi), approximately 650 miles, Abraham's servant **relates to Rebekah** things concerning **his master Isaac** (24. 65, 66). The Holy Spirit **leads us** onwards through **this** wilderness scene, ever speaking to our hearts, day by day, of **the** preciousness of our Lord **Jesus Christ**. We continue in **the** hope of **that** joyful meeting **with the** One whom not having seen **we** love, and on whom, though now **we see Him** not, yet believing, **we** rejoice greatly **with joy** unspeakable and **full of glory** (1 Pet. 7. 8) **Rebekah** soon **made** her decision (24. 58). **The** subjection of **wives** to their husbands **is** linked **with the** husband's love towards their **wives, thus** forming a **mutual** bond of true affection and understanding, a **mutual** sharing of one another's joys and sorrows, pleasures and griefs, laughter and tears. In marriages of God's children, **the will of the Lord should be the** foremost consideration, and those contemplating marriage should not only love one another, **but love the Lord**. "As Christ loved" (Eph. 5. 25); **there is no higher** standard than this.

*H. R. Dodge*

**From Liverpool.** —The servant **charged** by **Abraham** to find a **wife** for **his son** was entrusted **with a great** responsibility. Although **we are** not told **his** name **we** thought it was **Dammesek Eliezer**, who at one **period** **Abraham** thought would become possessor of **his** house (Gen. 15. 2). **Abraham** knew **that** God, who **had** been **with him** all through **his** long **life**, would prosper **the** errand, and bring about **that which** was **desired**. This servant **pledged himself** to **Abraham**, and

took delight in doing his master's bidding in seeking a bride for his son.

We see his earnestness in his prayer to God for guidance (24. 12); his task was a difficult one. He looked to the Lord to open up opportunities for him, and his great desire was that God would show kindness to Abraham. We observed his watchfulness and his patience, to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not. He was loud in his praises of his master. He then declared the object of his visit, and made the proposal, offering a definite choice to the parents of the young woman. When Rebekah was asked "Wilt thou go with this man?" she said, "I will go. " The purpose of the servant was accomplished. He introduced Rebekah to Isaac and no doubt retired to tell his master what he had done.

The purpose of the father, to seek a bride for his son, suggested to us Mat. 22. 2: "A certain king... made a marriage feast for his son. " The son, in whom all the father's purposes were to be fulfilled, was in this respect like the Son of God (Eph. 7. 20-22). The prospects of the bride, we noted, were that she was thought of before she knew it (24. 4), and arrangements were made for her to be offered the position of wife to Isaac. Likewise "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love" (Eph. 7. 4). See also Eph. 5. 27. *D. Fillis, M. S. Elliott, G. S. Webster*

*From Melbourne.* —Abraham in his advancing years realised his responsibility to bring into his family a suitable bride for his son, Isaac, that from such a union might spring a holy nation to give pleasure to the God of glory. There were daughters of the land of Canaan, but none of these commended themselves to him. He had evidently pondered much over the question; and the bride to be chosen must not be a hindrance to his son. It was a solemn responsibility that the union thus brought about should bring glory to the God who had called him into the land of Canaan, for the sons and daughters who, Abraham anticipated, would spring from the union would be the progenitors of that holy nation. Therefore he turned his thoughts away from the daughters of the land. It would appear to us that Abraham's influence had lived on in Mesopotamia. Even though his brother Nahor had not followed him out, yet it seems evident that he had made

**deep** and lasting impressions on **his father's** household who remained. **As a result there was** evidently a standard of righteousness **because of the** knowledge of God **imparted to them by Abraham** over **half a** century earlier. The **bride for Isaac must be** one who **had a** knowledge of **the true** God. **Abraham** emphasised **the** importance of his son not returning to Mesopotamia from whence **he** and Sarai **had departed at the call** of God. By an everlasting covenant, Canaan **was to be the perpetual** inheritance of his descendants, and **there must be the** birthplace of **the** nation, to which land they could under **all** circumstances and **at all** times look **back** in **future** generations. During **the** years of sojourning in Canaan, **Abraham** had acquired a **further** and **deeper** knowledge of **the** God of glory, and in this **further** knowledge of **Him, Isaac's bride must be** instructed. **But she must also be** willing to **leave her** home and country and **make the desert** journey to Canaan.

In **the** narrative is a beautiful foreshadowing of things **that were** yet future. In **chapter 22** we find a foreshadowing of **the** offering **up** and resurrection from **the dead** of God's only begotten Son. In Eliezer is seen a type of **the** Holy Spirit, who is one with **the Father** and **the** Son, and **speaks** not of Himself. The Lord **Jesus**, speaking of **the** Holy Spirit said, "**He shall glorify Me, for He shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you**" (John 76. **14, 15**). **As** Eliezer spoke of **the** riches of **Abraham**, and **that he had** given **all** unto **Isaac**, so **the** Spirit of God **speaks** of **the** riches of God's mercy (**Eph. 2. 4**) and **the** unsearchable riches of Christ (**Eph. 3. 8, 19**). **As Rebekah heard, she** believed, receiving thereupon in **the jewels placed upon her the earnest of the** inheritance to **be shared with Isaac**. This foreshadows **the sea** of **the** Holy Spirit, which is **the** earnest of **the** eternal inheritance of **the Church** which is Christ's body, unto **the** redemption of **the purchased** possession (**Eph. 7. 13, 14**). The **desert** meeting recorded in **the** closing **verses** of **the** chapter is a foreshadowing of **the** meeting in **the** air of **the Church** which is His body with **the** heavenly Bridegroom (**1 Thes. 4. 14-17**), whence **the** Bride will **be** conducted to **the** place prepared (John **14. 2, 3**).

*DM., T. W. F.*

*From Nottingham.* —It is heartening to read of **the** quiet perseverance of **Abraham's** faith **after the severe** trial recorded in Gen. **22**. **He** is very **clear** as to **the** significance

of God's **call** to **him** to **leave the** land of **his** nativity (Gen. 24. 7). Abraham's **faithful** servant **might have** misgivings about **the** willingness of **the** woman to **follow him** into a strange land, **but Abraham had** no such difficulty. **With his** knowledge of God **he** could say, "The **LORD, the God** of heaven... shall send His angel before **thee.** " **Abraham** truly **believed** God; **his faith** was a **practical** thing, **realistic** in its daily outworking. **What he was** doing **was** in **the** mind and **will** of God; **he had** nothing to fear.

There is precious typical teaching in **the chapter** under consideration, especially when considered **with previous** chapters. In **chapter 21 the birth** of Isaac, **Abraham's** only son **and heir** to **all he had**, is typical of our Lord **Jesus Christ**, God's only Son, whom **He had** appointed **heir** of **all** things. Coming to **chapter 22**, Isaac **laid** on **the altar** **speaks** to us of **the sacrificial** work of Christ. In **a figure** **Isaac was received back** from **the dead**, type again of our beloved Lord who rose on **the third** day. In **chapter 23 the death** of **Sarah** would speak to us **of the** setting aside of Israel. Then in **chapter 24 Abraham** sends **his** servant to find **a bride** for Isaac, speaking to us of **the** present day of **grace** when God **is** seeking out **a** people for **His Name**. It is to **be their blest** portion to **be** joined to His Son, share His throne and to know **His** love and riches.

Abraham's servant **as he** went forth to seek **Isaac's bride** may **well** speak to us of **the Holy Spirit's** activity in **the** world, working in **the hearts** of men and bringing **them** to godly repentance and **faith** in **the** Saviour. **But** surely **he** can also speak to us of **the** servant of **the** Lord going about **his** Master's work. It is **well** to notice **that with Abraham's** assurance of **the** presence and overruling of God **he** was **quick** to do his task (24. 10) and in **all he did** **he** was **faithful** to his master. **With what** joy, **we** think, **he** would **be** able to **relate** "**all the things that he had done**" (24. 66). It was his responsibility to **be faithful** - not to worry about **the** evidence of success.

**The** servant's actions on reaching Nahor **call** for attention. **He** prayed. The prayer consists of one hundred and ten words, **with** no vain repetitions and, **as we** learn from 24. 45, from **the** heart. **Such** prayers, **the** outpouring of **a** soul's burden, God hears. It is **helpful** to notice **the** sequence of events: **he** prays, **he** recognises **the** answer to **his** prayer, and **gives** thanks. In **verses 26** and **48** **we** have **helpful** instruction

regarding worship. The servant (**a**) bowed his **head** (**b**) worshipped and (**c**) spoke. This may **be** compared with **Mat. 2. 11**, and taken as guidance for **us** in our attitude in **the** worship of God.

**Rebekah** longed to go to **Isaac**, and did not allow **her** brother and mother to delay her. **Whatever** their motive, **Rebekah's heart** was **set** on the one who loved **her**. **We** are reminded of **Mat. 10. 37**. **Bedecked** with **that** which **Isaac**, through **the** servant, **had** given **her** **she** set off to **meet** **her** lover on **the** way. **She** was adorned with **what** **he** had provided **and** given, and soon **came** **that** blissful meeting, a type of **that** which one day **we** shall know **when** **we** meet Him, our eternal Lover.

*R. Hickling*

*From St. Helens.* —God **had** **blessed** **Abraham** in **all** things. **We** know **that** "**He** **that** **spared** not His own **Son**... how **shall** **He** not also with him freely give us **all** things?" (Rom. **8. 32**). **Abraham**, himself **called** out by God, was anxious **that** his son, **Isaac**, similarly **separated**, should not **take** a wife of **the** Canaanites. **He** commanded his servant under oath concerning this, instructing **the** servant to go "unto my country, and to my kindred, to **take** a wife for my son Isaac." **He** was insistent **that** **Isaac** himself should not go in case **he** would **be** **tempted** to stay. **The** chosen bride, **Rebekah**, **must** come out also to **her** bridegroom - Christ's bride, **the** **Church**, **must** come out to him and **there** is **the** **further** **call** to disciples, "Come ye out from among **them**, and **be** ye separate . . . and **I** will receive you" (2 Cor. **6. 17**). The servant **had** doubts **as** to how **he** would recognise **the** chosen one **but** **Abraham** was confident **that** God would direct. **The** servant swore faithfulness to his master, took gifts and **departed**.

Drawing near to **the** city **he** came to **the** place where at evening-time women could **be** **expected** to **be** found drawing water. Now **Abraham's** servant sought **further** guidance from God **and** outlined specific details which would enable him to recognise **the** woman who is to **be** **Isaac's** bride. Immediately God's response was seen, as **Rebekah** appeared. **Her** willing co-operation indicates **that** **her** heart had been **prepared** by God. **We** can **be** **sure** **that** in like manner God will direct our paths, and especially our efforts to **reach** others, if in faith **we** ask Him and then follow **where** **He** leads. **We** are reminded how **Peter** and Cornelius **were** directed **each** to **the** other, **Peter** saying, "**I** came without gainsaying, **when** **I** was

sent for" (**Acts 10. 29**), and Cornelius, "Forthwith therefore I sent to thee" (**Acts 10. 33**).

**Rebekah, assisted** by her brother Laban, soon **made the** servant welcome in **their** home. Laban's words, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord... I have prepared the house", show another **heart made** ready by God. Refusing to **eat** until **he had** told **his** errand, **the** servant proceeded, **first** to **tell** how God **had blessed his master**, then to outline **the** object of **his** mission, giving **details** of how **his master had** instructed **him**, saying how **thus far** God **had** graciously **led him**. "I bowed my **head**, and worshipped **the LORD, the** God of my **master Abraham, which had led me**". Always **he speaks** of **his master** and **his master's** son and **the** God of **his master** lovingly and fervently. Would **that this were** always **true** of us!

**As we await** our **Isaac, the** Lord, our Bridegroom, **assured** of **His** soon-coming, may our response **at all times** in our wilderness journey **be like Rebekah's - "I will go"**.

*J. Raspin*

### COMMENTS

1. (*Atherton & Leigh*). —The absence of "complete precision" **raises** an interesting point. **We all** recognize **that** many **Old** Testament narratives foreshadow **aspects** of divine purpose in **Christ**. Some of **the detail** may remarkably **pre-figure His** Person and work. **Yet** in other contexts **a** major **feature is emphasized**, and surrounding **detail** may not **be** intended altogether to harmonize. **This** should not **detract** from **the** wonder of **the Spirit's** guidance in foreshadowing so **much** of **Christ** in **Old** Testament history.

2. (*Atherton & Leigh*). —It would **seem** strange if **the** reason for sending **a trusted** servant **with a** train of ten **camels** and **much treasure had** not been disclosed to **Abraham's** 40-year old son and **heir**. **I share the view that Isaac was** fully informed in **the matter**, and **that this** typified **future** divine purpose.

3. (*Barrhead*). —Other contributors (e. g. Melbourne) amplify **the** reason for seeking **a bride** from among **Abraham's** kindred. **See also answer** to question from Liverpool.

4. (*Birkenhead*). —**This is** an interesting suggestion. **The** two **views are** of course, to **a** certain extent complementary, since **the** Holy **Spirit** so largely works through human agency.

*G. P.*

## QUESTION AND ANSWER

*From Liverpool:* Why was it necessary to get a bride from his father's old home, seeing his relations were idolaters when his father separated from them?

There is no mention in Gen. 11. 31 of Nahor and his family leaving Ur of the Chaldees with Terah, Abram and Lot. Yet in Gen. 24 Abraham's servant went to Haran to find a bride for Isaac. Bethuel the son of Nahor, was presumably at that time established in the Haran area (c. f. Gen. 29. 4). Is it possible that Nahor had followed his father and Abraham to Haran before Terah died? Be that as it may, there was a family presence in the Haran area, and it seems significant that details of Nahor's family are given at the end of Gen. 22; it is stated that this family development was told to Abraham (v. 20). Moreover, fragments of the narrative in Gen. 24 imply that Bethuel and Laban had some knowledge of God as Jehovah. Laban's opening greeting to the servant was, "Come in thou blessed of the LORD" (v. 31), while he and his father discerned that 'The thing proceedeth from the LORD' (v. 50). Again from such passages as Gen. 29. 31-35 it would seem that Leah had a God-fearing appreciation of Jehovah's dealings with her. Admittedly there is evidence of Laban and his daughters harbouring "gods" (Gen. 31. 30; 35. 4). Nevertheless it seems clear that those of Abraham's kindred living in the Haran area were considerably enlightened in contrast to the spiritual darkness of the Canaanite. Hence Abraham's instruction in Gen. 24. 4 and Isaac's counsel in 28. 1, 2. G. P.

### ERRATUM

Editors regret that an omission has caused confusion of thought in sentence 5, para. 2 of Kingston's paper in September issue (p. 137). Please amend as follows: —

"... this may be the significance of his being described as 'the lad' whom God was with (Gen. 21. 17-20). But Ishmael is also described as a 'wild ass' (see Job 39. 5-8), son of an Egyptian bondwoman (see Rom. 7. 14) warring against that which was spiritual (Rom. 8. 7)<sub>#</sub> and was an archer, so to be compared with Esau (Rom. 9. 10-13). In this role he depicts the sinner's old nature. Hence Abraham... "

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# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)'*

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## EDITORIAL

Abraham is a magnificent figure who fills his own times and pervades much of Scripture. His faith is unique, and he is the great example to all who would please God. His life is an interpretation of who God is, and it is no wonder that God is pleased to be known as "the God of Abraham", or that Abraham is "the friend of God". In this month we come to the end of that remarkable life, but contemplation of the rich typology in his life and the lives of his family is meat for many days. The allegories from his family life draw the lines of God's plans down the ages and give us confidence in God's purposes for ourselves.

Sarah's life is complementary to Abraham's and her real importance is in the birth of Isaac which was "by faith". Yet as contributors point out she is an example in several ways to other generations. The careful record of the burials is a link for later generations with the great God of the promises made to this wonderful husband and wife. Abraham's care in passing on God's bounty to Isaac is important - he provided for his other sons but gave his all to Isaac. We are reminded of another of whom it is said, "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell".

In Abraham's domestic arrangements there are factors indicative of the mode of his time and apparently in conflict with what we know of God's will, and they raise questions not easy to answer. A contributor offers his opinion which we commend for study.

A. B. R.

## ASPECTS OF MARRIAGE IN ABRAHAM'S EXPERIENCE

In the May 1975 issue of Bible Studies some views were expressed on Abraham's relations with various women. It may be opportune to explore further what the Scriptures teach about marriage and how these things affected Abraham in his day.

Gen. 2. 18-25 introduces the subject of marriage showing that, in the Creator's view, man for his good needed the companionship of "an help meet for him". So He formed

woman and "brought **her** unto **the man**", saying in 2. 24, "Therefore **shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave** unto **his wife**: and they **shall be** one flesh". The new couple would **be** a new family unit in a new household. **It is** not fully **stated** in **this passage** that the Creator intended that there should **be** a one-to-one relationship lasting "**till death do them part**"; **but** when **we read** the comments of the Lord **Jesus** on **this** scripture **as** given in **Mat. 79. 6** **we** learn that **such was** indeed the Creator's intention. **It is** particularly important to note that the teaching (or **law**) of **Gen. 2. 24** was given before the **Fall** and that marriage was instituted by God, not by men. In **this** context **Gen. 2. 25** is worthy of note, "They were both naked... and were not ashamed". **This** shows that **Adam** and **Eve** before the **Fall** were not self-conscious of **sex** difference. To **them** it was **all** natural and no **cause** for embarrassment. However, in **Gen. 3. 7** the situation changed quickly and radically. They **became** suddenly self-conscious and embarrassed so that they **made** aprons of **fig leaves** to **hide their** nakedness. **The** entry of sin **made this** constitutional, grievous and far-reaching change (see **Rom. 5. 12-19**). **This** striking deterioration in **sexual** innocence **has affected** all of **Adam's** descendants, including **Abraham**, and **it is** the reason why the sins of fornication and adultery are so abhorrent to the Lord. They bring to **His** nostrils the stench of the **Fall**. [**This conclusion is just a little difficult** to follow, **except** in so far as **all** sin **stems** from the **Fall** - Eds.]. For **that** reason those sins should never come into the **lives** of any people associated **with** God.

No further **law** on **this subject** was given **until** the **law** of Moses, when, in the seventh commandment, Israel were told, "Thou **shalt** not commit adultery". **This** clearly **upheld** the sanctity of marriage **which was** later **upheld with equal** firmness by the Lord **Jesus** in **Mat. 79. 8**.

If then **such be** God's **will** as to marriage how **did** **Abraham** fall so far short when **he** took other women, first **Hagar**, and later concubines (**Gen. 25. 6**)? **The** answer **is** found in the **effect** of the **Fall**, **which affected** Sarah **as well as** Abraham. **She was** afflicted with barrenness **whilst** Abraham **faced** the prospect of leaving **this** world without a son to **be** his heir (**Gen. 75. 5**). In **his** day **that was** a serious reflection on his manliness. Although God **had made** promises to Abraham in **Gen. 75. 4-21** **which he** believed, **his faith** **had** not grown sufficiently to overcome the mistaken suggestions of Sarah

that he take Hagar, her bondwoman, and raise children by her. **Abraham did indeed have a son by Hagar but one that had no place in God's promises of Gen. 15. His** hearkening to the word of Sarah **was a mistake which he later had cause to regret. But what of the moral aspects of his relationship with Hagar? Did Abraham, the friend of God (James 2. 23) commit adultery? Strictly and sadly, the answer is "yes", though whether Abraham realized that is unclear. [It seems a sweeping implication that all polygamy involved adultery -Eds. J.**

**He was so close to God that the law of Gen. 2. 24 was probably known to him. He did have one wife, Sarah, and there is no suggestion that he had other wives at the same time. [It has in fact been very seriously advanced that Keturah's marriage preceeded Isaac's birth - see NT. 1937, p. 15 -Eds. J.**

**In such a marital situation it may be safely deduced that Abraham had knowledge of the one-to-one aspect of the institution of marriage, but the embarrassment of having no son was so keen that this good man lapsed from the sanctity of marriage inherent in the primeval law. He did not transgress any statute law (e. g. the law of Moses), for he lived in days when no law was given. "For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed where there is no law" (Rom. 5. 13). The error of Abraham was not lawlessness but a failure to maintain the beautiful type of Christ and His church which the primeval law contained, and which is more clearly brought out in the married life of Isaac and Rebekah who were chosen by God to be themselves types of Christ and His church. At this point it may be useful to point out that in Gen. 22 we have typical teaching of Christ the sacrifice; in Gen. 23 of the setting aside of Israel nationally as typified by the death of Sarah; in Gen. 24 of the bringing in of the Gentile as represented by the bride from the far country; and in Gen. 25 of the future recall of Israel as seen in Abraham's marriage to Keturah who bore him sons.**

**What then can be said of Abraham's having concubines as stated in Gen. 25. 6? This, sadly, is further evidence of the effect of the Fall on Abraham and of his weakness in a time of loose living by others around him. The Lord saw these things and, without a doubt, found them distasteful. But He forbore judgement in order that His purposes in Christ might take their course even in the Book of Genesis. It may be that**

Abraham's weakness in marital matters **is the root cause of the need for the Lord to prove Him as** recorded in Gen. 22. 1. **[ Is this so? What do others think? - Eds. ]**

To Abraham's eternal credit **his faith stood that severe test and a beautiful piece of typical teaching about God's "only Son" has come down to us in the Scriptures.**

In **all** our thinking about marriage and related **subjects we** need ever to **keep** in mind **the** spiritual importance of **the** typical teaching of Christ and **His** church **which** began in Gen. 2. 24, **was stated with** utmost clarity in **Eph. 5. 22-33** and **is** described in Rev. 79. 1-10. **J. J. Park**

### **THE PROBLEM OF THE UNJUST STEWARD**

**(Luke 76. 1-13)**

In response to **the** invitation for further comments on **this subject** (November issue, p. 161) **we** welcome **this** contribution from J. H. Johnson (Galston).

**Suggested answers to the four questions raised:**

1. **It is** not **"the Lord"** who commends **the** unrighteous steward, **but "his lord"** (R. V. ). Men tend to **admire** cleverness rather than honesty, even **the** cleverness of criminals. In **the** eyes of many, **the real crime is in being caught.** Being a son of **this** world, **the** steward's lord thought **as** they do, even though **he was the loser (Ps. 49. 18).**
2. **The Lord did** not say, **"the sons of this world are** wiser than **the sons of light", but inserted the** important qualification, **"for their own generation"; this changes the** sense completely, meaning **"in the eyes of the unregenerate" - for them the** getting and laying up of treasure on **earth are the** important things.
3. **a) "I say unto you" is** an authoritative way of speaking, not an ironical statement (c. f. Mat. 5. 20, **22, 26, 28** etc).
- b) "The mammon of unrighteousness" is wealth - the** "stronghold" of **the** unrighteous (c. f. Ps. **52. 7** R. V. M. ).
- c) Disciples were to use their wealth** or money to **help** those in need; **it was** not to **be a god in which to trust - "Trade ye therewith"** (c. f. **Acts 4. 32-37; 2 Cor. 8. 1-15; 9. 13, 14).** To gain affection through helping someone financially **is to trade** well.
4. **"When it shall fail"** simply **refers to the** end of **life - "we** brought nothing into **the** world, for neither can **we**

carry anything out" (1 Tim. 6. 6), but we go to be welcomed into the eternal tabernacles. There will be a warm welcome for all believers, but the welcome for some will be warmer than for others, just as for some there is richly supplied "the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 7. 11).

[These are thoughtful suggestions, calling for careful analysis, and we shall be glad to receive further views from other readers -Eds.]

### THE DEATHS OF SARAH AND ABRAHAM

(Genesis 23. 1-20; 25. 1-10)

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —Sarah died at the age of 127 years and is the only woman whose age at death is recorded, and whose burial is given in detail. This is probably because she was the mother of the promised seed. She lived and died in faith, identifying herself with her husband when he received the call of God in Ur of the Chaldees (Is. 57. 2). She was younger than Abraham by ten years. Thus Abraham dying when 175 years old survived his wife by 38 years.

Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba (22. 19) and he came to Hebron where Sarah died. Does this indicate a time of separation for some reason? [Comment 1]. Canaan was given to Abraham by promise, yet Abraham viewed himself as a stranger among the people of the land. Thus he asked for a portion of land from the Hittites to bury his dead. Abraham's objective was to bury, not cremate. The glorious truth of resurrection was in view; for these noble men and women, who included Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah (35. 27-29; 49. 29-32), were looking for and desired a better country, that is, a heavenly.

Abraham secured the field with the trees thereof by a firm contract. Ephron the Hittite would have gladly given it to him, but Abraham would not have it so. As a man separated to God he must pay the price. The name Machpelah means "double" or "double over" and is derived from the word "kaphal" as in Ex. 39. 9; 26. 9. This may give the idea of a double cave, or double entry - a way in and a way out with resurrection in view. Abraham, after Sarah's death, married again. This seems a little strange, but stranger still that he should beget six sons, [see answer to question from Melbourne]. When Abraham died at 175 years old his two sons

born earlier **buried** him. **It was good that Isaac and Ishmael** were together to honour their revered **father at his death. He died "in a good old age" - his body. He was "gathered to his people" - his soul.** Being "gathered to his people" cannot mean **that he was buried with his fathers** in Mesopotamia. The expression **seems** to indicate **that his soul was taken to the place** where **all those who had died in faith** were **gathered**, namely **upper Sheol**. The saints of **this age at death** are seen **as being "at home", which** literally means "to be among one's own people" (2 Cor. 5. 8). Abraham **gave up the ghost. What does this mean?** [Comment 2]. **We suggest Abraham did not give up his life** of himself. **The Lord alone did this. Thus Abraham's life was taken from him by the faithful Creator** whose prerogative **it is to give and to take away life. As we take leave of this great man and woman, we would honour them with a fitting scriptural epitaph: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 7/6. 15). E. B., G. A. J.**

**From Barrhead.** —**We** noticed in regard to **Abraham** and in connection **with the death** of Sarah two principles by **which he was governed.** The first **was his dealing with the men of the world in the purchase of the field and the cave of Machpelah as a burying place for the body of Sarah, in that he acted** honestly and maintained moral integrity, being a debtor to no man, fulfilling **the scripture, "Owe no man anything".** It also indicated **his faith that in the ages to come God's promise about the land of Canaan would be fulfilled.**

In **regard to the cave of Machpelah** the bodies of **these beloved saints** would go into **the cave** then go through and finally come out in triumphant resurrection glory. **It was also said that six in all** were buried in **this cave,** namely Abraham and Sarah, **Isaac and Rebekah** and Jacob and **Leah.**

Reference **was made to the unique place Sarah had,** her name being changed from Sarai to Sarah (Princess). Sarah **filled a place** in the genealogy of **the woman's Seed. The dispensational aspect was viewed** too in Gen. **22, 23 and 24. All that Abraham did was motivated by faith.** Heb. **77. 13** fully confirms this. **The land was still in prospect and his seed** would soon possess it.

"Precious in **the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints**" **is fitting as a tribute to the man of faith, the friend of God, the father of the faithful. A marvellous day it will be**

when he shall see the city of which God is the builder. For the saints of this dispensation is the exceedingly great promise "that it doth not yet appear what we shall be".

*William Fullarton*

*From Birkenhead.* — Abraham, upon the death of Sarah, negotiated the purchase of a field with a cave in which to bury his wife. He purchased the field rather than accept it as a gift, so that he would have control over who would be buried there, thus preserving the principles of separation from the surrounding peoples. After looking for some significance in the place of burial, we decided that it was somewhere near at hand so that Sarah could be buried within the requisite period. The transaction was carried out in the approved fashion, witnessed by the men of the place at the gate of the city (c. f. Ruth 4).

As Abraham's life drew to a close he made preparation for his death. The children of the concubines were sent away, as it was considered they would be a hindrance to Isaac. After leaving gifts to the sons of the concubines he left the residue to Isaac, the heir according to promise [Comment 3]. The details of Abraham's death led us to explore the Old Testament teaching on life after death. His body was buried in the field purchased from the sons of Heth. His spirit returned to God (Eccles. 72. 7) and his soul was gathered to his people. This was concluded to be in upper Sheol on the basis of Luke 76. 22, 23. As to its locality, the view was that it was within the earth on the basis of Jacob's words (Gen. 42. 38) and the experience of Korah (Num. 26).

*B. M. Turner, R. D. Williams*

*From Derby.* — The conception and birth of Isaac was a work of divine power. God has since favoured barren women with children, for example Rebekah, and the mothers of Samson and John the Baptist. Sarah suffered disability on three distinct counts. She was barren, it had ceased to be with her after the manner of women, and she was past the age, but "she counted Him faithful who had promised" (Heb. 77. 11). Detailed circumstances of age, death and burial are not noted in Scripture about any other woman.

We had some discussion about the expression "gathered to his people" associated with the death of Abraham. We thought this expression involved more than the burial of his

body. In Gen. 49. 29-31 we read two different phrases namely, "I am to be gathered unto my people" and "Bury me with my fathers". We thought the expression "Bury me with my fathers" meant the disposal of the body, whereas "gathered unto my people" would indicate the destiny of his soul. God alone has the prerogative as to the destiny of the soul, "Unto Jehovah the Lord belong the issues from death" (Ps. 68. 20). In Luke 16 Abraham is heard speaking from upper Hades, which the Lord Jesus called Paradise in Luke 23. 43. After the descent of the Lord into this Paradise below, He led forth a multitude of captives who by His great power were translated to a position far above the starry heavens. It was to Paradise, the third heaven, the beloved apostle Paul was caught up. So Abraham, and all of like precious faith, we believe to be where we, in God's mercy, hope to be when the earthly house of this bodily frame is dissolved. We have seen ourselves as part of the great host of the spiritual seed of Abraham. More precious still, we are made joint-heirs with Christ who is the chief of all Abraham's seed, the great restorer of Israel in a day still future, and of a remnant at this present time according to the election of grace (Rom. 9. 27 and 7 7. 5). G. Conway, S. R. W.

*From Lagos.*—The closing scenes of the life of Abraham and Sarah are presented to us in Gen. 23 and 25. There are two places of interest mentioned, Kiriath-arba and the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre (vv. 2, 9). These two places are identified with Hebron. Hebron means association or fellowship. This is the place where Abraham had built the altar to the Lord and where also he had pitched his tent for many years (Gen. 73. 18; 74. 13). At least sixty years had passed since Abraham became associated with Hebron. He dwelt there as "a stranger and a sojourner" (v. 4). His only possession, of all the lands of Hebron, was a burying place. In Hebron, therefore, the patriarch Abraham would be a burning light of testimony to many of his contemporaries. Of them it could be said, "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names" (Ps. 49. 11). "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 72. 15). When the children of Heth said to Abraham, "Hear us, my Lord: thou art a prince of God among us" (v. 6, R. V. M.), it was the

**highest** commendation they could **give** to **Abraham** and **Sarah**, not **because** of the greatness of their material possessions **but** because of the very sweetness of their lives in their midst.

From the time when the God of glory appeared to **Abraham** until the time of **Sarah's** death was about **62** years and to the death of **Abraham** **100** years. [This calculation is doubtless based on **Abraham's** age as stated in Gen. 72. 4, **but** would not the appearance of the God of glory (**Acts 7. 2**) have been significantly **earlier**? *Eds*]. **Abraham** and **Sarah** were "joint-heirs of the **grace** of **life**" and the very closeness of their walk with God and in company with each other made the death of **Sarah** greatly felt by **Abraham** as bespoken in his mourning and weeping for her (v. 2).

S. Coker, E. Bassey

*From Leeds.* —In our final consideration of **Abraham** we come face to face with "the last enemy that shall be abolished", and are reminded of the One who "abolished **death**, and brought **life** and incorruption to **light** through the **gospel**" (1 Cor. 75. 26; 2Tim. 7. 10).

The **death** of **Sarah** took place at **Kiriath-arba** (Hebron) which was about **30** miles from **Beer-sheba**, the place at which **Abraham** was formerly located (Gen. 22. 19), and we read in 23. 2 that **Abraham** came to mourn for her. It is evident that even at the latter end of his life **Abraham** was still a stranger and a sojourner in the land, as the people of **Israel** were later enjoined to be (Lev. 25. 23). **Abraham** did not put down permanent roots in the land; he was ever a tent-dweller. We are reminded that this is the divine order, "strangers and sojourners", and whilst we in our day may establish ourselves in permanent homes, our true home is in heaven (Phil. 3. 20; 2 Cor. 5. 1. c. f. Gen. 23. 4, 1 Chron. 29. 15, and 1 Pet. 2. 11).

**Abraham** lived **38** years after the death of **Sarah** and during this period he took another wife **Keturah** (Fragrance). Of the children born from this union only one, **Midian**, appears later in **Scripture**. While he lived (25. 6), **Abraham** made provision for **Isaac** his "only" son. As he had sent away **Hagar** and her son **Ishmael** (27. 14) so he sent away the sons of his concubines eastwards.

We noticed that **Abraham's** death brought together **Isaac** and **Ishmael** (25. 9) and that they, together, buried his body.

**Abraham's death, at the age of 175** would have been after the birth of Isaac's children, Jacob and Esau. Abraham would have been strengthened by this further evidence of God's promise being fulfilled through his "only" son and of his seed. We noted from vv. 8, 9 that we have reference to the tripartite nature of man, when Abraham (a) gave up the ghost (his spirit), (b) was gathered to his people (his soul), and (c) was buried (his body). At death, the unity of these three, spirit, soul and body, is broken and separation takes place. The spirit returns to God who gave it (Eccles. 72. 7). The soul goes to Sheol (Hades or Paradise) (Luke 76. 19-31; Acts 2. 27, 31). The body returns to earth and dust, as it was originally (Eccles. 72. 7; Gen. 3. 19). It has been said that (1) the spirit is *in* the man (1 Cor. 2. 11); (2) the body is *on* the man (2 Cor. 5. 1), and (3) the soul *is* the man (Gen. 2. 7).

*H. R. Dodge, P. M. Jefferson*

**From Liverpool.**—Sarah is the only woman whose complete age, death and burial are mentioned in Scripture. Sarah died aged 127 years in Hebron, 37 years after the birth of Isaac. Sarah has the honour of a place among the great of Heb. 7. 11. She goes down in history as a woman of faith. This is God's summary of her life, despite what we read about her failings, particularly over the promised son. It was Hudson Taylor who said, "We need not a great faith, but faith in a great God". Like Sarah our faith is not always unwavering. She is cited by Peter as an example to Christian women with respect to their relations with their husbands (1 Pet. 3. 5, 6). Abraham buried her in a bought plot, the only part of Canaan which he owned in the land which he had been promised.

Abraham's marriage to Keturah gave us some thought. Did he marry her after Sarah's death, or was she a concubine? It seems strange that a man of at least 137 years deeply grieved at his wife's death should immediately marry again and produce six children. This is all the more amazing when before the birth of Isaac, he considered his own body as good as dead (Rom. 4. 19) [see answer to question from Melbourne]. Abraham looked well after his family, but took care to see that he was doing God's will regarding Isaac. He gave all that he had to Isaac. This reminded us of our blessings in Christ (Eph. 7. 3; Rom. 8. 32).

Abraham died aged 175 years and was buried in the same place as Sarah. "Gathered to his people", we thought, re-

ferred to the soul of Abraham, and that it always meant going to Paradise or Abraham's bosom. As a contrast to this Job 27. 19 refers to some who are not so gathered. The promise given to Abraham still awaits fulfilment. The Lord Jesus said, "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 8. 11). So these patriarchs will be raised again, and given the land and more beside that was promised them so long ago.

D. J. Webster, G. S. Webster

*From Melbourne.* — Sarah had fulfilled her divinely appointed mission as the wife of Abraham and served the counsel of God in her generation in bearing Isaac and caring for him during his early life. Her work was to have repercussions not only on Isaac's descendants, but also upon the Gentile nations. We have no doubt that she was a true help-meet and worthy life-partner to him of whom Jehovah had said, "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children... after him, that they may keep the way of the LORD" (Gen. 78. 19). Sarah and that noble descendant of her line (Mary) both demonstrate before men that Jehovah is the God of the impossible. Sarah's course on earth was ended, and it was Abraham's sorrowful duty to find a place of burial for her mortal remains. As he approached the sons of Heth (descendants of Ham) he described himself as a stranger and sojourner among them. Although by divine covenant the land belonged to him and to his descendants, as yet he did not even possess a burying place. The reply from the sons of Heth indicates the respect which his godly testimony had created among those in whose presence he had lived for so many years, "Thou art a mighty prince (prince of God) among us"; and an immediate offer of the choice of their sepulchres was made. Abraham had apparently already made a decision and the choice was the cave of Machpelah. We wonder if he and Sarah had discussed this prior to her death. The meaning of the name is given in the margin as "a doubling", which could mean a double cave. We have also heard it suggested that it conveys the meaning of two openings, "a way in, and a way out". If this is so it could be a testimony to the faith of Abraham, who "looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God"; the double opening speaking of the resurrection. The price agreed was 400

talents of silver (approx. 38, 000 lb. ), but to Abraham the cave and the field, although acquired with his own money, were as an earnest of the inheritance which would yet be that of his descendants. DM., T. W. F.

*From Methil.* —Even the children of Heth acknowledged Abraham as a great "prince of God" yet he would take nothing from the world. We see this in the matter of his purchasing the field and cave to bury his dead, and we are reminded of the occasion when he refused to take even a thread or a shoe-latchet from the king of Sodom, lest he should say "I have made Abram rich". On this occasion his whole demeanour and comportment towards the sons of Heth and Ephron was honourable and commendable in every way and reminds us of the words of Paul in 2 Cor. 8. 21. Abraham in fulness of faith in the promise that God had made to him was able to make this transaction with the sons of Heth knowing that in a day to come, not only this burying ground, but the whole land would belong to him and to his seed.

We think of Abraham as the great father of all those who have exercised simple faith in the God of Abraham. Scripture speaks of him in this sense. He had such a vision of the "God of glory" that he was able by faith to eschew the things of this world, becoming a pilgrim, a sojourner and a stranger, going about from place to place with his tent and his altar, and that in the very land God had promised to him, and to his seed for ever (Heb. 77. 8—10).

All the time we are thinking of the seed (plural) that God refers to in Gen. 75. 5, 6 we must always have uppermost in our minds the Seed (singular) which is Christ (see Gal. 3. 16). Without Him and His death and resurrection, of which Isaac is indeed a wonderful type, there would be no blessing either heavenly or earthly. Everything for earth and heaven is based on the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord. He was the seed, the "grain of wheat" that fell into the ground and died, bearing much fruit (John 72. 24).

It is noteworthy how much space is given to the death of Sarah. She typifies Israel today of whom the Lord Jesus is bereft, but finds comfort in the Church of which Rebekah is a type, not the only one in Scripture (see Gen. 24. 67). Perhaps it is noteworthy too that Abraham and Sarah both exceeded the 120 years to which God had limited the span of human life (see Gen. 6. 3). *A. McIlree (Senior)*

**From Nottingham.** —The portion under consideration opens on a sad note as we read of the death of Sarah. For many years Abraham and Sarah had shared a life rich in experience as they walked with God, but it is appointed unto men once to die, and now the time had come for the parting. We can enter into Abraham's mourning and weeping sympathetically as we too have experienced separation through death. Faith triumphed, however, even at this time of sadness, and Abraham's desire to bury his dead in the land of promise is proof of this. He had the confident hope of resurrection as we too have and this must have brought a ray of light and joy into the gloom.

On turning to ch. 25 we read, with surprise, "Abraham took another wife..." The question arises, when did this happen? If the divine record follows the sequence of events chronologically then it must have been after the death of Sarah. In this, it is suggested, there is an extension of the typical teaching which has been noted in an earlier paper. After the union of Isaac and Rebekah, which speaks of Christ and the church, Abraham had further seed through Keturah. This would speak to us of the blessing that will flow to mankind through Israel after the church has been caught up. But if we are to take the events as presented as being in chronological order, how do we equate them with such statements as in Heb. 7 7. 12, "there sprang of one, and him as good as dead..." and Rom. 4. 19, "... he considered his own body now as good as dead" [Comment 4; see also answer to question from Melbourne]. It seems possible therefore that Abraham took Keturah while Sarah was still alive and before Isaac was born. We suggest there is significance in the fact that in 1 Chron. 7. 32 we have the names of the sons of Keturah and after, in v. 34, we read "and Abraham begat Isaac..." [Comment 5].

His had been a life of faith, yet Abraham may have often remembered the place and circumstances from which he had been called, not to lust after them as Lot did with Sodom, but in deep appreciation of what God had done for him. "The Lord... brought me up... out of an horrible pit... and he set my feet upon a rock, and... put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God" (Ps. 40. 1-3).

*R. Hickling*

**From Vancouver.** —Most appropriate are the words, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises... and

having confessed **that they** were strangers and pilgrims" (Heb. 77. 13). Though respected among men and loved by God **the time came** when **the words were true**, "**It is appointed unto men once to die**".

**Little is said regarding the actual deaths** of either Sarah or Abraham. Both **died in the land which God had promised** and were **buried in the same cave**. When Sarah **passed away**, Abraham, being a sojourner, **must needs purchase a burying place**, and **it would appear he had determined the location he wished**. Abraham approached **the leaders of the children of Heth** and **made known his need**. They respected **him** and regarded **him as a Prince of God** and were willing to **give him** any location **he chose**. **We note the words**, "In **the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead**; none of **us** shall withhold from **thee his sepulchre**." To **accept** would **cause him to be indebted to them**, and in addition, to **have Sarah buried in a Hittite sepulchre among the children of Heth was unthinkable**. **His answer was**, "**I am a stranger and a sojourner with you**". **He was a separated man in life** and would also **be in death** even though **it cost him much**. **Sarah was 10 years younger than Abraham**. **She died when she was 127 and Abraham when he was 175 some 38 years later**. If Gen. 25 is chronologically given, **Abraham after the death of Sarah, married again**. **We also note that Abraham had concubines**. Thus **the descendants of Abraham were many**. However, **Abraham accepted the word of God that all His promises would be channelled through Isaac**. God **had chosen a man - Abraham**, from whom would come **a nation that would be His people and He would dwell among them**. The **climax of all God's promises to Abraham would be in the coming of the Christ**. The Lord said to **the leaders of Israel in John 8**, "**Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad**". Then in **Heb. 77. 13 we read**, "**These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar**".

**J. B.**

### COMMENTS

1. (*Atherton and Leigh*). —I think **this** only means that **Abraham came from his tent, say, to where Sarah's body was lying**.
2. (*Atherton and Leigh*). —**This expression is used throughout both Old and New Testaments and describes the time when a man literally breathes out for the last time, and dies**.

3. (*Birkenhead*). —I don't know that **Abraham left anything - he seems to have done his giving while alive, like Isaac and Jacob after him.** Gen. 25. 5 says "And **Abraham gave all he had to Isaac**" and v. 6 follows **with the statement that "unto the sons of the concubines Abraham gave gifts."** **Isaac had a special place and portion - "all that he had", but there were gifts for the others too.** There is typical teaching in this, I think.

4. (*Nottingham*). —Some types like **Isaac and Rebekah** are obvious and there is a main stream of typology in our study, **but without a scriptural lead I would hesitate to make types of Keturah and her sons, or others in Abraham's household.** After **the Church is caught up will the world not have to await the Lord's coming to receive blessing? Whatever the total record is of Abraham's household and family, in God's plans Isaac is Abraham's "only son" (Gen. 22. 2).**

5. (*Nottingham*). —I support this view, and suggest **Keturah was first a concubine and then a wife.** **A. B. R.**

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*From Birkenhead:* With clear guidance that monogamy was the Divine mind, why was concubinage permitted?

**This is a very difficult question, and the Scriptures do not offer a ready answer.** Different dispensations appear to present different circumstances and **the Lord who is Sovereign permits what perplexes us** in our day. Certainly many notable men of **Scripture practised concubinage, and the remarkable story in Judges 20, 21 carries no criticism, though Phineas was High Priest.** It is worth noting that **concubinage is similar to marriage, in that the relationship was legally protected, but not so binding as marriage (Ex. 27. 9, 10; Deut. 21).** It was not regarded as adultery, and carried no penalty it seems, at the time when it was practised.

*From Liverpool:* How can we reconcile the account of Gen. 23 with Acts 7. 15, 16 and Gen. 33. 18, 19?

**Abraham bought from Ephron, and Jacob from the sons of Hamor, and Stephen brings both transactions together in Acts 7. Abraham and Jacob were laid in one tomb and Joseph in the one bought by Jacob.** Could it be that **Jacob bought "the parcel of ground" on an instruction of Abraham with money Abraham gave for the purpose?**

[Another suggestion, from "The Scripture of Truth" (Collett) is as follows:

1. According to Gen. 23. 17 **Abraham bought a cave and the field in which it stood.**
2. According to **Acts 7. 15, 16** Abraham bought *another* sepulchre; **but it is not stated that he bought the field in which it stood.**
3. According to Gen. **33. 19** Jacob, **years afterwards,** bought "**a parcel of ground**" (c. f. Josh. 24. 32) **which in all probability was the very field in which Abraham's sepulchre stood: for it appears that this field and Abraham's second sepulchre formerly belonged to the same owners.** **Eds.]**

**From Melbourne: 1. Is there any justification for the suggestion that the cave of Machpelah was one with a double opening, "a way in and a way out" and that Abraham's faith is revealed in his choice of such a burying place?**

Contributors support **this view** from the meaning of **Machpelah** and find in it a declaration of **Abraham's faith** in resurrection. I do not know of **scriptural** or other authority **which** says **the cave was** so formed or **that Abraham was** so motivated in making **his** choice, although **there is** no doubt **that Abraham believed** in resurrection.

**2. Was Keturah "another wife" as we are told in Gen. 25. 1, or a concubine, as in 1 Chron. 7. 32?**

Both, I think. **First a concubine and then after Sarah's death a wife.**

**3. Was Keturah contemporary with Sarah? Can we read Gen. 25. 1-7 as a continuation of the record of ch. 22?**

I think so. **I am happy with the present arrangement of the chapters and the sequence of the events thus presented seems natural** to me.

**See also discussion in "Needed Truth" Vol. 44 (1937) Pp. 15, 16.** **A. B. R.**