Studies in Genesis - 17

Louis T. Talbot

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/talbot-pub

Part of the Christianity Commons, and the Missions and World Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/talbot-pub/54
In chapter fifteen, which is our lesson for today, we find the first reference to God's coming unto man "in a vision," for thus He talked with Abram; and we find also God's covenant with the patriarch, whereby He reaffirmed His promise made in former years to this man of faith. In this chapter we find the first "Fear not" of the Bible; the first statement concerning Abram's justification by faith; and a remarkable prophecy of Israel's bondage in Egypt and her deliverance therefrom.

Yet further confirmation of the covenant, together with the establishment of the token of the covenant, are given in chapter seventeen—following Abram's sad experience concerning Hagar and the birth of Ishmael, as recorded in chapter sixteen. But we shall leave that to another lesson, as this fifteenth chapter alone is rich and full. However, as we read of the covenant in our lesson for today, let us refer also to the further explanation concerning it in chapter seventeen, that we may get the full meaning of God's message to Abram in the lesson before us.

"Abram the Hebrew" had returned from the rescue of Lot, had experienced the spiritual blessing from his meeting with Melchizedek, and had refused a reward from wicked Sodom's king. Perhaps he was feeling the reaction—both physical and mental—of the great strain through which he has just passed, when "the word of the Lord came unto" him "in a vision ..." Perhaps he was fearful and afraid lest the conquered kings give him further cause for alarm, lest they seek vengeance for his victory over them. Perhaps he was being tempted by Satan concerning the reward he had so magnanimously refused at the hands of a worldly king.
However these things may be, God was good to him; and He manifested His divine approval of His servant's faith and consecration when, "after these things"—after the battle, after the victory, after the blessing, after the testimony before the king of Sodom—

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (verse 1).

"The God of Glory Appeared Unto . . . Abraham"

You will remember that God had appeared to Abram when he was in Ur of the Chaldees, and had called him out. You who studied with us through the eleventh chapter will remember that, in all probability, chapters ten and eleven of Genesis mark the place where God gave up the nations. It is likely that idolatry did not begin until after the flood. At least, there is no trace of idolatry among the antediluvians; and it is likely that after the flood, from the time of the building of Nineveh and Babylon, from the time of the great leader, Nimrod, who was "a hunter of souls" before the Lord—it is likely that at that time idolatry began.

In the first chapter of Romans we learn that "God gave up" the nations because they chose to make their own gods, because they had deliberately given up the knowledge of the true God. And so the human race was left without the knowledge of God.

Now when God called Abram, He began the revelation of Himself; He began to reveal Himself again to the human race. He spoke to Abram, calling him out of idolatry, even as Joshua said to Israel in his day:

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods" (Joshua 24:2).

History and archaeology tell us that the people of ancient Ur of Chaldea worshipped the moon. Whatever the form their idolatry took, Terah, the father of Abram, "served other gods." It was Stephen who told the Jewish Sanhedrin,
in his last message before his martyrdom, that “the God of glory appeared unto . . . Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran (or ‘Haran’)’’ Acts 7:2.

Now the name, “the God of glory,” is a millennial title. We read it again in the twenty-ninth Psalm. This is the thunderstorm Psalm, depicting the history of the human race as a terrible storm, the thunder rolling, the lightning flashing, things being crushed to earth, the forest bowing before the terrific wind—a picture, undoubtedly, of the history of the world. And then at the end of the storm God appears, and the last word of the Psalm is “peace.”

**God’s Purpose—Blessing upon the Race**

**through Israel**

When God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, God called him as “the God of glory.” This is His millennial name, His millennial title. And in calling Abraham, God had in view the blessing of the human race. Let me say, this morning, that when this world gets any blessing, it will get it through the Jew. What the world has today that is worth anything came from the Jew. The Jews gave us our Bible; they gave us our Saviour. What have we besides that? Through Christ we have the knowledge of God, which came through Israel. We have nothing; we are a poor, lost race, apart from what the Jew gave us. And when blessing comes, it will come through the Jewish Messiah, the King of Israel.

Until that people is gathered in and gathered back to the land which God promised Abraham, there will be no blessing for this world. We must not confuse prophecy and history. Away back in history God said by prophecy, “I will give the Holy Land to Abraham and to his people.” It was two thousand years from that time to Christ, and it is two thousand years since Christ. And now after four thousand years, Abraham’s people have their eyes fixed on the Holy Land. The progress of history never confuses prophecy. History runs in the mold of prophecy.

It was “the God of glory” who called Abraham. How Stephen knew it nobody knows, except that God told him; the Holy Spirit inspired him to say it. Moses did not say in
Genesis that “the God of glory” called Abraham, but Stephen used God’s millennial title. When “the God of glory” appeared to Abram, He had the end in view. He started from Abraham, and from him built a family; from that family a nation; and from that nation a Saviour. By that Saviour the church is saved. And by that Saviour the heavens will be peopled and the universe filled with glory and redemption song. It all began when “the God of glory” called Abraham.

My friend, you have to love the Jews whether you like them or not. Maybe you do not like them, but you must love them; for you have nothing without them. The world will go on sinking deeper into the mire, and a world war will obliterate one-third of the human race before Israel’s King shall come and put down the armies of the earth. Then men will turn their spears into pruning hooks and learn war no more. God will fill the earth with glory “as the waters cover the sea.” I had to say that much this morning for the Jew. I wish Hitler were listening in to hear it!

**GOD HIMSELF—ABRAM’S REWARD**

This same “God of glory,” the One who will yet rule as Israel’s righteous King, “came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” Thus God honored Abram’s faith and his witness before the king of Sodom. Thus He quieted any fears the patriarch may have had about possible danger from the defeated enemy.

“Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”

Except for his God-given faith, Abram had little to merit reward. Had he not, previous to this, gone down into Egypt and told a falsehood, saying that Sarah was his sister? Instead of being a blessing there, he had become a curse—as Israel always is when she is out of the will of God, as she is today.

But following this terrible failure, Abram had returned to the place of the altar, and God had given him victory and
blessing and a testimony before the world. Therefore, God, in His grace, met him and promised him reward.

It is wonderful how God deals with His people. He never deals with us according to our failures. He always deals with us after His mercy and after His grace. Even if God did not deal with us after our sins, if He dealt with us according to our failures, alone, we should not get very much. But God did not deal with Abraham according to his failures, or according to his sins. Meeting Abram on high ground, He promised him reward—and that reward was God Himself!

Somebody asked me a few days ago about rewards and about "the judgment seat of Christ." Let me say that "the judgment seat of Christ" is not "the great white throne." You, as a believer, my friend, will never stand at "the great white throne." You ask me, "Why?" Because that is the judgment place for sins, and you have no sins to be judged. Your sins were washed away in the blood of Christ; your sins were borne on Calvary; Christ put them away by the sacrifice of Himself. You could not stand at "the great white throne," because you would be out of place. But you will stand at "the judgment seat of Christ," which undoubtedly will be just after the rapture and the marriage supper of the Lamb. There Christ, with nail-pierced hands, will minister rewards to His people. If you have been faithful to what He gave you to do, if you have testified when He asked you to testify, if you have gone to a soul and led that soul to Christ when He asked you to, if you have done your work just for His glory and not your own glory, then you will receive a reward. If your service has not been thus, if you have lived for yourself, you will not be lost; you will not be judged for your sins; but you will lose your reward.

We read in the book of Revelation, "Let no man take thy crown." It is possible that God has a crown for you, which somebody else will wear. That is possible according to the Scriptures. "Let no man take thy crown." If God wants a testimony in Africa, if He chooses you to give it and you refuse to go, He will send another; for the witness of God must be given, and the church of Christ must be gathered. But the one who answered His call, will receive the crown for that service.
That, my friend, according to the New Testament, is reward. No Christian can ever have his sins brought up in heaven. His sins are buried deeper than the deepest sea—as far removed as the east is from the west. God has put them away; they are forgotten; they are under the blood of Christ; they will never come up again.

But for a life of service for His glory you will one day receive from Him a reward. Oh, what will it be to look into that face, and receive a crown from that hand, the hand that was nailed to the cross? To receive a word of commenda-
tion from Him for the few things you did down here, that you did just for Him alone! But just to be forever with Him will be the greatest reward of all. And that must have been in the mind of God when He said to Abram, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward”—His love, His approval, His blessing—during Abram’s earthly pilgrimage and for all eternity!

 Abram’s Boldness in Prayer

Now in this fifteenth chapter we find Abram dealing with the Lord. Taking Him at His Word, he asked,

“Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go child-
less, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Da-
mascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given
no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir”
(verses 2, 3).

God had promised him a son, and Abraham was getting old. He had been in the land many years; still he had no child. I am inclined to think that, when God appeared to him, saying, “Fear not, Abram,” he was given boldness with the Lord. My Christian friend, do you know what boldness with the Lord is? Are you afraid in prayer? Do you feel sometimes that you can not pray? Do you feel that, because of the way you live, you do not have a right to pray? Well, ask the Lord for boldness. We are God’s children. Through Christ we are children in the Father’s house. You know that a child does not have to sit in the parlor, waiting for his father to come in to speak to him. I had to do that in a home once, when suddenly a little boy rushed in through the front door, passed me in the parlor, went into the next room and

[61]
out into the kitchen. If he had wanted to, he could have gone upstairs and through all the rooms. I knew who he was. He belonged there. He was a child of that home. That is boldness—a child in the father's house.

And our Heavenly Father wants us to have boldness in His house; for does He not bid us enter into His presence without fear? Listen to His invitation:

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ..." (Heb. 10:19-22).

Abram was exercising his privilege as a child of God. Having been promised the blessing, he was not going to let it go. He became bold in prayer, and asked, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me ...?" He reminded the Lord that the promised child had not been given. Exercising great faith, he claimed the answer to his prayer. May the Lord strengthen our faith likewise, that we, too may go to Him as little children, claiming His own best will for our lives!

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

**God’s Promise to Abram Reaffirmed**

God honored Abram’s faith, and reassured him, saying that, not a servant, but a son should be his heir.

"And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (verses 4, 5).

According to an oriental custom Abram was asking God if his servant, born in his own house, should be his heir. But
God had a richer blessing for His child. Already He had promised to increase his seed “as the dust of the earth” (13:16). And now He adds to that promise the reassurance that His own descendants shall be as “the stars” of the heaven for multitude. It has been suggested that “the dust of the earth” speaks of Abram’s earthly seed; “the stars” of the heaven, of his spiritual seed—all the children of faith.

How often, when things seem dark to us, when we grow discouraged or weary or perplexed—how often at such times the Holy Spirit flashes across our minds and hearts some precious promise of our loving Lord! Oh, that we would trust Him more implicitly, more constantly.

**ABRAM’S JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH**

And now we come to the verse that is quoted at least three times in the New Testament to prove that Abram was justified before God by faith, and faith alone:

“And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness” verse 6; (cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23).

This is the first time we read, in the Bible, the words “believed,” “counted” (or “reckoned”), and “righteousness.” But Abram was certainly not the first man to believe God and to be justified by faith! Yet he has gone down in history as one of the greatest heroes of faith in the living God.

“He believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

Now that is justification. Justification is believing God. You are justified before God if you believe what God has said. And you ask me what you are to believe? You are to believe the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. That comes first. You must believe everything that God says concerning Christ, or you are not a believer. Believe that He was, in the beginning, the eternal Son of God; that He was born of a virgin; that He was without sin, perfectly holy; and that in His perfectly holy body He went to the cross to give that body a sacrifice. Unless it was perfectly
holy, it could not be a sacrifice for sin. But since there was no sin in that body, He laid it on the cross, a sacrifice for our sins. You believe that. You believe that Christ was sacrificed for you. You believe that after three days and three nights He arose from the dead, and that He ever liveth to make intercession for you. That is faith—that you receive all the testimony of God concerning His Son. And God saves you just for that. You are justified by faith.

Now Abraham was justified by faith. That is what we read here. God told him something, and he believed it. This sixth verse is one that ought to be marked in every Bible:

“And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

If you are trying to add any paltry works of yours to the finished work of Christ, my friend, then quit trying. Read the book of Romans. Read the fourth chapter, where this remarkable verse is quoted; and learn there that Abram was “justified by faith” long before the Law of Moses was given, even before he had received the covenant, with the token of the covenant, which was circumcision. Read in Romans 3:20 that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his (God’s) sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Read all of Galatians for the same clear teaching, showing the difference between law and grace. By grace we are saved through faith, and that faith is the gift of God. (See Eph. 2:8, 9.) We have nothing of which to boast. For while good deeds should be the fruit of salvation, they can never be the means of our redemption. That is the gift of God!

Herbert W. Taylor tells the story of two men who heard the message of the Cross—one a self-righteous European; the other, an American Indian, still in his paganism. Both were unsaved, but both were deeply convicted of their need of a Saviour.

A few weeks later they met. The European was restless and gloomy; the Indian, radiantly happy. After exchanging greetings and conversing a few minutes, the native American explained the difference in their state in these words:
“It is like this: A rich prince comes along and offers you a costly robe. You look at your own coat and say, ‘Ah! mine is pretty good still; I will make the best of it for a while.’ But the prince meets me, and offers this poor Indian the beautiful robe. I say, ‘This old blanket no good,’ and fling it away, and I put on at once the robe he gives.”

Thus it is with many who are trusting in their own morality or self-righteousness for their standing before God. It can never cleanse from sin! Like Abram of old, like the American Indian, all must believe God, that their faith may be counted unto them for righteousness.

FIRST JUSTIFICATION—THEN THE COVENANT!

Not until Abram “believed God” and was justified by faith did God give him the covenant. This is fundamental! Look at verse 18 of our chapter:

“In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram . . .”

First justification—then the covenant. Many erroneously teach that we have to be children of the covenant in order to be saved. But, my friends, in the covenant which God made with Abram there is nothing said about salvation; it is a covenant to give to Abram the land of Canaan and a “seed” through whom the Redeemer should come, with all the blessing included in that wonderful promise. No; you can not be saved by the covenant of God with Abram. You must go to Calvary’s cross for eternal redemption!

Do you not see that Abram was a saved man before he got the covenant from God? There is no use saying you are made a child of the covenant and on the way to salvation; because then you put “the cart before the horse.” Justification comes before the covenant; and if you are a Gentile, you have nothing to do with the covenant. It belongs to Abraham’s people, Israel.

So Abraham was justified by God. Now he was made perfect by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—by faith, because he believed God. The Lord Jesus said that “Abraham rejoiced” to see His day; “and he saw it, and was glad” (John
8:56). In Christ he was justified by faith, because he believed before he received the covenant. Receiving the covenant was a promise of the land. Justification was for himself and his standing before God.

No, my Gentile friends, you have nothing to do with the land of Palestine; but your standing before God is very important. And how do you stand this morning? Is there anybody in this radio audience who is not sure just how he stands with God? It is all by faith. If you came to this broadcast this morning a lost sinner, you can go out rejoicing that you know that everything is right between you and God. Why? Because by faith you accept the Lord Jesus; He takes your sin away; He gives you life; He gives you peace; He gives you standing with the Lord, the standing that He Himself possesses. There is nothing that you need for this standing before God, unless it is in Christ; nothing that you need but you find it in Christ. And it all comes to you by faith in Christ. So before I go any further, why not accept the Lord as your Saviour? You can do it while I am preaching; you can settle the whole matter with the Lord. If you are now sorrowful, you can go on your way rejoicing. "Abraham believed God." I believe God, and He counts it to me for righteousness.

THE COVENANT—GOD'S PROMISE TO ISRAEL

"In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (verse 18).

That is the covenant. Find salvation in it if you can. People are on their way to salvation, they say, by being made children of the covenant. You may be on your way to the Holy Land, but you can not inherit that unless you are a Jew, one of Abraham's natural seed, one of the great company to be brought back during the tribulation period and taken on into the millennium. Then God will give to Israel their land, and through Abraham bless the whole earth.

Now the full Abrahamic covenant is given in the seventeenth chapter, as we have already observed. Will you
If you want to know the complete Abrahamic covenant, you will find it in Genesis 17:6-8. This is the sum total of it:

"And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

I repeat it, find salvation in that if you can. You see it is false teaching that the Abrahamic covenant has anything to do with a man’s salvation. Abraham was a saved man before he got the covenant, because he believed God. And after God had given him the covenant, he was to be in possession of the land for all the ages to come. Israel is God’s everlasting people. What part the Gentile nations will have, we do not know; we shall find out during the millennial period, when God will place the nations where He wants them. But we do know about Israel. We know where they belong, and we know where they now are going. They are being driven back to their home, promised four thousand years ago by the Lord Himself.

Yes, God’s covenant with Abraham belongs to Israel. The blessing of Israel in the covenant is yet to be the blessing of the world. Oh, what a day that will be when God fulfils that covenant of Abraham, when He shall bring back the Jewish nation! And, my friends, they have begun their weary journey back to Jerusalem. In the thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel we read of the shaking of the bones, and then the clothing of the dry bones, the standing up of a great army, and the nation brought to life. This is happening today, before our very eyes.

**Israel's Regathering in Palestine**

I listened, while I was East, to a man who told the story of the mandate secured by England over Palestine, and how
Palestine has been given to the Jew to colonize and to have for a national homeland as in former days. The journey back to Jerusalem has begun.

You remember perhaps the story of Allenby, the general who was chosen to go to Palestine during the first World War. If anybody asks you what the result of that war was, if you search to find anything that anybody gained by the war, you will find little other than millions of lives lost and a list of debts to be counted up into billions of dollars. Nobody gained by the world war; it was a dead loss in men and money—except for the Jew. The Jew got something.

There was a man in England whose name was Dr. Weizman. He was a scientist; and in his laboratory during the war he perfected an explosive. England was looking for a new explosive, in order that she might quickly end the war. When it was presented to the English government, they asked Dr. Weizman how much he wanted. He said he would not sell it. But they said, "We must have it." Then he replied, "You may have it, but I will not sell it. What I do want is this: If at any time after this war, the English government is in a position to help the Jews go back to Palestine, let the English government help them get it." And they made a promise. It was a Jew who helped to end the war, who started the retracing of Israel's steps to that land as her national home.

You will remember that General Allenby thought of Jerusalem as a sacred city, and would not fire a shot against it. He surrounded the city. The Turks had a secret exit. They said, "We can leave at any time if the English armies are too much for us." But they found that the English had discovered their secret exit. They did not know what to do. Then one Turk, who was a Mohammedan, said, "Allenby, Allah, our God, Allah"—and they surrendered to General Allenby. Nobody knows why, and not a shot was fired. It is said that Allenby wired to King George before the city surrendered, and wanted to know what to do. King George wired back, "Get all your generals together and have a prayer meeting." You never heard of a war like that! God was working! The city surrendered. General Allenby would not
ride into the city on horseback, but bareheaded he walked into the city of Jerusalem and took it—and gave it to the Jew!

PALESTINE TODAY—"A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY"

I read just this week that Palestine, with an Arab ruling over it, and with Jews to help him, is the only country in the world that has a surplus in the treasury, with not one single pound or dollar of indebtedness. They have closed the year with $15,000,000 in the treasury. God says it is "a land flowing with milk and honey." Something like seven million cases of oranges were shipped out of Palestine this past year. The Jews are going back as fast as they can go.

We are living in a day when the hand of the Lord is very evident in fulfilling one of the greatest prophecies of all Scripture, the fulfilling of God's covenant with Abraham, as well as His later covenant with David. For just as soon as the land and the people, who have long been separated, get together, then God will raise up a throne, and send them their King!

So you have the covenant of Abraham, and the covenant with David. But let me go back once more to remind you that these have nothing to do with salvation. This is all glorious to me, and it ought to be glorious to every child of God—to realize that we stand on the very threshold of the last things. Christ undoubtedly will soon come for His church. Therefore, my friends, in the meantime, let us warn never-dying souls that they can be saved only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

WHY GOD GAVE THE COVENANT TO ABRAM

Abram "believed in the Lord," and his faith was "counted unto him for righteousness." But still he wanted a sign, or a token, that he would receive the inheritance. God had said unto him,

"I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"  
(verses 7, 8).
The vision God had given him, the Lord's own "Fear not," and His assurance of the greatest of all rewards had given Abram boldness in prayer. And now he asked,

"Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"

Now that seems to be the reason why God gave him the covenant. It should not have been necessary, when God had given His Word, that He should also give a covenant; but Abram was just like us. He needed something additional upon which to stand. It seemed that the bare Word of God was not enough, so he practically asked for something more than God's Word; and God gave him the covenant. Even then he could not wait for God to fulfil His promise, and the sad experience concerning Hagar and Ishmael followed.

It seems rather dangerous on Abram's part for him to have asked God for a yet further proof of the certainty of His Word, because God does not usually allow us to ask questions. We have to believe, to take Him at His Word.

In the New Testament we read of a similar experience. The Angel Gabriel had told Zacharias that he and Elizabeth were to have a son in their old age, to which Zacharias replied,

"Whereby shall I know this? for I a man old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him . . . behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season" (Luke 1:18-20).

Yes, Abram had boldness with the Lord in prayer; but we must remember that he was a child in the Father's house. God had made him a wonderful promise, and Abram was not going to let God go. There is such a thing as holding onto God in prayer!

**Access to God—By Sacrifice Alone**

God's answer to Abram's question, "Whereby shall I know . . . ?" teaches us, even as it taught the patriarch of old, that sinful man can have access to a holy God only on the basis of sacrifice, foreshadowing the shedding of the
blood of the sinless Son of God. Note carefully God's answer to Abram:

"And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away" (verses 9-11).

In other words, God said, "Abram, I am going to begin now to deal with you, but I want you to remember that you can approach Me only by sacrifice." Hitherto, God had spoken to Abram; but now He was going to deal with him. God was going to do things for Abram, but He could meet him only on the basis of the shed blood. This is a fundamental lesson for us to learn, my friends, that only as we bring to God the atoning blood can we have approach to the Lord. Only by faith in "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," can we have any dealings with Him.

My Christian friend, remember this when you pray. Perhaps you have had a day of failure; and when you reached home in the evening, you felt that you had not done what you should have done during the day. Perhaps you felt that this neglect on your part would interfere with your prayer. No, your access to God depends upon what Christ has done for you on Calvary's Cross. You may have been a disobedient child, but you are the Father's own child, by faith in His beloved Son. You have a right to go to the Father, tell Him all about the day, and get all the confusion out of your mind. And then you can pray, not on the foundation of your goodness, but on the foundation of the shed blood of Christ. You will find every time that you have access to your loving Father. That, I think, is what God meant when He said to Abram, "Now before I start to deal with you, bring Me a sacrifice." The animals were killed; their blood was shed; and they were laid upon the altar.
"And when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away."

In this act Abram was exercising great faith, for the fowls (vultures) represent Satan’s hosts; whereas this offering was presented unto the Lord! Abram would not let Satan rob God! And how Satan does try to rob God and man of the blessings of Calvary! By fire and water and sword; by doubt and criticism and ridicule; by “science falsely so called”; by every evil device the enemy of God and man would deny the only Lord and Saviour! But Abram, by faith, drove the fowls away, and so should we do likewise!

A Prophetic Outline of Israel’s History

In the verses which follow the record of Abram’s obedience in providing the animal sacrifice, we read a remarkable prophecy that outlines Israel’s history for more than four hundred years; and, typically, down through the centuries. Except for the first promise of the coming Redeemer, recorded in Gen. 3:15; and except for God’s promise to Abram of a nation and a Saviour, written in Gen. 12:1-3; we might say that Gen. 15:12-17 marks the beginning of prophecy. Certainly it is the first detailed prophecy concerning God’s chosen people, Israel; and a large portion of the prophetic Scriptures has to do with the Hebrew nation.

Indeed, the Bible is a prophetic Book. It tells us how Israel began; it tells us the history of Israel; it tells us what God has done through Israel; it tells us what He will yet do through Israel. We cannot put any nation before Israel. It is ignorance that tries to exalt any other nation at the expense of the Jew. What do we have in the Bible? Why, right from here in our lesson today we have a marvelous list of prophetic utterances, all beginning with one man whom God took when his body was dead, as to nature, and by a miracle gave him a son. Through that son God built a nation. Through that nation He gave us a Saviour and a Book. And through that nation He will fill the earth with glory! And it all began here in Genesis. Therefore, I think you may mark this in your Bible as the beginning of detailed prophetic utterances concerning God’s chosen people; for here He gave to
Abraham an outline of Israel’s history. It is a glorious future that awaits Israel; yet how much of suffering precedes the glory!

Now let us read the prophecy of verses 12-17:

“And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their’s, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.”

In the "deep sleep" and the "horror of great darkness," together with the awakening therefrom, God seems to have been teaching Abram that he was to die before receiving the inheritance, but that there awaited him a sure resurrection; and that the inheritance would be received through suffering. Israel was to go through the furnace of affliction in Egypt before deliverance on the night when the paschal lamb was offered. Even so, by the suffering and death and resurrection of "Christ, our Passover," and by that alone can Jew or Gentile be saved.

1. The Prophecy of the Egyptian Bondage. When God told Abram that his seed should be “a stranger” in a land that was not theirs, afflicted “four hundred years,” He spoke of the Egyptian bondage. And in so doing, He mentioned the actual number of years of Israel’s servitude.

The age in which we live has no time limit. It can run on, because God’s Jewish clock has stopped. When He deals with His people Israel, He is dealing according to years. But when Israel is out of God’s will, as they are today; and when God does something else, as He is now gathering the church; then the Jewish clock is stopped.
Somebody asked me about the end of this age. My friends, the only thing I know that is preventing the Lord Jesus Christ from coming at any moment is the completion of the church. There is no time limit. All of these attempts at seeking a time for the end of the present age and the coming of Christ have no foundation whatever in the Scriptures. After the church is taken to heaven, then those who know the prophetic Word of God will know when Christ is coming back to reign. We know already how long the millennium will be, for “millennium” means “a thousand years.” We know how long the tribulation period will be. If Israel had understood Daniel in Daniel’s day, they would have known their Messiah was coming the first time; because when He died on the cross, it was exactly at the end of sixty-nine of Daniel’s seventy “sevens” of years. The seventieth “week” or “seven” is yet to be fulfilled during the tribulation period. But now, my friends, you can hasten the coming of Christ by going out to preach. The more missionaries there are to go with the Gospel, the sooner the church will be gathered. I know of nothing preventing Christ’s coming for the church, except that the church is not yet completed. After that God’s clock will start again. God said to Abram, “Your people will be in bondage four hundred years.” So they were down in Egypt under the Pharaohs until Moses led them out by a great deliverance four hundred years later.

When we remember that God gave this prophecy to Abram before Isaac was born, long before Jacob and Joseph and his brethren lived, we realize the miracle of it. For Jacob was an old man when he and his family—seventy souls in all—went down to sojourn in the land of Egypt, because of the great famine.

As long as Joseph and the good Pharaoh lived; that is, for thirty years, Israel was treated well in Egypt. But that Pharaoh died, and “there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). And then the servitude for Israel began. For the story we need only read the opening chapters of Exodus, a literal fulfillment of God’s prophecy to Abram!

It must have been great faith, indeed, that enabled Abram to trust God for a prayer that would be answered
only after four hundred years! But he "believed God."

Whether he realized it or not, the Lord was going to bless Israel during her sojourn in Egypt, even through all the suffering. From a big family of seventy souls they grew into a great nation of 600,000 men able to bear arms (Exod. 12:37), to say nothing of women and children. They must have numbered at least two million souls when they left Egypt. Again, they had access to all the wisdom and learning of Egypt when Egyptian civilization was at its height. And yet again, through the mighty power of God, by the hand of Moses, Israel learned something of God's omnipotence, as well as His love for His people. It behooved Abram to wait patiently, even four hundred years, for God to work on behalf of Israel, yet it does take great faith for one to wait long for answered prayer!

2. The Prophecy of Judgment upon the Egyptians. Let us read again verse 14:

"And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance."

You remember how God told Israel to ask of the Egyptians gold and silver. The word used in our King James Version of the Bible is "borrow," but the literal Hebrew word is "ask." God would not tell His children to "borrow" what they did not expect to pay back. But Israel had worked long and hard, building "treasure cities" for Israel, as slaves driven by cruel taskmasters. Therefore, God told them to "ask" for what they had earned.

The Egyptians were so glad to get rid of them by the time the ten plagues had swept over the land, that they gave them everything they asked. Then when the Egyptians went after Israel to bring them back (because they had their wealth), God judged the Egyptians and they were overthrown in the Red Sea. Thus God delivered His people, fulfilling to the very letter, all that He had told Abram so long before He was going to do. Such is prophecy, fulfilled to the very letter; and thus did Israel, after four hundred years' bondage, "come out with great substance." And that is why
the Psalmist wrote, saying that God “brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes” (Psalm 105:37).

3. The prophecy of Long Life for Abram. God reassured His servant, saying,

“And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.”

So Abram knew that he was going to be an old man before he died. Many people would like to know that. Oh, how even Christians are afraid of death! May the Lord deliver us from that. For “to depart, and to be with Christ . . . is far better!” (See Phil. 1:23; cf. II Cor. 5:8.) Abraham lived to be one hundred and seventy-five years of age, and then he “was gathered to his people” and to the Lord. As Friend to friend, God told him in this prophecy all these things.

4. The Prophecy concerning the Iniquity of the Amorites. The prediction of verse 16 is very significant:

“But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”

These words suggest to us a likely reason why God is waiting before executing judgment upon gross sin and wickedness in all its forms today. He is waiting for things to ripen. God has to wait until sin heads up to a certain place before He judges it. Things look very ripe for judgment to me now. We are told in the book of Revelation that God will send forth a reaper into the earth to reap when “the harvest of the earth is ripe.” (See Rev. 14:15.) That word “ripe” is really “overripe.” It seems to me that things are overripe now in the world. I have never seen things as they are now, in the fifty years that I have been in this world. It seems to me that this thing from the pit called nudism is the “ripest” thing known. It is so ripe I think it is revolting. That is my opinion. When evil men introduce a bill in the Assembly to permit people to go nude, I think the harvest of the world is ripe, indeed! That is what I think—and I want you to know where this minister stands, because there
is another so-called minister at the head of that cult. God said to Abram, "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." When sin heads up and gets ripe—and sin is raising its head to heaven, one nation putting God out, another nation taking a whole country, merely thieving a great country from its rightful owners—when the cup of iniquity is full, then the harvest of the world will be ripe. Let us get ready for the coming of the Lord.

Here we have also another proof of the accuracy of God's prophecies and their fulfillment. God told Abram that his people would leave Egypt "with great substance" in "the fourth generation." As we turn to the record in Exodus 6:16-20, we find that these four generations are named: Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses and Aaron. Levi, we know, was the son of Jacob who went down to Egypt in the time of famine. His son, Kohath, was the father of Amram, the father of Moses and Aaron. Thus it came to pass that "in the fourth generation" Israel left Egypt, even as God had said to Abram. God's Word is ever, always, infallible!

5. The Prophecy of Israel's Testimony to God. Even through Persecution. The miracle that followed all these words of the Lord was also prophetic of Israel's future.

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces."

God was saying to Abram something like this: "Abram, your people are going to have two experiences. They are going to be a smoking furnace; that is persecution. And they are going to be a burning lamp; that is, testimony." And truly Israel has been both! The Jew has been in the fires, passing through the furnace; but where do we get our light but from the Jew? Who gave us the Light of the world? Israel, then, was to be what? A smoking furnace. Pity the Jews. Pray for Israel. Get down on your knees and ask God to hasten the day of their deliverance. They did more for you than any other people. The Word of the Lord said, "A smoking furnace," and then a brightly "burning lamp"—light for all the world. Our Saviour is the Lion of the
Tribe of Judah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Truly God has fulfilled His Word! And even though His earthly people will yet go through their darkest day of tribulation, yet before them shines the ray of hope and eternal glory—when they accept their Messiah and King.

In that day God's covenant with Abram will be completely fulfilled. Never in all her history has Israel occupied all the land God gave to Abram, "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (verse 18). But that day of full and complete possession of all the land included in God's covenant with Abram will yet come to pass as surely as the night follows the day.

Are you going through deep waters and fiery trials, my Christian friend? Take courage, for the God of Abraham is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). He is the same God who, as a "burning lamp," even "the Light of the world," walked with the three Hebrew children through the fiery furnace. His name is called Jesus, the eternal Son of God; and as the Triune God was Abram's "shield and exceeding great reward," so also will He go with you and be your portion, whatever trial you may be called to endure. Trust Him ever, for His promise never faileth:

"Fear not: for I have redeemed thee... when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour" (Isa. 43:1-3).

Having been justified by faith, you may hear God saying to you, as He said to Abram many centuries ago,

"Fear not... I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

[23]