

Lesson 7

The Covenant With Abraham

Sabbath Afternoon, May 7

In a vision of the night the divine Voice was again heard. “Fear not, Abram,” were the words of the Prince of princes; “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” But his mind was so oppressed by forebodings that he could not now grasp the promise with unquestioning confidence as heretofore. He prayed for some tangible evidence that it would be fulfilled. And how was the covenant promise to be realized, while the gift of a son was withheld? “What wilt thou give me,” he said, “seeing I go childless?” “And, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.” He proposed to make his trusty servant Eliezer his son by adoption, and the inheritor of his possessions. But he was assured that a child of his own was to be his heir. Then he was led outside his tent, and told to look up to the unnumbered stars glittering in the heavens; and as he did so, the words were spoken, “So shall thy seed be.” “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” Romans 4:3.

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 136, 137.

When Abraham was nearly one hundred years old, the promise of a son was repeated to him, with the assurance that the future heir should be the child of Sarah. But Abraham did not yet understand the promise. His mind at once turned to Ishmael, clinging to the belief that through him God’s gracious purposes were to be accomplished. In his affection for his son he exclaimed, “O that Ishmael might live before Thee!” Again the promise was given, in words that could not be mistaken: “Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him.”

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 146.

God conferred great honor upon Abraham. Angels of heaven walked and talked with him as friend with friend. When judgments were about to be visited upon Sodom, the fact was not hidden from him, and he became an intercessor with God for sinners. His interview with the angels presents also a beautiful example of hospitality.

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 138.

The greatest victories gained for the cause of God are not the result of labored argument, ample facilities, wide influence, or abundance of means; they are gained in the audience chamber with God, when with earnest, agonizing faith men lay hold upon the mighty arm of power.

True faith and true prayer—how strong they are! They are as two arms by which the human suppliant lays hold upon the power of Infinite Love. Faith is trusting in God,—believing that He loves us, and knows what is for our best good. Thus, instead of our own way, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership, and accepts its blessings.

—*Gospel Workers*, p. 259.

Sunday, May 8: The Faith of Abraham

To the curious crowd pressing about Jesus there was imparted no vital power. But the suffering woman who touched Him in faith received healing. So in spiritual things does the casual contact differ from the touch of faith. To believe in Christ merely as the Saviour of the world can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere assent to the truth of the gospel. True faith is that which receives Christ as a personal Saviour. God gave His only-begotten Son, that I, by believing in Him, “should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. When I come to Christ, according to His word, I am to believe that I receive His saving grace. The life that I now live, I am to “live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20.

Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction, by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which, through the grace of Christ, the soul becomes a conquering power.

—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 62.

The patriarch begged for some visible token as a confirmation of his faith and as an evidence to aftergenerations that God’s gracious purposes toward them would be accomplished. The Lord condescended to enter into a covenant with His servant, employing such forms as were customary among men for the ratification of a solemn engagement. By divine direction, Abraham sacrificed a heifer, a she-goat, and a ram, each three years old, dividing the bodies and laying the pieces a little distance apart. To these he added a turtledove and a young pigeon, which, however, were not divided. This being done, he reverently passed between the parts of the sacrifice, making a solemn vow to God of perpetual obedience. Watchful and steadfast, he remained beside the carcasses till the going down of the sun, to guard them from being defiled or devoured by birds of prey. About sunset he sank into a deep sleep; and, “lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him.” And the voice of God was heard, bidding him not to expect immediate possession of the Promised Land, and pointing forward to the sufferings of his posterity before their establishment in Canaan. The plan of redemption was here opened to him, in the death of Christ, the great sacrifice, and His coming in glory. Abraham saw also the earth restored to its Eden beauty, to be given him for an everlasting possession, as the final and complete fulfillment of the promise.

As a pledge of this covenant of God with men, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, symbols of the divine presence, passed between the severed victims, totally consuming them. And again a voice was heard by Abraham, confirming the gift of the land of Canaan to his descendants, “from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.”

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 137.

Monday, May 9: Abraham's Doubts

Abraham had accepted without question the promise of a son, but he did not wait for God to fulfill His word in His own time and way. A delay was permitted, to test his faith in the power of God; but he failed to endure the trial. Thinking it impossible that a child should be given her in her old age, Sarah suggested, as a plan by which the divine purpose might be fulfilled, that one of her handmaidens should be taken by Abraham as a secondary wife. Polygamy had become so widespread that it had ceased to be regarded as a sin, but it was no less a violation of the law of God, and was fatal to the sacredness and peace of the family relation. Abraham's marriage with Hagar resulted in evil, not only to his own household, but to future generations.

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 145.

God gives light to guide those who honestly desire light and truth; but it is not His purpose to remove all cause for questioning and doubt. He gives sufficient evidence to found faith upon, and then requires men to accept that evidence and exercise faith.

He who will study the Bible with a humble and teachable spirit will find it a sure guide, pointing out the way of life with unfailing accuracy. But what does your study of the Bible avail, brethren and sisters, unless you practice the truths it teaches? That holy book contains nothing that is nonessential; nothing is revealed that has not a bearing upon our actual lives. The deeper our love for Jesus, the more highly we shall regard that word as the voice of God directly to us.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 303.

You need not go in uncertainty and doubt. Satan is at hand to suggest a variety of doubts, but if you will open your eyes in faith you will find sufficient evidence for belief. But God will never remove from any man all causes for doubts. Those who love to dwell in the atmosphere of doubt and questioning unbelief can have the unenviable privilege. God gives sufficient evidence for the candid mind to believe; but he who turns from the weight of evidence because there are a few things which he cannot make plain to his finite understanding will be left in the cold, chilling atmosphere of unbelief and questioning doubts, and will make shipwreck of faith. . . . Jesus never praised unbelief; He never commended doubts. He gave to His nation evidences of His Messiahship in the miracles He wrought, but there were some who considered it a virtue to doubt and who would reason these evidences away and find something in every good work to question and censure.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 232, 233.

Tuesday, May 10: The Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant

At this time the rite of circumcision was given to Abraham as “a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised.” Romans 4:11. It was to be observed by the patriarch and his descendants as a token that they were devoted to the service of God and thus separated from idolaters, and that God accepted them as His peculiar treasure. By this rite they were pledged to fulfill, on their part, the conditions of the covenant made with Abraham. They were not to contract marriages with the heathen; for by so doing they would lose their reverence for God and His holy law; they would be tempted to engage in the sinful practices of other nations, and would be seduced into idolatry.

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 138.

The faith that is unto salvation is not a casual faith, it is not the mere consent of the intellect, it is belief rooted in the heart, that embraces Christ as a personal Saviour, assured that He can save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. . . . This faith leads its possessor to place all the affections of the soul upon Christ; his understanding is under the control of the Holy Spirit, and his character is molded after the divine likeness. His faith is not a dead faith, but a faith that works by love, and leads him to behold the beauty of Christ, and to become assimilated to the divine character. [Deuteronomy 30:11-14 quoted.] “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

It is God that circumcises the heart. The whole work is the Lord’s from the beginning to the end. The perishing sinner may say: “I am a lost sinner; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He says, ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’ (Mark 2:17). I am a sinner, and He died upon Calvary’s cross to save me. I need not remain a moment longer unsaved. He died and rose again for my justification, and He will save me now. I accept the forgiveness He has promised.”

—*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 391, 392.

When Abraham had been nearly twenty-five years in Canaan, the Lord appeared unto him, and said, “I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” In awe, the patriarch fell upon his face, and the message continued: “Behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.” In token of the fulfillment of this covenant, his name, heretofore called Abram, was changed to Abraham, which signifies, “father of a great multitude.” Sarai’s name became Sarah—“princess;” for, said the divine Voice, “she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.”

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 137, 138.

Wednesday, May 11: The Son of Promise

In all ages, God has wrought through holy angels for the succor and deliverance of His people. Celestial beings have taken an active part in the affairs of men. They have appeared clothed in garments that shone as the lightning; they have come as men in the garb of wayfarers. Angels have appeared in human form to men of God. They have rested, as if weary, under the oaks at noon. They have accepted the hospitalities of human homes. They have acted as guides to benighted travelers. They have, with their own hands, kindled the fires at the altar. They have opened prison doors and set free the servants of the Lord. Clothed with the panoply of heaven, they came to roll away the stone from the Saviour's tomb.

In the form of men, angels are often in the assemblies of the righteous; and they visit the assemblies of the wicked, as they went to Sodom, to make a record of their deeds, to determine whether they have passed the boundary of God's forbearance. The Lord delights in mercy; and for the sake of a few who really serve Him, He restrains calamities and prolongs the tranquillity of multitudes.

—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 631, 632.

The privilege granted Abraham and Lot is not denied to us. By showing hospitality to God's children we, too, may receive His angels into our dwellings. Even in our day, angels in human form enter the homes of men and are entertained by them. And Christians who live in the light of God's countenance are always accompanied by unseen angels, and these holy beings leave behind them a blessing in our homes.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 342.

Christ says to His redeemed people, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (Matthew 25:34-36).

Prayers, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits . . . but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits, and grow naturally upon a good tree. . . . When hearts sympathize with hearts burdened with discouragement and grief, when the hand dispenses to the needy, when the naked are clothed, the stranger made welcome to a seat at your fireside and to a place in your heart, angels are coming very near, and an answering strain is responded to in heaven. Every act, every deed of justice and mercy and benevolence, makes sweet music ring in heaven. . . .

Every merciful act done to the needy, the suffering, is counted as though it were done to Jesus Himself. When you succor the poor, sympathize with the afflicted and oppressed, and befriend the orphan, you bring yourselves into a closer relationship to Jesus.

—*That I May Know Him*, p. 335.

Thursday, May 12: Lot in Sodom

Two of the heavenly messengers departed, leaving Abraham alone with Him whom he now knew to be the Son of God. And the man of faith pleaded for the inhabitants of Sodom. Once he had saved them by his sword, now he endeavored to save them by prayer. Lot and his household were still dwellers there; and the unselfish love that prompted Abraham to their rescue from the Elamites, now sought to save them, if it were God's will, from the storm of divine judgment.

With deep reverence and humility he urged his plea: "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." There was no self-confidence, no boasting of his own righteousness. He did not claim favor on the ground of his obedience, or of the sacrifices he had made in doing God's will. Himself a sinner, he pleaded in the sinner's behalf. Such a spirit all who approach God should possess. Yet Abraham manifested the confidence of a child pleading with a loved father. He came close to the heavenly Messenger, and fervently urged his petition.

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 139.

How was it with the rebellious inhabitants of the antediluvian world? After rejecting the message of Noah, they plunged into sin with greater abandon than ever before, and doubled the enormity of their corrupting practices. Those who refuse to reform by accepting Christ find nothing reformatory in sin; their minds are set to carry their spirit of revolt, and they are not, and never will be, forced to submission. The judgment which God brought upon the antediluvian world declared it incurable. The destruction of Sodom proclaimed the inhabitants of the most beautiful country in the world incorrigible in sin. The fire and brimstone from heaven consumed everything except Lot, his wife, and two daughters. The wife, looking back in disregard of God's command, became a pillar of salt.

—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 75.

In mercy to the world, God blotted out its wicked inhabitants in Noah's time. In mercy He destroyed the corrupt dwellers in Sodom. Through the deceptive power of Satan the workers of iniquity obtain sympathy and admiration, and are thus constantly leading others to rebellion. It was so in Cain's and in Noah's day, and in the time of Abraham and Lot; it is so in our time. It is in mercy to the universe that God will finally destroy the rejecters of His grace. . . .

. . . Since it is impossible for God, consistently with His justice and mercy, to save the sinner in his sins, He deprives him of the existence which his transgressions have forfeited and of which he has proved himself unworthy. Says an inspired writer: "Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be." And another declares: "They shall be as though they had not been." Psalm 37:10; Obadiah 16. Covered with infamy, they sink into hopeless, eternal oblivion.

—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 543–545.

Friday, May 13: For Further Reading

The Story of Redemption, “Wavering at God’s Promises,” pp. 76, 77;

Conflict and Courage, “Entertaining Strangers,” p. 50.