

## Lesson 8

### The Promise

#### Sabbath Afternoon, May 14

Abraham's great act of faith stands like a pillar of light, illuminating the pathway of God's servants in all succeeding ages. Abraham did not seek to excuse himself from doing the will of God. During that three days' journey he had sufficient time to reason, and to doubt God, if he was disposed to doubt. . . . Abraham was human; his passions and attachments were like ours; but he did not stop to question how the promise could be fulfilled if Isaac should be slain. He did not stay to reason with his aching heart. He knew that God is just and righteous in all His requirements, and he obeyed the command to the very letter. . . .

Abraham's faith was made manifest by his works. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" James 2:21, 22. There are many who fail to understand the relation of faith and works. They say, "Only believe in Christ, and you are safe. You have nothing to do with keeping the law." But genuine faith will be manifest in obedience. Said Christ to the unbelieving Jews, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." John 8:39. . . .

Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unfaltering obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false. God declared to His servant, "Now I know that thou fearest God [notwithstanding Satan's charges], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded.

It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham made answer, "God will provide Himself a lamb;" and when the father's hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man's salvation. 1 Peter 1:12.

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 153–155.

## **Sunday, May 15: Mount Moriah**

God had called Abraham to be the father of the faithful, and his life was to stand as an example of faith to succeeding generations. But his faith had not been perfect. He had shown distrust of God in concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, and again in his marriage with Hagar. That he might reach the highest standard, God subjected him to another test, the closest which man was ever called to endure. In a vision of the night he was directed to repair to the land of Moriah, and there offer up his son as a burnt offering upon a mountain that should be shown him.

At the time of receiving this command, Abraham had reached the age of a hundred and twenty years. He was regarded as an old man, even in his generation. In his earlier years he had been strong to endure hardship and to brave danger, but now the ardor of his youth had passed away. One in the vigor of manhood may with courage meet difficulties and afflictions that would cause his heart to fail later in life, when his feet are faltering toward the grave. But God had reserved His last, most trying test for Abraham until the burden of years was heavy upon him, and he longed for rest from anxiety and toil.

**—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147.**

When sin has deadened the moral perceptions, the wrong-doer does not discern the defects of his character nor realize the enormity of the evil he has committed; and unless he yields to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit he remains in partial blindness to his sin. His confessions are not sincere and in earnest. . . .

The humble and broken heart, subdued by genuine repentance, will appreciate something of the love of God and the cost of Calvary; and as a son confesses to a loving father, so will the truly penitent bring all his sins before God.

**—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 641.**

The finite minds of men are inadequate fully to comprehend the plans and purposes of the Infinite One. We can never by searching find out God. We must not attempt to lift with presumptuous hand the curtain behind which He veils His majesty. The apostle exclaims: "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" Romans 11:33. We can so far comprehend His dealings with us, and the motives by which He is actuated, that we may discern boundless love and mercy united to infinite power. Our Father in heaven orders everything in wisdom and righteousness, and we are not to be dissatisfied and distrustful, but to bow in reverent submission. He will reveal to us as much of His purposes as it is for our good to know, and beyond that we must trust the Hand that is omnipotent, the Heart that is full of love.

**—*The Great Controversy*, p. 527.**

## Monday, May 16: God Will Provide

That day—the longest that Abraham had ever experienced—dragged slowly to its close. While his son and the young men were sleeping, he spent the night in prayer, still hoping that some heavenly messenger might come to say that the trial was enough, that the youth might return unharmed to his mother. But no relief came to his tortured soul. . . . Satan was near to whisper doubts and unbelief, but Abraham resisted his suggestions. . . .

Even now he did not murmur against God, but strengthened his soul by dwelling upon the evidences of the Lord's goodness and faithfulness. This son had been unexpectedly given; and had not He who bestowed the precious gift a right to recall His own? Then faith repeated the promise, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called"—a seed numberless as the grains of sand upon the shore. Isaac was the child of a miracle, and could not the power that gave him life restore it? Looking beyond that which was seen, Abraham grasped the divine word, "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." Hebrews 11:19.

. . . With trembling voice, Abraham unfolded to his son the divine message. It was with terror and amazement that Isaac learned his fate, but he offered no resistance. He could have escaped his doom, had he chosen to do so; the grief-stricken old man, exhausted with the struggle of those three terrible days, could not have opposed the will of the vigorous youth. But Isaac had been trained from childhood to ready, trusting obedience, and as the purpose of God was opened before him, he yielded a willing submission. He was a sharer in Abraham's faith, and he felt that he was honored in being called to give his life as an offering to God. He tenderly seeks to lighten the father's grief, and encourages his nerveless hands to bind the cords that confine him to the altar. . . .

Then Abraham saw "a ram caught in a thicket," and quickly bringing the new victim, he offered it "in the stead of his son." In his joy and gratitude Abraham gave a new name to the sacred spot—"Jehovah-jireh," "the Lord will provide."

It was to impress Abraham's mind with the reality of the gospel, as well as to test his faith, that God commanded him to slay his son. . . . No other test could have caused Abraham such torture of soul as did the offering of his son. God gave His Son to a death of agony and shame. The angels who witnessed the humiliation and soul anguish of the Son of God were not permitted to interpose, as in the case of Isaac. There was no voice to cry, "It is enough." To save the fallen race, the King of glory yielded up His life. What stronger proof can be given of the infinite compassion and love of God?

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 151–154.

## **Tuesday, May 17: The Death of Sarah**

Sarah was the first and only true wife of Abraham. She was entitled to rights, as a wife and mother, which no other could have in the family. She revered her husband, calling him lord; but she was jealous lest his affections should be divided with Hagar. God did not rebuke Sarah for the course she pursued. Abraham was reproved by the angels for distrusting God's power, which had led him to take Hagar as his wife, and to think that through her the promise would be fulfilled. . . .

Abraham . . . did not reveal the true nature of his journey to Sarah, knowing that her affection for Isaac would lead her to distrust God, and withhold her son. Abraham did not suffer paternal feelings to control him, and lead him to rebel against God. The command of God was calculated to stir the depths of his soul. "Take now thy son." Then as though to probe the heart a little deeper, he adds, "thine only son whom thou lovest." That is, the only son of promise, "and offer him as a burnt-offering."

—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 104–106.

The heritage that God has promised to His people is not in this world. Abraham had no possession in the earth, "no, not so much as to set his foot on." Acts 7:5. He possessed great substance, and he used it to the glory of God and the good of his fellow men; but he did not look upon this world as his home. The Lord had called him to leave his idolatrous countrymen, with the promise of the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession; yet neither he nor his son nor his son's son received it. When Abraham desired a burial place for his dead, he had to buy it of the Canaanites. His sole possession in the Land of Promise was that rock-hewn tomb in the cave of Machpelah.

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 169.

My sickness has taught me my own weakness, and my Saviour's patience and love, and His power to save. . . . He sees our weakness, He knows how we lack faith and courage; yet He does not cast us off. He is pitiful and of tender compassion toward us.

I may fall at my post before the Lord shall come; but when all that are in their graves shall come forth, I shall, if faithful, see Jesus, and be made like Him. Oh, what joy unspeakable, to see Him whom we love,—to see Him in His glory who so loved us that He gave Himself for us,—to behold those hands once pierced for our redemption, stretched out to us in blessing and welcome! What will it matter though we toil and suffer here, if we may only attain to the resurrection of life! We will patiently wait till our time of trial ends, and then we shall raise the glad shout of victory."

—*Life Sketches*, p. 266.

## **Wednesday, May 18: A Wife for Isaac**

Abraham had become an old man, and expected soon to die; yet one act remained for him to do in securing the fulfillment of the promise to his posterity. Isaac was the one divinely appointed to succeed him as the keeper of the law of God and the father of the chosen people, but he was yet unmarried. The inhabitants of Canaan were given to idolatry, and God had forbidden intermarriage between His people and them, knowing that such marriages would lead to apostasy. The patriarch feared the effect of the corrupting influences surrounding his son. Abraham's habitual faith in God and submission to His will were reflected in the character of Isaac; but the young man's affections were strong, and he was gentle and yielding in disposition. If united with one who did not fear God, he would be in danger of sacrificing principle for the sake of harmony. In the mind of Abraham the choice of a wife for his son was a matter of grave importance; he was anxious to have him marry one who would not lead him from God.

**—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 171.**

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is that that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a veil, and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.”

**—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 173.**

One victory it is positively essential . . . to gain, [is] the victory over the stubborn will. In this struggle you can conquer only by the aid of Christ. You may struggle hard and long to subdue self, but you will fail unless you receive strength from on high. By the grace of Christ you can gain the victory over self and selfishness. As you live His life, showing self-sacrifice at every step, constantly revealing a stronger sympathy for those in need of help, you will gain victory after victory. Day by day you will learn better how to conquer self and how to strengthen your weak points of character. The Lord Jesus will be your light, your strength, your crown of rejoicing, because you yield your will to His will.

Men and women may reach God's ideal for them if they will take Christ as their Helper. Make an unreserved surrender to God. To know that you are striving for eternal life will strengthen and comfort you. Christ can give you power to overcome. By His help you can utterly destroy the root of selfishness.

**—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 49.**

## **Thursday, May 19: A Wife for Abraham**

Abraham had marked the result of the intermarriage of those who feared God and those who feared Him not, from the days of Cain to his own time. The consequences of his own marriage with Hagar, and of the marriage connections of Ishmael and Lot, were before him. The lack of faith on the part of Abraham and Sarah had resulted in the birth of Ishmael, the mingling of the righteous seed with the ungodly. The father's influence upon his son was counteracted by that of the mother's idolatrous kindred and by Ishmael's connection with heathen wives. The jealousy of Hagar, and of the wives whom she chose for Ishmael, surrounded his family with a barrier that Abraham endeavored in vain to overcome.

Abraham's early teachings had not been without effect upon Ishmael, but the influence of his wives resulted in establishing idolatry in his family. Separated from his father, and embittered by the strife and contention of a home destitute of the love and fear of God, Ishmael was driven to choose the wild, marauding life of the desert chief, "his hand" "against every man, and every man's hand against him." Genesis 16:12. In his latter days he repented of his evil ways and returned to his father's God, but the stamp of character given to his posterity remained. The powerful nation descended from him were a turbulent, heathen people, who were ever an annoyance and affliction to the descendants of Isaac.

### **—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 173, 174.**

As the Bible presents two laws, one changeless and eternal, the other provisional and temporary, so there are two covenants. The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden, when after the Fall there was given a divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. To all men this covenant offered pardon and the assisting grace of God for future obedience through faith in Christ. It also promised them eternal life on condition of fidelity to God's law. Thus the patriarchs received the hope of salvation.

This same covenant was renewed to Abraham in the promise, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Genesis 22:18. This promise pointed to Christ. So Abraham understood it (see Galatians 3:8, 16), and he trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It was this faith that was accounted unto him for righteousness.

### **—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 370.**

Abraham was a man favored of God. The Lord said: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." Abraham was honored of God because he cultivated home religion and caused the fear of the Lord to pervade his whole household. It is God who says: "I know him, that he will command"—there will be no betraying of sacred trust on his part, no yielding to anyone but God; there is a law, and Abraham will keep it; no blind affection will cloud his sense of right and interfere between God and the souls of his children; that kind of indulgence which is the veriest cruelty will not lead Abraham astray.

### **—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 547, 548.**

**Friday, May 20: For Further Reading**

*My Life Today*, “Walk by Faith,” p. 342;

*The Desire of Ages*, “The Light of Life,” pp. 468, 469.