

Article 4

The Call of Abraham : Building an Altar

Everywhere Abraham went he built an altar to the Lord. As you read this, remember that the promise that all nations should be blessed in Abraham, specified families. *The religion of Abraham was a family religion. The "family altar" was never neglected in his household.* This is not an empty figure of speech, but comes from the practice of the fathers to whom the promise was made, and of which we are partakers if we are of their faith and practice.

AN EXAMPLE FOR PARENTS

God said of Abraham, *"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; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him."* Genesis 28.19

Note the words, "He will command his children and his household after him, *and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.*" He would not simply command them to do it, and there let the matter rest; but *He would command them, and the result would be that they would keep the way of the Lord. His teaching would be effective.*

We may be sure that the commands of Abraham to his children and his household were not harsh and arbitrary. We shall understand them better if we consider the nature of the commandments of God. They "are not grievous." "His commandment is life everlasting." He who thinks to follow the example of Abraham in commanding his family, by harsh, arbitrary rules, and by acting the part of a stern judge, or a tyrant, making threats of what he will do if his commands are not obeyed, and enforcing his commands, not in the spirit of love, because they are right, but because he is stronger than his children, and has them in his power, has much need to learn of the God of Abraham. "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nature and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6.4

At the same time we may be sure that the commands of Abraham were not like Eli's, weak and querulous reproofs to his wicked and worthless sons: "Why do ye such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear." 1 Samuel 2.23,24. On the other hand, Abraham transmitted a blessing to all eternity, because the commands, which he gave to his children, had restraining power.

Abraham was to be a blessing to all people. Wherever he went he was a blessing. But this blessing began in his family. This was the centre. From the family circle the heavenly influence went out to the neighbors. And now we may well notice more closely the statement that when Abraham built an altar, he "called upon the name of the Lord." Gen. xii. 8; xiii. 4. In Dr. Young's translation this is rendered, "He preached in the name of Jehovah." Without calling attention to the various places where the same expression is found, it is worth while to note that the Hebrew words are identical with

those used in Exodus 34.5, where we read that the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood by Moses, “and proclaimed the name of the Lord.” We may therefore understand that when Abraham erected the family altar he not only taught his immediate family but he “proclaimed the name of the Lord” to all around him. Like Noah, Abraham was a preacher of righteousness. As God preached the Gospel to Abraham, so Abraham preached the Gospel to others.

ABRAHAM AND LOT

“And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” “And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdsmen of Lot’s cattle; and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee, and me and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.” Genesis 8.5-8.

When we understand the nature of the promise of God to Abraham, we can understand the secret of his generosity. Suppose Lot should choose the best part of the country; that could make no difference with Abraham’s inheritance. *Having Christ, he had all things. He did not look for his possessions in this present life, but in the life to come.* He would accept with thankfulness whatever prosperity the Lord might send him; but if his riches in this life should be small, that would not diminish the inheritance that was promised him.

There is nothing like the presence and blessing of Christ to settle all disputes, or to prevent them. In the course taken by Abraham, we have a true Christian example. As the eldest he might have stood upon his dignity, and have claimed his “rights.” But he could not have done so as a Christian. Love “seeketh not its own.” Abraham manifested the true Spirit of Christ. When professed Christians are eager to grasp the things of this world, and are troubled lest they shall be deprived of some of their rights, they show that they are unmindful of the enduring inheritance, which Christ offers.

THE PROMISE REPEATED

Abraham’s Christian courtesy, which was the result of his faith in the promise through Christ, as not unrecognized by the Lord. We read: —

“And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.” Genesis 8.14-17

We will not forget that “to Abraham and his seed were the promises made; He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and *to thy Seed, which is Christ.*” *There is no other seed of Abraham except Christ and those who are His.* Therefore this innumerable posterity, which was promised to Abraham, is identical with that spoken of in the following scripture: —

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.” “And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, what are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7.9,10,13,14

We have already learned that the blessing of Abraham comes on all nations through the cross of Christ, so that in the statement that this innumerable company have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, we see the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, of an innumerable seed. “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Galatians 3.29

The reader should not fail to notice in the repetition of the promise in Genesis 13, that *the land* figures very prominently. *We found it in the preceding chapters, and shall find it as the central feature of the promise wherever it occurs.*

ABRAHAM AND MELCHIZEDEK

The brief story of Melchizedek forms a link which unites us and our times most closely with Abraham and his times, and shows that the “Christian dispensation,” so called, existed in the days of Abraham as well as now.

The fourteenth chapter of Genesis tells us all that we know of Melchizedek. The seventh chapter of Hebrews repeats the story, and makes some comments upon it. Besides this we have references to Melchizedek in the sixth chapter, and in Psalms 110.4

The story is this: Abraham was returning from an expedition against the enemies that had carried away Lot, when Melchizedek met him, bringing bread and wine. Melchizedek was king of Salem, and priest of the Most High God. In this capacity he blessed Abraham, and to him Abraham gave a tenth part of the spoil, which he had recovered. That is the story, but from it there are some very important lessons drawn.

In the first place we learn that Melchizedek was a greater man than Abraham, because, “without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better,” (Hebrews 7.7), and because Abraham gave him the tenth part of all.

He was a type of Christ, and was like Him: “Made like unto the Son of God.” He was a type of Christ in that he was both king and priest. His name signifies, “king of righteousness;” and Salem, of

which he was king, means "peace;" so that he was not only priest, but king of righteousness and king of peace. So of Christ it is said: "The Lord said unto My Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." Psalms 110.1,4. And the name whereby He shall be called is "The Lord our Righteousness." Jeremiah 23.6

Christ's kingly priesthood is thus set forth in the Scriptures: "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord; even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." Zechariah 6.12,13. The power, by which Christ as priest makes reconciliation for the sins of the people, is the power of the throne of God, upon which He sits.

But the main thing with reference to Melchizedek is that Abraham lived under the same "dispensation" that we do. The priesthood was the same then as now. Not only are we the children of Abraham, if we are of faith, but our great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens, is by the oath of God made a High Priest forever, "after the order of Melchizedek." Thus in a double sense it is shown that "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad." John 8.56

Abraham therefore was a Christian as much as any one who has ever lived since the crucifixion of Christ. "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." But the disciples were no different after they were *called* Christians from what they were before. When they were known only as Jews, they were Christians just as much as they were after they were called such. The name is of but little account. The name "Christians" was given them because they were followers of Christ; but they were followers of Christ before they were called Christians, just as much as they were afterwards, Abraham, hundreds of years before the days of Jesus of Nazareth, was just what the disciples were who in Antioch were called Christians; he was a follower of Christ. Therefore he was in the fullest sense of the word a Christian. All Christians, and none others, are children of Abraham.

The reader will notice that in Hebrews 7 we are referred to the case of Abraham and Melchizedek for proof that the paying of tithes is not a Levitical ordinance. Long before Levi was born, Abraham paid tithes. And he paid them, too, to Melchizedek, whose priesthood is the Christian priesthood. Therefore those who are Christ's and thus children of Abraham will also give tithes of all.

It will be noticed that the tithe was a well-known thing in the days of Abraham. He gave tithes to God's priest as a matter of course. He recognized the fact that the tithe is the Lord's. That record in Leviticus is not the origin of the tithing system, but is simply a statement of a fact. Even the Levitical order "paid tithes in Abraham." We are not told when it was first made known to men, but we see that it was well known in the days of Abraham. In the book of Malachi, which is specially addressed to

those living just before “the great and terrible day of the Lord,” we are told that those who withhold the tithe are robbing God.¹

The argument is very simple: Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek; the Melchizedek priesthood is a priesthood by which righteousness and peace come; it is the priesthood by which we are saved. Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, because Melchizedek was the representative of the Most High God, and the tithe is the Lord's. If we are Christ's then we are children of Abraham; and therefore if we are not children of Abraham, then we are not Christ's. But if we are Abraham's children, we shall do the works of Abraham. Whose are we?

One other item should not be overlooked in passing. It is the fact that Melchizedek who was king of righteousness and peace, and priest of the Most High God, brought out to Abraham bread and wine, of which Christ said, “This is my body,” and “this is my blood.” It may be said that the bread and wine were for the refreshment of Abraham and his followers. Very true; but that does not in the least detract from the significance of the fact, for we are continually to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ. Melchizedek came out in his capacity of king and priest, and Abraham recognized him as such. Note the connection in Gen. xiv. 18, 19: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the Most High God. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram, of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth.” It is quite evident that the bread and wine, which Melchizedek brought forth, acquired special significance from the fact that he was the priest of the Most High God. The Jews in the days of Christ scoffed at the statement that Abraham rejoiced to see His day. They could see no evidence of the fact. May we not see in this transaction one evidence that Abraham saw Christ's day, which is the day of salvation?

¹ It should be understood that no man, nor any human power, neither the Church nor the State, has anything to do with requiring people to pay tithe. “The tithe is the Lord's” and with Him alone people have to do in the matter of tithes. Tithes do not belong to the State, nor is the State empowered to collect them for the Lord. Whether or not a person will pay the Lord's tithe to the Lord is a matter for himself alone to decide, just the same, as whether or not he will worship God at all, whether he will keep the Sabbath or not, etc.