



LESSON VI.—FEBRUARY 10, 1907.

Abraham Called to be a Blessing.

Genesis xii., 1-8.

Golden Text.

I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.—Gen. xii., 2.

Home Readings.

Monday, Feb. 4.—Gen. xi., 1-9; 27-32.
 Tuesday, Feb. 5.—Gen. xii., 1-9.
 Wednesday, Feb. 6.—Gen. xii., 11-20.
 Thursday, Feb. 7.—Isa. xli., 1-20.
 Friday, Feb. 8.—Mark x., 17-31.
 Saturday, Feb. 9.—Gal. iii., 1-14.
 Sunday, Feb. 10.—Gal. iii., 15-29.

(By Davis W. Clark.)

Four centuries and a quarter have passed since the Flood. Noah himself had been dead only seventy-five years. Yet the new race seemed as deeply sunken in sin as the old. The goodness and severity of God in the Deluge appeared to have been in vain. In the midnight gloom of a general degeneracy some few tapers, like that of Melchisedec's on Zion, were yet alight; but even these were in danger of extinction by the violence of the wicked.

The race was in revolt against God. It had built its defiant tower, whose lofty stories were to be a refuge in case of a second flood. It seemed to have learned nothing by the sudden judgment which confounded its language and scattered it abroad. The first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans gives a faithful portraiture of the moral condition of the race at this period. Though they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, were thankless, and changed His glory into an image. 'With their theoretical errors the stream of their practical transgressions rose to a fearful height.' The remains of these eldest cities of the Euphrates Valley, now being dug up, show the people given to those gross immoralities usually attendant upon heathenism. The peril was extreme that the knowledge of God would be entirely lost, and that, too, not by accident but by design. They did not like (wish or care) to retain God in their knowledge, so the foolish heart of the race was darkened.

At this crisis an ever-watchful Providence stepped in, meeting the emergency in a manner to excite the admiration of men and angels. He let the stream of human life flow on in its perverse course, not arresting it by any further general judgments. But from the great torrent foaming out its shame and casting up its mire and dirt, He took aside a little stream comparatively pure and had it run in a channel He had prepared for it, much as water is taken aside in the race to turn the mill. Here was no capricious favoritism. The design was to bless all humanity by blessing one of its families.

The proverb, 'What God does, is well done,' has no finer exemplification than in the selection of the progenitor of the new race. His very name is significant.—Abram 'exalted father.' Physically, intellectually, spiritually, he was God's man for the hour. His phenomenal virility has survived in his descendants for forty centuries. So has his intellectuality. He was ready for the glorious appearance that approached him. Then, as ever, the prepared message came to the prepared mind.

Abram was the first of pilgrim fathers, the first emigrant impelled by religious motives. He undertook his journey for conscience

sake. He left a lovely land—marvellously rich—the home of the wheat-grain, pomegranate, apple, and grape. He left the highest civilization of his day and libraries with their title-page volumes. He left country, kindred, father's house, to become henceforth a pilgrim and a stranger.

Well may his name be engraven high upon that tall obelisk, the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, among the immortal heroes of faith—for it was with faith that he heard the Divine call, and by faith he obeyed, going out, not knowing whither he went.

It pleased God to encourage and sustain his faith with exceeding great and gracious promises. God undertook to be his guide, promising to show him the land, to make of him a great nation, bless him, and make him a blessing; to make His cause his own, so that his friends should be God's friends, his enemies God's enemies. He should be the first link in that long chain of generations of which, in the fulness of time, the Messiah would be born.

Three verses suffice to describe the call; the fourth narrates the obedience. So Abram departed. A blessed adventurer, he voyaged across the sea of sand upon his ship of the desert. As Columbus landing upon the shore of the new world unfurled the standard of Spain, and took possession of it in the name of his kingly patron, so Abram, reaching at length the land of promise, built an altar and dedicated the land and its inhabitants to Jehovah.

ANALYSIS AND KEY.

1. Human degeneracy demands Divine intervention.
2. The Divine method.
 A little stream of human life.
 Directed in a special racial channel.
 No favoritism.
 The blessed one to bless all.
3. Abraham's fitness to be progenitor.
4. The first pilgrim father.
 A hero of faith.

THE TEACHER'S LANTERN.

The genesis of anything always has a peculiar fascination. We never tire of origins. This lesson brings us to the fountain-head of the most important racial stream that has ever coursed its way through history; a stream to whose bosom the oracles of God were committed for twenty centuries; a stream that bore to earth the infant Messiah, as His type once floated on the Nile. A bird's-eye view of the winding of this stream, and the possible important function it may perform in the future of the kingdom of God, will prove an attractive introduction to the lesson.

Effort should be made to portray Abraham's exalted character and his fitness for the purpose for which God employed him. Crowd his career into a nutshell. Display its salient traits—faith, resolution, courage, military tact, magnanimity, etc.; admit its blemishes, but show them mere spots on the sun. Abraham would be a good man for our age; he was superlatively good for the age in which he lived. The Bible deals faithfully with the characters it portrays. It presents its characters, not ideally, but as they actually were.

Legends concerning Abraham may be used with good effect—especially the one from the Koran which describes him as secretly nourished in a cave until he grew up. Coming to the mouth of the cave for the first time, he sees a star and cries, 'This is my god.' But the star fades before the moon, and he acknowledges the latter as his god. But when the sun rose he turned in adoration to it, until it in turn sank—then the patriarch cried: 'Neither star, nor moon, nor sun shall be my god, but He who made the heavens and the earth!' By whatever process, Abraham had shaken off the polytheism and idolatry of his fathers, and was monotheistic and Messiah-aspiring.

Through this fascinating narrative, as through a tissue curtain, one sees the Christian life spiritually portrayed. The Christian is a called one. He has heard and heeded. He breaks away from an old environment. He

makes a transition. The word Hebrew first applied to Abram (Genesis xiv., 13) is supposed to mean 'one who has crossed over,' and to refer to the passage of the Euphrates. The Christian starts for a better land, assuring his heart with the faithfulness of the Promiser. He sings:

I'm but a stranger here—
 Heaven's my home.

He shows by his manner of life that he regards himself as a pilgrim. He might go back to his old life if he wanted to—as Abraham might have gone back to Mesopotamia, but he did not. He rears his altars as he journeys on. As Matthew Henry says: 'Wherever Abraham had a tent, there God had an altar.' He is God's witness as he goes, observed of all observers, his light and salt the savor of all about him. He has but one other river to cross, and that is Jordan—and then he enters the sweet fields of Canaan.

It paid Abraham well, and that for two worlds, to obey God. Present-day obedience to God has promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

A lasting and good fame is the gift of God. 'I will make thy name great.'

Terah is the type of those who fall out by the way in the march to the land of promise. Robert Colyer says: 'Terah started for the highlands of Canaan, but he settled on a flat.'

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, Feb. 10.—Topic—Lessons from the Patriarchs. I. Noah. Heb. xi., 7; II. Pet. ii., 4-9; I. Pet. iii., 17-22.

Junior C. E. Topic.

LESSONS FROM TRIALS.
 GODLINESS.

Monday, Feb. 4.—Job's prosperity. Job. i., 1-5.

Tuesday, Feb. 5.—Job's afflictions. Job. i., 13-2; 13.

Wednesday, Feb. 6.—Job's sufferings. Job. vii., 1-11.

Thursday, Feb. 7.—Job's complaint. Job. vi., 1-9.

Friday, Feb. 8.—Job's confidence. Job. xiii., 15.

Saturday, Feb. 9.—Job's repentance. Job. xlii., 1-6.

Sunday, Feb. 10.—Topic—The story of Job. xxiii., 1, 2, 3, 10.

What the Pastor Ought to Know About the Sunday School.

On every point in the Sunday school the pastor ought to be a master. So far as the school is a piece of machinery he ought to know every wheel, pulley and band. So far as the school is a business body, he ought to know its outer and inner life, its organization, its methods and its financial management. So far as the school is an institution he ought to know its history, its strength, its purposes and equipment. So far as it is an association he ought to know its members, its spirit, its resources, and its dangers. So far as it is a school he ought to know its teaching force, its ever recurring wants and its sources of supply. In a word the pastor ought to know more about the school than any one else or all others put together.—Dr. Wm. E. Hatcher, in the 'Pastor and Sunday school.'

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