

Sabbath School Teacher.

LESSON X.

March 9, 1878.

TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

Gen. xxii. 7-14.

7. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

8. And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

9. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him upon the altar upon the wood.

10. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

12. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.

13. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

14. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.

COMMIT TO MEMORY VERSES 7, 8.

PARALLEL PASSAGES.—1 Peter i. 7; Heb. xi. 17-19.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—BLESSSED IS THE MAN THAT ENDURETH TEMPTATION (that stands the test).

With vs. 7 and 8 read John i. 29 and iii. 16; with v. 9 read Phil. ii. 6; with vs. 10-12, 1 Sam. xv. 22; and with vs. 13 and 14, Isa. liii. 7.

As, for the sake of teaching the great lessons of this narrative, and at the same time keeping the lesson short, we do not begin at the beginning, it will be proper to look at

(a) Abraham. Ever since God called him, growing in likeness to God—the great end in calling any man. (Eph. i. 4; Rom. xii. 2.) He has freely chosen good; walked in holiness; helped the weak; and now loves his son. God's teaching has increased his faith, and his faith has been rewarded. He honored God by believing, and God honors him by taking him into covenant, making him a prophet (xx. 7) and intercessor (xviii. 32).

He has now the child of promise—a possession dear beyond all expression. There is something by which his faith can be tested and his character approved.

(b) "The God," v. 1 (as it is in the Hebrew—some think to mark the distinction between this and any suggestions like that to Eve, or from his own heart.) calls; He owns all; has a right to dispose of the life he has given as he will, especially if it be sinful, and so forfeited; and if it be innocent, he can make up for suffering commanded by fitting rewards. Thus Christ—Heb. xii. 2, "joy set before him." God is not in doubt of Abraham's heart feeling. He proves him, to bring out by actual, visible, memorable experiment. The proving once endured, is good for Abraham and all his seed; and the mode of it is a standing lesson on human sacrifices. God wants the will—the visible killing, the righteousness of which man acknowledges, God provides for in his own way.

(c) The circumstances. A dream or night vision came, v. 1—after he had been prepared ("after these things") by former lessons.

The victim is to be his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved (three elements of trial—not a slave; not Ishmael; not a son in whom he had little interest).

The place is only described generally—the neighborhood of Moriah—when he is there, the spot will be indicated. So we are shown how to do a thing, when we have gone forward to the doing of it.

The manner of his compliance. Prompt; "rose up early." Ps. cix. 60. (Why do we put off repenting and believing? We dislike God's will—would not do it if we could help it.) He did not confer with Sarah. He did not ride, but walked; and was only girded to carry the wood, and probably some provisions. It was like the pack-mule of a mountain party. Two lads—servants—went along, to wait on Abraham and Isaac. It was the third day before the neighborhood was reached, i. e., next day but one. Twenty miles, it is calculated, had to be walked. Isaac must have been well grown; he could carry the wood.

The lads were left behind when Abraham had the spot shown him. His faith was, after two days' trial and exercise of it, assured. "We will come again;" not putting them off; or giving an evasive answer beforehand to questions they might ask, but accounting that somehow God would bring Isaac back; "that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." Heb. xi. 17.

Everything for a sacrifice was taken. Abraham meant it all—was in earnest—did not go through the motions merely.

And now listen to

I. ISAAC'S QUESTION.—Solennly put, like God's order in vs. 1 and 2, "where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" He saw the knife and tinder, and carried the wood, but the lamb? A natural question for him. How it must have tried his father's natural feeling! Only faith could deal with it. This question men always ask when they have to do with God: See Mic. vi. 6, 7. "The God should and a sacrifice; 'Hasty and blood' cannot think of. Rom. x. 3.

II. ABRAHAM'S ANSWER.—Men are sometimes lifted above themselves, and say more than they know. See Calpurnia, John viii. 14. Abraham would give more an-

swer, and quiet his son's mind. This was all he knew. He had a general belief that God would do what is right and good. This was founded on previous words of promise, and his own experience of God's faithfulness. "He gave a son—whom I did not see how. He will bring us through here, though I see not how." This obeying, though not seeing, is honoring to God in the highest degree. We serve, not because we see how and why, but because we hear God commanding us and feel sure that he sees. See Isa. i. 10. Doubts are best got rid of by doing. To obey gets us out of perplexity. See Ps. xxxvii. 34. "Wait on the Lord, and keep his way." &c.

III. GOD'S ANSWER.—At the right time. Picture the scene: A few stones gathered together; wood laid on them; Isaac bound—a matter of form, not force—and laid on them; the knife gleaming in Abraham's raised hand—and the heavenly voice! v. 11. The same solemn, deliberate style as at the first, but with double earnestness, "Abraham! Abraham!"

God answers by "word and deed": "Do not slay Isaac. I take the will for the deed. I have made it known that thou fearest me; that thou dost believe in my power, goodness, faithfulness; that my word is enough for thee. See James ii. 21-24.

At the same moment Abraham sees the ram, entangled by his long horns in the bramble. God has provided and he burns in the room of Isaac—"a burnt offering instead of his son."

And in memory of God's faithfulness—of his own unconscious prophecy, of its fulfillment, and of the lesson to him and his for ever more, he called the place "Jehovah-jireh," "the Lord will see (to it)," or provide. The two words are those used in v. 8, "the Lord will look out a lamb for himself," and the memory of this being handed down, a popular proverb had grown out of it (v. 14), in common use in Moses' time, and bore witness to the event.

See the lessons: (1) God said to the world, to whose gods human sacrifices were offered, "My servants are as truly devoted to me as idolaters to their idols." But (2) "I do not desire such sacrifices. I provide the victim." (3) As Abraham gave up Isaac willingly, so God gave his Son for us. (4) As sentence of death passed on Isaac, and the ram was the substitute for him, so death passed upon us, and Christ is the "Lamb slain." (5) See the correspondence in the place (Moriah); "the third day"—Christ rose on the third day; the carrying the wood—"bearing his cross." See also the Jewish rule that the first-born should be the Lord's (Exod. xxii. 29); and notice the silence of Isaac (Isa. liii. 7).

It is obvious that, in some respects, Isaac is a true type of our blessed Redeemer, willingly given by the Father, willingly giving himself, to death. So it is true also that the ram, substituted for us, is a type of "the lamb of God." Each type by itself is imperfect, and it is by adding one to another that the full idea can be conveyed to the mind. Hence it has been said that Isaac and the ram together typify Christ. Isaac was too good to die, and the ram dies for him. The humanity of Christ dies, but the divine nature cannot; yet the body "prepared for him" has a value given it by being united to the divine. So let us "behold the lamb."

Questions like the following should bring out the meaning of these facts:

What training had Abraham received? What graces exercised? How did he resemble God? What was his best possession? What is Isaac called? Why child of promise? Where was he to be offered? In what manner? By whose hand? What made this so trying? How did Abraham act? Who accompanied him? Mode of journeying? Time? Isaac's question? How answered? By Abraham? By the Lord? The substitute for Isaac? Of what the ram is a symbol? Points of likeness to the sacrifice of Christ? Did the heathen offer human victims? Would this encourage them? How Abraham's faith is displayed? To whose honor? Any memorial of this deed? Repeat the proverb? How it arose? Whence the words Jehovah-jireh come? Exact meaning of them? What use may we make of them?

LESSON XI.

March 16, 1878.

JACOB AND ESAU.

Gen. xxvii. 30-40.

30. And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Jacob his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting.

31. And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me.

32. And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy first-born, Esau.

33. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison and brought to me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.

34. And when Isaac heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.

35. And he said, Thy brother came with subtily, and hath taken away thy blessing.

36. And he said, Is he not rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?

37. And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him; and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?

38. And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless-

me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

39. And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above;

40. And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother: and it shall come to pass that when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.

COMMIT TO MEMORY VERSES 39, 40.

The following passages are connected with the lesson and illustrate it: Rom. xi. 29; Heb. xii. 17; Gen. xxxii. 1; xxvi. 48; Jer. xlix. 8, 10; Obad. v. 6; Mal. i. 1, 2, 3; Heb. xi. 20 and xxii. 16.

THE CENTRAL TRUTH IS—GOD'S COUNSEL SHALL STAND. See Prov. xix. 21.

The pupils should be shown the difficulty of putting ourselves in the place of the persons here to be studied, and the danger, in consequence, of our failing to catch the exact ideas; e. g.,

(1) We have nothing like the birthright. It was then an institution, and Isaac had faith that the spirit of God would direct him in blessing his first-born.

(2) Life itself is now changed. It is difficult to think of Jacob and Esau as being in middle life at this time, but so they were. They had lived half their days.

(3) It is hard for us to conceive of the manner in which God dealt with his people before they had, as we have, the perfect rule of the Scriptures, and when lacking that, they had direct messages from God's Spirit.

(4) They should be particularly shown with what precision the prophecy of Isaac has been fulfilled to Jacob and Esau. (See the passages above quoted.)

The natural order in which to follow out this lesson is—the parties; the transaction; and its results.

I. THE PARTIES.—Four in number:

(a) Isaac—old; nearly blind, as is very common in the East; expecting death sooner than it came, perhaps as he was at the age at which Ishmael, his half brother, died; feeble; anxious to perform his final duty, as an old man would make his will. He was always of an easy, quiet, simple nature, with little force of character.

(b) Rebekah, his wife; Laban's sister; with a firm, decided character (see ch. xxiv. 58). She preferred Jacob to Esau. It is an excuse for her that she was told of God's preference before he was born (see xxv. 23), and that Esau vexed her by his marrying, ch. xxvi. 34, 35. Rebekah's family less high-toned than Isaac's (see Laban's character, and Rachel's image, ch. xxxi. 34).

(c) Esau, rugged, wild, not ungenerous, thoughtless; given to field sports, rather than shepherd's life, setting no great store by the religious advantages in the family; for a present enjoyment willingly parted with his prospects. How many Esaus there are still! But this thoughtless one was deeply sinful, and offensive to God (ch. xxv. 34).

(d) Jacob, more thoughtful; aware of the promise in his favor; very cautious; calculating; brought about, in a moment of Esau's weakness, the transfer of the birthright; yet had a defence; no force used; Esau's free will gave it up; erring in going before God's providence to secure promised good; punished for his haste; like his mother, whose friend and companion he was, and whose spirit he caught.

II. THE TRANSACTION.—How often there is a suppressed difference in a family, not often coming to the light. Property or some other interest is the occasion, and even husband and wife may be on opposite sides. We think there was such a latent division here, and Isaac's getting up the banquet was a plan to carry out his wish for Esau without trouble or awkwardness (v. 2-4). Rebekah has a counter-plan. She heard more than blind Isaac knew, v. 5; unfolds it to Jacob, v. 6; meets Jacob's objection, v. 11, by a plan which the Romans, in later time, used to conceal baldness, v. 16; and boldly carried out her idea. Jacob was blessed, and one phrase shows how the family was divided, "thy mother's sons," v. 20. Isaac, dumbly remembering God's word to Rebekah, had his misgivings, as we may surely infer from the manner in which he received the real Esau, v. 33, "yea, and he shall be blessed."

Yet his emotion is deep; he "trembled exceedingly," v. 33, not only at the fraud committed, but at the evident will of God prevailing in spite of his. He took it as settled that Jacob was to have the blessing.

Esau at length fared like all careless persons sooner or later) awakes to his loss, v. 34. He is to be pitied, though he is also to be blamed. He did not value the blessing at the right time. His marriages were in a different spirit, and indeed his life. Hearing of Jacob's "subtily," he vents his anger on him—not unaturally; plays upon his name, "a supplanter;" forgets that he sold the birthright of his own will (v. 32), and begs for a further blessing (v. 38). "His tears now fall, and his whole heart is moved, but too late. This is the meaning of the often misapplied text, Heb. xii. 17, 'he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.' This word for 'repentance' is 'change of mind.' 'He found no way of changing Isaac's' (not his own) 'mind, though, &c. (see Gouge on Hebrews; or Barnes).

Not did he clearly understand the nature of the blessing, but seems to think his father said 'give as he pleases. Irreligious men have no true idea of the real nature of spiritual blessings: 1 Cor. iv. 4.

Moved by his tears and entreaties, Isaac—without reference to the birthright blessing—utters a prediction of temporal good, but also contains a prophecy of all that had been given to Jacob. Doubt exists as to the meaning of the words, "thy dwelling," &c. Dr. Murphy and others render it, "away from the fatness of the earth shall be thy dwelling," &c., which is certainly more in accordance with the future of Esau than the English rendering, unless the emphasis be on earth, and the idea be, "Thou shalt not have the spiritual, but thou shalt have the earthly blessing. Then the fulfillment would be in the sudden growth of Esau's descendants. We prefer Murphy's rendering.

III. THE RESULTS.—Esau's anger. He forgets his own act; has just to reflect upon. You often find wrong doers thus flatter and defend themselves: "Some one did wrong, or they would have done better," v. 41.

Yet Jacob had been deceitful, and so tempted Esau to murderous thoughts. Jacob in danger is a sore trial to Rebekah, and that trial is continued by his necessary flight. It is not certain that she ever saw him again.

In these cases, the patriarch, made a prophet for the time (see Gen. xx. 7), does not cause, but announce what follows. A glance at Esau's children shows how the words were realized. After being long free, they were conquered by Sual (1 Sam. xiv. 47), and by David (2 Sam. viii. 14). Then came long struggles, ending in their conquest and union with Israel. (See illustration.)

Learn, (1) How little things have great results. A meal—a birthright.

(2) How trifles show character. They are small, but it is momentous. "He sold his birthright"—"profane."

(3) How the beginning of strife is like the letting out of waters (Prov. xvii. 14). How unlovely and far-reaching are family quarrels! Brothers! be friends.

(4) How dreadful deceit is, even for a good end! God punishes it, though He may use it.

(5) How free men are! Esau did not sell his birthright because he knew of a promise, or of God's intention, but because he did not care about it. So wicked men.

(6) How God is sovereign. The argument founded on this, Rom. ix. 10-18, in which Mal. i. 3, "yet I hated Esau," is quoted. "Hated" means "loved less than," not positive hate, as in Christ's words, Matt. xxv. 14. "Hate" can only mean there "love less than" Christ.

(7) God is not bound to love or save any of us. He is in Christ, and saves all who come to him; but it is all of grace. We must beware of being "profane" and despising the salvation. We can become sons of God, but if we think nothing of the privilege, He may well "let us alone." See Hos. iv. 17. Then shall we become hard in heart, and our "feet shall slide in due time."

TOPICS FOR QUESTIONS.

Name of Isaac's half-brother—at what age Ishmael died—Isaac's reflections—intention—arrangement with Esau—Rebekah's course—why taken—promise concerning Jacob—evil of this plan—its success—its punishment—on Jacob—on Isaac—on Rebekah—Esau's feeling on returning—Isaac's—the entirety of Esau—his idea of the blessing—his father's prediction—probable meaning—seed of Esau—the inheritance given Edom—how the Edomites held their ground—their after-history—Esau's feeling toward Jacob—Esau's sin—Jacob's name—meaning of—lessons of this to us—regarding grace—the sins of good men—the evil of contentions—the sovereignty of God—meaning of "Esau hated"—and how Esau's mind was free.

O, THE HAPPY CHILD!

Elizabeth Christina, Queen of Prussia, was speaking one day to the little daughter of her gardener, and was greatly pleased with the wisdom and gentleness of the child. Some time after, as the queen was about to sit down with her ladies at table, the child was brought in, and the queen ordered her to sit beside her. The queen was curious to see what impression the gold and silver and bright ornaments would make on the little girl. She looked around in silence and astonishment. At last she folded her hands, and said in a clear voice,

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness,  
My beauty and my glorious dress;  
'Midst flaming worlds in those arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.

The ladies were deeply moved. "O, the happy child!" they of them exclaimed to the queen, "how high she is above us!"

"A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM."

An esteemed clergyman writes thus:

"Very recently a little boy in my parish, only six years of age, was sent by his mother, to fetch his father from a public-house.

"He found his parent drinking with some other men; one of them invited the little fellow to take some beer. Firmly and at once the boy replied:

"No, I can't take that; I'm in the Band of Hope."

"The men looked at one another, but no one was found to repeat the temptation. The man then said:

"Well, if you won't take the beer, here's a penny for you to buy some bull's eyes—a kind of sugar confectionery.

"The boy took the penny and said:

"I thank you, but I had rather not buy bull's eyes; I shall put it into the Penny Bank."

"The men looked at one another, and for some moments were entirely silent. At length one of them rose and gave utterance to his feelings in these words:

"Well, I think the sooner we sign the pledge and put our savings in the Penny Bank the better."

"Such was the effect of the two speeches of a boy six years old. How many old people have made much longer but less effective speeches! 'A little child shall lead them.'"—Germ.

A GOOD EXAMPLE.—A young lad, member of a Presbyterian school in Rochester, N. Y., has just completed the seventh year of his attendance there, without missing a single Sabbath, making an entire year of Sabbath, 365, in which he has been uniformly and promptly in his seat. In token of the fact the school presented him with a silver watch. The superintendent of the school has been a member nearly 40 consecutive years.

Our Young Folks.

SATURDAY NIGHT.

Placing the little hats all in a row, ready for church on the morning you know, washing wet faces and little black feet, darning them ready and fit to be used, putting them into clean garments all white, &c., &c., that is what mothers are doing to-night.

Shutting out holes in the little worn hose, leaving by shoes that are worn through the toes, looking over garments so faded and thin, who but a mother knows where to go to get a changing a button to make a look new? That is what mothers are doing to-night.

Calling the little ones all around the cross, hearing them list for their soft evening prayer, telling them stories of Jesus of old, who loves to gather the lambs to his breast, watching them listen with their eyes a night—that is what mothers are doing to-night.

Creeping so softly to take a last peep, after the little ones all are asleep: anxious to know if the children are warm, tucking the blanket round each little form, kissing each little face, rosy and bright—that is what mothers are doing to-night.

Knocking down gently beside the cradle bed, lovingly and gently she bows down her head, praying as only a mother can pray, "God guide and keep them from going astray."

A BOY'S LOVE FOR HIS MOTHER.

Of all the love affairs in the world, I can surpass the true love of a big boy for his mother. It is a love noble and true, and in the highest degree to both. It does not mean merely a dutiful affection, but a love that makes a boy gallant and courteous to his mother, saying to every body plainly that he is fairly in love with her. Next to the love of her husband, nothing so crowns a woman's life with honor as this second love, this devotion of the son to her. And I never yet knew a boy to "turn out" bad who began by falling in love with his mother.

SPEAK GENTLY.

"Please help me a minute, sister. "Oh! don't disturb me, I'm reading" was the answer.

"But just hold this stick, won't you, while I drive this pin through?"

"I can't now; I want to finish this story," I said, emphatically, and my little brother turned away, with a disappointed look, in search of somebody else to assist him.

He was a bright boy of ten years, and my only brother. He had been visiting a young friend, and had seen a wind-mill, and as soon as he came home his energies were all employed in making a small one, for he was always trying to make tops, wheelbarrows, kites, and all sorts of things such as boys delight in. He had worked patiently all the morning with saw and jack-knife, and now it only needed putting together to complete it, and his only sister had refused to assist him, and he had gone away with his young heart saddened.

I thought of this in the fifteen minutes after he had left, and the book gave me no pleasure. It was not intentional unkindness, only thoughtlessness; for I loved my brother, and was generally kind to him, still I had refused to help him. I would have gone after him, and afforded him the assistance he needed, but I knew he had found some one else. Yet I had neglected an opportunity of gladdening a childish heart.

In half an hour he came bounding into the house, exclaiming, "Come, Mary, I've got it up; just see how it goes!"

His tones were joyous, and I saw that he had forgotten my petulance, so I determined to atone by unusual kindness. I went with him, and, sure enough, on the roof of the wood-house was fastened a miniature windmill, and the arms were whirling around fast enough to suit any boy. I praised the windmill and my little brother's ingenuity, and he seemed happy and entirely forgetful of any unkind word, and I resolved, as I had many times before, to be always loving and gentle.

A few days passed by, and the shadow of a great sorrow darkened our dwelling. The joyous laugh and noisy glee were hushed, and our merry boy lay in a darkened room, with anxious faces around him, his cheeks flushed, and his eyes unnaturally bright. Sometimes his temples would moisten and muscles relax, and then hope would come into our hearts, and our eyes would fill with thankful tears. It was in one of those deceitful calms in his disease that he heard the noise of his little wheel, and said, "I hear my windmill!"

"Does it make your head ache?" I asked. "Shall we take it down?"

"Oh! no," he replied. "It seems as if I were out of doors, and it makes me feel better. Don't you remember, Mary, that I wanted you to help me to fix it, and you were reading, and told me you could not? But it did not make any difference; for mamma helped me."

Oh! how sadly those words fell upon my ears, and what bitter memories they awakened!

How I repented, as I kissed little Frank's forehead, that I had ever spoken unkindly to him. Hours of sorrow went by, and we watched by his couch, hope growing fainter, and anguish deeper, until, one week from the morning on which he spoke of his childish sports, we closed his eyes, once so sparkling, and folded his arms over his pulseless heart.

He sleeps now in the grave, and home is desolate; but his little windmill, the work of his busy hands, is still swinging in the breeze, just where he placed it, upon the roof of the old wood-shed; and every time I see the tiny arms revolving, I remember the lost little Frank, and I remember, also, the thoughtful, tin tinkled words—"Exchange."

The faithful soul who, for the love of Jesus Christ, despairs himself of everything in this world, enjoys true liberty, and becomes all things to Jesus, who for the love of us became poor.