

Sabbath School Teacher.

LESSON VIII.

Feb. 28, 1873.

THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM.

Gen. xv. 1-7.

COMMIT TO MEMORY verses 5, 6. PARALLEL PASSAGES.—Acts ii. 5; Heb. xi. 12.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord."

The key to this passage is in v. 6. "Vision" and "righteousness" are to be explained.

With v. 1 read Isa. xli. 10; with v. 2, Pa. xxxvii. 3; with vs. 3, 4, and 5, read Duet. x. 22; with v. 6, Rom. iv. 18; and with v. 7, Neh. ix. 7, 8.

INTRODUCTION.—We now enter on a new field in Scripture history. The race of man, traced consistently through the changes before the flood; flood described; man as a race, has a new trial after the flood, and instead of fearing God, men grow more corrupt. To keep alive a people for God, it becomes necessary to call out and separate a family.

A distinction now formed between the church and the world. The Scriptures give history of the church, and only that of the world as it affects the church. A new dispensation is introduced in the call of Abram.

Three peculiarities of expression occur in this connection: (a) In verse 1, for the first time, we have "the word of the Lord," so frequent afterwards.

(b) In xii. 7, where the Lord, on a previous occasion, made known his intention, we have the first appearance of the Lord to man. What appears could not have been of Jehovah, whom "no man hath seen," John i. 18; nor of a created angel, for he is called Jehovah, v. 7. Most authorities, therefore, take it to be the Lord Jesus, "the only begotten Son," "who declared him." The Jews called the being so appearing the Memra, or "Word," of the Lord. (John i. 1.)

(c) In v. 2, we have the first use of the two words together, Lord God. It is also in v. 8, and in Duet. iii. 24 and ix. 26, and nowhere else in the Books of Moses.

These facts show that if God was removing farther from the world, "lying in wickedness," he was coming nearer to those whom he called out of the world.

We ought to study—

I. ABRAHAM, descendant of Shem (x. 21) and Heber (x. 24), son of Terah (xi. 31), born in Ur of the Chaldees, a place not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, thought by many to be Orfa, which, from its natural features of bold rock and fine springs, Stanley thinks must have been a spot of great attraction; others find Ur in the modern Mughier, about twenty-five miles off, on the right side of the Euphrates. His family, if not idolaters, lived among them. He was advanced in years, married, but without children. He was a chief, or head of a large household, not unlike the chiefs of feudal times, owning many persons as slaves, but treating some of them at least as friends. He was not unused to war, had his men trained to it, and the rescue of Lot was prompt, decided and brave. He had to plan for a great family, for whom he was responsible; hence for him to leave his home and set out to wander was not like a man rising from an eastern state and going to a western territory. It was far more like the first movement of the Pilgrim Fathers, if a man had been responsible for the comfort and safety of all.

The country was not explored, as now; there was much violence; and the Lord did not at first tell him where to go. Believing and obeying God, therefore, was a test of character.

HOW GOD CALLED ABRAHAM.—Our lesson is not the first notice of the event. We look back to ch. xii. 1. He said, "Get thee out of thy country," &c. Abraham appeared to obey. His father Terah had lost one son, Hama; was now about to lose another, and appeared to have decided also to go. Hence his removal is described in ch. xi., to finish that part of the history, according to usage. But the good Terah died at Hara, and Abraham was detained there for some years.

There were three ties to be broken by obeying the call: with his country; with his home and kindred; with his father's house (xii. 1). But there was as yet to this, for his "land" he gets the promise of a great nation; for the joys of friends, "I will bless thee;" and for his father's house, the prospect of being himself the honorable head of a new and greater house. In keeping God's commandments, there is great reward, sooner or later. (Ps. xiv. 11.)

II. GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM.—He has been settled in the land God showed him, and has a home and possessions. But he has many drawbacks. He is among strangers. He is old. He has enemies. He has defeated them; but they may attack him again. He is childless. He perhaps desponds at times.

God says, in a vision, "Fear not." (See John xii. 15; Luke i. 19 and ii. 10. He names him. (See John xx. 16.) He gives him assurances that meet part of his difficulties: "I am thy shield"—fear not hostile strangers. He has not forgotten the original promise, "I will be thy exceeding great reward." "I will guard against all evil: I will give all good."

Abraham has no child and no land. How is the promise to be made good? He appeals to God, Lord of all, as well as Jehovah, as to the meaning of the promise. The next heir to all he had and to all God promised, is Eliezer of Damascus, whom he calls "possessor of his house," v. 2, and a "son of his house," v. 3.

The Lord gives (a) an assurance, v. 4. His own child shall be his heir, and the heir of all the promises.

(b) A sign that appeals to his senses. He had promised a seed as numerous as the dust-particles. Now he bids him look above to the stars (v. 5) innumerable. As the seed shall be as the stars, so the Lord will give a sign that He will be true.

seed; he who created the stars by a word can make good this promise: "So shall thy seed be"—not one heir, but like these in number!

In the former communications from God, Abram had been so far influenced as to obey. He did like Noah, "as the Lord commanded him." How far he expected, or had distinct believing hope, we are not told. But now he "believed" (v. 6), so as to count confidently upon the fulfilment of God's word.

The second part of v. 6 is most important from the use of it made in the New Testament. In Rom. iv. 3, Paul says it was not Abram's work that was counted righteousness, but his believing.

To the Galatians, inclined to make too much of the law, as a way of obtaining righteousness, he says, "Abraham did not get righteousness by the law, but by believing." Gal. iii. 6, 9. To those who missed the active, practical side of faith, James brings up Abraham's offering of Isaac, as the way of his being justified—that is, proof of his faith was given. We might put it thus: suppose Abraham had refused to believe God, would he then have had any righteousness?

But he took God's word; he looked upon the seed as sure, because God said it; he ceased to look to flesh and blood; he looked to God; put himself in God's hand; and the righteousness which he could not otherwise obtain, God imputed, or set down, or counted to him. And the disposition of soul that led him to believe God, would lead him to obey in all things, even to offering up Isaac.

The formal signing of the covenant was then entered upon in the bringing and slaying of the creatures of Abraham, and the further solemn manifestation of God's presence, and prophecies of the future, vs. 7-18.

Learn from this—(1) To stand up even in war, may be pleasing to God. Abraham did, and conquered, and vv. 11 "after these things" God came to him; "thy shield."

(2) To deny one's self for the Lord's sake, pleases God. Abraham did so (xiv. 22-24), and was no loser; "thy reward."

(3) Doing God's will brings us more light. Abraham received clear promises the farther he went.

(4) Sacramental signs are given to faith, and they help faith.

(5) The great thing we want is righteousness, and the way to get it is by believing what the Lord says to us.

SELF DENIAL.

The teacher of limited knowledge and of ordinary talents, who, with a warm Christian heart, takes a personal interest in each scholar, will succeed where one of great learning and remarkable gifts, without his personal attachment of his pupils, would completely fail. On this point Dr. Hussy, of England, says: "Great abilities are not nearly so valuable as this. Pupils must not be allowed to leave the Sunday-school with the feeling that the teacher will think of more of them till next Sunday. They must be led to know that their teacher is interested in their welfare, and that he will not fail to pray that his instructions may be blessed."

ASKING QUESTIONS.

The importance of calling into exercise the thinking faculty in teaching, is not in danger of being too frequently pressed upon the attention of the teacher. To succeed in arousing this faculty, it is generally better to allow the scholar to ask questions freely upon the lesson, rather than for the teacher to ply the scholar by framing questions himself. Some of the questions asked by the scholar in this way may be wide of the topic, and occasionally quite absurd; but a little skill on the part of the teacher will guide the thought and hence the question into proper and instructive channels, and hold the entire class to the subject of the lesson. The thinking required by a scholar in order to ask a fair question, will increase his interest in the lesson. He must have some error and sharply-defined point in his mind before he can frame a good question, and the effort he must make to comprehend any phase of the lesson so that his question will not be confused and incoherent, is one of the elements of success in true teaching.—S. S. World.

THE MAN FOR SUPERINTENDENT.

In selecting a new superintendent, it is better to take a young man who will grow in fitness for the position, than an older one who will make no new attainments, nor conform himself to the changing demands of our advancing age. The young man who is slow and awkward now, may make an efficient superintendent when he has acquired knowledge of his duties and experience in their performance; while the older man, who seems at his ease in charge of the school, will gain no fresh ideas, nor be ever better fitted than at present for his duties; indeed the age will hurry away from the old man while it is carrying forward the young one. The best man for superintendent is the man who is likely to do best in the long run, rather than the one who shows best to-day.—Ibid.

The husks of omniscience rustle in every wind; the full corn in the ear holds up its golden fruit noiselessly to the Lord of the harvest.—Whittier.

Without a belief in personal immortality religion surely is like an arch resting on one pillar, like a bridge ending in an abyss.—Muller.

On earth, we have nothing to do with success or with its results, but only being true to God and for God; for its sincerity, and not success, which is the sweet savor before God.—Robertson.

Silently—simply—lilies develop into the things of beauty they are, and shed abroad the fragrance that refuses to be hidden. They grow, not because we look upon them with eyes of admiration. In them we witness all the beautiful unconsciousness and sweet simplicity of healthy life and growth.

Our Young Folks.

THE MONTHS.

January brings the snow, Makes our feet and fingers glow. February brings the rain, Thaws the frozen lakes again. March brings breezes loud and shrill, Stirrs the dancing daffodil. April brings the primrose sweet, Scatter the daisies at our feet. May brings flocks of pretty lambs, Skipping by their fleecy dams. June brings tulips, lilies, roses, Fills the garden with its glories. Hot July brings cooling showers, Apples and gilliflowers. August brings the sheaves of corn Then the harvest home-borne. Warm September brings the fruit, Sportsmen then begin to hunt. Fresh October brings the pheasant. Then to gather nuts is pleasant. Dull November brings the blast, Then the leaves are whirling fast. Chill December brings the sleet, Blazing fire and Christmas treat.

OUR DOG JERRY.

"O papa," said my boy Ned to me as we were starting for a walk one morning with Jerry, "I have taught Jerry such a lot of things since you have been away: he can fetch sticks out of the water and beg splendidly—come here, Jerry," (taking a piece of bread from the breakfast table) "and show papa how you can beg."

Jerry accordingly, a beautiful black retriever which I had bought for Ned a few months before, sat up and looked as demure as a four-legged stoic can do, till he got the bread, when he thanked Ned by a wag of his tail.

"I taught him that, papa," cried Ned. "Good dog, Jerry! But Lizzie" (Ned's sister) "helps to make him fetch the sticks."

"Well, but," said I, rather amused, "if you teach him all this, Ned, does he never teach you anything in return?"

"He, indeed! Come now, papa, what can a dog teach me? And I am very glad, dear old Jerry," (bending down and clasping Jerry, who returned the salute by licking the boy's face) "you at any rate don't come the schoolmaster over one; it is enough to have old Goggles," (this was Ned's dreadfully irreverent name for his master, who wore spectacles) "bothering one from morning to night with his x y z's and his tuptoo, isn't it? What do you think, papa? old Goggles positively makes us learn half a page of irregular Greek verbs every morning now; but we always shp them when we can."

"Ah, well, my dear boy," was my mild answer, "we have all of us had to go through the same hard experience, I suppose. But as to Jerry, do you know I think he tries to teach you a good deal, if you have only the wit to learn? Only Jerry is wiser than most masters; he teaches chiefly by example."

Now this, as I thought it would, piqued Ned, whose great failing was to think himself immensely clever.

"Indeed, papa!" he cried, rather scornfully. "And pray what is he teaching me now, as he is jumping about like that? For since we had got out of the house, Jerry was running about like a mad dog, now bounding a dozen yards forwards, now running back to us and leaping up, barking all the time and wagging his tail, till I thought it would come off."

"Oh, can't you see, Ned? I replied, coolly. "It is his way of giving you a lesson against cruelty to animals."

"I don't see it a bit."

"Why, he is barking out as loud as he can. 'See how delighted I am at getting out of doors—just as you are, Ned, when you rush out of school! You see there is not as much difference as you thought, between you and me; I, and all other animals, can feel pleasure and pain as keenly as yourself; so remember that, the next time you pull a poor dog's wings off.'"

"Well, come, papa, I am not cruel to animals, whatever else I may be," protested Ned.

"I don't think you are, Ned, intentionally," I answered. "By the way, how is the last of those little bulldogs you and Tom Duce brought home a few days ago?"

"Oh, it tumbled into a pot of boiling water yesterday, papa, so we were obliged to kill it," said the boy.

"Ah, then, that makes up the six, does it not? Let us see: there was this; and one, you said, fell out of the nest; two the cat got; and two wouldn't eat, you told me, because you could not feed them as well as the old bird did. So the whole six are disposed of now. No, no, Ned; you are not cruel intentionally."

Ned began to see that I was poking fun at him, so he did not answer, but walked on sulkily, kicking down the tusks which happened to be in his way. By and by, we got to the river, where Jerry bounded in after the sticks and stones. Ned kept throwing for him into the water. We had amused ourselves for some time with watching him plying for the sticks or snatching the sticks in his mouth, and after shaking himself when he got back to land, bringing us the recovered treasure.

At last Ned, who never sulked for a long time at once, laughed and cried out to me: "There, papa, now; what lesson is Jerry giving me now? To fetch sticks out of the river, I suppose; but you surely don't want me to learn to do that?"

"No, Ned, I do not. But Jerry is trying you now in quite a different tack, because he sees you have already forgotten his last lesson to you, about cruelty to animals."

"Well, how am I cruel now?"

"By not remembering, Ned, that it is a cold day for him to be so long in the water. The sport was very well at first both for us and the dog; but you never noticed that for the last five minutes poor Jerry has been shivering violently with the cold every time he came out of the water. I did notice it, but I thought I would see how long you would go on."

"Oh, papa, I did not think of it. Poor Jerry!" said Ned, blushing, and then crossing his dog, who galloped off a hundred yards a moment afterwards, and soon raced himself warm.

"So you see that Jerry, observing you

Y Folks did not mind his first lesson, was trying to give you another of quite a different kind," I went on.

"What was that, papa?"

"Why, I think he must have heard you when you were talking about Mr Wilson" (this was the name by which 'old Goggles' was known to all the world except his pupils) "and saying how much you hated learning those Greek verbs. So Jerry said to himself, 'Now, I'll just show Ned practically what he ought to do about those verbs, and—'"

"Well? Ah, papa, you are sticking fast!"

"Not at all. 'I'll give him,' says Jerry, 'a right good example, once for all, of obedience, and of cheerful obedience, too, to show him he ought to do things he does not like, when he knows it is right.' So Jerry plunged in time after time because you were his master, and told him. And though he hated the business, and it made him as cold and miserable as was possible, still he went on as long as you thought proper, and never even murmured. But I've no doubt he said to himself, as he gave himself that last shake, 'There, if Ned doesn't see what he ought to do about those verbs after all this, he is a duller Ned than I take him to be. He will surely never let himself be beaten by a dog.'"

"Well, papa, I won't either," said Ned, hanging down his head. "I promise you I won't slip them again."

" Bravo, Jerry!" I cried, patting the poor dog's head. "You will be Ned's master yet, I can see. But holla, what is this? Oh, Jerry, I did not expect this from you," I said a minute afterwards, as Jerry rushed up to a beggar he saw, and began barking furiously at him, and snapping at his heels. "Come away, Jerry; do you hear? Bad dog!" and Jerry came back, looking very miserable, and with his tail between his legs, while Ned began dancing about in glee, and laughing slyly in my face.

"Ha, ha, papa!" he exclaimed at last. "Then Jerry does not always teach right—I have caught you now."

"Why, no, Ned," I replied, "I am sorry to see that Jerry, after all, is only like other masters—he makes mistakes sometimes. He has made one now, I suppose. He is evidently a dog of aristocratic tendencies, who dislikes rags and tatters, and thinks such things have no business in the world, so it is 'the proper thing' in his opinion to show a superb contempt for poverty. I think I have heard young fellows—in fact, I am not quite certain I have not heard you, Ned—talking about 'roughs' and 'cads,' meaning people probably quite as good as themselves, only poorer. Yes, you were telling me the other day about your cricket match with the National School, and how indignant you all were at being beaten by 'the cads.' And perhaps, after all, Jerry only wishes to show you the absurdity of this feeling, by letting you see how silly a looks in a dog."

However, Jerry retrieved his character before long; for, as we passed some farm-houses on our return, a little terrier came bounding out, and in a most insolent way began barking and snapping at our dog. But Jerry, though at first he made a pause, and began wagging his tail by way of salute to the small stranger, yet when he saw the other's cantankerous, unfriendly spirit, he trotted gently on again in a dignified way, moving neither faster nor slower than before, and never even taking the trouble to look aside at the barking cur. When a big sheep dog, however, bigger than our dog, and evidently awakened by the noise the terrier made, came bounding out of the yard and also flew at Jerry, the latter's whole demeanor changed. At first indeed he gave a gentle wag of his tail, as much as to say, "Now, let us be friends and don't be silly;" but when he saw the sheep-dog also meant to annoy him, he rushed on him like lightning, and laid him over, and in a moment sent him back again faster than he came, and howling from a bite in the leg. After this, and a short pursuit, he resumed his stately trot, while the terrier contented himself for the future with growling from within the gate.

"Good dog, Jerry!" cried Ned, enraptured at his friend's triumph. "I can tell what he meant to teach me there, papa," he continued, laughing. "He was showing me that a really brave fellow won't touch a little boy, even if the little one is rather impudent; but the instant a big fellow meddles with him he goes at him like a brick."

"No bullying, eh?" I replied. "Well, Ned, I perceive you are beginning to find out this cunning old Jerry for yourself; so as I see the postman coming with the letters, I'll leave you to your lessons with him."—Good Things.

RISING TEMPERATURE.

"What kind of weather shall we have to-morrow," asked Robert, as the family sat at the supper-table.

Elice.—"Old Probabilities says there will be rising temperature."

Robert.—"What does that mean?"

Elice.—"Why, it means, of course, that the weather will be colder to-morrow."

Robert.—"Why do you think so?"

Elice.—"Because 'rising temperature' is increasing temperature, which, of course, is colder temperature."

Robert.—"But as a rising thermometer indicates increasing heat, 'rising temperature' must mean warmer weather."

Elice.—"Let us ask papa. Papa, what is meant by 'rising temperature' in the weather reports?"

Papa.—"Have you looked into the dictionary? What does it say?"

The children went to the library and brought out Webster's Dictionary, and finding the word "Temperature," one of them read as follows:

"8. (Physics.) Condition with respect to heat or cold, especially as indicated by the sensation produced, or by the thermometer, or pyrometer; degree of heat or cold; as the temperature of the air; high temperature; low temperature; temperature of freezing or of boiling."

Papa.—"I believe by 'rising temperature' the reporter of the weather signals means warmer weather. It would be just as easy for the weather reports to say 'colder' or 'warmer' weather, and then everybody would understand them."

POLITENESS.

One of the English mildreds was so struck with the politeness and good feeling manifested in St. Paul's writings, that he affirmed that if St. Paul had said that he himself had ever performed a miracle, he would believe it, because he deemed St. Paul too much of a gentleman to tell an untruth. Whatever we may think of this remark, we cannot but be struck with the power which politeness had over the infidel. And as this infidel is not an exception, it may be well to show some few of the advantages of being polite.

It is Scriptural. If St. Paul taught politeness by his example, so did he in his writings. He tells us, "In honor we must prefer one another." Here is the great secret of politeness, namely, forgetfulness of self. In another place he says: "Be courageous;" in other words be polite.

It makes friends. Nothing so wins upon strangers as true politeness. A little attention, shown in a stage or in the cars, or at a public table, costs us very little. But what an effect it has upon the person to whom the attention is shown! The pleased look, the grateful smile, shows us we have gained a friend.

TRIAL.

You can't stand it! Why not? Others have had a much harder time than you. You have not been used well! Very likely. A great many have not been used well; but that is no reason they should kill themselves. You don't mean to kill yourself, but go where they will use you better! Is that the best way? Now, is it not better to think more of how you use others, and less of how they use you? This, of it a while. Was Jesus always used well? Were the apostles always used well? What then! Did they run from the cause? Let me tell you what to do. "Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Why, bless you, trial is for your good. Stop the paper! Better take two. That is the way to come out ahead of the "what do you call it" that is in you. Endurance is a part of the Christian life, you know. Sometimes it is the best kind of doing. Read the benedictions. What a "good time" we sometimes have in doing! You can not see what trials are for! May be to prove you.

RENOVATION BY FAITH.

If you have failed for this life, do not fail for the other, too. There is very much that may yet be done, even in the afternoon and twilight of men's lives, if they are hopeful and active.

When one of my Norway spruces died from the rude handling of last winter, instead of rooting it up and throwing it away, I let the amplexosis take possession of it, and it grew up rapidly through all the ranches of the tree and covered the top with leaves. And in the autumn, these leaves, which had been green before, were all changed to a brilliant crimson; and the tree in its own life was not half so beautiful as it was when covered by this vine, clad with all the colors of the setting sun.

Are you like an old tree that is dead, and has dropped all its foliage, and stands with its trunk and branches bare? Let faith and love cover you, and you will be more comely and more useful standing clothed in such garniture than you were clad in all your former strength.

Be patient, old man. Be patient, mother. Be patient, widow. Be patient, you that are impoverished. Be patient, men that are scarcely thought of, and are treading lower and lower. God thinks of you.—Becher.

SONGS IN THE NIGHT.

God our Maker "gives songs in the night." So said Elihu to Job.

The Apostle Paul and his companion Silas had scarcely begun their ministry in Europe, when they were seized by order of the magistrates of Philippi, and cast into prison. Racked with pain, as they must have been, sleepless and weary, they were heard at midnight, from the depth of their prison house, praying and singing praises unto God.

In all this Paul and Silas were not sinular. God gives songs in the night to His faithful people.

When Samuel Rutherford was sentenced to imprisonment in the city of Aberdeen, "for righteousness" sake, he wrote to a friend, "The Lord is with me; I care not what man can do. I burden no man, I want nothing. No king is better provided than I am. Sweet, sweet and easy is the cross of my Lord. All men I look in the face, of whatsoever rank—nobles, poor, acquaintance and strangers, are friendly to me. My Well-Beloved is kinder and more warm than ordinary, and cometh and visiteth my soul; my chains are overlaid with gold. No pen, no words, no engine can express to you the loveliness of my Lord Jesus. Thus, in haste, I make for my palace at Aberdeen."

When Madame Guyon was imprisoned in the castle of Vincennes, in 1695, she not only sang, but wrote songs of praise to her God. "It sometimes seemed to me," she said, "as if I were a little bird whom the Lord had placed in a cage, and that I had nothing now to do but sing. The joy of my heart gave a brightness to the objects around me. The stones of my prison looked in my eyes like rubies. I esteemed them more than all the gaudy brilliancies of a vain world. My heart was full of that joy which thou givest to them that love thee in the midst of their greatest crosses," a sentiment which she embodied during one of her imprisonments in a touching little poem which begins thus:

"A little bird I am, Shut from the fields of air; And if my cage I sit and sing To Him who placed me there; Well pleased a prisoner to be, Because, my God, it pleaseth Thee."

A good man in great trouble kept repeating: "Why art thou cast down, O my son?" His wife, at length, asked why he did not release the rest of the passage, "Thou art in God; for I shall yet praise Him." Then are "songs in the night" for all those who will but look to Him.