

WALK BEFORE ME
STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM
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Chapter one: THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

ABRAHAM is called the friend of God in three different places in God's word. (Isa.41: 8, 2; 2cor.20: 7; James.2: 23) The Lord Jesus Christ said in John 15.v.15 that he wants his disciples to be his friends. He wants us to know all his hearts secrets, for friendship always becomes stronger as friends share the secrets of their hearts. In Gen.18: 17 God said before he destroyed Sodom and Gomorah "How can I hide this secret from my friend Abraham?"

God wants us to be such friends of His, to whom, as we come under his heavenly plan, He can reveal hidden mysteries. Because we enjoy such fellowship with God, (Matt.13: 17) God intends that the things that are hidden from the wise and prudent should be revealed to us. In 1 Cor.1: 1."The things which the angels desire to look into". Refer to the mysteries, which are hidden from the angels and the God's prophets and great men, yet which are revealed to those who become the friends of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord appeared ten times to Abraham from Genesis 10 onwards. In chapter 12 he appeared twice. At each appearance He revealed a secret of divine a secret of friendship. It is a step revelation (cf. Gen.12: 1). To be true friends of the Lord Jesus Christ we must be delivered from all our old friendships and brought into new friendships. We must be completely plucked out from old friendships. In John 15:19 we realize that we have pulled out by God's mighty hand from the world, and worldly relations and friends, who cannot enjoys this friendship with God.

On many occasions the Lord said one word, or by one touch healed the sick. In the case in Mark.8: 23, however, He led out blind man by hand, showing us by this example how to be true disciple or a friend. Till that day relations or friends had led the blind man. But the day the Lord led him out, He was saying in effect: You must now let me help you and lead you day by day." So He took from old associations, not because He was afraid to perform the miracle, but for a purpose, the very same purpose for which Abraham had been compelled leave his kith and kin, and all his friends, and had been give new revelations. This is the first thing we have to learn if we want to enjoy God's divine friendship.

The Lord promised to Abraham a sevenfold blessing in chapter 12:2,3 " I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee I will make thy name great. Thou shalt be a blessing. I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee: and in thy name shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This sevenfold blessing is intended to any person who desires to be a friend of God. Let us look at it by phase by phase.

"I will make of thee a great nation."- Once you are saved then through you many more may be saved; and through them one by one, many more again may be saved. We shall all become a part of His family, and through our prayers, testimony, love and sacrifice, and other means others may be saved.

" I will bless thee"- We began to receive from God all kinds of eternal and special blessings day by day. Because of the new life and because of his love we have everlasting peace and eternal joy, love and friendship.

"I will make thy name great"- When a man dies he is forgotten completely, no matter how great he might be in this world, but a man who is born again, and all those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, will, at death, be welcomed in heaven as kings and priests.

" Thou shalt be a blessing"- Others on earth will be comforted and strengthened and encouraged through us.

" I will bless them that bless thee" -means exactly what the promise says, and *"curse them that curseth thee"*, is a promise that he will not allow any weapon of the enemy to prosper against us.

" In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." That promise indicates we have a message to all nations. Whenever the Lord may take us, we can give the same gospel and the same message.

This sevenfold blessing is intended for everyone who is prepared to draw out from the world and worldly associations. In verse seven, God again appeared to Abraham. Abraham was learning how to worship God. When he first obeyed God and left everything behind, the Lord appeared to him and taught him how to worship. Now by the alter he was learning the simple lesson that somebody had to die to make him righteous. By ourselves that is by our own effort and labor, none of us becomes righteous. People remained in darkness because they have tried to be righteous by their own efforts. The alter shows the death and the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He came to the world to die in our stead, and for our sins, in order to make us righteous. The more we learned to worship God the more we will release how high a price He had to pay in order to make us righteous. That realization will make us more thankful and helps us to worship with all our hearts.

Because of the famine Abraham took his wife and went to Egypt (v.17). They Were only two in number, and there was a great danger; but God worked on their behalf and intervened and protected them. Similarly, in unseen ways the Lord protects us from many dangers. We do not become supernatural when we are born-again .we have to face human problems. Our bodies remain bodies of clay and we are to face trails, sorrow and sufferings, sickness and all kinds of disappointments, yet we find God continues to protect us all the time. (1cor.10: 13; 2Cor.2: 9; Psa.24: 7) We need to remember whenever we find ourselves in great danger, temptations and trails due to human weakness that the Lord knows how to protect us.

Because of fear Abraham told a lie, or rather a half lie. He said of Sarah: " She is my sister, and in a way she was his sister (Gen.12: 12). We often in the beginning of any new path we are full of fears, but the Lord in His grace and mercy protects and saves us from these fears. We have to be faithful to Him, trust Him and obey Him. And then we discover step by step growth in spiritual life and faith.

Chapter Two: THE DANGER OF HUMAN AFFECTION

ABRAHAM was called the "friend of God," and the Lord Jesus Christ said in John 15 of those who believe in Him, "I have not called you as servants but I have called you as friends" because he wants to give us all things which He received from His Father. As we begin to grow spiritually we will enjoy our friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ and will talk to him very freely, and tell Him all our secrets, and He will also talk to us lovingly and show us many new things day by day. We are reminded in Matt.11: 25 that things, which are hidden from the wise and prudent, are revealed to babes.

Within a period of forty years God appeared to Abraham ten times. At every appearance He revealed a new secret of divine friendship, in fact, in these appearances could be regarded as ten steps of divine friendship. We have already seen in chapter 12 how God appeared twice to Abraham. The third time God commanded to leave the country and go to a new country, but God did not tell Lot to go with Abraham. Only because of human sympathy Abraham agreed to take Lot with him. Lot was a nephew of Abraham, and may have requested Abraham: "Uncle, let me go with you." Perhaps Abraham refused Lot at first, but later, seeing his tears he must have agreed. Men rarely shed tears. Ladies have the privilege of shedding tears whenever and wherever they like- it may be at the bus stand or at the station. If they want money from their husbands they often shed tears and get it. It is very effective way of softening the heart of the husband! Ladies can shed tears and wipe them away-tears are an ordinary thing with them, but when a man shed tears it is not ordinary thing with them. Lot may have shed tears to soften heart of Abraham, and finally Abraham must have agreed to take Lot with him. Many of us miss God's best by yielding to human feeling and emotions, and many believers are lost out because they have been carried away by someone's affection and consequently do not listen to what God says, nor obey Him.

Abraham agreed to take Lot with him, but after a while there came a strife between Lot's servants and Abraham's (Gen.13: 7) Human affections always leads to strife, and we must remember that every affection must be sanctified by the Lord Jesus, whether it be affection for husband or wife, children, parents, brothers, sisters or relations. Unless it is sanctified, it will one day bring trouble. In Matt.12: 48-50 we read our Lord's mother, sisters and brothers they had an extra claim over the Lord Jesus. They sent a message to him demanding to see Him, so our Lord Jesus said; "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?" Be sure affection for husband or wife, children, brothers, sisters and relations do not keep you away from God. How often we find people who prefer to love their relations than to do the will of God. They think "How can I leave so and so? How can we hurt so and so? How can we wound so and so?" At the same time they grieve the Holy Spirit by going against the will of God.

It is quite clear that Lot has no desire for heavenly things because when Abraham asked him to choose the land which lay before him, Lot chose a good land not far from Sodom and Gomorah (v.10) Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent towards Sodom. Lot knew the condition of Sodom and Gomorah at that time. It was not a secret the cities were well known everywhere for their wickedness and shame. Abraham said to Lot: "If you go to the left, I will go to the right, and if you go to the right I will go to the left." Lot chose a place not very far from Sodom and Gomorah. He was attracted by the fertility of the land. He might

have thought, " I am not inside Sodom and Gomorah. I am going to live outside." But in chapter 19:1 he was inside Sodom. In those days elders of the city come to the gate for judgment, and soon he was made an elder of the city. He probably intended to live outside the city, and possibly thought that he would do some good when the men of the Sodom and Gomorah requested him to be an elder. In chapter 13:5 we are told that he had much wealth, and came to Sodom with his flocks, herds, and tents. Then he saw the fertile land and in short time he became still more prosperous, and probably because of his prosperity the men of Sodom and Gomorah asked him to be an elder. We see clearly what was in the heart of Lot in response to these things. He desired popularity and when he became more wealthy he also became more ambitious for name and fame. Many believers in the same way become more ambitious for name, power and authority. They are also anxious to become leading men in the assembly, not because they have spiritual concern, but because they want a name. Please take warning, and do not let worldly prosperity deceive you. What God gives in his own time is far better than earthly riches.

We see in Gen. 12:1 that even though Abraham had to make a very big sacrifice in leaving Ur of Chaldeans, yet God has some other way to compensate him. He did not have to go to Sodom and Gomorah to get more cattle and money. God in his own way began to supply his need. So we believers should not adopt worldly ways or methods to get more money or income, for God has his own way to give us what we need.

We are told in verse 14 that after Lot was separated from him, God appeared to Abraham. After he had obeyed God and separated from Lot, the Lord gave Abraham further instructions. He said to him, "Lift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward; for all the land thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed" (v.14-15). God was showing to Abraham more and more what kind of an inheritance He had for him and for his seed.

Though we may hear of our spiritual inheritance from different preachers, yet we do not often understand what it means. Many are like Jacob as we see him in Gen. 28:13-15,20. God promised so much to Jacob but in verse 20 he was thinking only of his physical need and his protection. God had promised to give him more than he could ever imagine or think. It is only as our attention is enlarged that we can understand spiritual things. God told Abraham to look northward, southward, eastward, and westward and to walk through length and the breadth of the land to claim his inheritance by faith. Imagine yourself having to walk throughout your lifetime non-stop twenty-four hours a day. That is what Abraham would have had to do. God said in effect: " I am going to give you an inheritance which cannot be measured by any human measurement."

For us also, it is only by our spiritual enlargement that we can know and measure the inheritance God has given us. We have to go through many situations to be given a large spiritual vision. God was showing Abraham that it was only through fellowship with God, that is with the living God, that he could understand God's ways.

Many think more of Bible knowledge than of the fellowship with God. They do not get tired when reading the Bible or giving a sermon. They enjoy Bible study, but they find it difficult to spend time with the God. They blame their knees or their backs. How can I stay on my knees when my back pains me? Please blame your

hearts not your poor knees. It is difficult to spend time with the living God because your feelings and thoughts trouble you, or they are wanderings here and there. Yet it means refreshing and blessing to have time with the living God (Isa.40: 31), and by true fellowship with living and loving God you become stronger and stronger.

The Lord met Abraham at Hebron. There he was building an altar by which he began to thank God for making him righteous. The more we worship God the more we enjoy true fellowship. Try it. When you go upon your knees do not think of any request of supplication but just go on thanking the Lord for what he has done to make you righteous. Say to him: "O Lord I have no request other than I want to be with thee and in thy presence. I want to stay in thy presence to feel that thou art with me." Such a fellowship will inspire you, and God will be able to show you to do, according to His own will.

CHAPTER THREE: THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL FOOD

THE Lord wants us to enjoy His friendship and to share His secrets just as two friends who are very close to each other are able to share each other's secrets. To be able to do this we must learn to speak to Him freely and hear His voice clearly every day. We must be led by him in every detail of our life. If day by day we spend our quiet time prayerfully we will find the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to us from His word, and showing us many secret things, things which are hidden from the wise and prudent. But to gain His friendship our response to Him must be a true one.

In Gen.12: 22 we see that the Lord appeared ten times to Abraham within a period of forty years. In chapter 12 He appeared for the first and second times. In chapter 13 He appeared for the third time and now in chapter 14 He revealed Himself for the fourth time, this time in Melchisedec as a type. At that time Abraham was returning from fighting and defeating the enemies of the King Sodom. These enemies are captured and taken captive not only the King of Sodom but also Lot the nephew of Abraham who was then living at Sodom. Abraham rescued Lot and his family and his goods and his people with him (v.16); At the same time he rescued King of Sodom and all his men.

The King of Sodom and the four other King, his confederates had been defeated by three kings, and Abraham had gone out defeated the victors with a handful of his own men. Now the king of Sodom was extremely thankful to Abraham for rescuing his men and all his property. He came to Abraham and said generously: " Give me the persons and take the goods to thy self." This could have been a very big temptation to Abraham but God had prepared him for it, when he spoke to him through Melchisedec.

We had already seen how wicked the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were. They defiled in the sight of the Lord and all that they had was also defiled. Now the Lord did not want Abraham to accept any of these defiled 'goods' from the hand of the King of Sodom, so he sent Melchisedec to him in Gen. 14:18 to give him the extra strength he needed to overcome the temptation to accept the offer made by King of Sodom. As we see from Heb.7: 1-3 Melchisedec was a high priest of the Most High God, - "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God he abideth a priest

continually." Melchisedec brought bread and wine with him and blessed Abraham. This was the spiritual food, which Abraham needed to overcome temptation. In this way Melchisedec becomes a type of our Lord Jesus Christ who has become both our bread of life, and our Great High Priest.

The thought that our Lord Jesus Christ is our bread of life is repeated seven times from John 6:v.48 onwards. How can we eat and drink our Lord Jesus and make him our meat and drink? By faith and with the help of the spirit we can do so at any time and at any place. Just as we drink water when we are thirsty, and eat food when we are hungry so also we can eat and drink our Lord Jesus when we are hungry and thirsty. In this way we can conquer any temptation. All of us are subject to many temptations every day, and God has made for us a loving provision of victory by making our Lord Jesus Christ our daily bread and drink.

Abraham was tired and weary after his long march finally to overtake the enemy and fight with them. His shoes were also worn out and doubtless needed shoelaces. The King of Sodom came to him with full of gratitude and offered him all the goods that Abraham had rescued, and said: " Give me the persons and take goods ". What a temptation! But Abraham answered: "Even though my clothes are torn and my shoes worn out, I will not accept thread to stitch my clothes nor shoe-laces to tie my shoes. Though I am hungry I will not touch any of your food".

From all this we can see that Abraham was not refusing ' the goods' because he was rich and did not need them, but because he wanted to show that he was wholly and solely dependent on God for all his needs even to a shoe-lace. This is the first thought.

The second thought is that he refused to defile himself with the defiled things of the Kings of Sodom and Gomorah. That is why he refused to take thread or shoelaces or even a piece of bread. It is when we are very hungry and thirsty that we have many temptations. We get doubts about trusting God for all our needs. Many preachers and so-called God's servants are not 'God's servants' ' at all. They go begging for many things in one-way or the other. It makes no difference whether they are Indians or Americans or English. Only the way they beg in India is different from the way they beg in America or England. In India they put on old clothes to beg, but in England they put on good clothes and stand by the wayside trying to sell something or other, as shoelaces or matchboxes or pens. The fact that their real business is not selling things, but they are in need of financial help is so obvious that kind-hearted people will take a matchbox and put five-rupee note in their hands, and ask them to keep the change. Open begging is forbidden, but all the same it is begging. In the same way some servants of God say that they serve God but, by means of letters and photos, they beg for money. For this reason they send the report of their work. They want more and more money. They are not satisfied. So they remain in want and remain in barren spiritually. But if you just trust God he will provide you with all your wants even to your shoelaces. Don't go to King of Sodom for help for this is how many believers lose their faith. To get a job or promotion they go to worldly people and use worldly methods, or trust their aunts and uncles for money for their marriages.

It was to enable Abraham to withstand the temptation of accepting the offer of the King of Sodom that he received spiritual food, and, being strengthened he was able to conquer temptation when it came. We have to eat and drink our Lord Jesus Christ by faith everyday. Say to Him: "Lord Jesus, You are my bread and you are my drink. Satisfy me and give me inward strength, and prepare me to resist the temptations that are likely to come to my way today. Save me from being defiled from the things of Sodom. Help me to put my trust in thee and thee alone. Help me to look to thee alone for all my needs." He will honor your faith.

Abraham gave the tithes of all he had to Melchisedec. This he did to show that what he had done in defeating the enemy was by the help of God. He was also acknowledging that the same God would supply all his needs in the future. By giving our tithes we show that all we have is in him. We also show that we have confidence in our Lord that he can provide all our needs, no matter what they are, and we also tell the Lord that we will not look to any worldly friends or relations for any help.

In these days of food shortage in India there is the temptation to send reports to America or other countries. They do not say outright that they want money but will say that there is great shortage of food in India and so many are starving in Calcutta, or some other place. Then when the money does come, twenty-five percent of it goes to wife and children, twenty-five percent to some other cause and a small percentage to the starving. What hypocrisy! Such deceive themselves and others, and lose faith in God. But if we honor God, as did Abraham, God will honor us, and supply all our needs.

CHAPTER FOUR: GOD'S COVENANT

In Gen. 15 we have the fifth appearance of our Lord to Abraham, when the Lord appeared to Abraham in order to test his faith.

In "the whole armor of God" we are given a shield of faith (Eph. 6: 16); for it is only by a strong living faith that we can defeat the enemy. In Mark 11: 11 the Lord himself calls it the faith of God, as we can see in the margin. In Galatians 2:20. It is only as we are indwelt by God himself that we can have strong faith. God said to Abraham in this vision in Genesis 15; 'Abraham believe Me and My word'.

God said further: "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." In Psalm 84:11 God is described as a "Sun and Shield". The reward depends on faith, we cannot receive a reward. The Lord uses sufferings and trials to give us faith. (1Pet. 1:7). God had spoken so clearly to Abraham, yet it was hard for him to believe (Gen. 15:2,3). Abraham had waited for many years and finding that he was childless he went about to make his will leaving his property to his chief steward. God appeared to him to save him from making a mistake. Because of our limitations we often have many doubts. Sometimes we may have strong faith but doubts return to trouble us, and God in His Love and Mercy intervenes again and again.

At last God himself appeared to Abraham at the right time. He called him outside and said to him: "Look heavenward Abraham. Don't look at yourself, or your wife, or your limitations, or your wife's limitations. Don't look at circumstances but look upward, and then your faith will become strong. Look heavenward and count the number of stars, so shall your seed be."

Till today nobody knows the number of the stars. There are so many and so far away. God knew that he could not count the stars, but he purposed to strengthen his faith, and it is only by looking upward that we can have faith. The enemy will make us to look downward, upon our limitations, our shortcomings or our failures. Our eyes should be constantly on him, and we must take hold of His promises by faith. (V.13-17)

Jeremiah. 34:18 throws some light on this passage. In those days when two parties had to make an agreement, they would take an animal and slay it and divide in two parts. Both the parties would pass between the parts of the animals, thus making a promise that could not be broken. In the same way God was making a covenant with Abraham; He told him to take two animals and two birds (v.10, 15,17) and slay them, and cut them into two parts. Then the Lord caused a burning lamp to pass parts. Then the Lord caused a burning lamp to pass between those pieces, thus making an unbreakable covenant with Abraham (v. 13-17).

Abraham was listening to God, and God was able to tell him beforehand how his seed as a nation would be in Egypt for four hundred years and would return to the land in the fourth generation. God was thus giving the Amorites and the Hittites, the people of the land, four centuries to repent of their sins. If they would not repent of their sins, they would be judged. Leviticus 18.23-25 is a description of the defilement of the land. When the children of Israel returned to it out the land of Egypt. God had waited for four centuries for the nations living there to repent, but because they did not repent they had to be judged. God told the children of Israel to destroy all the cities utterly, and their inhabitants.

The Lord Jesus Christ today has made a covenant with us through His blood and by that by that covenant we possess His inheritance. At the same time we will be used by Him to judge other powers. (1Cor.6: 2, 3) For such a privilege we must be given a strong active faith, a faith that overcomes doubts, and listens and obeys when He speaks to us.

CHAPTER 5: POWER THROUGH FAITH

WE have already seen that there is a seven fold secret of divine friendship. At each appearance God revealed to Abraham something of this secret, in a step-by-step revelation.

If you have steps in your home your home you will not jump over them. But climb them step by step. So it was with Abraham. God appeared twice to him in Genesis 12, 13, 14 and 15. Chapter 17 records the sixth time. He appeared to Abraham, when a man could expect a son. Both he and his wife had become like dry trees. At that time he had to believe that though he was old and his wife equally old, God was able to fulfill His promise (Romans. 4: 19-24).

It was only at this time Abraham got real faith, and for this kind of faith in him God had been waiting for 25 years. When God first appeared to him he had faith, but it was not a strong faith, (Heb.11:8)

He obeyed God and straightway left his country, kith and kin, and went away to a strange and new country. Even though it required much sacrifice and faith to obey like this, God was not satisfied. Step by step He was preparing Abraham for a stronger faith till he and his wife had become too old for childbearing. Until God put new life into their bodies they could not have a child. In other words they had to receive new life because they had both become like dry trees. That was the great secret of faith through which they understood something of the power of resurrection; and by that same power we also can conquer temptations.

We find Apostle Paul in Philippi saying with desire, " that I may know him and the power of His resurrection". Even though he had seen many miracles performed

through his ministry during the past years, and though God had worked through him mightily, yet he was saying here in his old age, " I count all things but loss.... That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection", which is the highest power available to believers. Many believers go on scheming and planning for many years, seeking to have power in their lives. Even though they face up to many failures in their lives, they remain barren spiritually, and then began to scheme as to how they can have power over their temptations. They think that by seeing dreams, or by having certain experiences and visions they will obtain power. But they still remain weak. They do not realize that their power of resurrection is at their disposal. If we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ died in our stead for our sins, and also believe that He rose again for our justification and to live in us by His Holy Spirit, then by faith we can receive into us day by day the power of resurrection for every situation, every temptation and every need.

To give us such a faith the Lord the Lord will take us through many painful situations and trails. We can see that thought in 1cor.1: 11 gold has to be refined by fire. It cannot be cleaned by soup and water. The gold is refined again and again till every little impurity is burnt away. In the same way to deliver us from doubts and unbeliefs we have to go through refining fires. We are made to have faith and we think it is a strong faith, but the question is: Is the Lord satisfied with our faith to appropriate the power of His resurrection day by day, the Lord satisfied with our faith? Unless we gave faith to appropriate the power of His resurrection day by day, the Lord is not satisfied. Paul said in Galatians 2:20 " Christ liveth in me", because He is the living Christ that lives in us to conquer our temptations every day by faith in the power of His resurrection.

Even though the Ephesians were taught by Paul and Apollos and Timothy, yet Paul prayed for them (Ehes.1: 16-20) that they might know the exceeding greatness of His power, even the same power that God wrought in Christ when He was raised from the dead. Why should he pray like that? In Ehesians 1:3 he says: "Blessed be the God and the father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." For such a blessing we must know how to receive into us the power of His resurrection, and to gain that knowledge and faith, the Lord will take us through trails, and sufferings, hardships and difficulties.

Just as God appeared ten times to Abraham, so the Lord appeared ten times to His disciples after the resurrection. He first appeared to Mary at the sepulcher, then to the men, and then to peter, then to the disciples on the way to Emmaus and in the evening to all the disciples in the upper room. Then He appeared to five hundred, then to James, then to Thomas, then at the Sea of Galilee, then at the Bethany went He went to heaven. On the Easter day there are five of His appearances, and again five appearances before the day of ascension. There we have the ten-fold secret of the power of the Resurrection. We find it really helpful if we study these appearances together, that is the appearances of God to Abraham and the appearances of the Lord to His disciples. In Genesis 17:1 the Lord said: " I am the Almighty God." This he said to enable Abraham to enjoy God's mighty power.

"I am the Almighty God, there is nothing too hard for me." Nothing is impossible with God; He can do all things. The God of love and mercy wants us to have the faith that can experience and enjoy the power of Christ's resurrection. At the time when Abraham was old he may have walked with a stick, for when we become weak and old and feeble we become helpless. So Abraham may have walked with a stick feeling very disappointed and thinking to himself: " God said to me He

would give me a son, but there is no child yet." So with many doubts in his mind and leaning on a stick he was feeling weak and feeble. Then God said to Abraham, as it were: " Throw away the stick and walk upright and don't look old anymore. You are a young man and old. To other people you may seem you are very old, but in my sight you are still young". So Abraham threw away the stick, the stick, which indicate unbelief and disappointments and speaks of human weaknesses. Abraham walked straight like a young man. God was saying as it were: " I am the Almighty GOD and I am going to pour power into you"(vs.2&6) Abraham was asking for the one son for the most. But the Lord said to him," I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee".

Apart from this experience Abraham would never have known what was in the heart of God for him. Even so in our sufferings we will never know what God has in His heart for us, how much God wants to give us. It is only by faith we can realize our blessings. The devil tries to weaken our faith again and again. Rather than trust God we look to man for everything. Even though God's servants talk about the Almighty God in their preaching, we find that we find much more time in begging. They beg for money, milk powder, and for shoes and for many other things, through their letters, pictures and photos and by other means. They are beggars in God's service. But we have got to prove that our God is an Almighty God. The one whom we believe and preach is living Christ, and the one who is willing to give us every thing. As Paul says in Philippians. 4: 19" My God shall supply all your need". It is by glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives that we manifest the power of His resurrection by faith.

Because God wanted to reveal His power of resurrection in Abraham He came to make a covenant with him (vs. 11). Galatians 1 says, "strengthened with all might"; Abraham did not get a child with human strength, for he and his wife were very old. God has to put new life into both their bodies. That is the power of resurrection, the death conquering power of divine life. It is by that power they were able to get a child. Why was Abraham circumcised? Circumcision is the symbol of fact that the power of God is available to man. By faith we receive that power by appropriating it for every trial and temptation and test. Sometimes it takes us many years to receive that faith. In the beginning we depend on Bible knowledge for victory. Then we depend on long prayers and fasting, or will power or dreams and visions. All these things fail. All that we have to say is " Lord reveal to me that secret." Then we know how foolish we have been. The same Lord died for us, and who comes to live in us, can give us that power. We can have Him for all our needs. So God in sovereign way uses many means to give us faith.

The Lord gave Abraham a new name because of his faith in God's promise. He changed his name from Abram to Abraham: " A father of many nations have I made thee." (Vs. 15). He and his wife had been tested by God till they were free from their doubts and unbelief (Vs. 19). How lovingly and patiently the Lord gave both of them strong faith. All of us have the same problem. The enemy creates in our mind doubts in many circumstances, but God lovingly keeps on rebuking and helping us. God knows our human limitations (Gen. 17:17), so He sends messengers again and again to give us strong faith and to take away our fears and doubts (Psa. 103:14).

CHAPTER SIX: THE SEVENTH APPEARANCE

IN Genesis 18: 1 the Lord appeared to Abraham for the seventh time in the plains of Mamre. According to Genesis 13: 18 Mamre is Hebron, and Hebron means fellowship. Now Abraham had learned that privilege of enjoying that fellowship with God. In chapter 19 we see Abraham sitting at his tent door with great expectation. He is not happy exactly, but expectant. He is looking forward to something. As you grow spiritually you may be given admonition of coming events. There is something in the heart that will warn you to be on the lookout.

In this way we are prepared beforehand. To Abraham in chapter 18:2 the Lord appeared as an ordinary man, but to Lot in chapter 19 God appeared as an angel. In chapter 18:9 three men speak to Abraham. And they put a question together, but in verses 10 and 13 the Lord is alone with Abraham and is speaking to him. When God began to talk to Abraham alone, Abraham recognized that he was talking to God, though he was disguised Himself as an angel. In case of Lot only two angels go to him. Though they came as ordinary men Abraham welcomed them with great joy. In the case of Lot however, though they appeared to him as angels, yet half-hearted welcome he gave to them.

Compare the welcome given by two men in chapter 18 and 19. Abraham runs to meet them. That shows what joy he had in receiving them. Though Abraham saw them as ordinary men yet he went out to meet them with joy. Lot knew that these men were angels, but he stood where he was to welcome them. In Genesis 18: 3-5 Abraham is saying "come and sit down. I will go inside and prepare food for you three." But Lot gives them no mention of food, though he gives them water to wash their feet. He told the angels, " you stay here and go away in the morning"(Gen. 19:2). Perhaps he was afraid that his wife would reject them and refuse to give them food. In Genesis 18:6, with what great joy Abraham ran to the herd and brought in young calf. He told his wife to take three measures of fine flour. Now one measure of flour is enough for three people, but they prepared food for nearly thirty people. Though he had three guests, his joy was so great that he wanted his whole family to have fellowship together. Whatever he could prepare he prepared in full abundance, and they came to him with great joy.

In the case of Lot however, the angel said, "we will abide in the street" (Gen. 19:2). They were quite willing to stay in the street all night because of half-hearted welcome given by Lot. They knew that wife and children of Lot were not of one mind with him, and therefore the angels were not willing to go inside, so Lot had to press them to do so. When we go to some houses we feel that the Lord is there. We find it great joy to be with such people. But when we go to other homes we do not like to be there even for a few minutes.

What kind of home is your home? It is not your furniture or wealth or food that can make a happy home. It is only Lord's presence that can make a home happy. Abraham, Sarah and the whole family joined together to receive three guests, and the guests were very happy to be with them. But in the case of Lot in Genesis 19:3, only after much persuasion the angels came into Lot's house. Perhaps Lot said, " By the way have you had any food?" For the sake of formality some people ask this question and not with the desire of entertain. Many years I went to see my sister. She asked me " Won't you have something to eat? I replied, " Yes, please" then she said, " You looked so tired that I thought that you would refuse. We

have nothing in house. Perhaps Lot was doing the same kind of thing. There is no mention of Lot's wife. Perhaps if Lot had asked his wife to prepare food for the guests she might have retorted, "Prepare it yourself. They are not my guests, but yours." We read that Lot himself "baked unleavened bread, and they did eat."

Lot had chosen to stay very near to Sodom. At first he may have lived outside Sodom, but later on he came inside. Then he became an elder in Sodom, and the result was that his own people became full of worldly pleasures. Many people lose their joy and happiness because they are attracted by worldly honor and wealth and glamour. Abraham received these guests because he thought that they were God's messengers. He received them as strangers at first. Perhaps, Hebrews.13: 2 refer to Abraham. It was only when he began to speak to them that he knew who they were. That should be our attitude also; to receive even strangers in His name with great joy.

The lord appeared to Abraham to strengthen his faith. The Lord said, "Sarah, thy wife, shall have a son". Sarah laughed within herself saying: "After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my Lord being old also?" The Lord asked: "Why did Sarah laugh?" How the devil tried to bring in doubt. That is the devil's work. God knew beforehand that doubt would come to their minds, so He came lovingly to take away their doubts. God will surely send messengers from time to time, to encourage and strengthen His people when they are full of discouragement. This can happen through letters, a book or messengers.

In Genesis 18: 16 Abraham walked with the men. He walked with them as Enoch walked with God, not to get any favor but just to have fellowship with them. Then the two men went to Sodom and the Lord stayed behind, to talk with Abraham personally. He said: "Abraham is my friend. I know him and I cannot hide any secret from him. I have watched him and know how he looks after his family. Now I'm going to tell him my heart's secret. My time has come to judge the men of Sodom and Gomorrah." Abraham stood before the Lord while the angels went on to Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Lord Jehovah talked to Abraham alone. As the friend of Abraham He talked freely with him. He did not send His angels to speak to Abraham but came in person to do so. Some men when they want to talk to us they send their servants. They tell them: "Go to so and so and give them this message". Here God is saying, "I will talk to Abraham myself. I have an important matter to talk with him". So He sent His angels on to Sodom and Gomorrah.

What a privilege we have, what a great honor to be His friends. Just imagine the Lord Himself coming to talk with us. But first we have to be tested and approved to be worthy of this privilege. In Genesis 18:19 the Lord said, "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him." So the Lord has been watching Abraham and his household all this time; how he had been giving God's message to whole family faithfully. Every family should have family prayer regularly. If we will teach our children God's word regularly and faithfully we too can become God's friends, and that which is hidden from the angels be revealed to us. When God told Abraham about coming events, Abraham interceded for the men of Sodom and Gomorrah. He gained boldness as God's friend. We can also have boldness and liberty to intercede for others, and to claim grace and mercy for those who are in darkness. Thus we can become God's coworkers (Vs. 33).

God did not go to Lot, but sent His angels to warn them, because Abraham interceded for Lot and his wife and his two daughters. The Lord had no desire to share His secret with Lot, because Lot had grieved Him by preferring to stay near Sodom and Gomorrah. He was deceived by fertile land nearby, and in the end had become an elder in Sodom. If anyone of us like Lot, prefers worldly pleasures and honor, the Lord will not come to us, nor reveal to us His secrets. I know of many believers who are born-again. They know the meaning of the "Church of God". But they want to be elders somewhere, and they despise the fellowship of God's people. They want to be honored by elders, and nominal Christians are ready to welcome them. They will be rescued from 'fire', but all that they have done will be as 'wood, hay and stubble' and will be burned up. Let us take warning, lest the things of this world are more to us than the promises of God.

CHAPTER SEVEN: OBEDIENCE-THE SECRET OF BLESSING

WHEN Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac she told Abraham (Gen. 21: 10) " Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." This was grievous to Abraham. Because of his natural affection for Ishmael, Abraham felt hurt and wounded when he heard these words. Then God appeared to him again the eighteenth time. Evidently Sarah was governed by the Holy Spirit at that time, while Abraham was governed by his love and affection for Ishmael. This is conformed in Galatians 5 vs. 22-31. Sarah was being governed by Holy Spirit, a lesson she was learned by bitter experience. She herself had offered Hagar to Abraham (Gen. 16: 1-11), ten years after they had come out of land of Chaldees. She had waited for ten years for God's promise to be fulfilled, but when she saw that nothing had happened she gave her maid to Abraham. Then she was despised, we are told, by Hagar. She had made a mistake, and had been governed by her old nature instead of waiting for God's time to receive a son.

In chapter 21:10 we see Abraham being governed by human affection. Having learnt her own bitter lesson Sarah says, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son. "Not all who are called Christians have part in the inheritance in the saints in light. Nominal Christians, no matter how good they may be outwardly, have absolutely no share in it. There are so many nominal Christians who are so good by nature. They are so loving and nice. They make such sacrifices and spend much money in the Lord's work. But sad to say they are not born-again. They depend upon their own righteousness for salvation.

A man of God was staying in a certain place for Gospel Campaign. He was staying with a very nice Christian family. When he was going away from that place he prayed, " Lord give me a message for my host and hostess. They have been so good to me, so please give me a very nice message." God gave him the message and it was "One thing thou lackest". The man of God said, "Lord they have been so good to me. How can I give them such a message?" The more he prayed the more the same message was given to him again and again: "One thing thou lackest" (Luke 18: 11). He did not have the courage to say this directly to his host and his hostess. So he wrote it on a piece of paper and pinned it on the window curtain. Then he came downstairs and thanked his host and his hostess and went away. After he left, the lady of the house went upstairs and found the piece of paper that was pinned to

the window curtain. She read the words, "One thing thou lakeest" and called her husband, "these are the final words of the man of God to us" she exclaimed. So they both knelt down by the window and prayed, "O God; show us the meaning of the words left for us by the man of God". When they prayed like this God showed them the meaning, how till that day they were not born-again, but were depending on their own good works for righteousness. They had not received to experience the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. Outwardly they were very good Christians full of good deeds, attending all meetings, and were giving regularly their money for the Lord's work. But they were not born-again. Don't let your wisdom or your sympathy deceive you. Enen though Abraham had great love for Ishmael, Ishmael had no share in God's kingdom. He was born of the flesh but Isaac was born of the spirit. The Lord had put new life into the body of Abraham before Isaac was born.

So Isaac is a type of the power of resurrection in the Bible. Unless we receive by the experience the power of resurrection we have no share whatsoever in God's kingdom. Make sure to which group you belong: whether to that of Ishmael or to that of Isaac. Now Abraham was in great spiritual danger at that time because he was being governed by human affection for Ishmael. So God appeared to him and told him to hearken to his wife for whatever she said was important. Because we have done God's will in the past is no proof that we shall continue to do so in the future. It is possible to make mistake at any time. As we grow older in age our affection for relations and friends also becomes strong and many fail God in their old age because of their affection for others. Many parents, wives, husbands and children disobey God because of love for someone else. This human affection must be brought under the subjection to God's affection. Though this subjection is very painful it is very safe. Abraham had to send his son away from him and God would not have appeared to him if he had not obeyed him. Though it was very grievous to Abraham, yet he obeyed God. It is very painful to obey God's word and God's command, but Abraham was open to God's rebuke. The purpose for which God appeared for Abraham in chapter 21 was to show us how to be governed by the spirit at all times and never by flesh. If you want to be God's friend never allow anyone to come in the way of obeying God, not father, mother, brother, sister, children, friend or wife. In subtle way the enemy will bring before you these objects of affection, and sometimes cause a wife or child to start weeping to hinder you from doing God's will.

Having received the Lord's command Paul the Apostle on his way to Jerusalem stopped at Cesarea for a while (Acts. 21:13) The prophet Agabus came there and took Paul's girdle and bound his own hands and feet and said: "Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." When Paul's friends heard these words they began to weep. They were good people, and close friends of Paul. They were also born-again people, but when they heard how Paul was going to be treated they began to weep and say, "Don't go there. Don't go there." But Paul replies, "What mean ye to weep and break my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of Lord Jesus." Paul had heard God's command clearly and was sure of God's will, so though his friends entreated him with tears and tried to prevent him from going, he remained firm. Many of us are not so strong. We allow the tears of others to prevent us from doing God's will.

Tell me honestly and truthfully, have you not disobeyed God on occasions when your loved ones began to weep as they heard that you wanted to obey Go? This is the why many have not obeyed God's call for service. Similarly many have refused to go when God wanted to them to go somewhere else. Some have refused to take baptism. Others have not given God what He desired from them. Tears of the loved ones have been the cause of disobedience, and the Lord has had to speak to you and rebuke you. However, loving and lovable that person may be, you cannot love anyone more than God. GOD'S WORD SAYS, "Whosoever loveth father and mother, husband or wife more than me is not worthy of me."

Having passed the test, Abraham was able to go through another test. He had been on the point of making a mistake in connection with Hagar and Ishmael, but God spoke to him and he obeyed. Then came a very severe test in chapter 22. So God appeared to him in the ninth time, in the same year as the happenings in Genesis 22. Just as in chapter 21 Abraham was governed by his affection for Ishmael, so there was also a temptation for Sarah to be so governed in the case of Isaac. So Abraham did not tell Sarah anything about God's demand of Isaac. There are some husbands who think that they must tell their wives anything and everything, what they think and what they eat. They tell all their church matters to their wives. The wives also go on pumping their husbands: "Tell me where did you go? Tell me what did you do? What did you say? And what did that elder say?" Weak-minded husbands tell everything to their wives, and wives go on gossiping everywhere. In this way the wives of the God's servants spoil the ministry of their husbands. The husbands think that they are showing their wives more love by telling everything in this way. Abraham knew by experience the danger of telling his wife Sarah certain things. He knew that if he tell Sarah that God had asked him to sacrifice Isaac she would immediately start weeping and say: "O my son Isaac, my only son, surely God won't ask such a thing from us." So, he guided by the Holy Spirit, Abraham took Isaac away without saying anything about the whole matter to Sarah. Husbands take warning. Don't tell your wife everything. The wives may weep for hours. Don't listen to your wives in the things, which are only between you and God, but learn to give God's will the first place.

The ram in chapter 22 was brought there by God Himself. There was no fears that ram would run away. God had brought it there, and Abraham caught it in a thicket by its horns. Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice the ram? For a purpose that ram was caught in the thicket. God was telling Abraham as it were: "Now Abraham, you have obeyed My voice fully. Without any question or hesitation you offered your son on the altar. So like the ram caught in the bush I am caught to you and bound to you. You will now command me and I will obey you." What a mystery! God bound to Abraham. You don't realize what a privilege it is to obey God; that it is your right to do so. As we obey God whole-heartedly we can command God. "Command ye me", He says in Isaiah 45: 11. Then He will listen to you.

This is the tenth last God appeared to Abraham. See the blessing God gave to Abraham this time. "Since you have heard my voice and obeyed be I am bound to you and you can command me. I am at your service." It is a heavenly mystery. As we obey God fully we become worthy of God's whole kingdom. (Gen. 22:17 last part): " And thy seed shall possess the gate of their enemies." It is God's purpose to give us the whole kingdom - victory over our enemies and dominion over His works. "Fear not little flock, it is the Father good pleasure to give you Kingdom." Obey Him fully even in small matters. Come under His full dominion. Then His Kingdom will be your Kingdom, His glory your glory, and all He has will be yours.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ON CHOOSING A BRIDE

HERE is another incident from the life of Abraham, which contains a warning and a very helpful instruction to the parents who are in search of a partner for their sons or daughters. Many sad mistakes are done by parents as well as young people, when it comes to the marriage question, and thus we come across many unhappy homes. All their lives they have to repent for the mistake they made.

Abraham gave a solemn warning to his servant, when he put him in charge of finding a wife for his son (Gen. 24:3) " I will make thee to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that thou shalt not take a wife for my son of the daughters of cannanites among whom I dwell."

This is first warning to believers. You cannot be joined with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), and this is the first thing that you need to keep in mind. Many believers' parents do not mind whether the girl or the young man they select is born again or not. They are concerned only with other requirements, such as education, money, color, family and other such things. Abraham gave his servant a very solemn warning against the daughters of Canaanites. He was to be guided step by step by divine wisdom. Abraham knew by experience that his servant was capable and could be trusted to do what was asked of him. (Vs. 2) he was a trustworthy servant. Many depend on uncles and aunts and others to make matches for their children, but you cannot depend upon such people in these things. You have to entrust the responsibility to trust worthy and spiritual people. We see from the scriptures that Abraham's servant depended on God for every detail. He did not set about this business by going to this person that person in this matter. (Vs. 12). He applied a big test to make sure God's will. If he had depended on his human wisdom he would have first made that the girl belonged to a suitable family. As Abraham was very wealthy, the servant might have been governed by worldly considerations of an equally wealthy family. But he did not have any such considerations in his mind. He thought only of God's will in this matter, and prayed with great faith, which goes to prove that he was a man of prayer and very spiritual. He knew how to make sure of God's will. He was not governed by his own judgment and feelings. Many parents go in for wealthy matches and make a muddle of whole thing, but Eliezer was not governed by considerations of wealth, or color or education. He did not say to himself, " This is the girl" every time he saw a pretty girl, but instead he put a very big test to the Lord. (Vs. 13, 14). " Behold I stand at the well of water...and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say: Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, and she shall say: Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also; let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac." The servant had ten camels with him. Camels drink five large pots of water each, and the girl had to undertake to draw water for ten camels. What a big task! Only God could make such a test a success. Now we can see the divine wisdom given to Eliezer. A girl who could draw water for ten camels would have to be a girl with a large and willing and tender heart. Eliezer was in search of a girl who was both humble and willing. Being a spiritual man he was looking for spiritual girl. Rebecca was such a girl. When her parents wanted her to stay for long time with them before going to Abraham's house, she refused and was willing to go with servant immediately. (Vs. 58) When she knew from him how the Lord had lead him step by step, she knew that she was the God's choice for Isaac, so she went with Eliezer without questioning. Usually girls weep on their marriage day and also when they have to leave their home. But Rebecca did not weep.

Rebecca was a spiritual woman. When the children struggled in her womb she inquired of the Lord. (Gen. 25: 22) She knew how to find God's will. These things show that God gave divine wisdom to Eliezer to make the proper choice. If you want to find a partner for your daughter, your son, or yourself, please ask for divine wisdom, grace and help. Apply every test to know God's will, and don't be governed by your feelings or wisdom or judgment.

In Genesis 24:63 we read that Isaac went out to meditate or pray, in the field. While Eliezer was looking for a bride for him, Isaac was praying about the matter in the field. He must have been praying, ' O Lord, guide Eliezer so that he is able to make the right choice for me." Abraham prayed, Eliezer prayed and Isaac prayed, and this is how they found God's will. Let this be your example. Do not make mistakes in this matter, for the question of choosing a right partner is very important and big matter. Many believing parents as well as the young people themselves make mistakes in this, and, when it is too late, they suffer. Look around at the unhappy homes and take warning.