

In our survey of Bible history, we come today to the account of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The biblical material covered in this part of God's dealing with mankind begins at the twelfth chapter of Genesis and continues through the remainder of that first book of the Bible. In our previous discussions, we have looked at the creation of man, then at the fall of man, the entrance of sin into the world, and God's punishment of man's universal sin through the flood.

But God has not given up with mankind. He continues to work in loving care and concern in spite of man's defection and sin and turning away from Him. Now the Lord begins to work through the call of Abraham, then through the choice of Isaac over Ishmael and then through the choice of Jacob over Esau. He is working in a loving selection of a family out of whom He will make a great nation--the nation of Israel, and concerning whom most of the rest of the Old Testament deals.

In the twelfth chapter of Genesis we are told of Abraham's call from God and of the promise which Abraham was given by God in connection with the people who would come from Him. I think the story of this great patriarch is somewhat familiar to many. You recall that he was called out of his home in Ur of the Chaldees. He then migrated over to Palestine. He spent some time wandering from one part of Palestine to another. Though he was a great patriarch, he nevertheless was human, which means that he also had a sin nature as all of us do. One of his sins after he got into Palestine was going down to Egypt when God told him that he should stay in the land and there he deceived the king of Egypt with regard to his wife.

You remember the incidents in his life like the story of the birth of Ishmael. Abraham was not quite ready to trust God with regard to the promise of a son by his own wife. You remember the story of that promised son in the birth of Isaac--how miraculous his birth was! You remember the story of the separation with Lot and how Abraham unselfishly took whatever Lot did not want to take. There are many very interesting and wonderful incidents in the life of Abraham.

But what is Abraham to us? May I suggest a few things that this great patriarch teaches us? I already said that Abraham was the father of the nation Israel; indeed he is called that in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Acts. As such also Abraham was the father of the Levitical priesthood, and he is called that in the seventh chapter of Hebrews. Abraham is one of the important links in the genealogy of Christ; you will notice that in the genealogy recorded in the first chapter of Matthew. Abraham is also called the father of the faithful in the third chapter of Galatians and the reason that is so is simply that Abraham is our great example in the matter of salvation. In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul writes these words (Romans 4:3) "What saith the Scripture?" Paul is answering a question which he has raised in the preceding verses, "How was Abraham saved? How did he find justification?" To this question, Paul answers as follows, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." This is why Abraham is called the father of the faithful, because he is the great example of faith in God for salvation. No man has ever come to God any other way, and Abraham is our great example in this.

Abraham is also an example in fellowship for the believer in Christ. You recall that Abraham is called, in the second chapter of James, "the friend of God" because he walked with God, because he obeyed God's commandments and ordinances and statutes. In this he became the friend of God. The prophet Amos said, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" This is why Abraham was God's friend, because he was agreed with God on God's terms. So many people today are trying to walk with God as if God would be willing to compromise Himself and His standards to man's desires and wishes. This is not the case. The agreement which we must have in order to be able to walk with God is an agreement on His terms and Abraham found them. We read in the book of Genesis 26:5 that Abraham obeyed God, obeyed His statutes, His judgments, His commandments, His ordinances, and because he did, he could be called the friend of God. The formula which Abraham found successful in his day is still the formula by which God deals with man and the formula by which we can find happiness and peace with God--faith in order to be saved, and obedience in the Christian life in the walk with God in order to be blessed in the days of our life.

After Abraham came Isaac, the child of promise, the child that was born out of due time, beyond the age when there should have been children. Isaac was chosen over Ishmael. The story of Isaac is somewhat familiar too--his choice; how he was used as a test of Abraham's faith in the matter of the offering in Genesis twenty-two; the very famous story of his marriage in Genesis twenty-four, the story of the birth of his children, Jacob and Esau; his prosperity like his father Abraham; and finally in the thirty-fifth chapter of Genesis, a record of his death.

God's choice continues, however, in the making of this nation Israel because Esau is not chosen and Jacob is. So the line of Bible history follows from Isaac through Jacob--Jacob who worked for his wives; Jacob whose twelve sons became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel; Jacob who finally ended his life in Egypt because some of his children had sold Joseph into slavery and God used this to preserve their own lives in the time of famine which came upon the land of Palestine; Jacob whose life ends in happy reunion with his long lost son in Egypt.

What can we learn from this period of Bible history? First of all, God makes loving choice among His people for the purpose of preserving a line that will be pleasing to Him. If God had not called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob there would have been none who would have sought after Him. It is not a matter of God's showing preference. It is a matter of God rescuing somebody out of the morass of sin in order to have a people for Himself. This He did in the choice of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and in the blessing of the people of Israel who came from these patriarchs.

I think, too, we see in this particular part of biblical history the certainty of God's promises. God promised Abraham that He would make him a great nation. He promised him that He would bless him. He promised him that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed. God reiterated this promise to Abraham on several occasions adding to it boundaries of the land which He would give to Abraham. God reiterated this promise to Isaac, God reiterated it to Jacob, and God did make of Abraham a great nation. God did bless him and God has through Christ blessed all the families of the earth--through Christ, the descendant of Abraham. Some of the promises of this covenant which God made with

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have not yet been fulfilled as they were actually given. Some day God will do this and bring to pass the full fulfillment of all the promises that were made to this man and to his descendants. In other words, Abraham's life and Abraham's covenant promise made to him is a certainty and an assurance to all of us that God keeps His word, that God will fulfill all the promises that He makes to His people.

Whatever problem may be facing you today, you may find its solution in the certainty of the promises of God, for the God who made the promise and who kept His promise to these patriarchs is the same God who lives today and who keeps His promises to His own people.

I think too, not only do we see the loving choice of the people and the certainty of the fulfillment of God's promises but we also see in the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the security of the one who believes God. When four or five hundred years later, God introduced Himself to Moses in the third chapter of Exodus, He introduced Himself in this manner. He said, "I am the God of Abraham, and I am the God of Isaac, and I am the God of Jacob." If God had said to Moses, "I was the God of Abraham or Isaac or Jacob," then we might fear that God had cast off the one whom He had chosen. If he had said, "I was Jacob's God, but I didn't like what he did" or "Jacob failed me and so I cast him off," we would have no security. But when God introduces Himself as still the God of these three patriarchs in spite of their sin; in spite of their defection; in spite of all of their failure; it gives to all of us who sin and fail God daily a sense of security that God continues and will continue the relationship into which He has entered with His people through Jesus Christ. If you are a child of God, you need never fear that God will cast you out. In spite of sin and failure, He is your God and He will continue to be your God through time and through eternity.