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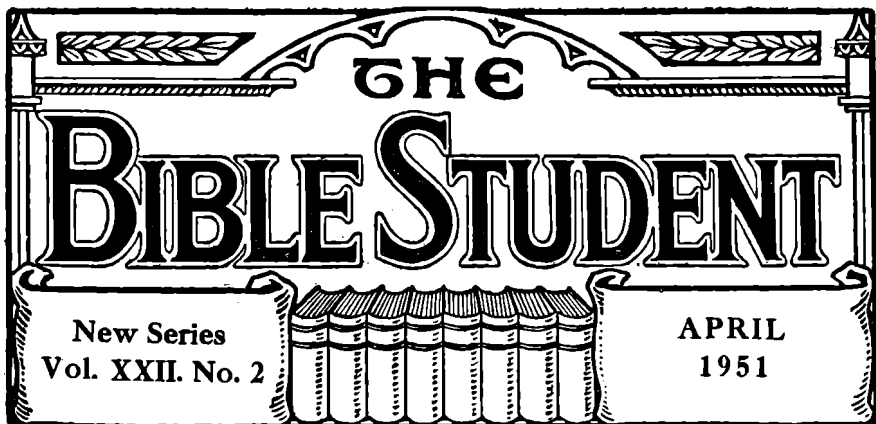
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“The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light”

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Jesus Christ on our behalf in the Sanctuary. The more we learn of the glories of His Person and of the value which His Sacrifice on the cross gives to His work in the Sanctuary, the more shall we appreciate what His presence in the Sanctuary means for us. It is good for us to meditate, in communion with God, upon the virtue of the precious blood of Christ, and the majesty and power of His heavenly ministry, so that we may apprehend more fully its effects in our hearts and lives and in our changing experiences and circumstances here below. Do we not often fail to remember that both our deliverances from danger and our experiences of joy, as well as the disciplinary experiences of sorrow, come by reason of what Christ is doing in the presence of God? We owe, indeed, everything to the immediate operations of the Holy Spirit, but what the Spirit does is inseparable from the ministry of Christ in Heaven.

THE THEOPHANIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

By ALEX SOUTTER

II. Abraham the Intercessor

In a former paper entitled *The Tent Door** we dealt with the first part of this Theophany. Abraham's aloneness with his Lord, his act of worship and his lavish hospitality were there considered. We now pass on to the second part of Gen. 18 (v. 16ff.) which portrays the Friend of God engaged in the holy art of intercession on behalf of sinful Sodom.

The Lord—the central Figure of the group of visitants from heaven—had just pledged His word that a son would be born to Abraham and Sarah. The promise was based on a question that incorporates a challenge and a bond. God's word was His bond, and no power or authority in the universe could take up the divine challenge, even though nature's laws must needs be suspended to fulfil it. It is to be noted that the very words used in the LXX here, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord," are also used in Luke 1:37 in Gabriel's message addressed to Mary.

* In the issue of October 1950; which is separate from this series.

Did the Lord deliberate with Himself when He said "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (v. 16). Or was He speaking to the two messengers? Whichever way, this noble utterance marvellously reveals how intimate may become the relationship between the creature and the Creator.

Abraham's family life brought great glory to the Lord who had chosen and called him. "I know him", said God, "that he will command his children and his household after him" (v. 19). This verse is the counterpart of Gen. 15:6: (Abraham) "believed in the Lord". There, the patriarch trusted in God; here God trusts the patriarch. The principle of reciprocity is nowhere seen more clearly than in these two scriptures. Isaiah puts it succinctly in chap. 7 verse 9 of his prophecy when he says: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." The words *believe* and *established* are one and the same—the Heb. word *aman*. Isaiah might be paraphrased thus: "If ye will not trust in Me I will not trust (in) you" But in Abraham's case how sweet is the reciprocation. He confided and trusted in God, and God confided and trusted him.

In considering this great passage on intercessory prayer—the first of its kind in Scripture—we might helpfully divide it into three:—

(1) *The place prayed for.* The sodomy of Sodom, as described in chap. 19, makes awful reading. No wonder Lot had his righteous soul vexed daily by their filthy conversation (2 Pet. 2: 7, 8). A Christian may pay too high a price for earthly prosperity. Lot did: Sodom impoverished him spiritually and in the end, materially as well. Scriptures like Isa. 3:9; Jer. 23:14; Ezek. 16:49 show how bold and unabashed, proud and haughty, and in God's sight utterly abominable Sodom was. Yet in the day of judgment some will be found even more guilty than the Sodomites—see Luke 17:28. Jude underlines the deliberateness of their sin—they abandoned themselves to it. It is thought by some that Abraham stopped short of the full privilege of intercession. Later on God offered to spare Jerusalem for the sake of one man (Jer. 5:1). But perhaps we should withhold judgment on such a matter as this until the day declares it.

(2) *The Person who prayed.* Abraham, regarding whom Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:7) said when addressing God, "*Thy Friend*"; but God Himself, in Isa. 41:8, said of him, *My Friend*.

God called him His *Friend*; Sarah called him *lord* (1 Pet. 3:6); his neighbours called him a *mighty prince* (Gen. 23:6); but here (18:27) he calls himself *dust and ashes*. His humility made it easy for him to pray; his humility would give him power and confidence as he prayed. First he stood before the Lord as a humble suppliant. Then he drew near. As he drew near, did the Lord reciprocate by drawing near to him? We cannot say, but this we do know, when we, in prayer, draw near to God, He assuredly draws near to us (Jas. 4:8.)

(3) *The Prayer itself* is worthy of intensive study. It is at once rational and reverential; rooted in faith's humility and offered in faith's sincerity; enriched with love's pleading, and illumined with love's emboldening. At the beginning he hopes that 50 righteous might be resident in Sodom; he ends with 10. Abraham's intercession is in 6 stages. He begins by reaching up to heaven's throne as he says, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Reducing the number to 45 he comes down to the dust in his estimate of himself. At 40 his converse with his Lord flows on uninterruptedly—"he continued yet to speak". Coming down to 30 his tone softens while he says, "Let not the Lord be angry." At 20, he ventures on in holy confidence to speak as mediator and suppliant. And finally he reaches the minimum, 10; whether it was God's minimum we cannot say; and there he stays to plead softly and tenderly for the sinning populace of Sodom. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of his prayer is his boldness, or freedom of speech, reminding us of Heb. 4:16, "Let us come *boldly*, (Gr. *Parrhēsia*, freedom of speech). It is not recorded that he *prayed* but rather that he *spoke* to the Lord, as if to emphasise that holy converse that marks the exercise of all true prayer and intercession. The word "speak" is mentioned 6 times in this passage—5 times concerning Abraham and once with reference to the Lord (vv. 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33). And whilst Sodom was not spared, Lot was delivered. Thus did God magnify His mercy and fulfil Abraham's desire. God did *not* slay the righteous with the wicked—see v.25.

The portraiture here given of the Lord Himself is of supreme importance. First He appeared in human form as Abraham's Guest, then as his Benefactor, and now as the Lord and Potentate of the nations. Yet it is preeminently in grace that God is here revealed. We see on the one hand His longing to confide in

Abraham, and on the other His reluctance to punish the men of Sodom. It might reverently be said that Jehovah was slow to accept what His ears had heard of Sodom's sinfulness—He must needs investigate the case and visit the place Himself. Only after that would He allow the sentence on Sodom to be executed. He was not willing that Sodom should perish but that all in it should come to repentance. Verse 21 portrays the Lord—the Judge of all the earth—virtually searching for a just reason for the sparing of Sodom. That search, alas, was in vain.

In God's yearning to unveil His thoughts to Abraham regarding the doom of Sodom, we are given, as it were, to feel the very heart-beat of divine tenderness and love. The Creator here confides in the creature. Abraham is led into the inner council-chamber of heaven. All is revealed—nothing hid. There on the high ground of Hebron overlooking the cities of the plain stands the Maker of the universe with Abraham the creature of His hands. Nothing mars this holy intercourse. Heart is knit with heart. They bear a common burden. God shares with His servant His sorrow regarding a sin-hardened people. Abraham converses with Jehovah, and Jehovah with Abraham, until the appointed time of parting when they go their several ways—Abraham to his tent-home in Mamre and the Lord to His lofty throne in Heaven.

“Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). It is this divine law that operates so authoritatively in the story of this Theophany. God shared His ‘Secret’ with Abraham, as He did in a later day with Daniel, and John (Dan. 9:22; Rev. 1:1) and a host of others. We still may know God's secrets, but with this difference: as we walk with our Lord, He shares them with us, not by direct vision or revelation, as in the case of prophets and apostles, but through the volume of the Book those holy men of God were miraculously moved to write.