

ABRAHAM, who is the father of us all.

Richard Hussey.

Translation from Spanish

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Preface to translation.

On one or two occasions, perhaps more, English brethren have expressed to me in the past their desire that my books should be made available in English.

I did not feel inclined to do so, mainly for two reasons. In the first place was the consideration that the English Christian literature is so vast and rich, that my modest writings could hardly be a contribution of any weight and substance.

Secondly, attempting such a task would make heavy demands on my time, which would of necessity impinge on what I have known clearly to be my chief priority – Spain and the Spanish people.

However, having published my last book in Spanish, entitled “Women of Distinction – not a few,” at least for the present I do not feel drawn to write any further book in Spanish.

This allows me a little spare time, and for this reason I have decided it could be worth while undertaking some translation work.

To attempt translating all my 15 books would be a mammoth task, far beyond my reach, but I have chosen the above, entitled “Abraham, who is the father of us all”, which I consider worth while and within the scope of my strength and available time.

I have always thought that translations apart from some very worthy exceptions, are in general a second best, inasmuch as the flair and inspiration of the writing in its original tongue can rarely be matched, no matter how hard the translator may try.

Strange as it may seem, I find this also applies to the present work, even though I am my own translator. The reason is twofold: on the one hand my calling and ministry are, as already mentioned, to Spain and the Spanish people, and so the way it is to be worded and expressed must of course be suited to the Spanish mentality and style, which is so different from the English.

On the other hand, although my English could be rated as more or less satisfactory, actually I have a better command of Spanish.

Because of all this, I consider therefore that this translation will be rather like a second best, not matching the level or standard of the original in Spanish.

However, and despite the foregoing, I trust the Good Lord will be pleased to instil into its pages something of the fragrance and spark which –one knows full well – can only come from the heavenly breath of the Holy Spirit.

Time and those who read its pages will tell whether this hope and wish of mine has been crystallized or not.

On a practical note, the whole text of the translation will be posted on my website – ricardohussey.com – and not printed, published and distributed as a book. To download, all that is necessary is to click on **DOWNLOAD FULL TEXT**.

So I close in commending it to the Lord, with the prayer that despite all the drawbacks pointed out, in His great loving kindness He will choose to make it of some blessing and profit to every saint who will choose to read it.

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Preface by Bernardo Sánchez García

The present book is the precious fruit of a blessed ministry of biblical exposition, carried out by its author in his itinerant labours in evangelical churches in many locations in Spain and other countries.

It is a rather brief book, divided into 31 chapters, preceded by a foreword by the author, and brought to conclusion by an epilogue that describes the beauty of the heavenly city, and a poem of thirteen stanzas of six lines each, gathering and summing up the main threads of the book.

It focuses on the outstanding person and character of Abraham, father of all true believers, whose spiritual lineage - the genuine family of God, by their faith in Christ - Who is the precious seed by which the eternal and divine redemption has been accomplished.

The author delights us with many an inspiring reflection, leading us by the hand, as it were, in following Abraham's pilgrimage in every one of its most outstanding occasions. Thus we are brought to see the heights of faith and glory to which the Lord conducted His servant.

Step by step we are introduced into Abraham's experiences, trials, shortcomings, spiritual conflict, and the ultimate triumph and rich fulfilment to which our beloved Heavenly Father brings us, by virtue of being in his spiritual loins as father of us all.

The book could well be used as a daily devotional, which may not only refresh the spirit of the readers, but also dispel the shadows of uncertainty and insecurity that sometimes assail us, particularly in the dark hour of trial and tribulation.

We have enjoyed beyond words reading it, which in a sense has been like plunging into its pure words, running from the stream of divine inspiration through this singular master of biblical exposition.

We warmly recommend it to all those who have the honour and responsibility of feeding the flock of Christ, as both pastors and members of the blessed lineage of true faith.

Bernardo Sánchez García

Bernardo Sánchez, who was promoted to glory some 6 years ago, was a distinguished servant of the Lord, well known in Spain as a prominent Bible teacher, who served as pastor in various churches in the Iberian Peninsula over a period of more than four decades.

He was born in Puerto Llano, in the province of Ciudad Real, and came to know the Lord as an adolescent, and from that time on he led an exemplary life of full devotion to the Lord's service coupled with an unclouded testimony, and by the side of his dear wife, who predeceased him by a few years.

The actual preface was much more extensive, but for the sake of brevity we have only included part of it.

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FOREWORD

The spiritual fatherhood of Abraham over all the true sons of God reborn of the Holy Spirit, is one of the richest and most fascinating subjects we find within the inexhaustible wealth of the Holy Scriptures.

It holds wonderful mysteries, understanding by this not the kind of thing that brings darkness, strange enigmas, fear, or any such thing.

Instead, they are the secrets of divine love and providence which were hidden in the heart of God from past eternity, and that now, in the full light of the dispensation of grace in which we are living, have been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

Before going any further, and to dispel any possibility of a wrong interpretation or misunderstanding, we must stress that this paternal link or bond with Abraham is not a blood or carnal one. Instead, it applies to every man and woman that by a living faith in Christ Jesus as Saviour and Lord, have obtained full forgiveness, salvation and eternal life.

Our whole focus is that this is what makes them sons and daughters of Abraham, and not their being Jewish or Israelite by blood; however, these may indeed become sons and daughters of Abraham in the sense of the approach of our book, but only by receiving Jesus Christ as the true Messiah, and embracing fully the gospel faith.

Many years ago, after reading the story of Abraham's pilgrimage, which is covered in Genesis, from chapter 12 to 25, we were left with a question.

¿What was the purpose and what truths were wrapped up in the whole narrative, which gives us, in not a few cases with many details, all his journeys up and down the land, plus the great variety of experiences he went through in the process?

At a later date we discovered two verses in the book of Hebrews, together with passages in Romans and Galatians, which opened up the clue that would help us to grasp the purpose and truths that lie therein, and additionally, greatly enlarge our understanding and vision of their vast and far reaching repercussions.

"And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham."

"For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedec met him."
(Hebrews 7: 9-10)

In this passage, the author of Hebrews is referring to the occasion of Abraham's encounter with Melchizedec, which appears in Genesis 14: 18-20. In the whole chapter 7 he traces wonderfully through the type and figure of Melchizedec, the person and eternal priesthood of our Lord Jesus.

In the two verses quoted above we find something really amazing, and yet full of simple logic – that is, when Abraham gave Melchizedec the tithes of all he gained in his previous battle, Levi, of whom Abraham was actually his grandfather – also paid tithes.

That is to say that what Abraham did on that occasion was not only something done by himself; it was also an action which marked or programmed, for lack of a better word, the seed of Levi, which he was carrying in his loins.

Or, to put it in a different way to make it clearer: Levi, while he was in Abraham's loins, many years before he was born, had a sign stamped upon him which we may rightly term a *genetic trait*. This was to predispose him in such a way that in his days and time he would do just what Abraham had done many years before.

All this, of course, is but a confirmation of what is widely known: apart from biological genes that affect the body, there are those of a moral nature pertaining to parents, which affect their children.

For this reason, we find it appropriate to use the term *spiritual loins*, to differentiate from *physical loins*, which have merely a carnal or blood connotation.

Before continuing, we stress that the whole focus of our book is based upon the moral or spiritual genetic traits, not on the biological ones affecting the human body.

And so, we are to enter into the vast and wonderful truth of the genetic seed, a field in which scientists have made many significant discoveries over the last few decades. This, with the proviso, of course, that, as already pointed out, we will be dealing exclusively with the moral and spiritual genetics, not with the biological.

We find it right to point out at this stage that the omniscient Holy Spirit, inspirer of the Sacred Scriptures, deemed it right to choose as the first book of the sixty-six comprising the whole Bible, the book of *Genesis*.

Indeed, in this first book we find the genes or origins of many of the most important truths and principles, which are further developed later in the Scriptures.

Among them lies the stupendous one of the genetic seed of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as per the title we have chosen for our book, and which we will begin to attempt to plumb and fathom as we start our first chapter.

Yet here goes another clarification before we proceed. In many Christian circles it can be seen clearly that the main emphasis lies in his great material wealth.

Whilst well aware of this fact, and that it is only right and proper that God's true sons and daughters, at least in this more or less affluent Western civilization to which we belong, should be prospered and blessed materially, we must aim higher than that. And most of our approach will be found to lie in the eternal values of grace, light, truth, union and communion with our Blessed Beloved God, and many others, which appear either directly or in type, as the biblical narrative proceeds.

All these, we find, transcend by far the material and financial, and uplift and carry us to a much loftier plane.

And so with this in mind, we now move forward.

We do so with the prayer that our Heavenly Father will grant us grace, light and understanding, to unfold and trace aright the wonderful treasures bound up in the life story of the great patriarch Abraham, father not only of Israel as a nation, but of all those redeemed by a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Particularly in the early chapters, readers will note a tendency to repeat and explain once more things that have already been said previously.

We fully appreciate that for those who have readily understood things from the very first time, this might seem repetitious and even unnecessary.

However, we would ask such to bear with us, as it is done for the benefit of some readers who might not find it easy to grasp things clearly first time. So our book will not be a literary jewel by any manner of means. However, our desire is to set things forth in the simplest, most basic way possible, to make them abundantly clear to all.

This is our fifth book. Every author impresses somehow upon each of his writings the seal of his personal style and idiosyncrasy, and Christian authors, that of their spiritual identity.

Whilst under this umbrella or common denominator, we have endeavoured from the very beginning so to write, that each book might be in some way different from the previous ones, both in its focus and general approach.

In this respect, possibly our present fifth book is that which most differs from the previous ones, and we trust it will be well received by God's people.

As pointed out by pastor Bernardo Sánchez in his preface, we have arranged it in 31 rather brief chapters, bearing in mind that it could thus be used as a devotional treatise with one chapter for each day in the month.

Finally, we would suggest to every reader that, before pressing on, he should open his heart in prayer, that the Lord would quicken to him these pages by the Spirit, so that he may fully grasp and absorb the many truths and principles to be found in the fascinating theme of Abraham's spiritual fatherhood over all the true sons of God.

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CHAPTER 1

ABRAHAM, the friend of God.

In the first place, it is best that we make a brief summary of the life of this outstanding man, whose name was first Abram, which means exalted father, and later changed to Abraham, that is, father of multitudes.

As previously stated, his life story spreads from Genesis chapter 12 to 25. However, it must be said that in other parts of Scripture there are references and even comments on his life and his many experiences, which greatly enhance and enlarge our understanding and appreciation of the vast theme we are considering.

He was born in Ur of the Chaldees, and we ponder with wonder how the Omniscient Eternal God, could identify and single him out, from among the thousands and thousands of that vast empire, knowing full well that he would be that special and highly favoured vessel, through whom he was to outwork His great and far reaching purposes, in terms both world wide and eternal.

Since his departure from Haran with Sarai, as Sara his wife was then known, and his nephew Lot, to his death at the age of 175, there was the time span of exactly one century. It is indeed significant and most meaningful that it took the Lord precisely one hundred years, to bring to full fruition His great purpose concerning him.

At times it would seem that the unfolding of God's purposes is not swift, and progress is ever so slow. However, one sees that in the end, with His amazing skill and foresight, He brings forth the precious and final product, shall we say – for lack of a better word – that lay in His heart from past eternity.

One of the highest distinctions the Scriptures have honoured Abraham with, is that of being known as *the friend of God*. (2nd. Chronicles 20: 7, Isaiah 41: 8 and James 2: 23)

We are to dwell upon in more detail on this special and personal relationship later in this chapter. But before that, we shall comment on it from the viewpoint of *Abraham, the father of us all* as the pivotal focus of our book.

In that special relationship of *friend of God*, we perceive that the Lord wished to share with him His great fatherhood. To that end He forged and brought about a great variety of situations, trials, and deep experiences, by which Abraham was able to identify with God as the Everlasting Father in a way and intimacy which we dare say was above that known by any other mortal, except of course our dear Lord Jesus.

The final result was to be amazing and breathtaking. The man that up to the age of 86 had not had a single son, was to turn into the father of innumerable sons and daughters, both as the dust of the earth (Genesis 13: 16) and the stars of heaven. (15: 5)

Such innumerable multitudes were to belong on the one hand to the people of Israel, His flesh and blood descendants – on the other, to those related spiritually, by virtue of embracing the faith which he first embraced as father and pioneer of this way.

It has been said that the first comparison – *as the dust of the earth* – applies to the people of Israel, whereas the second – *as the stars of heaven* – to his spiritual sons and daughters.

The almost entire content of our book is focused on the latter.

We must now define precisely who are the sons and daughters of Abraham in this concept of spiritual lineage.

“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham,” (Galatians 3: 7)

It goes without saying that we must not understand faith in this context as merely traditional, in a general and not quite defined sense; rather it is clear and definite, and above all, a faith that takes the same effect in our life as it did in Abraham’s.

In other words, it must mean believing in real earnest, as well as receiving and obeying the word which God has spoken to us – in our time and dispensation, the gospel of truth.

Moreover, the result of this should be that we are joined in our inner man to the God Who has spoken it to us, and are moved by it to honour Him, as well as follow and serve Him all the rest of our life, just as Abraham did.

Those of us who can with all certainty know ourselves as such, must from now on, as we move forward, understand clearly this amazing truth: *many centuries ago, we were as a spiritual seed in the loins of our Father Abraham.*

To put it in other words, he, our father, was carrying us in his spiritual loins all along his earthly pilgrimage.

At first sight, to some this may appear strange, far fetched and difficult to understand; we trust, however, that as we proceed it will become increasingly clear and every doubt or reservation will be dispelled.

At this stage it is right to point out that this fatherhood of Abraham is in no way a contradiction of the great and eternal fatherhood of God our Heavenly Father.

The simple facts that the Lord changed his original name to Abraham, which means, as we have already seen, father of multitudes, and that Paul both in Romans 4: 16 and Galatians 3: 7 and 29 calls him the father of us all, makes it quite plain and beyond any doubt.

Perhaps the simplest explanation is to say that in his special relationship with the Lord as *friend of God*, the Almighty found it right in His heart to bestow upon him the great honour of bearing and reflecting, at least in some measure, His own glorious fatherhood.

Abraham’s name appears in Scripture, as Abram first and thereafter as Abraham, some two hundred and eighty six times. As a point of interest, it is important to add that more than half of these references occur after his death, a significant pointer to the great impact of his person and life even after his earthly pilgrimage came to an end.

He also had the high distinction of being the first of a very few select Scriptural characters, who were named twice by the Lord in addressing them. It happened to him as recorded in Genesis 22: 11, and subsequently to Jacob (Genesis 46: 2), Moses (Exodus 3:4), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10) and Saul of Tarsus, later to be known as the apostle Paul, in Acts 9: 4. (*)

There is also a very particular mention of Abraham from the very lips of our Lord Jesus, in the passage concerning the rich man and Lazarus, which appears in Luke 16: 19-31.

(*) The case of Martha, whom our Lord Jesus named twice in Luke 10: 42, is of course on a quite different plane.

In a further passage, in answering the Sadducees, Jesus said: *“But as touching the resurrection from the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you, saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* (Matthew 22: 31-32)

This not only confirms the truth concerning life after death. It also brings out the fact that the words – *“which was spoken unto you”*- clearly implied that God’s words to Moses in the passage of the burning bush where they appear, had a much more far reaching significance. By being featured in Exodus 3: 6, it was intended for the Sadducees, that they, who denied that there is an after life, should understand their great error clearly and beyond any doubt.

But now returning to the passage in Luke 16 regarding the rich man and Lazarus, it is important to note that our Lord’s words in this instance were not a parable, but something that actually took place.

In the solemn scenario of the after life with which we are presented in this passage, we find Abraham in an important twofold role.

On the one hand, we learn of him comforting Lazarus in his bosom, after all the poverty and hardship he had faced while here on earth.

On the other, with great authority delegated from God, we see him denying the rich man his request – a very selfish one indeed – that Lazarus should go and cool his tongue, for he was being tormented by a horrible flame.

Not only that, but he also wanted Lazarus to go and testify to his five brethren who were still alive, so that they should not end up in the same place of torment as he.

It would be too lengthy to comment on the way in which he replies to these two petitions, but it is certainly worth pondering very seriously every word of what he says to the rich man. It should rightly fill us all with a deep sense of awe, whilst spur us on to pursue the right course in life, and not the wrong one.

As we see then, Jesus let us know that our father Abraham is still alive unto God to this very day, and he is also at present discharging divinely assigned duties and responsibilities.

These two we have considered are possibly not the only ones, and we may well learn of many more when we are in glory with the Lord.

Another point that must not be missed is that the Lord Jesus recognised the fatherhood of Abraham. We find three occasions in which he distinctly identified two sons and a daughter: Lazarus, as per the case we have just considered, the woman troubled by a spirit of infirmity (Luke 13: 16) and Zachaeus, as we see in Luke 19:9.

As a final remark bearing on all this, we must add how blessed and highly favoured we should count ourselves – belonging to such a great Heavenly Father, omniscient, almighty, omnipresent and full of love and mercy towards them who seek Him.

And also as a worthy reflection of this, we surely must feel proud to be of the lineage of our great spiritual father, Abraham, the friend of God.

In the following chapter, we are to begin to unfold more specifically the untold wealth of the precious legacy we enjoy in being his true sons and daughters.

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CHAPTER 2 – The genetic seed.

At risk of appearing repetitious, we shall now point out and explain once more the truth of our being, as a spiritual seed, in the loins of our father Abraham many centuries ago.

We do this for the reason already given, of helping some who may not find it easy to comprehend, with apologies to those who see it quite clearly and with no difficulty.

Verses 9 and 10 of Hebrews 7, previously quoted, point out the genetic factor quite clearly. Levi was as yet in his father Abraham's loins, so when he – Abraham – gave his tithes to Melchizedec, it was as though he – Levi – in his own day and time should do just the same.

It is quite evident that this principle applies not only to giving of tithes, which is the actual thing referred to in Hebrews 7, but to all other aspects, both moral and spiritual.

In short, that those of us who really belong to faith as previously defined, were being carried by Abraham our father in his spiritual loins.

Then, as he was borne along by the skilful and omniscient hand of the Lord on that long span of a full century, he faced the most varied situations.

There were, true enough, at least a couple of human failings. However, overall, his faith and absolute obedience to God through thick and thin, especially when it came to offering up his precious son Isaac, marked him as the outstanding champion and pioneer of the way of faith.

Many, or rather most of all those situations he had to face, represent, either directly or in type, similar situations which one way or another we as Christians also have to face.

And so, as he was treading that long and wonderful path, the Lord was doing something quite stupendous through him. So to put it, He was turning it all into a formidable computer, in which with amazing – nay unfathomable – wisdom and foresight, he was programming the spiritual seed of millions and

millions of us, who have embraced the living faith of the gospel and come to new birth.

At the coming of time for each of us, channelled though our Lord Jesus Christ, the seed par excellence, we were and are to find ourselves, by virtue of that divine programming, predisposed to decide, choose and act in the same way that he did, following his footsteps, taken many centuries ago. (See Romans 4:12)

We have said in our previous paragraph *channelled though or Lord Jesus Christ*, so that it might be quite clear that just as the fatherhood of Abraham does not contradict in any way that of our Heavenly Father, so this genetic programming is in no way at odds with the redemptive work of Christ.

Quite the contrary, it is entirely channelled through Him and His all sufficient sacrifice on Calvary, as clearly shown in Galatians 3: 16:- *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not unto seeds, as of many; but as of one. And to thy seed which is Christ."*

An important point must be made at this stage. In some translations of the Bible the word descendent is used in this context and many others. We are thankful that our King James Version renders *seed*, as per the original Greek and Hebrew.

Whilst seed also means descendent, it has a much richer meaning in that a seed contains all the traits and features of where it comes from, in this case our father Abraham, and his seed par excellence, which is Christ.

And so we find ourselves virtually predisposed so as to live and walk as Abraham did, in taking decisions, making choices and facing situations just as he did.

A very simple comparison, albeit on a much lower plane, is what we commonly say of a son who has turned out just like his father – like father, like son, or else, a chip of the old block.

It should be made clear too that this being, by divine programming, predisposed to live and act as Abraham our father did, does not impinge upon the free will principle, which God has established and will always honour.

There are times when no doubt all of us one way or another deviate from the highest. Our father Abraham did so at least on two occasions, as we are to see at a later stage, so how much more may we!

However, it is then by wise and loving chastening that our Heavenly Father corrects us and brings us back to the right path.

Sometimes we have compared it to the satellite devices which so many motorists use nowadays to guide them to their destination. When we take a wrong turning or go astray, our Father redirects us, and generally by the road of repentance, coupled sometimes with chastening, he sets us on the right course again.

In the following chapters we shall begin to consider and comment on the steps taken by our father Abraham.

We trust the previous repetition concerning the genetic seed and its repercussions, have now been clearly understood by all. Should this not be so with any reader, we recommend he goes over once again both the introduction and the whole of this chapter.

On another line of thought, in so many cases, in the pursuit of leading believers to a deepening progression in their spiritual walk, the general trend of Christian ministry and exhortation lies in seeking something new, in addition to what they already have. Or else, they may be encouraged to attend conventions and retreats where qualified ministries can help and inspire them.

With due respect to this, which is the way – and a good way indeed, in which most or all of us have gone – we are presenting in our whole approach a focus which is quite different.

It is based upon discovering what we already have in being Abraham's sons and daughters, and nurturing and developing it, with the intent of bringing it to full fruition by the grace of the indwelling Spirit.

In order to illustrate this we have on occasions used the example – as a supposition – of an eight or ten year old child, who at school is doing below par in most subjects.

However, at some stage his teacher notes that in geometry he shows an unusual ability, and by clever use of his ruler, protractor and a pair of compasses for drawing circles, he excels all others in his class.

Later in life he goes on to become either a clever draughtsman, producing elaborate scale designs, or perhaps he even goes further to become an eminent architect. He had it all in him, by birth actually, but it took time to discover it and bring it into full play.

And that is what the following chapters are about: discovering what we have latent in us by being sons of Abraham, and setting about nurturing and developing it step by step, with keen persistence and perseverance.

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CHAPTER 3

His calling and the first step of faith

“Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.” (Genesis 12: 1)

This is the first time the Lord spoke to Abram, as he was then called. It was in Ur of the Chaldees, in Mesopotamia, as pointed out many years later by Stephen in his speech in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 7.

He obeyed, but, as is generally considered, only in a partial way. Apart from taking with him his wife, which was obviously the right thing to do, he also took his father Terah and his nephew Lot. He also tarried at Haran for a lengthy time instead of continuing to Canaan.

His father seems to have been the cause that detained him so long at Haran, as hinted by Stephen in his aforementioned speech. (See Acts 7: 4)

As for Lot, his and Abraham's pastors had such sharp contentions that a separation between them took place. Lot moved on to Sodom and eventually begat Moab and Ben-ammi, who became the fathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites respectively, both sworn enemies of God's people Israel.

As we can see, a picture of incomplete obedience which took much time and pain to put right.

In our time and dispensation, by the word of the Gospel of truth, we are called to repent over our sins and believe in the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection.

The consequences of our obedience to this generally imply forsaking the world and our worldly friendships, to launch out on a way which is both new and unknown.

The difficulties and trials that in so doing come our way are often quite daunting, considering our lack of knowledge and understanding of what is actually a totally new venture – walking along a path we have never trodden before.

This helps us to appreciate the understanding, and shall we say tolerance, with which the Lord viewed Abraham's shortcomings and his very slow progress in that early stage.

At the same time, it is encouraging to know that, with many of us for the same reason, the Lord has been equally understanding and magnanimous; – as we often say, He has not given up on us!

At the same time, it helps us to identify better with our father Abraham, as we see in him a fallible man, with failings and shortcomings, especially in the early stages – rather than one who never put a foot wrong.

To sum up the foregoing, what happened to him in that beginning is in essence the same as what happens to us who are true sons of God by second birth.

Outward circumstances vary indeed, but basically the word of truth comes to us by the gospel, and as we truly receive it and embrace it, it joins us in our spirit to the God Who spoke it to us. From then on, the right sequel is to love Him, follow and serve Him all the rest of our life.

So now, as the first practical conclusion that applies to us all – to you, my dear reader, to myself and to all others: we must know without a shadow of doubt that that which defines the true sons of Abraham, as clearly explained previously, has in very deed happened to us.

Again at risk of being thought repetitious, we outline it yet once more. As an embryonic spiritual seed we were in him, our father Abraham. It

predisposed and programmed us so that like him, upon receiving that word of the gospel of truth, we should believe it, embrace and obey it.

The fact that at that stage his obedience was incomplete, does not mean in any way that that seed was ineffectual in its transmission to us, his sons.

Quite the contrary, it accords exactly with what in many cases has happened to some if not most of us, inasmuch as we too have often been at fault, especially in our early beginnings.

Finally, a very important additional point and which goes far beyond. When the Lord spoke that first word to Abraham, His living word entered his innermost being as a sacred seed of His very person, with the ingredients of His character and His many wonderful attributes.

At a later stage we shall expound further on this.

For the present we just add the attribute of His eternal and majestic fatherhood. As His word permeated Abraham's spirit, it communicated to him, albeit only as an embryo at that stage, an earthly reflection of that Heavenly Fatherhood, which was to grow and mature till he became in very deed the true father of us all.

From now onwards, we shall be summing up briefly the main points of each chapter.

You and I, as true sons of Abraham were already in him as a spiritual seed when God spoke to him, telling him to leave his country and kindred, to go to a land that He would show him.

His obedience marked and programmed us, so that in our day and time, by the grace of God, and in full use of our free will, we had the same inclination which he had of believing, embracing and obeying that divine word.

CHAPTER 4

The far reaching promise and the altar unto the Lord

Together with the calling to leave his country and kindred and to go to the land that He would show him, the Lord gave Abraham a promise of such great magnitude, that the natural senses would consider it an impossibility.

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: “

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12: 2-3)

This initial promise was, so to put it, the global promise embracing in a panoramic manner the vast purpose the Lord had for his life.

At a later date, as Abraham advanced in his pilgrimage, the Lord would proceed to unfold it in the various specific situations which were to arise. At the same time, He would gradually enlarge it till it reached its complete fruition and fulfilment.

To sum it up, the promise held the following points:

1) From him the nation of Israel would come forth, comprised at present of the millions that dwell in their own land, plus the many millions and millions scattered in many countries in the world.

2) The Lord would bless him, and give him a great name so that he would become a blessing to very many.

3) He would reward with blessing as many as blessed him, and curse him that cursed him.

4) The supreme goal, that in him all the nations of the world would be blessed.

This last one in particular was to be crystallized at a later stage, when it would become plain that it would be through the seed par excellence, Christ the Messiah, through His all sufficient atoning offering on Calvary.

For the present we will add no more, but at a later stage we will be seeing it in more detail, as his life story progresses.

The altar unto the Lord.

“And there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him” (Genesis 12: 7b)

“...and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. (Genesis 12: 8b)

“...and built there an altar unto the Lord.” (Genesis 13: 18)

In his journeying from Haran southwards towards the land of Canaan, Abraham stopped first at Sichem, and later by a mountain between Bethel and Hai.

Directly after pitching his tents in these two places, as well as at Hebron at a later date, we see that Abraham did something most important and full of significant meaning: he built an altar unto the Lord.

Both in Ur of the Chaldees, from whence he had come, and in Canaan where he now was, we can be quite certain that there must have been many altars raised unto pagan gods.

Abraham was quite clear and uncompromising in bearing witness, amidst all the idolatrous people that surrounded him, that he only honoured Jehovah, the great I AM Who had appeared to him and called him.

We may well imagine him, as a foreigner and stranger, with his wife and all his servants, as well as his belongings and cattle, waste no time in raising this altar as his first priority.

The remark “...and the Canaanite was then in the land” which we find in 12: 6b gives rise to a very important point. Both he and all those sojourning with him, as well as their belongings and cattle, strongly drew the attention of all the folk that lived in the region.

They would surely note with great curiosity how this strange foreigner set up his camp, and would view him with great respect.

And more than that, they would note how immediately after pitching his tents he would proceed to raise that very special altar unto a God unknown to them.

It is not far fetched to imagine that in so doing Abraham was taking a great risk. He was in a strange land as a sojourning foreigner. He was surrounded by totally unknown people who worshipped and bowed before their own pagan gods.

In not honouring any of them, and instead, seen by all, honouring his own God – Jehovah - as said, totally unknown to all those people, doubtless he was exposing himself and all his own to a great risk and danger.

However, none of this served to intimidate or dissuade our father from doing what he knew he must do even at great cost and always: honour the true God that had appeared unto him, and had spoken to him and called him in such a clear and unmistakable way.

In being so brave one can assume that he did so, fully convinced that the Lord, who had told him to go to that land, was faithful and mighty to keep him from all evil.

Calling upon the name of the Lord before the altar he had raised, also denoted bowing before the Lord, as a token of surrender and total obedience to Him, whilst disowning completely any allegiance to any other god.

It also meant thanking and praising Him for His many mercies, His protection against all evil and His most generous and lavish provision, which he had already begun to enjoy whilst he was in Haran.

We should also add that that calling on Jehovah’s name would include praying for His continued favour and mercy, that he might be guided and also kept from the many dangers he might meet.

One of such would obviously be that the people of the land, seeing him as a stranger that had come to sojourn in their land, should view with suspicion his intentions in so doing, as well as become jealous seeing him prospering and becoming so rich.

But the Lord gave him ample signs of His great faithfulness, in that not only was he kept from being attacked or ill treated by any of them; at a later date they expressed great respect for him, and actually honoured him as a prince of God. (Genesis 23: 6)

That calling upon the name of the Lord on which we have commented, apart from all that has been said, was something that was seen and in some measure absorbed by Sara his wife, his nephew Lot and all the servants he had taken on in Haran, and who sojourned with him, and served him’

All this was indeed pleasing unto the Lord, and meant laying a good foundation, over which all the great purposes could begin to be built upon gradually.

As sons of Abraham, we find in our innermost being a firm intent to honour our Lord, and testify to the world that surrounds us that He, and He alone, is our God. The fact or possibility that we might be misunderstood, that they might consider us fanatics, or that they may make fun of us or mock us matter little. Our deepest and dearest desire is to honour Him and to be faithful to Him above anyone and anything else in life.

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CHAPTER 5

His going down to

Egypt, and his

return.

“And there was a famine in the land: and Abraham went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.”

As pointed out previously, the fact that Abraham had lapses in which he proved to be fallible and imperfect, helps us to identify better with him. This without failing to have due regard to the many qualities and virtues which mark him as an outstanding man.

When he arrived at Sichem, in Canaan, the Lord appeared unto him, confirming that he would give that land to him and his seed.

But now that there was a great famine, he decides to go down to Egypt, to sojourn there, supposedly until such time as the famine in Canaan ended.

No doubt this was a false step, albeit with the mitigation that the famine was very grievous.

We have highlighted he went down in quoting the text, because not only was it descending geographically to the South West, but also because it was clearly not in line with the path of faith upon which he had embarked.

The right thing would have been to stay where the Lord had told him, trusting Him despite the famine, and not to remove from there, thinking he could come to something better.

The sequel was that in Egypt it did not go well with him. For one, there is no hint that the Lord spoke to him at all while he was there.

Furthermore, by saying that Sara was his sister and not his wife he got into serious trouble. Ultimately, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, told him: *“now therefore behold thy wife, take her and go thy way.”*

“...and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.” (See

Genesis 12: 19b and 20b.)

As we can see, not at all a satisfactory or happy end.

He might have considered as a possibility going to some other land, but in his conscience he knew the right thing was to return to Canaan, even though most likely the famine still continued.

Here we are to see a positive trait in his character, which no doubt was communicated to the spiritual seed he was carrying in his loins.

It was that of reckoning, by God's dealings with one, often through ensuing adversity and chastening, that one has strayed from the will of God, coupled with a feeling of urgency to return to it.

"And Abraham went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the South." (Genesis 13: 1)

"And he went on his journeys from the South even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first: and there Abraham called on the name of the Lord. " (Genesis 13: 3-4)

The significance of all this is quite clear. Firstly, his going to Egypt was a descent – a going down; now his return was a going up.

To stray from God's will and go one's own way is always a downward path, which may appear easy, but which always leads to great loss and ruin.

To come back is always an ascending way, laborious and at times hard. In God's wisdom and economy it is only right that it should be so; the fact that one, so to speak, has to crawl one's way back, often in a very arduous manner, is bound to make one appreciate every inch of recovered ground, whilst creating a desire that such straying should never happen again.

It should be noted that Abraham did not merely return to the land of Canaan – he went to the precise place where he had previously raised the altar, and there, once again, he called upon the name of the Lord.

A true spiritual return or restoration, is not just a matter of returning to the sphere of the church and its various activities; rather it is raising again the altar of one's life once more totally consecrated to the Lord, and calling upon His name, with all that it implies.

We certainly do not read that Abraham did any of this in Egypt, just as, by the same token, whoever turns his back on the Lord and starts going places, can do any of such things in the world.

But on the other hand, we are very grateful that our father Abraham set his heart to return *"on his journeys"* as the Scripture has it, on the uphill, laborious way of returning full length to Bethel, the original place from which he had departed, to the altar and to calling upon the name of the Lord in all its meaning.

This set its seal upon us whilst we were as spiritual seed in his loins - so that whoever of us might have taken wrong steps and gone astray in departing from the straight and narrow way, should also not only repent wholeheartedly, but also return with a firm resolve that will not be content until attaining to a full restoration.

To any dear reader who perhaps might have turned his back on the Lord, either by going back to a worldly life, or else, whilst still attending meetings and even engaged in church activities:

Identify and recognise this resolve to return which lies below the surface of your present backslidden condition, deep in your innermost being.

Respond to it by beginning like your father Abraham to set out *“on your journeys”* to return to that place where you really belong. Break free by prayer and calling on the Lord from any and every tie or bondage that is holding you back from that high destiny the Lord has for your one and only life. Pursue your return journey with patience and full perseverance, unto the recovery of all the lost ground.

And once you have achieved this, you will be able to begin climbing gradually, slow but steadily, till you reach that which you are truly meant to be, and no longer a failure, as the enemy of your soul would like you to be.

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CHAPTER 6

An extremely rich father.

“And Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold.” (Genesis 13: 2)

Despite the setback of his going down to Egypt, from which, thankfully, he fully recovered, Abraham was greatly blessed materially by the Lord.

This particular feature of material blessing and prosperity, has clearly been passed on to his carnal descendants. Indeed, it is a known fact that many Jewish folk in many parts of the world are most wealthy.

In general terms, it may also be said that, partly for their being diligent and undertaking, and also because the earthly blessings of the Lord still rest upon them, wherever they settle they tend to prosper well above others, especially in the majority of the Arab countries.

As regards us, who are his spiritual seed, in general it must be said that the same feature of prosperity should be found, at least in the comparatively prosperous Western world in which we live. It would be wrong on all counts that as true children of God, we should live impoverished lives,

particularly being surrounded as we are by unsaved men and women who are prospering greatly.

On the other hand, it is right to point out that there are poor countries where many Christians also live in poverty like the rest. However, no doubt the goodness of the Lord ensures that they do not lack essentials, and moreover that they are content and quite happy.

In this connection we remember hearing of a famous preacher who had imbibed a great deal of the prosperity gospel teaching. When he went to the Philippine Isles on a ministerial trip, he was very surprised to see that although the dear Christians there were so poor, yet they were so happy!

But in the context of the New Testament dispensation, wealth is to be understood in a much wider and larger concept. It gives us the non-perishable gold of eternal and sublime values, which go far beyond material riches, and raise us to the much higher plane of the wonderful grace and divine favour.

As is well known, there are those who, based on the Scripture we have quoted above, and other similar ones, have laid an undue and excessive stress on material prosperity.

From that perspective, it has sometimes followed that not prospering financially is a sign of the blessing of God not being upon one's life, or else that one's spiritual walk is not right.

Of course, this is an obvious and gross error. Not only in the Phillipine Isles, but in many other impoverished lands, Christians who are not affluent by any manner of means, certainly enjoy palpable signs of the Lord's favour and blessing.

It may also be added that in such countries of what we commonly know as the third world, after turning to the Lord and being saved, normally Christians rise to a higher level in their economy, and this is surely a true token of the Lord's blessing upon them.

But returning to the Western world in which we live, it can be safely said that every true child of God, so long as he is living in obedience, honouring Him with his tithes and offerings, and being diligent and responsible in his job, should live in reasonable financial comfort and free from debts, for as the Scripture tells us, we are to "*Owe no man anything*" (Romans 13: 8)

Perhaps here we should show some flexibility, in that in areas of high employment it is possible for dear Christians to be jobless and in financial straits.

All we can advise to such is that, if possible, without their left hand knowing what their right is doing, they should give unto the Lord what little they can, and make a point of spending only on what is strictly indispensable, to clear any debts they may have as a matter of great urgency.

Once this had been achieved, they will surely feel much more at ease and sleep better!

On quite a different note, we remember years ago hearing a preacher who had come into much prosperity.

Exhibiting a golden watch and some jewels he was wearing, he expressed how he had now come into a much greater dimension of faith and vision.

Our personal reaction to that was to feel a sense of pity towards someone of such a mentality. That glittering gold, apart from being totally unnecessary and dispensable, was and is something that we find totally unattractive.

What we really long for is that spiritual gold of the Holy Spirit's working day by day in our lives, so that we may become gradually more like the Beloved Son.

To sum it up, our Father Abraham was very rich indeed, and so we, his sons or spiritual seed, are not to live impoverished lives – we may readily trust our Father to see to it that we do not lack for any good thing.

But his focus was not on material, earthly wealth, but on those much higher values we have already defined, and in his particular case, above all, that in him all the nations of the world should be blessed.

As spiritual seed of Abraham, we are destined to be extremely wealthy in terms of the perpetual riches of divine grace and favour lavished upon our lives, whilst finding that our Heavenly Father sees to it that materially we lack for nothing, and live in His perfect will.

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CHAPTER 7

Choose Thou for me, dear Lord.

Lot, who was sojourning with Abraham, also had cattle and tents and the land was too narrow to contain them. There was a great deal of strife and contention between his shepherds and Abraham's.

It was then that our father reacted in a way that showed two noble traits of his character.

"And Abraham said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee and me, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren." (13:8)

Here we see a peaceful man, who wants no quarrels or contention, but simply to be in peace with every one.

In Titus 1: 7 we are told that a bishop should not be *"selfwilled, not soon angry."* So in this respect, and in many others too, he must be of abrahamic lineage.

This is in sharp contrast to someone who is contentious, and in such a situation would take the part of his own pastors and begin to have heated arguments about what was happening.

How carnal and ugly such a behaviour is! Folk like that it is best not to have anything to do with them, since they only bring trouble and headaches.

On the other hand, how good and pleasant it is indeed to have to do with sons of peace, like Abraham, who, far from complaining and fighting for their rights, always seek the way of peace and harmony.

For meek men and women there are many precious promises of blessing in the Scriptures, whereas for those who are otherwise in character, there are stern warnings that they will come to a bad end, unless they should amend and change for the better.

"Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right: or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." (Genesis 13:9)

Being as he was - older than his nephew Lot, - and certainly the head and leader of the whole party, it would only be right and proper for our father Abraham to have first choice.

However, in a further sign of meekness, he takes no hasty decision and leaves the choice entirely to his nephew.

Lot, by contrast, seeing the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, with very good prospects for his cattle, quickly chose it for himself, thinking he was getting the better part.

So he removed eastwards, and pitched his tent toward the wicked city of Sodom, which brought him, eventually but inevitably to a very sad end.

Instead Abraham settled in the rest of the land – what Lot had left to him, thinking his choice was the better one.

And soon after the story tells us: *“Lift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward and westward:”*

“For all the land that thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.”

“And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.”

“Arise, walk through the land in the length and in the breadth of it: for I will give it unto thee. (Genesis 13: 14b-17)

He left the choice to Lot, but he was really leaving it to the Lord he knew had called him. Hence the title we have chosen for this chapter – Choose Thou for me, dear Lord.

And what a glorious outcome! What blessed promises were poured into the Scriptures we have quoted above!

This is surely the happy portion of those that are meek and gracious enough to defer to others. In so doing, they are quietly waiting on the Lord, in the assurance that in due course He will give that good, and often enough, better portion, that He had in His foreknowledge already assigned to them.

It should be noted that the promise, now specifying clearly the land to which Jehovah told him initially that he would show him, was made after something important had happened: his separation from Lot.

Abraham had clearly received that calling from the Lord, whereas Lot had not, and joined himself to the party, probably invited by Abraham to do so, by reason of the carnal link between them.

This is somewhat reminiscent of the case of John Mark, nephew to Barnabas, who set forth with him and Paul on their first missionary journey. Barnabas and Paul had been called, but not John Mark.

In both cases the ensuing results were far from favourable, although it must be said that at a later stage John Mark was restored and set on the right course, whereas Lot came to a very sad end.

At all events, what we can glean from all this is the need to separate what is chaff and flesh from what is pure wheat and spirit. When that is not clearly understood and acted upon, one can only expect in the long run great frustration and failure.

Just like our father Abraham, by the spiritual hereditary factor, we find we have a placid peaceful temperament, coupled with the grace not to choose ourselves in the great

issues of life, but to leave it to our Lord Who loves us and knows best.

And by the experience we have just considered, we also absorb the great importance of setting apart whatever is of the flesh, so as to walk in pure spirit along the path of the heavenly calling we have received.

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CHAPTER 8

The stalwart and overcoming warrior

“And when Abraham heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.”

“And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.”

“And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.” (Genesis 14: 14-16)

There are many virtues and great qualities we can admire in our father Abraham. Some of them appear in the story symbolically, or allegorically, while others directly, or live, shall we say.

It is indeed paradoxical that the man we described in our previous chapter as peaceful, meek and mild, should now appear as a stalwart and mighty warrior.

But having heard that his nephew Lot, his wife and all others, plus his possessions, had been taken captive, there sprang in his heart a strong desire to go after the enemy kings who had captured them, with the firm intent of recovering all, which indeed he did.

Many years later, David, who was indeed of his lineage, found himself in a similar situation.

On returning from Aphek, where the philistines were stationed ready to fight against Israel, he found that Ziklag, the city where he dwelt at the time, had been attacked by the Amalekites and set on fire, and they had carried away captives the women folk and all others, plus all their goods.

It was an extremely difficult situation, as his men were greatly grieved and even thought of stoning David. But somehow, David encouraged himself in the Lord, and enquired of him whether he should pursue the Amalekites.

He received a blessedly affirmative answer: *"Pursue, for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all."* (1 Samuel 30: 8)

Of the six hundred men he had, two hundred only went as far as brook Besor, which they could not cross, being thoroughly exhausted.

However, the other four hundred overcame their great tiredness, and led by David, fell upon the Amalekites, who were eating, drinking and dancing, celebrating the great spoil they had taken.

And after a long battle, which extended from twilight to the evening of the next day, the Amalekites were overcome.

"And David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken away, and David rescued his two wives."

"And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them: David recovered all." (1 Samuel 30: 18-19)

We are not told that Abraham, in his particular situation, had consulted the Lord before pursuing those who had taken away Lot and his party and belongings.

Nevertheless, he surely knew in his inner man that it was his moral duty to do so. He did not stop to think it was Lot's own fault for drawing his tents towards that wicked city of Sodom, and "so let him now suffer the consequences".

Here we find yet another trait of his noble and righteous spirit.

From Genesis 14: 14-16, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, we see that Abraham and his servants, plus three allies of his who were men of the land in which he was now sojourning, also went a long and exhausting way to go to rescue Lot and the rest of his party.

We note the Scripture says *"his trained servants."* From this we gather that he had not only trained, or instructed them to serve him, but also to be brave warriors, in case the need arose.

Perhaps a question should lie in the heart of some: how and from where did Abraham get this warrior spirit?

We believe the answer lies in the fact that he got it from the very word – a living word it was, indeed – received from the Lord. Although no specific mention was made in the great far reaching promise we have referred to previously, it surely lay in the very Great One it came from.

In Exodus 15: 3 we are told that *"The Lord is a man of war"* and in Psalm 24: 8 *"the Lord mighty in battle."* That's where he got it from!

But, returning now to the two occasions we have considered briefly, in which both Abraham and David recovered all that the enemies had taken away, is it not the kind of thing that we, as sons of Abraham, often have to face?

We mean, of course, situations of the greatest variety, in which the wicked enemy, taking advantage of conditions favourable to him and his evil forces – through disobedience, carelessness or sheer negligence of some precious souls – has seized them, as well as their spiritual possessions, and is holding them in his clutches.

In such challenging circumstances, it is to be expected that true sons and daughters of our father Abraham, should arise and give themselves to the task – arduous and demanding as it may be – of fighting to rescue them from his claws, and recovering as well all they had lost.

The weapons we are given for this battle are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of enemy strongholds. The faith once given to all true saints, the almighty name - above all - of our Lord Jesus, prayer, fasting, the promises we find in the Scriptures, all this in meek and persistent dependence on the Holy Spirit, are more than enough to ensure victory and full recovery of all that was lost.

A precious passage we find in Ezekiel – 37: 1-10 lends itself to our present purpose. For the sake of brevity we only quote verses 9 and 10.

“Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, they lived, and they stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.”

We have underlined these last three words because they are so meaningful. Before that occurred those bones belonged to folk of no doubt the greatest variety of professions – carpenters, teachers, students, nurses, etc.

But now they had all changed to one single profession – they were all warriors!

We have previously quoted those two Scriptures that speak of the Lord as a man of war and mighty in battle.

And now we turn our focus on the very Lord Jesus, Who in the arena of Calvary fought the toughest battle of the universe and of history, triumphing openly and totally over Satan and all the hosts of evil. Thereby he was able to rescue our souls from eternal loss and condemnation.

However, the disobedience of not a few, wrong choices like that of Lot, and many other ways in which place has been given to the enemy, is still enabling those wicked powers of darkness to hold them in captivity.

How great a need there is, that men and women of the stalwart warrior spirit of our father Abraham, should arise and fight to liberate them and bring them back, with all their lost values recovered, to the place of restoration, blessing, and life abundant in our Lord Jesus.

Discover in your inner man, dear reader, the genetics of the tenacious overcoming warrior. Bring it into play by laying hold of the mighty armoury we have described.

And let the Lord guide you as to the captivity of some dear relative, friend or brother, and wrestle with faith, patience and perseverance, until he or she is fully restored, and all that which was lost is recovered, just like your father Abraham, and many years later David did.

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CHAPTER 9

Abraham's encounter with Melchizedec (I)

Following the story as it appears in the Scriptures, we now come to Abraham's momentous encounter with this very special and wonderful Bible character – Melchizedec.

The implications and repercussions are great and far reaching, and we have much ground to cover in considering them. Hence the need to split them into four chapters, so as to follow our pattern of short chapters.

The name Melchizedec, as pointed out in Hebrews 7, means King of Righteousness. Apart from being a priest of the Most High God, he was also King of Salem, which means King of Peace.

It is worth noting that he was the only Old Testament character who had the double role of king and priest. None of God's people could have that twofold position, since the priests all necessarily had to belong to the tribe of Levi, and the kings, as from David onward, to that of Judah.

On the other hand, in the New Testament we have Jesus as both King and High Priest, with the blessed addition that all of us, the redeemed children of

God, have been made by His blood both kings and priests. (See Revelation 1: 5-6 and 5: 9-10)

Apart from the very brief passage in Genesis 14 in which he first appears, in the rest of the Old Testament he is not mentioned at all, save in one verse of Psalm 110.

In the gospels, the book of the Acts and most epistles he does not feature either.

However, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, whether Paul, Apollos or whoever else it might have been, expounds on the subject at great length and in admirable depth.

Chapter 7 of Hebrews abounds in points of great substance. From the assumption – fully justified – that Melchizedec is an allegorical figure of Christ, many important and most valuable points are unfolded.

Although we will be dwelling upon this subject rather extensively, it will not mean departing from the main thread, as it might appear.

Although all that will be said about Melchizedec goes beyond the time in which Abraham lived, it is closely connected with him and our main theme.

The fact that, as we have seen, the name means King of Righteousness, points us to our Lord Jesus, whom John calls Jesus Christ the Righteous. (See 1 John: 2: 1)

So to put it, for Him one kilogram weighs exactly one thousand grams, not one more, neither one fewer. Likewise, a metre measures precisely one thousand millimetres, again, not one more, neither one fewer. In other words, a righteousness that is quite scrupulous and absolutely thorough.

Because of our sinfulness we were at enmity with our holy God and there was no way we could attain to a real peace with Him, without violating His strict righteousness.

But on Calvary this immeasurably great abyss was spanned, and so we find in Psalm 85: 10 the beautiful prophetic words that describe it:

“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

How wonderful! Righteousness and peace were separated thoroughly and absolutely, but the mercy and divine genius of our God found the way to overcome that impossibility in the arena of Golgotha. And so, in our Beloved Lord Jesus they are wonderfully joined together, and so we receive the blessed embrace of forgiveness and the kiss of our God’s love.

Now we press on, quoting Hebrews 7: 3 – *“Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.”*

Here his father’s name is not given, nor that of any of his ancestors. This is quite unusual in Scripture – in most cases when an important Bible character is first named, his father’s name is given, and sometimes his mother’s too.

By the same token, as the narrative continues, the names of at least some of their sons and/or daughters are also featured.

None of this is found concerning Melchizedec, and so the author of the epistle rightly traces from it our Lord's eternity, a fact which, moreover, is clearly attested to in not a few other Scriptures.

But where this seventh chapter of Hebrews excels is in expounding on Melchizedec's priesthood.

In his first appearance in Scripture he is said to be a priest of the Most High God.

From there, opening up wonderfully the only other mention of him in the Old Testament – Psalm 110: 4 – we are presented with a wide and significant range of truth.

The Psalm under reference starts by telling us in verse 1, in a clearly messianic strain: *"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."*

This is quoted by our Lord Himself in all three of the synoptic gospels, as well as by Peter on the day of Pentecost.

We now turn to verse 4 of the same psalm, which holds the key to all that is to be brought forth in the seventh chapter we are now considering.

"The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedec."

As stated in the last verse of Hebrews 7, the mosaic law appointed as high priests men that are said to be weak, apart from mortal.

Instead, and in sharp contrast, the word of the oath, inscribed in the Holy Scriptures many years after by David's pen and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, appoints the Son of God, who is made perfect for evermore.

But we now turn to another aspect, most important indeed. In the levitical order, as the priests were appointed, they were washed, clothes with garments for honour and beauty, and consecrated and sanctified – all within the framework of a fairly complex ritual.

However, there was something that was never included: the oath. And we must add, how could there be an oath when appointing Aaron as the first high priest?

We surely well remember the occasion when, whilst Moses was up in the mount, and as he tarried, the golden calf was made under Aaron's responsibility, and the incredible proclamation was made:

"These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." (Exodus 32: 4b)

How, we ask, by what stretch of imagination, could it be expected that the Lord should place Himself on oath for such a man?

It is true enough that at a later stage, Moses took him under his wings, and by example, correction and wise counselling he was able to restore him to a place of dignity and honour.

Nevertheless, as has already been pointed out, the Lord could never be on oath concerning him.

But what a wonderful contrast with our Lord Jesus! Here was and is someone the Everlasting Father could fully trust to the very utmost, and so the word of the oath came strong, loud and clear:

“The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedec.” (Psalm 11: 4)

We should note how that the actual oath was followed by *“...and shall not repent”*, which gives it still further weight and emphasis.

How firm and blessedly wonderful is His high priesthood! It should fill us with a sense of deep assurance, love and gratitude, for something so solid, rock like and eternally secure.

And furthermore, we are blessed that in exercising our own priesthood, derived from Him, our Supreme High Priest, by the absolute efficacy of His precious blood shed on Calvary, we can draw near.

This drawing near is on a higher level than in the Old Covenant Order, for it is *“with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”* (Hebrews 10: 22)

As sons of Abraham, we too may rightly expect to have enriching encounters with Christ, our Melchizedec, even though their nature and outer circumstances may be different.

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CHAPTER 10

His encounter with Melchizedec (II)

“”And Melchizedec king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the Most High God.” (Genesis 14: 18)

Abraham had just won a great battle, by which moreover he had liberated his nephew Lot with all his party and belongings.

It goes without saying that he and his army must have been extremely tired, and also very hungry and thirsty

So his encounter with Melchizedec was most timely, and had the virtue of encouraging and confirming him.

It so often happens that after a time of conflict and trials, in which by His grace we have proved faithful, He chooses to reward, comfort or bless us in a special way.

The fact that, in the first place, it is stated that Melchizedec took out bread and wine, must be interpreted as a practical provision both for Abraham and his improvised army, to satisfy their hunger and thirst.

We must, however, look beyond that to see that on that occasion, in symbol or allegorically, our father Abraham received the bread and the wine of communion of the New Covenant, chiefly as a memorial of His sufferings and death on our behalf. Of course, there is much more to the breaking of bread, but it is not necessary to enlarge on it at this stage.

However, there is something we must see and understand, surprising in a way, and yet very real.

If an average genuine convert were to be asked when did he first partake of holy communion – or breaking of bread – the ready, usual answer would be that it was on the first occasion immediately following his baptism.

But in fact it was long, long before that!

When he, and all of us who are truly born again, and of abrahamic lineage first partook, was on that very occasion when Melchizedec brought forth bread and wine for our father Abraham. As he ate and drank, we who were in his spiritual loins ate and drank as well.

Or to put it another way, what happened on that occasion marked us, as his spiritual seed, predisposing us to do so in actual fact in our day and time. And of course, with great delight and gratitude, as no doubt our father Abraham did.

Blessed Bread of Life!

When Jesus spoke to the Jews in Capernaum, on the occasion we are told of in John 6, apart from *Bread of Life*, as above, He also used other forms as symbols, all of which enlarge on its blessed significance.

"...the true bread from heaven" (John 6: 32b)"

"...the bread of God..." (6: 33)

"...the bread which cometh down from heaven"... (6: 50)

"...the living bread which came down from heaven"... (6: 51)

In explaining further on it, he added several points which reflect the ineffable good received by such as truly eat of it - briefly, as follows:-

- a) They will live for ever or eternally (6: 51 and 58b)
- b) They will have everlasting life, not only in terms of mere duration, but also of a quality far above that of natural existence. (6: 54)
- c) That bread is meat indeed. (6: 55)
- d) Whosoever eateth of it will live by Him. (6: 57)

We must now relate all this to the entire process of making natural bread. It will help us to understand better how much it cost our Beloved Lord Jesus to enable Him to pass on freely to us such great bliss.

- a) The grain of wheat which first must fall to the ground and die.
- b) The process of going through the mill, by which the grain is turned into flour that is then to be kneaded.
- c) The burning hot oven in which it is baked, and which clearly depicts something of the unspeakable agony He went through, all the long way from Gethsemane until finally, His death on Calvary.
- d) Finally, we cannot eat a loaf of bread whole – it must be broken up into fragments. *“Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.”* (I Corinthians 11: 24)

And now to the blessed cup of the communion in His blood!

“...the pure blood of the grape...” (Deuteronomy 32: 14b) Jesus being the true vine (John 15: 1) *“is drink indeed”* (John 6: 55b)

It not only gives us full redemption – free, complete and everlasting forgiveness – but much more.

So to put it, through the microscope of the Word of God we examine symbolically a precious drop of His sacred blood.

The microscope tells us that there is no trace of sickness whatever in the One to whom it belongs; moreover, it is traced to One who never knew fear, nor sin in any shape or form – who lived in perfect accordance with the will of God, and never suffered depression, nor gave way to unbelief or any of the evil temptations of Satan, even though He was tested to the utmost.

When it comes to drinking blood, something in us turns against it, as it smacks of cannibalism.

However, when it comes to this precious blood we have been considering, the picture is quite different.

Fully aware of its inestimable value, by faith we drink of it with full understanding, and we find it drink indeed, just as Jesus said. Then, and as the days go by, we gradually see all those wonderful virtues reproduced in our own selves.

The summing up of this chapter is twofold.

On the one hand we are encouraged to become fully conscious of the wonder working of our God, Who knows no boundary of time or space, and by which, many centuries ago we were destined, as spiritual seed in our father Abraham’s loins, to be blessed partakers of the Bread of Life and the Sacred blood, which is drink indeed.

On the other, just as our Abraham received it from Melchizedec, from now onwards, in partaking we should do so with a wider approach. Though it be brought to us by a dear elder, deacon, or simply another brother or

sister, we should see well beyond that, and respond as receiving it directly from our dear Melchizedec, with solemn gratitude and love, and fully appreciating by faith the unspeakable value we have seen, of both the bread and the wine.

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CHAPTER 11

His encounter with Melchizedec (III)

“And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most High God, possessor of heaven and earth.”

“And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.” (Genesis 14: 19-20)

What an abysmal contrast there is between law and grace!

In the first part of Deuteronomy chapter 27, we are told that after crossing Jordan the children of Israel had to raise up large stones, daub them with lime, and write on them all the words of the mosaic law.

Next we are told in the same chapter that six of the tribes had to stand on Mount Gerizim, to bless the people, and the other six on Mount Ebal, which means arid or totally lacking in growth, and from there they had to pronounce the curse.

It is noteworthy and striking that in the rest of the chapter there is no record of any blessing having to be proclaimed by the six tribes on Mount Gerizim.

Instead, and as from verse 15 right through to 26 at the end of the chapter, every verse without exception starts with the word *cursed* which the other six tribes on Mount Ebal had to pronounce. The chapter ends summing it up: ***“Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen”***

As a wonderful contrast, many centuries later, Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant, based on better promises, went up to the mount in Galilee, on which He gave us what is commonly and well known as the sermon of the mount, so full of truths, precepts and principles on a much higher plane than anything known before.

It is simply wonderful that from His lips the word *cursed* was never heard. Instead, from verse 3 of Matthew 5 right through to verse 11 included, every sentence starts with the same wonderful word, *blessed*, which is really music to our ears.

And yet, it must never be forgotten that to make it possible for that horribly condemnatory word *cursed* to be changed into *blessed*, He had to take upon His blessed shoulders the full, crushing weight of the curse we all deserved from our sinfulness.

In His whole life, and particularly in His public ministry, wherever He went He kept on imparting blessing upon blessing on all who sought Him and received Him.

Perhaps some of those who couldn't be by His side or near enough when He ascended, at the very end of His time on earth, might have asked: And what was the last thing He did or said before returning to heaven?

The answer, of course, is given in Luke 24: 51 : ***He blessed us!***

Melchizedec, being a faithful – albeit faint symbol of Him – once he had taken out bread and wine, spoke as recorded in Genesis 14: 19-20, and what do you think was the first word each time he spoke? ***Blessed!***

Although we don't know much about his background, what he did say on that occasion gave clear evidence of, shall we say, how well informed he was.

In his first utterance he made it quite plain that he knew that Abraham belonged to the Most High God, of Whom he himself was a priest.

Had he known Abraham before their encounter that time, and had he had any previous dealings with him?

There is nothing to confirm it in Scripture, but on the other hand, it cannot be completely ruled out.

The second time, he blessed the Most High God, and it can be safely assumed that it was for his understanding that Abraham's amazing victory against the armies of four kings, with his improvised army of three hundred and eighteen armed servants, plus his three allies – Aner, Eschol and Mamre – could have only been for one reason.

This he clearly expressed in his words - *"Blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand."*

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that what Abraham achieved on that occasion was nothing short of an amazing feat.

Bear in mind that he and his own must have arrived at the scene of the battle very tired – no cars, jet aircraft or such things in those days! – and not only did they fall upon their enemies, attacking them and putting them on the run. They went further, pursuing them for a long distance, and if that were not enough, they recovered all Lot's party and belongings that had been taken.

Melchizedec knew full well that such a stupendous achievement could have only been by the help of the Almighty Most High God.

And this, by clear implication, is another blessed legacy left to us by our father Abraham: that of being able to inflict defeat on spiritual enemies of far greater strength than our own, and recover all they had robbed us of, thanks to the formidable power of our great God working on our behalf.

Surely this is something that can rightly make us feel proud and extremely grateful: to be of the lineage of our father Abraham, and beyond and above it all, to be sons and servants of our Omnipotent, gracious and loving Most High God.

In commenting on the encounter, Hebrews 7: 6-7 points out that Melchizedec blessed *him that had the promises* to which we immediately have the following addition: *"and without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better."*

Abraham is seen as the highly blessed one who was bearing such precious and far reaching promises, but even so, as one having come across someone even greater than himself.

We must bear in mind, of course, that the epistle was written to the Hebrews. In previous chapters they had already been told that Christ was greater than the angels and than Moses.

Now, to add that here was someone even greater than Abraham was something not by any means easy for them to accept.

So, very tactfully, we have it put in words that are quite convincing and compelling, i.e. *"and without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better."*

May we learn from this, in trying to persuade others, to be polite and gracious.

But we must not omit the last words of Genesis 14: 20 :- *“And he gave him tithes of all.”*

Of late, in some circles there has been a teaching which objects to the giving of tithes, stressing that there is none of it at all in the New Testament.

To be quite fair, this is true, together with the fact that the handling of tithes in the Old Testament bears no relation to what is generally taught in many churches nowadays.

Tithes in the Old Testament were taken from the yields of husbandry, or from the cash raised from their sale, and were to serve the purpose of covering the expenses of travelling, board and lodging the three times a year the Jews had to travel to Jerusalem, to keep the feasts prescribed by the law of Moses. (See Deuteronomy 14: 22-26)

Additionally, every third year they had to be given to the Levites, the stranger, the orphans and the widows. (Deuteronomy 26: 12)

Furthermore, the first fruits had to be given to the levitical priests, since they had been set apart to administer the holy things of God. (Deuteronomy 18: 3-4)

We cannot, therefore, trace a rigid comparative pattern, which must be compulsory. This is not at all in keeping with the new regime of the Spirit.

However, there being servants of the Lord who devote all their time and efforts to serving a congregation, it can only be right and fair to recognise their labours and support them with tithes and offerings.

And yet a question – So tithing is not specifically prescribed in the New Testament?

No, it isn't, but what about Romans 4: 12, where we are told that the sons of Abraham follow in his footsteps?

Surely, no-one would put forward the absurd argument that tithing is the one step we are not to follow.

By the same token, nobody would want to disqualify himself as a son of Abraham to avoid tithing!

And finally, may we remember and believe the Lord's words *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

In Hebrews 7: 6 we are told that Melchizedec received the tithes from Abraham, which leads us to the clear conclusion that when we give, be it to a mission, a worthy servant of the Lord or a worthy cause, in fact we are giving it unto Him, our Melchizedec, and therefore come into the blessing of the *“inasmuch”* found in Matthew 25: 40.

Paul strongly reinforces all this in 2 Corinthians 9: 6 when he writes: *“He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”*

As the true spiritual seed of Abraham, we must expect to have successive encounters with our precious Lord Jesus, our Melchizedec. In each one, according to His wisdom, love and care for us, He will be encouraging, confirming

and strengthening us, so that we may continue steadfastly in the steps of our father Abraham.

At the same time, without the need for anyone to remind or pressurise us, moved by the principle of love and deep gratitude to the One to Whom we owe so much, we shall surely give with gladness and simple, loving hearts, endeavouring, whenever possible, that our left hand shall not know what our right one doeth.

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CHAPTER 12

His encounter with Melchizedec (IV)

Repercussions of the encounter

So far we have been considering the momentous encounter in itself, with all the precious truths that go with it, mostly gathered from the key verse 4 of Psalm 110, and all that is drawn from it in Hebrews 7.

We now move forward to ponder two important points, which are really a direct result of the encounter, but which happened shortly after.

“And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons and take the goods to thyself” (Genesis 14: 21)

This was no doubt a temptation set in our father’s path, and it seems to have taken place very soon after his meeting Melchizedec.

At first sight, it would have appeared both logical and fair, as Abraham and his men had rescued them from the enemy kings. Moreover, in doing so not only had they made a great sacrifice, but had also risked their lives.

It seems right to surmise that Abraham’s perception had become sharper and more sensitive, as a result of meeting someone of such honour and dignity as Melchizedec,

By contrast, he would have detected something quite the opposite in the king of a city so corrupt and abominable as Sodom.

The text, by the verb tense, clearly denotes that somehow he felt warned beforehand about the offer he would be receiving, and had decided that he would refuse it.

“And Abraham said to the King of Sodom, I have lifted up my hand unto the Lord, the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth,”

“That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.” (Genesis 14: 22-23)

As we see, a sharp and categorical rejoinder, in open contrast with his tender and submissive attitude towards Melchizedec.

Before our God we should always be so – tender and submissive - whereas, when faced with evil and temptation we should be firm and inflexible.

The reason he gave in refusing the offer was that he did not want that at a later date the king of Sodom should go about saying he had been enriched by him.

The Lord had already enriched him a great deal, and he knew the great difference between coming to wealth in that clean and pure way, and from a totally unclean source.

And so he had already lifted up his hand unto the Lord in a solemn vow that he would take nothing whatever that the king of Sodom might offer him.

This of course can be related on a very practical and real level, to similar or kindred situations, which often present subtle temptations to sons and servants of the Lord.

One recalls the case of a young man who was highly devoted to the Lord's service, and often went out on evangelistic outreach with other young folk.

At a later stage in life he got a new job as salesman. He was told by one of the directors of the firm that, whilst his salary was fairly good, he could earn much more if he followed certain procedures in his job, which were clearly not right nor honest

Most regrettably he chose to follow that twisted pattern, and, as could be expected, his spiritual life soon began to decline, his marriage and home broke up, and, as far as we can remember, things went altogether wrong.

It could be that at a later time he was restored by the mercy of the Lord – let us hope so.

“But they that will be rich fall into temptations and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”

“For the love of money is (one of the roots) of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (I Timothy 6: 9-10)

Let us take careful note of all this, remembering the right and wise way in which our father Abraham acted when facing a situation of that nature, and make sure we truly follow in his footsteps, doing exactly what he did.

To continue in the thread of our title, the second repercussion arises from the words “...*the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,*” which Abraham uttered in replying to the King of Sodom’s offer.

Prior to that, the narrative only features the name *Jehovah*, translated *the Lord* in our King James version. It is of course a wonderful name, containing a most rich meaning, which we are not to unfold now for the sake of brevity.

But on the occasion we are considering he adds *Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth*.

It was what he heard Melchizedec say when he met him. (Genesis 14: 19)

From which we draw the simple, yet precious conclusion, that the unforgettable encounter widened and enlarged his vision and understanding of his God.

He now speaks of Him in a loftier way – in a higher dimension.

By extension, we can safely conclude that our personal experiences with the Lord and His gracious dealings with us, should help us to appreciate with much more clarity his magnificent majesty and unsearchable greatness.

As a true son of Abraham, identify and recognise that genetic trait which moved him to refuse outright the King of Sodom’s offer, and act accordingly whenever facing a similar temptation.

At the same time, seek to draw nigh in depth unto the Lord, so that precious things that will widen your horizons in appreciating His exceeding greatness will come your way, whilst also enriching your speaking of Him by the blessed quickening of the Holy Spirit.

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CHAPTER 13

Words of encouragement, the shield and exceeding great reward

We still have a long way ahead of us in this task of following Abraham’s pilgrimage, in the many events and situations which took place, and gleaning from them practical points that apply to our every day living as sons and daughters of Abraham.

“After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.”
(Genesis 15: 1)

At this stage, Abraham being 75 years old, the Lord deemed it right and necessary to speak words of encouragement and reassurance to His servant and friend.

It is quite possible that, especially in the night vigils, surrounded as he was by a strange environment, sojourning as a foreigner, he might have feared and even said to himself: ***“What have I got myself into, going up and down this land continually? Where will all this get me to?”***

Full of kindness and tender understanding, the Lord speaks to him words of encouragement that dispel all fear, and impart full confidence. Let us have a brief look at them in each of their three parts.

“a) Fear not, Abram.”

We will remember that fear was one of the first dreadful results of the fall, and it came very soon after Adam and Eve had disobeyed.

Since then, fear has been one of the worst curses on mankind, and finds its expression in a great multiplicity of ways: fear of darkness, fear in storms and thunders, fear of becoming unemployed, fear of sickness, hunger, poverty, etc. until it reaches its final climax in the fear of death.

All along the thread of history, we find in Scripture, and also since then, the Lord has addressed His own beloved with the two blessed words He spoke to Abraham: ***fear not.***

We find them many a time in God’s word, and what a precious balm, what a tender comfort, and what reassurance and confidence they communicate to our needy souls, particularly in times of conflict or distress!

In this instance, he adds ***Abram***, denoting that the balm and comfort are precisely and personally for him, for his very self.

Although we have not found Him to add our name, every time He speaks to us in such a manner makes us see how very aware He is of our individual circumstances, needs, the pressures we may be under, or any other of the afflictions common to our pilgrimage.

He sees it all, knows it all, in all the uncertainties and hazards that we may be seeing ahead, and so helps us to hear His words of peace and loving care, that so encourage us to take heart and press on with quiet aplomb.

b) “I am thy shield”

This is very simple, but it is also absolute and categorical .

A shield is placed before us so that any dart or shot fired at us should rebound and not harm us.

Of course there can be some darts or shots that are so powerful that no shield can withstand them.

But the Lord makes His servant and friend know that He Himself is his shield. He shields him on all sides: before and behind him, to his right and to his left, above his head and below his feet,

For any weapon raised against him to reach and touch him, it would have first to pierce through that formidable protection of the Almighty, which surrounded him on all sides – a sheer and total impossibility.

Could our father Abraham, and we his true sons, be in a place of greater safety than this? Surely not!

As we are told in Isaiah 54: 17:

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise in judgment against thee thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

c)"... and thy exceeding great reward."

"...eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him." (I Corinthians 2: 9)

It is right to point out at this stage that Abraham was paying a great price for obeying God's word.

It was no light thing to leave his own land and the world in which he had been born and raised up, to launch out into what appeared from a natural, objective and cold approach to be a crazy adventure.

He was surrounded on all sides by strange people, although it is true to say he had in Mamre, Eshcol and Aner three faithful allies.

At that stage he had no land or settled dwelling place; not even *"so much as to set his feet upon"* as Stephen put it in his speech recorded in Acts 7.

Besides, in the long way he still had to go, many battles and sacrifices awaited him, as we will see in future chapters.

But the Lord moved in advance, to make him know that all that would prove absolutely worth while, because of the immense reward He had already prepared for him.

The reward had already been foretold in the global, comprehensive promise which we have outlined in a previous chapter. However, he would become aware of it in more detail as he progressed in his pilgrimage.

At the same time, we must differentiate between the solid, rock like promises, such as these made to Abraham, and spurious predictive ones which are so often pronounced in some circles nowadays, foretelling great and grand achievements, signs and wonders, and all that kind of thing.

From what we have seen, such flattering utterances never come true and leave behind them a wake of frustration and confusion, whilst at the same time bringing discredit and distrust.

The firm promises we have been referring to, concerned someone who had received a clear, unmistakable calling from above. Moreover, his path had already the hallmarks of thorough obedience, faith and sacrifice.

We fear that in most cases, the spurious predictions referred to above, have not been addressed to persons having those two basic requirements.

We now sum up the chapter as follows:

The genes which we are privileged to have as sons and daughters of Abraham, ensure that in times of need or in any crisis coming our way, we are to receive the reassuring word of encouragement and comfort from our Lord.

So long as we abide in the will of God and in total obedience, He will also shield us and we will find that no weapon formed against us shall prosper.

And at the end of our course, He will surely reward our faithfulness with His wonderful, eternal rewards.

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CHAPTER 14

The promise of a son of his own, and the covenant of sacrifice and fire

In response to the words of encouragement received, Abraham poured out his heart to the Lord, expressing his grief at not having a son of his own at his very advanced age.

The grief was compounded by the fact that all the wealth he had been blessed with, upon his death would go to a servant born in his household, and not to a son of his own.

So at this stage the Lord proceeded to let him know in detail, and confirm by a covenant, the promise made initially, which, as we have seen, was made in a general or global manner.

“And behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir..”

“And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven and tell the stars if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” (Genesis 15: 4-5)

So here the Lord makes it quite plain that he would have a son of his own, and that very son would be his heir, and not his servant.

But he also adds the astonishing promise that his seed would be as the stars in heaven

Astronomers tell us that the number of stars which can be seen by natural sight, unaided by a telescope or any other such instrument, is approximately three thousand.

However, well beyond the reach of our unaided sight, in the various constellations, the galaxies, as well as in the depths of space in our universe, and also in other distant ones, there are thousands upon thousands of millions of stars, of minor, mean or great magniture.

This takes us to Revelation 7: 9 where we are told that a great multitude that no man can count, of every nation, people, tribe and tongue, were seen before the throne and the Lamb, dressed in white garments and holding palms in their hands.

It has been pointed out, and we believe rightly so, that the promise of his seed being as the dust of the earth (Genesis 13: 16) and as the sand of the sea (Genesis 22: 17b) refers to his blood descendants, the people of Israel.

On the other hand, that comparing it to the innumerable stars of heaven relates to his spiritual seed, that is, those of us who, like him, have embraced the faith as previously explained, and have so become his spiritual sons.

“And he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15: 6),

This is a key verse, bearing on the divine redemption plan, and Paul quotes it in Romans 4: 3 and Galatians 3: 6, to emphasize that salvation is by pure grace, granted to him that believes, and not for compliance of the works of the law, – or rather, any attempt to comply with them.

In Galatians 3: 8 we find a most striking comment by the apostle Paul:

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

Here we see two beautiful truths neatly interwoven.

One is that Abraham, being the highly privileged friend of God, the Lord could not withhold from him the secret of His stupendous redemption plan, hidden in His heart from past eternity; and so He reveals it to him through the Scripture.

The other is that, as he took that step of faith that was counted unto him for righteousness, he became the blessed possessor of all the far reaching benefits and blessings it afforded. And by extension, and as the years and centuries went by, these same wonderful blessings would be the happy portion

of each one of his genetic seed scattered far and wide in all the nations of the world.

And what benefits and blessings!

Instead of being under the curse that was upon us all for not keeping the law, to find ourselves in the realm of the sovereign and superabundant grace of God, being justified freely by faith in Christ's redemptive work.

A true gospel of the most blessed good news indeed, revealed unto Abraham many centuries ago, but equally wonderful to all of us, when, in the course of time, it dawned in our own hearts too.

The Covenant of sacrifice and fire.

"And he said unto him, I am the Lord God that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it."

"And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it."

(Genesis 15: 7-8)

We may well understand why Abraham asked this question. Surely it was not from unbelief; rather it would stem from the great enigma of how could he possibly inherit it, being a foreigner dwelling in a strange land, and without the means nor the least desire to fight against its inhabitants to dispossess them of it.

Not far ahead, as the narrative progresses, we shall see how the Lord deciphers the enigma.

But before that, we must note carefully that the Lord assured him by a covenant that he would indeed inherit all that land in which he was sojourning.

It was a twofold covenant, both of sacrifice and of fire.

We should not miss the point that, as the dead animals were offered unto the Lord[, birds of prey tried to pounce on them and devour them.

But our father Abraham did not stand aloof and uncaring; far from it, he chased them away and did not allow them to touch them.

We are to be like him, not allowing the enemy in any wise to take away that which we have dedicated in sacrifice unto the Lord.

Immediately after this we are told that "...when the sun was gone down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him." (Genesis 15: 12)

By means of this dream, the Lord begins to decipher the enigma of how His promise to give him the land would be outworked.

He would not have to engage in battle to conquer it, nor would it be something immediate.

Before it could happen, his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and would be sorely oppressed for four hundred years.

All this was entirely fulfilled, and we are told of it in great detail from the end of Genesis up to the book of Joshua, under whose leadership they conquered the land he had been promised.

We should not fail to consider the anguish he must have felt when he had that dream, as a great horror of darkness came upon him.

He was carrying his descendants in his loins, so he felt a strong impact, as a shadow of the cruel bondage the children of Israel were to suffer under Pharaoh in Egypt.

But the interpretation of the dream takes us beyond that. Many of us, who are his spiritual seed, have also had to go through times of fierce oppression from the Pharaoh of this world and his wicked hosts.

Nevertheless, and thanks to the Lord's unspeakable mercy, we have been set totally free, and have moved on to a new life *more abundant*, not in a geographical or earthly dimension, but in a spiritual and eternal one.

Once the former interpretation of the dream was made, there came the sign to seal the covenant:

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed through the pieces."
(Genesis 15: 17)

What do we make of all this?

By the genetic principle, we who are the true spiritual sons of Abraham are in covenant with the Lord. He Himself has conceived it, so drawing us that, all that we are and have is unconditionally and totally offered unto Him.

Then, as a seal that the offering has been accepted, the celestial flame invades and runs through our innermost being, so that we become a living burnt offering, *"a sweet smelling savour unto the Lord,"* as is so often repeated in the book of Leviticus.

At this stage we make a digression to add something not found in the original in Spanish – a great hymn by L.F.W. Woodford. It is very dear to me, perhaps because when I first heard the word of God and was saved, that awesome, holy fire ran through my bosom in successive waves that branded and sealed me for God, and the little task He had appointed for me.

Burn fire of God! my ransomed soul possessing
Pure fire thou art, and I would dwell in Thee,
Light of my life, true source of every blessing,
Grant all my days one holy flame to be.
Burn fire of God! Thy grace and glory knowing,
My cleansed heart shall be all fire within:
Love all constraining, tenderness o'erflowing,
One kindling passion other lives to win.

Burn fire of God! Thy cloven tongue bestowing,
Baptizing me with heavenly energy,
Touched with live coals from off thine altar glowing,
My purged lips shall speak alone of Thee.

Burn fire of God! With seven-fold refining,
Till, mirrored from my deeps Thine eyes shall see
In purest gold Thy perfect image shining,
Thy Christ revealed in clear irradiancy.

**Burn fire of God! By Thine own love transcending,
Let all I hold, be Thine and Thine alone!
Heart, mind and will, a sacrifice ascending,
Consumed by fire from out Thy fiery Throne.**

Continuing now from where we left, we find therefore two further vital ingredients added to the genetic seed, which confirm us as being of abrahamic lineage: sacrifice and fire.

There is still a third ingredient the Lord added– that of blood, to make it a triple covenant– but this we are to consider before long in a later chapter.

As the spiritual seed of Abraham we are as the stars that cannot be numbered. As all of them, we have an inner fire that propels us, and all of us bear a glory that has been given us from above. It is a glory that differs in measure and expression, and it is at the same time unique and yet equal, since it all comes from the same Father of Glory, as we can see from I Corinthians 15: 41 and James 1: 17.

When we believe the word of truth of the gospel, our faith is counted and credited to us for righteousness, freeing us from the curse of the law, and without any need to try and keep it, to try and justify ourselves before God.

Delivered from the yoke of bondage to sin, and to the prince of this world, we move on to inherit the spiritual Canaan of a new and more abundant life in Christ Jesus.

And all this, sealed and corroborated by a sacred covenant of sacrifice and fire: the total offering of our life, accepted and confirmed by the celestial flame of the God that answers by fire. (I Kings 18: 24)

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Hagar and Ishmael

We are now on Genesis 16.

How often we lapse into impatience, not waiting quietly for the Lord to sort out problems or resolve knotty situations as He alone can!

We can be so prone to take matters into our own hands and manage them ourselves, when the right thing would be to abide in calm trust, letting Him intervene.

Of course, almost inevitably what happens in such cases is that we reap frustration and failure, and quite frequently great loss of time too.

Well, this time it was Sarah, Abraham's wife, who at the time was still Sarai, who fell into what we may rightly call a nasty trap of the flesh.

Ten long years had run by since they left Haran, moving southwards to the land of Canaan. Abraham was 85 years old and she was 75.

She thought by then that God had made her barren, and the desire to have a son moved her to attempt it through her Egyptian servant Hagar.

So she asked her husband to go in unto her, to which Abraham agreed.

Little did they imagine, Sarah in particular, into what trouble they were to get!

Hagar did in fact conceive, but instead of continuing submissive to her mistress, she began to despise her, notwithstanding the great favour she had received from her.

As a response to this Sarah began to oppress and afflict her, and Hagar could think of nothing better than to escape to the wilderness and find respite by a fountain.

The story tells us that the angel of the Lord asked her a double question – where was she coming from, and where was she going.

She gave an answer to the first but not to the second!

Here we can trace a fitting comparison with what frequently occurs when a child of God has perhaps been corrected or reprimanded by his pastor or spiritual leader.

He cannot take correction, so what does he do? He decides to quit and go elsewhere, without even praying about it.

So, asked by someone the same two questions, he only answers the first, having no answer to the second.

Briefly we sum it up by saying that when one is to make a move from the church to which one belongs, it should always be in good grace, and knowing full well what the next place is, and that it is clearly in the will of the Lord.

Later in the chapter we see that the Lord promised her that her descendants would be countless, no doubt in consideration of the fact that he was Abraham's son; also that her son's name would be Ishmael, which means *God hears*.

At the same time, she is foretold that he would be a fierce man, whose hand would be lifted against all his brethren and vice versa. This has surely proved true ever since!

In Galatians 4: 21-31 Paul takes up the Genesis 21: 9-21 passage to trace a very fitting allegory between the Old Covenant coming from Mount Sinai and which corresponds to the earthly Jerusalem, and the new one from the new Jerusalem which cometh from above.

Further on, we shall be dwelling upon this rather extensively.

Returning to the main thread – Hagar and Ishmael – it cannot be questioned that Abraham was wrong in agreeing to Sarah's request, as the whole sequel shows quite plainly.

What Jesus said in John 3: 6 – *"...that which is born of the flesh is flesh..."* finds a true fulfillment in all this.

The whole passage gives us a further sign of the obvious fallibility of our father Abraham. This, of course, in sharp contrast with the absolute and infinite perfection of our heavenly Father.

We believe we are right in saying that Abraham should not have lent himself to Sarah's request, and instead have trusted the Lord, and remained in quiet confidence that He was both able and faithful to fulfill His promise to him.

Another point that has often rightly been made is that, in inspiring the Holy Scriptures, the Spirit of God has not only described the virtues of God's servants, but also their weak points and failings.

This instance relating to Abraham, as well as many others concerning Gideon, David, Solomon, Jonah and others, are all included in the sacred writings to warn us, and to encourage us to take careful note and be on our guard not to fall into the same failings and shortcomings.

At the same time, and by the same token, the fact that Abraham took this wrong step does not predispose us to do likewise, but is rather a red light of clear warning.

A final point is that in His great magnanimity, despite his wrong doing in not refusing to cooperate with Sarah in her carnal plan, the Lord blessed the son born of Hagar and promised his descendants would also be countless.

However, this should in no way be an encouragement to do things that are not quite right and in the will of God, hoping that one will be blessed just the same.

We sum up the chapter by saying that it is good to learn from our own mistakes – and we have all made them in plenty! – and also from those of others.

By so doing, we shall be wise and sure footed, and avoid the many disappointments and heartbreaks that follow those who act otherwise.

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CHAPTER 16

Greater age and maturity, demand greater responsibility.

The narrative now leaves a blank space of 13 years, since the birth of Ishmael, when Abraham was 86.

Did the Lord speak to him during this long period?

It is possible that He might have; however, we dare to submit that He might not have.

Sometimes we have heard of folk who had the habit of seeking the Lord for a new word from Him every day.

As they shared with one what the Lord had, supposedly, spoken to them, it seldom struck one as genuine and as something solid from above – rather, it appeared as born from their own imagination, and at times, even fantasy.

In due course this impression was confirmed by the fact that, with the passage of time, it became clear that no concrete fruit or good accrued from what they felt they had heard from Him.

It is a self evident truth that no faithful and conscientious servant should need to receive new directions each day, unless there should be some special emergency or unforeseen new event, requiring special or particular guidance.

In winter weather, for instance, he knows full well that his first task is to clear up the ashes and kindle the fire, after which he will naturally go on with the normal chores of cleaning, tidying up, etc., which have already been previously assigned to him by his master,

By the same token, a true, and, shall we say, normal servant of the Lord should know well what he has to do, and how he is to go about his time day by day.

Will he expect the Lord to repeat things to him every morning?

“Remember to pray and seek my face. Don’t forget to read my word avidly today. Keep yourself in humility and purity at all times. Do not waste your time over unnecessary and unedifying matters. Do not lapse into the temptation of criticizing others, gossiping”, etc. etc.

Surely that, and all else that belongs to a wholesome Christian life, will be things that he will be fully aware of, without any need that they should be repeated to him day by day – in fact, we could add that he would take offence at such a thing!

And so the silence of the Lord, provided it goes hand in hand with a genuine inner peace, should be interpreted as a sign of divine approval, and not disapproval, as some may mistakenly think.

On the other hand, if one should be wrong footed or in error at any stage, so long as the attitude to the Lord is open and honest, it is to be expected that one should receive alarm signs or warnings, generally by the withdrawal of that inner peace that is to be, so to speak, the faithful and unfailing umpire.

One remembers praying to the Lord many years ago in a very definite way, to be kept in the clear and holy way of the Spirit and the Word of God.

One added that if for any reason one did not understand the warning, or did not take it on board, that He should please insist with all clarity, and if need be discipline and chasten one strongly, so as to ensure one would not miss the way or go astray.

Over the many years that have elapsed since one made that very important prayer, the Lord has proved His faithfulness in remembering it – in given and particular occasions He has had to resort to chastening, but one has been able to recognise that one deserved it, and that it was His true love at work for one's good.

In passing, we would urge anyone recently embarked on the new venture of the Christian life, or indeed anyone who has never made such a prayer, to do so without delay, with all his heart and in true faith.

But now, to have the other side of things. in situations in which there have been no dangers or hazards, the seal of the genuine peace of God, and of His blessing as a sign of approval, have sufficed to carry on in faith and confidence, without any need to seek new words or messages from above.

There have been some over the years, but only few and far between , and to signify a new important step – such as to move back to Argentina in 1987 - or when facing the odd unforeseen emergency.

At the risk again of sounding repetitious, we reiterate that there is no need that the Lord should be saying continually new things to us. So long as our life is well grounded in Christ, we should know full well what we are to do, and how we are to conduct ourselves in every sphere of life.

Continuing now with the narrative, we quote Genesis 17: 1:- “And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.”

The reader will recall that the previous time recorded in the narrative in which the Lord had spoken to Abraham, it was to give him reassurance and encouragement.

Instead we now find that it is a word of exhortation to walk before Him and to be perfect. Accordingly we have entitled the chapter “Greater age and maturity demand greater responsibility.”

It is a known fact for those of us than have been on the way for some good time, that in the early periods of incipient faith and growth, the Lord graciously bore with one by reason of one's immaturity. We must stress, however, that by this we do not imply in any way overlooking, or let alone, condoning what might be termed open sin.

Then as we progress in spiritual development, experience and understanding, he requires more of us. It goes without saying that He does it prompted by love, for our own benefit, and to bring us to higher ground, as well as to more effectiveness and fruitfulness in our service.

"I am the Almighty God" Most fittingly, the exhortation begins with a new revelation of Himself, through a name that has not appeared before – *El Shaddai* in the original Hebrew.

It means *God, the all sufficient one*, but with a tender and touching shade – *the breasted God*, the One Who from His loving breast nourishes and strengthens His own with His great love, which is thus both paternal and maternal.

We find in this a direct relation between our development and maturing, and an increasing perception of the greatness of our God – in this case and at this stage, a new aspect, not known before, of His manifold greatness.

And following such a further revelation of Himself, comes the pointed exhortation: "*Walk before me.*"

These three words hold much more meaning and depth than what is commonly understood, and what would appear first sight.

He is being urged and required to walk in such a way that he might know and feel that at every moment he was in the presence of Him, the very everlasting God Almighty.

How this awesome thought ought to affect us in word, thought and deed!

The Omnipresent, invisible but most real, Eternal God right in front of us, watching, listening and understanding every action, every word we utter, and every thought running through our mind, no matter how secret we may think it to be.

Truly something to ponder and to lay to heart in real earnest.

"...and be thou perfect."

We are not to understand this as becoming an infallible being, incapable of making mistakes. What is really meant is that at this more advanced stage, and with a few more years of the experience of walking in faith, the Lord required and expected more of him

May we describe it as follows:- a greater trust and confidence, an increasing calm and prudence, and a walk which gradually attains to the goal of being free from such common faults as fear, worrying with anxiety, or hasty actions or reactions, irritability, or else speaking unwisely and out of turn, all to be found in times of less maturity.

We believe this is both quite logical and reasonable. For example, from a ten year old child we may only expect and require of him what is normal and reasonable at that age.

If he does behave accordingly, we may well be satisfied with him, and so term his behaviour as perfect, although it will of course be a *relative perfection*. in keeping with his age and possibilities.

His degree of responsibility and behaviour should naturally be expected to increase once he is fifteen, for example, and so on.

In other words, the perfection we are talking about is closely connected with the greater or lesser age and maturity.

And we believe this is the way we are to understand it in other passages in which *perfection* is used in Scripture, such as Matthew 5: 48, Philippians 3:12- 15, Hebrews 5: 14 and 6: 1, James 1: 4, etc.

As Abraham's seed we are to expect that our God should require more of us as we progress in our pilgrimage.

He will want us to be more conscious of His omnipresence, which implies that we are right before Him at all times; that His piercing gaze searches every action, word or thought, as well as the intentions or motives behind each one.

And that we should know that He wishes us to please Him in everything , so that He may fully outwork His purposes for our lives, as He did in our father Abraham's.

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Chapter 17 – He taketh away the first that he may establish the second (Hebrews 10: 9)

We are very conscious that the Christian life and ministry is many sided, full orb'd, with a great variety of facets, such as prayer, the Word of God, faith, love, praise, true worship, perseverance, evangelism and soul winning, being firmly grounded and confirmed in Christ, and many others, which we could sum up as the full counsel of God.

However, if we were asked to define in a condensed way what we consider the deep down essence or backbone of it all, we would say that it lies

in the removal of the old, the carnal and the earthly, to establish or substitute the new, spiritual and heavenly virtues and values.

Hence the title we have chosen for this chapter.

The Scriptures, especially in the New Testament, gives us ample proof of

this.

We quote but some, out of the very many to be found.

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"

"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another." (Ephesians 4: 22-25)

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (Ephesians 4: 29)

"Flee also youthful lusts, but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Timothy 2: 22)

"But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth."

"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds: and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering." (Colossians 3: 8-10 and 12)

And so, taking into account that Sarah had her name changed, and Abram too, we submit a practical way of expressing the above, aware that it might not be quite the preference or win the approval of some

However, be this as it may, the truth conveyed in it is quite obvious and undeniable.

Sarai had the "i" removed from her name to be called Sarah,
which meant adding an "h": we also include Abram, who also had his name
changed at this stage, to become Abraham, thus adding an
"h."

In other words, we find in this the removal of "i's", which stand for the negatives, and the adding of "h's" which conversely stand for the positives.

Our problem here lies in the fact that many of the negative ones begin with "i" in Spanish, but do not in English, and equally many of the good new positives that begin with an "h" in Spanish, do not so in English.

However, we will begin with the "i's" that coincide in both languages.
Inept, incompetent, incapable, irresponsible, indifferent, insensitive,
infidel, inadequate, ineffective, indecent.

We now add a few others that start with "i" in Spanish with English
rendering in brackets:- impío (wicked) infiel (unfaithful) inútil (useless),
insensato (unwise), ingrato (ungrateful), iracundo (bad tempered), indigno
(unworthy)

As to the “h’s” to be added with have honourable, (strict) honesty, humility, hungry (for God and His word).

Finally, here go a few that do not coincide, with Spanish first followed by English in brackets: hombría plena (full manhood) hechura suya (His workmanship) hermandad fraternal (fraternal brotherhood) hidalgo (a noble person) hidalguía (nobility) hálito del Espíritu (breath of the Spirit)

As true sons of Abraham, and also daughters of Sarah (1 Peter 3: 6) we are destined to undergo the wise, loving dealings of our Heavenly Father through the working of the Holy Spirit.

As we move on, and granted our conscious and close cooperation, we shall see Him remove negatives from the fleshly or selfish life, whilst adding instead those positives that come from above, and which gradually change us into the image of our perfect model, the Lord Jesus.

With some who are at a more incipient stage these will be very obvious, whilst those with greater maturity will find it covers things that many would never consider at all.

Yet, small and petty as they may seem, they do matter to a gracious loving Father, Who is determined to turn His own beloved ones into precious pearls and jewels.

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Chapter 18 – The covenant confirmed and enlarged

Apart from what we have already shared about the new names given to Abram and Sarai, it is right that we should consider the full meaning of the new ones.

Abraham means “*father of multitudes*” and Sarah “*princess*”.

In making these name changes, the Lord predicted that He had made him – as already stated, “*a father of multitudes*” - and He would also make nations from him, and kings would be begotten of him. (17: 5-6)

Of Sarai he said that she would be mother of nations and kings of peoples would proceed from her. (17: 16)

We must not fail to see that in this there is a general principle, although sometimes there is the odd exception.

The principle lies in the fact that the wife and helpmeet of a servant of the Lord who has been blessed and honoured by Him, should likewise be blessed and honoured like him, so as to become "*a coheir of the grace of life*" as Peter so fittingly puts it. (See 1 Peter 3: 7)

It is sad to see the occasional exception to this, when wives are not at the right standard or of the right calibre, to flow spiritually alongside their husband.

In such instances the Lord cannot see His way to honour them as He does their husbands, who must find it painful that their life companion does not share with them what is the passion and supreme vision of their lives.

However, it is right and fair to point out that sometimes the opposite happens - and perhaps more often; husbands who are substandard spiritually, and cannot be therefore honoured by the Lord, to the wife's great frustration and grief.

But coming back now to the changed names, Paul's comment in Romans 4:17 "*God, who quickeneth the dead and calleth those things which be not as though they were*" – is particularly significant and meaningful.

In other words, He promises and assures Abraham that he will be father of many people, at a time when, at the age of nearly a hundred, he did not have a single son (except for Ishmael, born from the bond servant) - and so He calls him *father of multitudes*, as though the promise had already been fulfilled.

We must understand that the Lord's faith is unlimited, as well as his resources of power and wisdom. When in Genesis 1: 3 darkness lay on the face of the deep, He pronounced the three famous words:- *let there be light* with absolute faith and certainty.

We may rest assured that no shadow of doubt ran through His mind, thinking, for example, "*I have never done this before – I don't quite know how it will turn out.*"

None of that, of course – He spoke those words with total confidence and assurance, knowing full well that behind them were all His creative power and inexhaustible and eternal light.

Immediately the whole scene was flooded with light:- "*...and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good.*" (Genesis 1: 3b-4a)

Additionally, in John 1: 5 we read that "*...the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.*"

Not only is the light not comprehended by darkness; its supremacy over it is absolute.

In very simple practical illustrations, firstly we may think of a room totally immersed in darkness, but the moment we switch on the light, it invades the entire place and all darkness disappears.

In our oral preaching on a few occasions we have taken the opposite of a room fully lit up. Imagining that such a thing were possible, (!) a huge lorry arrives with sacks full of darkness; the driver and his assistant then proceed to

unload them, open them and cast their contents of darkness into the room in an attempt to fill it with darkness, but to no avail.

The absolute impotence of darkness becomes immediately apparent. Light is invincible!

Although this illustration will sound very odd and fanciful, it serves as an apt comparison to what happened with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

All the wicked forces of darkness targeted and charged against Him with all their might and devilish venom, but – praise God – quite unavailingly.

His blessed, pure, eternal light, far from being extinguished, stood firm and remained intact in all its splendour and majesty.

The faith, power, greatness and glory of our blessed Lord are all supreme and wonderful beyond words!

Returning now to the Genesis narrative on Abraham – after confirming the promise that he would be a father of nations by means of the very descriptive change of his name, the Lord now moves on to enlarge His covenant with him.

In considering chapter fifteen we saw it was a covenant of sacrifice and fire. It is now as though the Lord was not quite satisfied, and He proceeds to introduce a third part or ingredient to make it a perfect threefold.

The Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Who has placed us on this planet, comprised mainly of earth, air and sea, and Who has made us spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5: 23) now confirms and enlarges His covenant by turning it also into a threefold – sacrifice, fire and blood.

Thus He introduces circumcision by saying:- *“This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: Every man child among you shall be circumcised.”* (Genesis 17: 10)

Circumcision was an operation to remove the foreskin. It was painful to a degree that increased to its highest by the third day (see Genesis 34: 25), after which it gradually decreased till they were healed. (Joshua 5: 8)

It is commonly understood that, physiologically, circumcision has a purpose in that it serves to prevent health problems that could otherwise arise.

However, we shall just confine ourselves to the spiritual interpretation and significance, which comes through the highly inspired pen of the apostle Paul.

“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly: neither is circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” (Romans 2: 28-29)

“In whom ye are also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” (Colossians 2: 11)

Both Scriptures, in particular the second, speak to us of a spiritual operation by which the carnal sinful body of the flesh is cast off.

This does not imply, by any means, a state or condition of being unable to sin, for God does never remove or violate our free will.

The true meaning is that the sin principle which enslaved and overcame us, is now removed and overcome, so that we are no longer in bondage to sin, and instead, we are freed from its power.

"...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever commiteth sin is the servant of sin."

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be freed indeed." (John 8: 34 and 36)

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." (Romans 6: 6)

As we have seen, the circumcision surgery is performed on the virile member. Sex has been given to man and woman for procreation, as well as for mutual pleasure and comfort in married life.

It is a precious gift to mankind, but since the fall of Adam and Eve, it has been greatly distorted and vilified by the wicked enemy, in bringing about fornication, adultery, pornography, homosexuality, lesbianism, etc., all of which are clearly and unequivocally declared to be open sin in the Holy Scriptures.

The sharp incision for cutting off the foreskin, in symbol represents the cutting off of all that, but also of whatever is in the line of fleshly, carnal lust, in its many different varieties.

Many tend to reject this truth, feeling it is an extreme teaching - the eradication of the sin principle, at odds, they say, with biblical truth and practical experience.

However, let us look at it from a very simple and practical viewpoint.

We are thinking, for instance, of someone strongly addicted to smoking. On many occasions we have seen or known of such, both enslaved and impotent to overcome it.

Yet the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ has not only delivered them from its grip, but has removed all desire to smoke, and they have lived all the rest of their lives without ever having the least drawing to do so again.

My own dear father, now with the Lord, was a clear case in point. He started smoking at the early age of twelve, and in later life he tried to give up, even resorting to medical treatment, which proved quite unavailing.

Yet at a given stage, as he turned wholeheartedly to the Lord, he was completely freed from it, and never again had the slightest desire to smoke.

All the foregoing being unquestionably so, ¿why should we think that the same divine power and grace are unable to free men and women in a radical and complete way from all other diabolical bondages?

In fact, again, we have known and heard of many who can testify in very truth that they have indeed been totally delivered, and now they live enjoying that blessed freedom, which, moreover, has been promised by our Lord Jesus, as we have seen from John 8: 36.

And finally, from such a wonderful Christ as the blessed One we know, ¿can it be said that this is too much to expect, and that, despite the fullness of His redemptive work on Calvary, we should have to continue under the power and dominion of sin in our daily lives?

Most certainly and emphatically NO!

Before closing the chapter, and following the thread of the narrative, we must note Abraham's prompt obedience to the commandment to circumcise himself, as well as Ishmael and all the men of his household, both those born therein and those bought for money.

We know of no previous record of circumcision, and we must consider it as something new and quite unknown until then.

Being as it was, a bloody operation (See Exodus 4: 25-26) we may well imagine the natural resistance there might have been, even from himself, Ishmael, born of the bond slave Hagar, and all the other men in his household.

Nevertheless, we see how Abraham put obedience to the Lord above all that, and they were all circumcised that very day.

This not only gives proof of his absolute obedience – it also provides evidence of his authority in seeing to it that all the men under him without exception should submit to it, despite the strong reservations and objections some might well have had.

Truly an exemplary father, of whom we may well be proud indeed!

As Abraham's spiritual seed, we may expect that when the Lord honours our faithfulness with His seal of approval upon our labours, He should also do so with our wives and life companions.

Thus both we and they are honoured and blessed, as his right sons and daughters.

Additionally, we partake of the spiritual circumcision of Christ which delivers us from the bondage and slavery of sin.

Let us, like him, be ready to obey whatever we know our Lord is telling us to do, whether it be something simple and straightforward, or what might be contrary to our personal wishes, but that we know He is requiring of us.

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Chapter 19 – The blessed host of heavenly guests.

The happenings of chapter 18 of Genesis which we are now to comment on, took place soon after the covenant was confirmed and enlarged by the adding of circumcision, which we have just been considering.

What we are told in the first fifteen verses of Genesis 18 we are now engaged in, is really a beautiful story, with many points of great interest, and from which we may derive much inspiration and challenge.

Being seated at the door of his tent, in the shade, and no doubt seeking to benefit from the odd cool breeze amid the noontide heat, suddenly he had a delightful surprise:- *“And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door and bowed himself to the ground.”* (18: 2)

Evidently, he was in no fear, and went running to meet them and bow at their feet.

The same verb – to run – appears also in verse 7, and we find it very remarkable, as Abraham was no younger than fourscore and nineteen at the time!

The heat of the day which he was facing, moving him to sit placidly at the door of his tent and in the shade, was something he simply forgot about, at the sight of these distinguished guests.

Obviously in good health, and full of vim and vigour, he first runs to bow before them, and soon after *“ Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it to a young man, and he hasted to dress it.”* (18: 7)

One would think all this was about an athlete in the prime of life, not an elderly man all but one hundred years old!

Let this precious spirit of running towards our Lord, and hastening to serve Him and offer Him the very best, be found in each one of us.

May we never become apathetic or sluggish, but rather press on with a big heart for our God and Christ, to Whom we owe so, so much.

On another line of thought, in the passage we are considering it is rather striking to see verse 2, plural; 3, singular; 4, 5, 8 and 9 plural; 10, 13, 14 and 15 singular; this could denote either a manifestation of the Holy Trinity, or else that it was the Lord Jehovah and two angels.

Probably the right one is the latter, bearing in mind that at the beginning of chapter 19 we are told that the two angels had continued towards Sodom, whilst the Lord had remained with Abraham, His friend, saying to Himself: *“Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in Him?”* (18: 17-18)

Notwithstanding the above, it can be argued that verse 9, in which all three speak to Abraham in unity, and the following verse 10, in which there is an immediate return to the singular, can well lend themselves to support the former possibility.

Be as it may, there is no need to be dogmatic or rigid about it, and we would leave it to each individual reader to decide for himself which of the two is the right one.

We also find it worth noting the way in which Abraham offered his hospitality.

"Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree."

"And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts: after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do as thou hast said." (18: 4-5)

However, having said that, he hastened to bid Sarah to *"...make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, and make cakes upon the hearth."* (18: 6b)

And as if that were not enough (!) as we have already seen *"...Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it."*

Moreover:

"And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat." (18: 7-8)

We draw several important points from all this.

1) He gave them much more than what he had initially offered, so that his hospitality was lavish and most generous, well above what he had first thought.

It often happens that in first giving to the Lord we realise that it is very little; He deserves much more, and so we progress to give Him in greater measure.

2) The haste and urgency with which he acted, and which he also communicated to Sarah and the young man.

We are to serve the Lord promptly, with urgency and zeal that will overflow unto others.

3) The preparations, particularly that of the calf, despite the way he, Sarah and the young man hastened, must have necessarily taken some time.

We are moved by the condescending kindness of the three heavenly guests, who waited so graciously whilst Abraham, Sarah and the young man prepared for them.

4) We are equally impressed as we visualize the beautiful scene of the three guests, reclining under a tree eating what had been lovingly prepared for them, whilst our father Abraham stood by their side.

This is where we find the title we have chosen for the chapter to fit in suitably.

5) We must at this point relate this to what we read in Hebrews 13: 2 :- *"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."*

This verse is often crossed referred to the passage we have been considering. However, we do not deem this correct, inasmuch as Abraham was not *unawares*; he knew full well that they were angels.

The passage in Hebrews 13: 2 is really to be connected with Judges 13: 1-21. Here we see with all clarity that Manoah, who was to be the father of Samson, at first did not know that the being that came to make the announcement of his birth to his wife was an angelic being.

But what is most important in all this is to see the value and virtue of the ministry of hospitality. It is pointed out not only in Hebrews 13: 2, but also in Acts 28: 7, 1st. Timothy 3: 2 and 5: 10, Titus 1: 8, Romans 12: 13, 1st. Peter 4: 9 and 3rd John 5-8.

It is a service of receiving and putting up translocal ministries and other saints, and helping them on their way, thus reflecting the love and kindness of the Lord, Who know doubt richly rewards those who practise it.

As sons of our father Abraham we are to be genetically predisposed to exercise this noble and valuable ministry. Let us be consistent and do so whenever the appropriate occasion should arise.

As one who has travelled extensively over decades bearing the word of God, I can testify to the great blessing and encouragement received in this way, from so very many beloved saints up and down the land, especially in Spain, but also in Argentina, Eire, Cyprus, etc.

After having eaten, the three heavenly guests proceeded to announce to Abraham the proximity of the fulfillment of the long awaited birth of the child that barren Sarah was to have.

It is no longer at an indefinite future time, *"I will certainly return to thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son."* (Genesis 18: 10) This we understand to be the normal time of pregnancy or little more.

This was fulfilled precisely, as we know, as Abraham was ninety-nine at this stage, and a hundred when Isaac was born.

We deem it right at this point to comment on Sarah's reaction when she overheard the announcement from her tent, as well as Abraham's in chapter 17.

"...and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Genesis 18: 11b-12)

"Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old bear?" O that Ishmael might live before thee." (Genesis 17: 17-18)

This is in open contrast to what is stated in Romans 4: 18-21 and Hebrews 11: 11.

"Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be."

"And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb."

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief: but was strong in faith, giving glory to God."

“And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.”

“Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.”

We trust that the explanation we now submit will satisfy our readers.

We begin by pointing out that the two reactions quoted in the Genesis narrative appear immediately after the promise that Sarah would give birth, to Abraham in 17: 16, and reiterated in 18: 10 in Sarah’s hearing, resulted significantly in laughter, the meaning of Isaac, the name of the child they were to have.

However, to this reaction of laughter and unbelief, the Lord replied confirming that in very deed it would happen, and we assume that that settled the matter with them both, and from then on they believed in the fulfillment of it, as shown in the New Testament Scriptures we have quoted.

Practical experience shows that with our natural faculties and the reasonings of our mind, we can doubt or question what has been promised to us by the Lord because of the sheer impossibility entailed.

However, in our inner man a faith is lodged that is based not on the circumstances that make it impossible, but in what God has said. Such a faith presses on and in due course is rewarded by the full outworking of what the Lord has promised.

Let us live in keeping with the genetic trait received from our father Abraham in being hospitable, gladly and without grudging, as well as sons always willing to serve our Lord wholeheartedly.

And when circumstances surrounding us lend themselves to doubt, let us, like Abraham and Sarah, treasure in our depth what He has spoken to us, trusting until His words come to actual fulfillment.

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Chapter 20 – Abraham, the intercessor

Although he does not figure among the five great intercessors mentioned by the Lord in Jeremiah 15: 1 (Moses and Samuel) and Ezekiel 14: 14 (Noah, Job and Daniel) doubtless our father Abraham was certainly an intercessor to be reckoned with.

The passage which spreads from verses 16 to 33 of chapter 18 of Genesis which we are on, affords us abundant material bearing on this facet of his life and character, which on the other hand should also be found in each one of us who are his spiritual sons.

Let us notice in the first place that as the two other angels pursued their journey towards Sodom, Abraham went on alongside them (18: 16) – no staying at the door of his tent resting in the shade. They were marching on, so he went on with them, until wherever possible or wherever he were allowed to by them.

It is at this stage that the Lord reflects on the greatness which He Himself has conferred upon His great friend of being father of a great and strong nation, and that, in him, all the nations of our world were to be blessed.

Besides, He is certain that he would teach the way of the Lord to all his descendants, that they might walk in justice and righteousness, so that He might bring to pass all the good that He had promised him.

Accordingly, He feels He cannot hide from him something very important indirectly, to him His friend Abraham.

It was about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose sin had reached the very extreme, and the fact that his nephew Lot, his wife and two daughters lived in Sodom, amidst all that world of abominable iniquity.

At that stage the two angels move ahead, whilst Abraham remained before the presence of the Lord. He has got stuck by the Lord, and nothing seems to move him to leave Him and go back to his tent! (At least for the time being)

The burden that really weighs upon the true intercessor now becomes clear. He can in no manner give way to tiredness, the natural desire for comfort or let the daily normal occupations distract him, to prevent him giving vent to the cry that lies deep in his heart: there is a dear one who is at the very point of perishing, and it is both imperative and urgent that he should be rescued.

This prompts him to take a very important step.

“...but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near, and said: Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

(Genesis 18: 22b-23)

So far he has been before the Lord – i.e. in front of Him, at a rough guess a couple of yards away. But now that he is about to begin to intercede he gets close to Him – right by His side, or rather, right before Him – his eyes before Him, as well as his nose before His breath, and his mouth before His mouth.

This physical posture represents in type what we might well term the true credential of every genuine intercessor – to be very close indeed to his Lord.

From there he moves on to ask Him whether he is to destroy the city and not forgive it even if fifty righteous be found within it, then forty-five, then forty, thirty, twenty and finally ten. To all these questions he gets a favourable answer.

After his pleading should there be but ten, the Lord moves on, no longer speaking to him, and we are told that Abraham returns to his place.

No doubt he must have done so with the big question running through his mind – what would happen to Sodom, and above all, to his nephew Lot, his wife and two daughters?

In the realm of prayer and intercession there is a great variety of experiences. Sometimes we receive an answer promptly and in keeping precisely with what we asked for; others it happens that there is a battle fought in our hearts, so to speak, until we come to an inner release from the burden we were carrying, as well as a perfect peace, knowing that our prayer has indeed been heard and accepted.

On other occasions we do not know for certain what the outcome will be, but having done our part conscientiously and thoroughly before the Lord, we come to a place of quiet trust, knowing full well that He will do what is right, according to His wisdom, righteousness and great mercy.

We believe that Abraham's intercession for Sodom fell within this last aspect. He was motivated mainly by his great concern for Lot and his own.

The comment made by Peter in his second epistle is not only of interest, but also very relevant.

"And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly."

"And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked."

"The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." (2 Peter 2: 6, 7 and 9)

We see that the Lord did not grant absolving and forgiving Sodom, as Abraham had asked, but which would have indeed been wrong.

However, the answer he did get was that Lot, his wife and two daughters were spared, which, after all, was what he really wanted.

And this agrees, by the way, with what Abraham said to the Lord at the beginning:

"Shall not the Judge of the whole earth do right?" (Genesis 18: 25b)

Curiously enough, and though it may seem strange, what Abraham was asking for was not right – that the filthy and abominable wickedness of Sodom should be overlooked and not receive its just punishment.

And the Lord did not answer in accordance with what Abraham had asked for, but instead destroyed the city once the only just and his household had removed from it.

Paul aptly states in Romans 8: 26 – *“...for we know not what we should pray for as we ought...”*

The Lord understood full well the right motivation behind Abraham’s pleading, and he granted it, but not the way Abraham had expected, but according to his wise and strict justice.

Summing up on this, so long as in our praying the Lord sees a right heart attitude, asking for something which, however, is not really wise or timely, He answers but in a different manner.

Notwithstanding, in due course we come to see that His answer has been the right and proper one, in contrast with ours, however well meaning it might have been.

“And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.”

“And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.” (Genesis 19: 27-29)

This was the second time Abraham delivered Lot. The first was in the battlefield, as a warrior; this, on the ground of intercession.

Lot is referred to by the apostle Peter in the Scripture we have already seen, as a just man, and we must accept this as correct.

However, how sad a course did he run, and to what a miserable end did he come!

His wife turned into a salt statue for looking back at Sodom expectantly; dwelling in a wretched cave with his two daughters, through which he came to be the father of the Moabites and the Ammonites, both sworn enemies of God’s chosen and blessed people Israel.

What a contrast with our father Abraham, who, taking all along one and another step of faith and obedience, followed an entirely different way, which brought him to such a happy and glorious end!

We are to be consistent with the genetic trait of our father Abraham. Thus we must have a loving concern for those who, through a mistaken choice or any other reason, have either gone astray, or remained hurt or in a bad way, wrestling in persevering intercession for them, that they might be rescued or restored.

Moreover, we are to press on with great care not to take decisions based on material or earthly gains like Lot did. Instead, we are to follow the leading of the compass of the Holy Spirit and the Sacred Scriptures, which will always point us to the magnetic north of what the Lord truly has for us – diligently seeking just that, no more, but no less.

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Chapter 21 - ' Isaac's birth

There is no evil that lasts a hundred years, says a Spanish adage. And this affliction of not having a son of his own from his wife Sarah did not last a hundred years.

Although Abraham was exactly a hundred when Isaac was born, his long waiting had started when he was seventy-five. (See Genesis 15: 13)

Both he and Sarah laughed when the Lord made the promise that they would have a son in their old age. And so the name given to the child, accordingly, was Isaac, which as we all know, means laughter.

At the time of his birth, Sarah, who, from what we can gather from the narrative, till then had not been particularly cheerful, exclaimed: "God hath made me to laugh, so that they that hear will laugh with me." (Genesis 21: 6)

We can see it as the happy outcome that marked the end of a long and in some ways painful time of waiting.

"...weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Psalm 30: 5b)

"He that goes forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Psalm 126: 6)

Isaac's birth was precisely at the time foretold by the Lord, and Abraham took good care to circumcise him on the eighth day, as he had been commanded.

The child weaned.

"And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned." (21: 8)

This is the next event in this fascinating narration, and it conveys to all of us things of great interest and importance.

It was a very happy occasion, and Abraham decided to celebrate it with a great banquet. His long awaited, dearly beloved son, weaned from Sarah's

maternal breasts, was to begin having solid food – not only appetising, but also highly nourishing. Thus he would soon become a healthy and well developed child.

How much does the Scripture tell us, especially in the New Testament, about the sorrow of children of God who are badly underdeveloped.

Let us take three quotations:

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as spiritual, but unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, not with meat: for hereto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men? (1 Corinthians 3: 1-3)

“That ye henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men...” (Ephesians 4: 14a)

“For when for the time you ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God: and are such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.” (Hebrews 5: 12)

We shall just confine ourselves to drawing a comparison that is bound to prompt every reader to leave behind spiritual infancy and immaturity.

So, if a married couple should find that a child of theirs of, say four or five years old, were speaking with difficulty, his physical development clearly retarded, and still behaving like a one or two year old, surely they would be very grieved indeed.

By the same token, our Heavenly Father grieves over the behaviour of children of His, who should have already grown in grace and faith, as well as in responsibility, and sadly still continue to live and act as underdeveloped ones, constantly creating painful problems.

Do you really love your Heavenly Father?

Then, on all counts, and as a proof that your love is real and genuine, seeking the enabling of the Holy Spirit, make your utmost endeavour to mature spiritually and not give Him cause for disappointment or sadness by reason of carnal attitudes, or a wrong behaviour, not becoming to a true and good son.

The genetics of our father Abraham ensures that through pressing on faithfully, we may come to a very happy fulfilment in our earthly pilgrimage, after serving in faithful obedience, and even after having waited with patience, sometimes for very long.

It also predisposes us to mature, leaving behind spiritual infancy and childhood, and rejoicing that other younger ones should also do so in due course.

Chapter 22 – The two I's

We are so impressed as we see that in just following the story as it is told, many of the great truths of the Christian life unfold gradually one after another, in a simple and natural way.

And all of them, as pointed out from the beginning, contained in the genetic seed of our father Abraham.

Now we come to the two basic principles of the flesh and the spirit. To make it more palatable, or enjoyable shall we say, we find that the spark of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit comes into play at this stage.

It is brought to our notice and understanding, by the two I's, that of Ishmael and that of Isaac.

Immediately after the verse in the text telling us about the banquet celebrating that Isaac had been weaned, we read that Sarah became aware, obviously with much displeasure and concern, that Ishmael was mocking Isaac.

He was fourteen years older, and the right and proper way would have been to treat him kindly and fondly, as an elder half brother ought to.

It could well have been that he got jealous, as he saw little Isaac becoming the focus of everyone's attention.

But no doubt that mocking would have been to Sarah more than displeasing – very hurtful – for she would see in it the way in which Ishmael's mother had previously despised her.

As it is well known, in the passage in Galatians 5 running from verse 21 to 31, Paul draws a rich allegory from this part of the Genesis narrative. We will be dwelling upon it in some detail further on, but for now we point out that in verse 29 a stronger word is used instead of mocking – we are told it was persecuting.

So Sarah would see the mocking as something wicked, which would be bound to harm little Isaac. That explains why she found it very hard and told Abraham that he should be cast out together with his mother.

Abraham of course found it painful to accept, as Ishmael had come from his very loins, albeit carnal.

Here a carnal mind would hold that since it is clear from God's word that the wife is to be subject to her husband in all things, as per Ephesians 5: 24, Abraham should have flatly refused to do such a thing.

The Lord's direct intervention in the matter makes us see that Sarah was quite right in what she was asking. At the same time it gives us a valuable precedent so that we should appreciate that the husband, in some cases at least, may be mistaken, and his wife has been given to him as a helpmeet to help him see his mistakes.

Naturally, this is not to be the norm, but perhaps rather the exception. However, it is important that we should see it clearly, to avoid that by our teaching or conduct we should project a domineering machismo, so that every time it must be the husband's way, whether or not he be in the right.

If Abraham had left things as they were, not to go against his feelings towards his son Ishmael, he would have continued carrying the problem, which would have made things increasingly difficult for all three – himself, Sarah and Isaac.

Now we turn to unfold the allegorical interpretation found in Galatians 4:21-31.

The sending away of Hagar and Ishmael is actually the key point of this chapter.

Ishmael represents the carnal nature, our old man. Seven things are said of him that define the flesh both aptly and very significantly.

- 1) Born of the bond slave. (Galatians 4: 22)
- 2) Born of the flesh. (Galatians 4: 29)
- 3) A mocker. (Genesis 21:9)
- 4) Persecuted the one born of the Spirit. (Galatians 4: 29)
- 5) A fierce man. (Genesis 16; 12)
- 6) His hand to be against all others, and vice-versa. (Genesis 16: 12)
- 7) He dwelt in the wilderness. (Genesis 21: 21)

As a practical, itemized description of the flesh, nothing better and more fitting could be said.

By contrast, Isaac, the other I, was born of the free, by God's promise and according to the Spirit. (Galatians 4: 22-23 and 29)

His birth came after Ishmael's, just like that of our new man comes after our old man's. The absolute incompatibility of one with the other is self evident. If things had continued as they were, it would have inevitably ended in an impossible situation.

The flesh and the spirit cannot live together happily by any manner of means, for *"...the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit lusteth against the flesh..."* (Galatians 5: 17)

Hence, Sarah's demand, obeyed by Abraham, turned into a definitive and categorical sentence of the Scriptures.

"For what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bond woman and her son..."
(Galatians 4: 30)

We may well imagine Isaac, the next morning, noting that Ishmael was nowhere to be seen, go to his mother asking where he was.

"He's gone", would have been Sarah's ready reply.

"And when is he coming back?"

"Never again."

"Really? Never again?"

"That's right son – never, never again."

So Isaac would have leapt with joy, and from then on all around him was to be at his own exclusive disposal. He could play, run and jump, come and go quite freely, with none of the frustration and pain inflicted previously upon him by his wicked, malicious mocker and persecutor

Dear reader – this is all part of the one glorious gospel – really wonderfully good news. The Ishmael of our old man has been thoroughly dealt with by the blessed cross of Christ, so that our Isaac, the new man, born of God's promise and by the Spirit, should grow and develop freely unto fullness of life.

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” (Romans 6: 6)

We are now ruled by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which has set us free from the law of sin and death, (Romans 8: 2) and we have the blessed promise: *“Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace.” (Romans 6: 14)*

The genetic principles unfolded in this chapter predispose, us so that when we may be in disagreement with our wives, and they should be in the right, we should let ourselves be corrected by the Lord, and not insist obstinately to have our own way at all cost.

Additionally, through our Lord Jesus, the seed par excellence, we should appropriate and enjoy the glorious liberation of seeing our old Ishmael cast out and removed by the power of the cross of Calvary, so that the Isaac of our new creature in Christ Jesus, born of the Spirit, may grow and attain to a mature and more abundant life. (John 10: 10)

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Chapter 23 – The “ands” of the Bible

The treasures found in the Bible are both wonderful and virtually countless. It may be read from beginning to end, back to front, front to back, between the lines, a short or a long portion at a time, and many other ways.

Any assiduous reader, hungry for jewels and pearls, inspiration, guidance, encouragement or comfort, is always bound to find them, since the Author and best interpreter – the Holy Spirit – is faithful to reward such as, with a humble spirit and right motives, should diligently seek them.

As is well known, in the original manuscripts from which the Holy Scriptures have been copied and translated, there are no punctuation signs, neither are the divisions in verses and chapters to be found.

Both the one and the other have been placed by the translators and revisers at their discretion and understanding, in order to facilitate the reading and help comprehend the text better.

In some cases or passages, the rightness and precision of the punctuation chosen, or the division into chapter and verse, could perhaps be questioned – and additionally, some optional alternatives suggested in the margin could be more appropriate.

Nevertheless, we may rest fully assured that the real sense of the doctrine and truths set forth have not been distorted or affected at all, and remain firm and unaltered.

Although we are not to ascribe to the punctuation and division into chapters and verses the same degree of inspiration as that of the actual text, we believe that in some parts – not in all, of course – the Lord’s hand has been at work, so to speak, with shades and touches, which, at least for the writer, are both very obvious as well as delightful and most enriching.

And having made this lengthy introduction, we now move on to share concerning the rather unusual title we have given to this chapter.

Many years ago, when studying at school in distant Argentina, yours truly was taught that conjunction *and* was never to be placed at the beginning of a sentence. It was something clearly established in those days, but over the years there has been a tendency to allow it as correct.

In keeping with this change one has become more flexible, putting an “*and*” at the beginning whenever deemed fitting.

Moreover, any wise or careful reader must have realised that, whether this tendency be right or wrong grammatically, the Bible has taken sides with it, and we find it so in great profusion.

And it is precisely at this stage of the story - chapter 21 which we are considering – that we find it most clearly – in bold relief, so to put it.

In fact, out of the 34 verses of the chapter, no fewer than 21 – that is 62% - start with our pet word *and*. And it is one of our favourite words because every time we use it we denote that we have not finished – there is more to come.

And so this is the simple and yet wonderful message of this chapter. Just as in the Bible this little word “*and*” appears time and again in such profusion, so in variety and abundance are the many things that God has prepared for His own, those who truly love Him.

When the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ dawns on us, we begin to see that our sins are forgiven thanks to His all sufficient sacrifice on Calvary; we then go on to see that they are all blotted out and forgotten by the Lord, Who assures us that he will remember them no more.

From there we soon find that we have become new creatures in Christ, with no past history. Besides, we begin to enjoy the bliss, assurance and confidence that we are now sons of God, by virtue of a new birth that we have experienced.

And soon we become aware of the wonderful fact that we are now a living temple of God, Who indwells us by His Holy Spirit.

And so we go on gradually, to learn about the great and wonderful truths of the Christian life, such as the fruit of the Spirit, and the gifts; about faith that works by love, and the will of God for each day, finding that it is good, acceptable and perfect.

In due course we also come to realise that the Lord has a plan and a specific programme for our little lives, with good works graciously prepared for each one before we were even born, so that we might walk in them. (Ephesians 2: 10)

So with great delight and much gratitude we find all this unfolding, in a path of righteousness that is like the light of the dawn, that groweth more and more until the day is perfect.

And so we could go on at great length over new lessons learnt: experiences we go through, either in times of trial and temptation, or of blessing and enlargement.

Thus our horizons are widened more and more, flowing on to a marvellous outlook on the after life, with matchless bliss, joys and glories to go on for ever ad ever.

All this speaks to us of a God Who is infinite, and Who has an infinity of treasures prepared for them who are His sons in very deed. And with the passage of time, He gradually opens the great coffer, so to speak, containing all those riches, and wisely and progressively proceeds to dish them out to us, one, and another and another and yet another, in a never ending scale.

We may rest assured that in eternity the future, our great God will never come to a point where He will tell us that He has given us all He has – there is no more.

Is this your vision and understanding of the Lord, dear reader?

Refuse and banish from your mind forever the vision of a straitened and very limited God, Who has already given you all He has, and has no more for your future.

Without longing for things too great for you and that could trap you in the snare of conceit and vanity, open your heart humbly to Him, in search and quest for more of His many “*ands*,” such as the love and character of Christ, the beauty of holiness, the joy of serving Him with humble but true devotion, and many other virtues that will greatly enrich you.

Perhaps you are wondering: And what has all this to do with Abraham’s fatherhood, which is the theme of the whole book you have in your hands?

The fact of the matter is that it has a lot to do with him. This chapter of Genesis with such an abundance of “*ands*” is a clear sign of his wonderful, ever growing path, of which, by the way, we still have much more to come.

He took a great first step of obedience, leaving his land and people, not even knowing where he was going. But from then on those continual “*ands*” that the Lord had foreseen and prepared for him, began gradually to emerge and be forged, one after another by the unfathomable wisdom and skill of the One Who had chosen and called him.

So far we have seen one of them in each chapter, and in some more than one, and there are still many more to come – yes, of those blessed “*ands*” that God had for him, and has for us as his true seed.

So lift up your eyes and look upward and forward; recognise and identify each one, and appropriate them – they are for you too, dear reader.

Our father Abraham, when he left his old world behind and embarked on the road of faith and obedience, found that all along there were important lessons to be learnt and momentous experiences. No doubt, being as he is now in the after life, he is still continuing to find more of the blessed, endless things God had prepared for him.

Being in his spiritual loins, as we keep reminding our readers, all the foregoing has been imprinted and engraved in the spiritual seed from which we come.

Nevertheless, it would not be right not to point out that just as Abraham had to pay a very high price in terms of absolute obedience and sacrifice, so must we be prepared to do so whenever it may be required of us.

So let us go on to discover and foster all that great wealth, being prepared to pay the price when necessary, and not fall short of any of the precious “*ands*” our Lord has in store for each one of us.

Chapter 24 – God is with thee in all that thou doest.

(Genesis 21: 22b)

In Abraham's times, neither the Philistines, nor the Hittites, Canaanites, nor any other inhabitants of the land were hostile towards him, as centuries later they were towards the people of Israel.

Abraham dwelt in the land of the Philistines for a lengthy time. (See Genesis 21: 34)

Their king Abimelech came to him at an early stage of his sojourning with an express request: that he should swear to him that he should be kind and do no evil to him, his sons and grandsons, according to all the goodness he had received in their land.

He began with the words *"God is with thee in all that thou doest"* shown on the title.

He had obviously seen from the very beginning the special way in which Abraham prospered in every way, and possibly had a fear that if he went on prospering on such a scale, he might turn into a mighty potentate that could well subjugate him and his people, and dispossess them of their land.

Abraham agreed to this request and a covenant of loyalty between them was sealed there and then. The place where this took place then took the name of Beersheba, which, as we are told in the margin of annotated Bibles, means the Well of Seven or of the Oath.

At a later stage we will share at some length concerning this place, which in the process of time became of great importance.

Abimelech was the king of a pagan people who had many false gods. However, he soon recognised that an invisible hand was upon whatever Abraham did. And it became clear to him that that invisible hand was not of any of the gods of the Philistines, but of Abraham's God.

Therefore, in addressing him with this request, it became plain that he did not consider the blessing and prosperity he saw resting on him as coming from any other than the One he deemed to be, by his own words, the only true God.

This was truly an eloquent and powerful testimony to the Lord's being very much with Abraham in every conceivable way.

Let us now take some examples of other distinguished servants of the Lord, concerning which the Scriptures bear express witness that God was with them in whatever they undertook

1) Isaac. Abraham's son.-

"Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year a hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him."

"And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great."

"And Abimelech said unto Isaac; Go from us, for thou art much mightier than we." (Genesis 26: 12, 13 and 16)

2) Jacob, Abraham's grandson.-

"And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for your sake." (Genesis 30: 27)

"...for with my staff I have passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands." (Genesis 32: 10)

3) Joseph, great grandson of Abraham.

"And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison: and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not at anything that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper." (Genesis 39: 22-23)

"...and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do." (Genesis 41: 55)

4) Joshua, of a more distant carnal descent, but doubtless of Abraham's lineage.

"...ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof."

(Joshua 23: 14)

5) David, also of a distant carnal descent, but like Joshua, doubtless of Abraham's spiritual lineage.

"And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him." (1 Samuel 18: 14)

"...and the Lord preserved David wherever he went." (2 Samuel 8: 6b)

"And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away...and there was nothing lacking to them neither small nor great... David recovered all." 1 Samuel 30: 18-19)

6) Daniel, also of a distant carnal descent, but doubtless also of Abraham's lineage.

"Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel, concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him." (Daniel 6: 4)

We have just put the text without any comment, as they all speak for themselves, clearly and unmistakably.

It is wonderful to see how the Lord can take in His hands the lives of ordinary folk, both finite and fallible, such as all the six foregoing, and turn them into key vessels to display His many splendoured wisdom, perfection and power.

We end up with two important points. Firstly, though they were greatly blessed in every way, none of them was exempt from trials and conflicts. Some think erroneously that someone really blessed of God, apart from being successful, should be free from problems and struggles.

The truth is that such trials, conflicts, problems and struggles have been, and ever shall be on this side of eternity, the anvils on which the Lord, as the great master blacksmith, forges the real greatness that endures for ever.

As we are to see in our next chapter, even at this late stage of his experience, Abraham was to face the greatest trial of his whole life.

Our second point, is that we should not fail to relate the blessing of God upon him in whatever he did, with the exhortation he received to the effect that he was to walk before God and be perfect.

We have already commented on that very special word, which must have surely prompted him to live and walk on a loftier plane.

We have no doubt that he must have taken it in real earnest, or else the Lord would not have been able to bless Him as He did.

This chapter faces us with the challenge of taking on board the commandment to our father Abraham to walk before him and be perfect (this as clearly defined in chapter

16) so that we too may reap the great benefit of the Lord being able to bless us fully in all we do.

As we see, a challenge well worth going for with all love, devotion and faithfulness.

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We now come to the highest and most glorious peak in our father Abraham's life – the occasion on which, tried by God, he goes up to Mount Moriah with his son Isaac to offer him unto the Lord.

A great deal has been taught and preached by many, both in writing and orally, on this especially outstanding event.

In our first chapter we wrote about Abraham as the friend of God, pointing out that it went much, much deeper than a normal friendship, as we usually understand it.

To relate matters clearly, we start then by saying that without the faintest shadow of doubt, the offering of His life by our Lord Jesus in our favour on Calvary, together with His resurrection and ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, are the most glorious and wonderful things that ever happened in this world.

His resurrection, ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit could only be by virtue of His death on the cross – without that cornerstone they could have never happened.

For God the Father this meant a sacrifice that for our very limited and finite minds is absolutely impossible to understand and appreciate in its full magnitude.

It was only His unspeakable love for a world lost in sin that moved Him to do such a thing – to give His only begotten, beloved and eternal Son – the very best He had – in order to rescue and save us for ever.

The very well known verse – John 3: 16 – expresses this to a certain degree. However, we have the great disadvantage that having heard and read it so many times, we can be prone to lapse into a routine approach, and so fail to grasp it in at least some of its unfathomable depth and greatness.

So at this stage it might be right to pause for a few moments in quiet prayer, and then repeat the whole verse slowly, trying to appreciate every word.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish but have everlasting life.

It was certainly no giving of Him in a cold, insensitive manner. Quite the opposite, it was a giving unto the dreadful furnace that spread from Gethsemane all the way till He uttered His last words:- *"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."*

It began by being imprisoned as a criminal, spat upon and scourged ruthlessly, so that his blood was running down his back; punched and slapped on the face, mocked and blasphemed, and finally languishing for hours on the cross, His visage a pale spectre of sheer agony, both from the great, great physical pain, and the sorrow and anguish of His soul, particularly at the point when, made sin for us, He cried out:- *"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

It all goes well beyond any adequate description, and we shall never be capable of taking it in fully this side of eternity.

Loving our Lord Jesus as one does, many times, in reading the gospel account of His passion and death, one finds, as doubtless many others do, that it is hard

to read on – such is the deep, deep way in which one is touched going over the immense agony of the One so dear and precious to us, His blood bought saints.

All this goes within the context of our narrow and limited love as human beings - so small, so tiny – in comparison with the great, most tender, eternal love of God.

In the preceding paragraphs, we have been seeking to bring to our reader a clear understanding of what it must have meant to God the Father to give His only begotten, beloved Son, fully aware and in every detail, of all the torment He would be suffering.

At times of special pain or anguish, one always tends to seek the understanding sympathy and support of one very dear, and with whom there is great affinity and intimacy.

And it was in this sense that our Heavenly Father, Who, as we know, dwells in eternity and out of the time limitations such as we live in, foreseeing what it would all mean to Him, chose to draw Abraham to Himself, as His real, true friend, so that He might experience, albeit in a comparatively small degree, some of His immense pain and sorrow. Thus he was to enter into a precious bond of identification and intimate involvement.

In other words, that Abraham might understand well, by means of experiencing in his own flesh and blood, at least in some measure, the unspeakable pain of God the Father in giving His beloved son.

Abraham was so brought into a fellowship which possibly no other mortal has ever known, at least in this particularly tender and touching sense.

So this brings us, after a long but necessary introduction, to the point in which the Lord says to him: “...Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” (Genesis 22: 2)

As the previous verse tells us, the Lord was trying Abraham. In His foreknowledge He knew that he would respond favourably, and beyond the purpose of trying him was that of bringing him to that lofty plain of identification, as previously explained.

We may well imagine Him saying to Himself:- “I long that my servant, my great friend Abraham, should understand and tenderly identify with me in the supreme offering of my only begotten beloved son on Calvary. As he goes through this trial, it will enable him to do so – understanding and sharing with Me, as far as a human being can - that momentous hour in which I am to give My precious Son, in order to save lost mankind.”

On receiving the command from the Lord, we are told most concisely that Abraham rose very early, saddled his ass, took with him two servants and Isaac his son, as well as what was necessary for the occasion, and set off on his way to the land of Moriah.

Did he tell Sarah about it before leaving?

We are not told so, and think it very probable that he did not, although we cannot rule it out altogether.

Possibly, the night before he slept very little, thinking with great sorrow of what was to happen.

During his three day journey, one may well imagine the anguish of his soul. That dearly beloved son, awaited so long, with whom doubtless he had shared many precious hours of father-son intimacy, in a very short time was no longer to be by his side. He was to sacrifice him, bury his ashes, and he would see him no longer – gone for ever.

Humanly speaking, in such a situation, the natural and normal reaction of any good father would be to refuse outright to do such a thing.

Nevertheless, there was something in the depth of our father Abraham's being that knew he was never to say no to his God. The voice, the word, the commandment of the great eternal I AM that had chosen and called him, was above all else in his life.

As a sideline, it is worth pointing out that this commandment to offer his son, was given a few centuries before the law of Moses, which included as the sixth commandment the injunction *"Thou shalt not kill."*

Returning to our main thread, perhaps the most touching of all was the moment when Isaac asked him: - *"My father...behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"* (Genesis 22: 7)

With what tenderness Abraham answered!

And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering..." (22: 8)

It may be taken for certain that Abraham might have been wondering how this sacrifice of Isaac he was asked to make, could possibly fit in with the clear promise he had previously received that through him – Isaac – he was to confirm his everlasting covenant for all his seed. (Genesis 17: 19)

But Hebrews 11: 17-19 gives us a much greater understanding on this important issue.

We see that apart from the pain and sorrow side of things, there was a remarkable, nay amazing faith, in such a tragic situation.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac thy seed shall be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

The commandment to offer Isaac was something he knew he must obey, but at the same time it is clear that he did not think that the promise would become void and remain unfulfilled.

He knew that the great I AM was completely incapable of dishonouring His word and leaving it unfulfilled, and therefore he believed that God was well able to resurrect Isaac.

It was a superlative display of faith, enough to leave us all in wonder and amazement.

It is one thing to meditate and ponder over this, in an objective and detached way, not living at all in what was happening; quite another to find oneself, as Abraham did, in that very great trial, and with such anguish in his soul.

And yet, in the midst of it all, he held with unwavering faith the assurance that the seemingly absolute impossibility before him was not the last word –

His God would still find a way by which His promise would be firmly and totally fulfilled.

This is yet the additional point. In figure, Abraham received Isaac in resurrection, which adumbrates very fittingly the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

In Psalm 23: 4 David writes:- *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of shadow of death..."*

He is not referring to death itself, but to the shadow of death, when one is very close to it, but does not actually succumb to it.

With Abraham and Isaac it was precisely that – the figure or shadow of both death and resurrection. For, as we know, in the last moment the Lord absolved Abraham and gave him the substitute of a ram that was caught by the horns in a nearby thicket.

Instead, for our Heavenly Father and our beloved Lord Jesus there was no substitute. He tasted death on the cross for us all, there being no way of escape whatever.

But praise God, He also rose again, and, moreover, His resurrection was not in type or figure, but absolutely real and glorious. He is risen, and alive for evermore!

As the spiritual seed of Abraham, at different stages and also different levels, we are to be tried by the Lord. In doing so, He will always be seeking to mature us and gradually bring us on to greater measures of grace and Christ likeness.

By the same genetic principle, we are to find in our innermost being that which cannot and will not say no to the Lord when He asks anything of us, even if it be very dear or costly to us.

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Chapter 26 – The great summit of Mount Moriah. (II) and the Oath. (I)

When Abraham was at the very point of slaying Isaac, the angel of the Lord called him from heaven, to which he replied “...*Here am I*” (Genesis 22: 12b)

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

And so the sacrifice was not carried out, the Lord being quite satisfied, as He saw him totally willing and up to the very point of taking Isaac’s life.

We must not overlook the fact that on this occasion he was called by his name twice – Abraham, Abraham. As pointed out in our first chapter, he was the first of the very select group of five who received such a great distinction, the other four being Jacob, Moses, Samuel and Saul of Tarsus, who was later known as the great apostle Paul.

We have already seen that instead there was a ram caught by the horns in a thicket nearby.

Immediately after offering it, the angel of the Lord spoke to him for the second time. “*And said, by myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore: and thy seed shall*

possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” (Genesis 22: 16i-18)

In the lengthy historical thread of the Scriptures, we find that the Lord placed Himself on oath on not a few occasions.

Among others is that of Psalm 110: 4, which we have previously dwelt upon – It was concerning Melchizedec, a figure of Christ, to the effect that His priesthood would last for ever.

This oath to Abraham we are now considering is opened up in Hebrews chapter 6 in a wonderful way, which helps us to comprehend it in a greatly enlarged perspective.

“For men verily swear by the greater...” (Hebrews 6: 16a)

“For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance to the altar.” (Hebrews 7: 13)

In the New Testament Order we find that Jesus told us – His disciples – that we are not to swear.. (Matthew 5: 33-37)

Nevertheless, before His coming to the world men did swear, and many to this day still do, either in ignorance of His commandment, or in deliberate disobedience of it.

Both the former and the latter still have the habit of swearing by someone or something greater than themselves, as a way of making their oath firm and fully credible.

The author of Hebrews points out so appropriately that the Lord, not knowing of anything or anyone greater, swore to Abraham by Himself.

This gives this oath to Abraham the most superlative degree of credibility and trustworthiness: God Himself, the Supreme Being, Creator of the entire universe, places Himself, with His formidable and eternal omnipotence, on oath over the whole matter, as the weightiest guarantee of its absolute credibility.

“For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.” (Hebrews 6: 16)

In other words, an oath made responsibly and in very truth, dispels any doubt and confirms and establishes that which has been sworn, as both certain and unquestionable.

“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie...” (6: 18a)

The two immutable things are, as clearly shown by the context, the promise and the oath.

So here we are presented with the greatest emphasis and the most categorical terms, the fact that it is impossible that God should lie, and that, by virtue of the two – promise and oath – which are rightly qualified as immutable.

But the analysis that Hebrews makes carries us much further. It is not only most enriching – it helps us to grasp on a much higher note the vast extent of the momentous oath.

Starting from the fact that it was made to Abraham, it now goes on to express so much more that lay in God’s great heart of love. It is indeed

something quite amazing, doubtless received by revelation by the writer of Hebrews.

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”
(Hebrews 6: 16-17)

This is something that we could never gather expressly and with clarity going only by the Genesis narrative. It enables us to see far further than what is stated in the original story: the oath made personally to Abraham, reaches and encompasses every one of us to this present day.

What we are in fact told here is that in making this oath so many centuries ago, there was something very wonderful in our Lord’s heart: to show more abundantly to us, the heirs of the promise by being Abraham’s spiritual seed, the absolute immutability of his counsel.

In other words, that He longed that we should have a full assurance and confidence that His great promise of blessing (which we are to look into in detail in next chapter) was and is immutable, and in which it was impossible for Him to lie.

His word has always been true and trustworthy; however, so that we should not have the faintest shadow of doubt, He added His express oath, thus giving us the rock solid foundation of two immutable things, and thereby also giving us a strong consolation, so that we may be completely free from any fear or anxiety whatever.

Enough to fill us with the greatest faith, confidence, and assurance we have ever known!

Thank you so very much, dear Lord, that you make it so plain, that you wish that no shadow of uncertainty or doubt, whether over the past, present or future, should trouble our souls in the very least.

Thank you indeed, dear Heavenly Father, for the wonderful truth that the great blessing of the oath you made to Abraham, not only comes to us from being his spiritual seed. You have also taken great care to inspire the writer of Hebrews to make it quite clear that the wonderful oath has also been made to us, who are sons of Abraham by faith in your Son Jesus Christ – and who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the blessed hope set before us, which thus becomes a sure and steadfast anchor of our souls, which reacheth within the veil, right into Your very presence, where the forerunner has already entered on our behalf.

Chapter 27 . The great summit of Mount Moriah (III) and the oath (II)

Although the actual text of the oath is very clear and speaks for itself, we now summarise the four points it contains.

1) The blessed seed.-

"That in blessing I will bless thee..." (Genesis 22: 17a)

A clear categorical promise to bless him, in such a manner that there would be an overspill to all the seed he was carrying in his loins.

2) The innumerable or countless seed.

"...and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and the sand which is upon the sea shore..." (Genesis 22: 17b)

As previously pointed out, it is generally understood that the former comparison applies to his spiritual seed, i.e. those who are of faith, as per Galatians 3: 7, regardless of race, language or nation; whereas the latter, to the carnal or blood descendants, the people of Israel.

3) The victorious and overcoming seed.

"...and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." (Genesis 22: 17c)

As Moses expressed it so aptly many years later, practically on the eve of his his death:

*"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms
"Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the
Lord, the shield of thy help and the sword of thine excellency! And thine
enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shall tread upon their
high places."* (Deuteronomy 33: 27 and 29)

4) The seed par excellence, in and through which all the nations of the world have been blessed.

"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Genesis 22: 18)

In Galatians 3: 16 Paul writes *"...He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."*

At first sight, this would appear to be a contradiction, since the Genesis narrative on various occasions speaks of a very large and countless seed. However, we must understand that in Galatians Paul is referring to the spiritual seed – not the carnal – and he is making it plain that the blessing flowing on to us is channelled through Christ, Whom we call, we believe quite appropriately, the seed par excellence.

It is quite clear and unquestionable that absolutely all the blessing that we receive as sons of Abraham, has its source in the atoning and all sufficient sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His resurrection and ascension.

Although this has been shown distinctly previously, we find it right to reiterate and strongly emphasise it, by reason of different versions of the

teaching of judaisers, which was already in vogue in the first century AD, and the many that have emerged since then.

Even to this day some new ones have sprung up, and we know of cases of Spanish ex Christians, shall we call them, who have chosen to be circumcised and are attempting in some way to comply with the law of Moses.

Our stand has nothing to do with any of them. Instead, it consists of a careful analysis of all the blessing that comes our way from the viewpoint of the genetic principle derived from our father Abraham, as proved by the various scriptures we took from the very beginning.

But all this blessing – let there be no doubt whatsoever about it – comes to us thanks to our Lord Jesus and by virtue of His perfect and all embracing redemptive work on our behalf.

Hebrews describes still further benefits accruing from the promise ratified by oath.

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec.” (6: 19-20)

This hope is the anchor – both sure and steadfast – which sustains and upholds us in all that may come against us. But not only that – it also enters into the Most Holy place – not of the earthly tabernacle raised by man, but that pitched by the Lord.

Our Lord Jesus, as the forerunner, has already entered into that place of unspeakable bliss, and is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as high priest on our behalf for ever.

His presence there guarantees our access and admission, as well as our abiding there throughout eternity.

When an anchor is cast, it is attempted to drop it into the deepest place possible, shall we say figuratively in the depths of the sea, whilst by a solid and unbreakable cable it is tied firmly to the boat or ship to which it belongs.

And so, the little vessel of our life, weak and frail as it may be, is fastened by the faith once given to the saints to an anchor that is most solid and secure.

It is firm and unmovable, in the very presence of the Lord, in that blessed and most safe haven which is to be our eternal dwelling place.

After receiving such a wonderful and far reaching oath, Abraham did something very wise and important.

“So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.” (22: 19)

As shown in the margin of some of our bibles, Beer-sheba means the well of the oath.

In symbol, we take this as our abiding in the solid and unshakable ground of God’s promise ratified by His oath.

We have already seen in our previous chapter that an oath puts an end to any strife or controversy, and that in these two immutable things - the promise and the oath – it was and is impossible for God to lie.

Such a formidable and trustworthy fulcrum makes it possible for us to anchor our faith with full assurance and confidence.

There were still many hurdles and challenges awaiting Abraham in his lengthy pilgrimage. However, we can take it that by dwelling in this place called Beer-sheba – the well of the oath – he had reached a level of absolute certainty and rest. The promise followed by the oath had settled matters decisively and finally, and so he remained in that place, firmly holding on to what he now saw to be both invulnerable and invincible.

In all this we draw the clear and important lesson that such is the place in which we are to remain entrenched, firmly holding on to the word of promise and the oath, which also encompass us as the spiritual seed of Abraham.

In stages of incipient growth and development, one of the signs of our immaturity has been to depend on our feelings, or surrounding circumstances and many other factors. We may honestly admit that it has been so with each one of us.

Romans 10: 17 tells us that “...*faith is by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*”

When one evaluates the situation by any means other than God’s word, whether they are favourable or otherwise, one is making a great and important mistake.

It lies in the fact that, perhaps inadvertently, we are placing our faith in what we see, hear or feel. Thus they are what we turn to in order to judge or define a situation – not God’s word.

And so clearly our faith is not resting on God’s immutable words, so we get trapped into a spiral game of ups and downs, governed by what we see, hear or feel, or are told by appearances or circumstances.

That is surely sinking sand, and a certain sign of one’s need to grow and mature – to come to a place where we are firmly based on the solid rock of what God has said and is saying, disregarding what circumstances and appearances are trying to tell us.

A good few years ago, while I was in a town near Seville, in Spain, waiting on the Lord in prayer, and considering this whole issue of Abraham’s fatherhood and sharing on it in a united meeting, I received a revelation that startled me.

I was given to understand that our wicked enemy, in secret plotting with some of his hideous hosts, had decided that they should place themselves under oath to harm and if possible destroy servants of the Lord in that geographical area.

I must confess that at first I was alarmed, particularly as I knew it was something I was to share in that afternoon’s meeting, and it was obviously something that could be used by the enemy to bring fear and alarm to many.

However, I soon found a reaction rising in my heart, both very positive and at the same time reassuring.

Many years before, the Eternal Almighty God had placed Himself under a solemn oath to bless us, and that we might possess the gates of our enemies.

That wonderful oath, vouchsafed by His stupendous omnipotence, surrounds and protects us, as an impenetrable shield, which renders all the fiery darts and hateful attacks of our sworn enemy totally unavailing.

So long as we abide in our home ground, giving no place whatever to the devil, he cannot touch us in the least, as we are told in I John 5: 18b.

The oath made to our father Abraham genetically extends to each one of us, his sons, in all its great, great magnitude. This is strongly corroborated by what we are told in the express statement made in Hebrews 6 that encompasses all of us as well.

Like Abraham, we hold on to the two immutable things the Lord has pronounced – the promise and the oath – and firmly supported and anchored on them, we press on in blessing, enlargement and victory.

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Chapter 28 – Burial of Sarah – Isaac and Rebekah

Almost imperceptibly the scriptural story has been bringing us close to the sad event of the death of Sarah, Abraham's helpmeet and faithful companion for many years of their joint pilgrimage.

She was a hundred and twenty seven, and the sorrow of losing her not only affected Abraham deeply, but also Isaac, the beloved son, who at this stage was no longer the lad that had ascended Mount Moriah with his father – he was now thirty seven.

All this time Abraham was dwelling in the land of Canaan, which was the place of God's will for him.

When he approached the Hittites, who were the inhabitants of the particular territory of Canaan where he was sojourning, upon requesting the purchase of a plot of land to bury Sarah, he received a most friendly reply.

"Hear us, my lord; thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead." (Genesis 23: 6)

Although we have already considered Genesis 12, in which we read of his going down to Egypt, we now return briefly to it by quoting Pharaoh's words to him in dismissing him, which show a striking contrast.

"...now therefore behold thy wife, take her and go thy way." (Genesis 12: 19b)

When one is out of the will of God, especially so when going places in the Egypt of this present evil world, one may only expect to be dishonoured and humiliated, as Abraham was on that occasion.

On the other hand, when one is where the Lord wants one to be and in full harmony with His will, He faithfully sees to it that one is honoured and exalted.

The distinction of being seen and treated as a prince of God, whilst sojourning in the land of pagan people, was one of the many honours the Lord deemed right to bestow on him; and it should be noted that it was at a stage when he was elderly and also mature in the path of faith and obedience.

It is an invariable principle that when a servant of the Lord presses on in faithfulness and holy living until old age, the Lord graces him with the most precious honours and rewards of his whole life.

In his speech in Acts 7, Stephen, in referring to Abraham's dwelling in Canaan, in verse 5 he said: *"...and he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on..."*

At this point, Abraham felt prompted to request a particular plot – that belonging to a certain Ephron, the son of Zohar. This man, wanted to gift it to Abraham, such was the high esteem in which he and all others held him.

It would have been easy and very tempting to accept this kind offer.

However, giving clear evidence of how honest and honourable he was, Abraham insisted on paying in ready cash its full price.

So he weighed to him *"...the silver which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant."* (Genesis 23: 16b)

It was done in the presence of all the sons of Heth as witnesses of the transaction.

Although this is quite elementary, not a few times does one hear with sorrow of believers, and sometimes even servants of the Lord, who have not been, as they ought to have, beyond reproach in money matters.

Let the example of Abraham's thorough integrity be followed by all of us, not only in that respect, but in all others, so that we might be *"...blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."* (Philippians 2: 15)

The following event in the narrative – the way Rebekah was fetched by Abraham’s servant and brought to be Isaac’s wife, is a really precious story.

Apart from being one of the most beautiful passages – full of delightful and candour – it brings out some practical truths, as well as a rich symbolism.

In this latter respect, we can see Abraham as representing God the Father, very concerned that the ideal bride be found for the beloved son. The faithful servant who was entrusted with that mission stands for the Holy Spirit, and Rebekah for the church, the bride of Christ. –

In addition to this we will not be going into much detail – only three practical points.

Their marriage, despite the fact that there were matters on which they disagreed, was one of the happiest in Scripture, although that of Aquila and Priscilla found in the New Testament is also to be highly commended.

Neither of the two – Rebekah or Isaac – was preoccupied about the one they were to marry. Rebekah was busy drawing water from the well for the thirsty, and Isaac was meditating in the field, possibly pondering truths his father had shared with him on the life of faith and obedience, and perhaps praying and praising the Lord as well.

Without knowing the injunction the Lord Jesus gave us many years later—“*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you*” – (Matthew 6: 33) they were both living in the spirit of it.

And the Lord faithfully blessed them, giving them to each other.

Then many years after they had been joined together – perhaps forty or more – we are given a touching scene in which Isaac was caressing Rebekah, as a sign that their mutual love was still tender and sweet.

In many cases one has known of young folk – both fellows and girls – who, having a strong desire to marry, have done so putting it before honouring and serving the Lord, failing to wait patiently for Him to guide and bring it to pass in due course.

The result in many cases has been much sorrow, and a whole lifetime to regret having made such a great mistake.

We cannot therefore but urge all young single brothers and sisters in Christ, to take the Lord’s exhortation cited above in real earnest, knowing that “*all things*” definitely includes the very important step of marriage.

A second point is what can be drawn from Genesis 24: 22 and 53, where we are told that the servant commissioned by Abraham took out golden earrings, two bracelets, jewels of silver and gold, and raiment and gave them to Rebekah.

This clearly stands for the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit, both to equip and beautify the church, the bride of the Lamb.

Finally, the third one relates to the camels that Rebekah and her maids rode on the way to meet Isaac.

As opposed to the dromedary which has only one hump, the camel has two, and the saddle goes between them.

Figuratively, the front one stands for a brake to prevent us from hastening unduly, while the back one is to urge us gently to move forward and not delay, and so arrive late or simply not to make it.

Seated comfortably between both we can progress without haste or delay, at the pace set by the servant Who is the Head of the party.

Very simple indeed, but how easy it can be to fail to keep in step with the Spirit, and slide into one or the other extreme.

Let us be wise and remember at all times the lesson we are taught by the two humps.

The genetic traits of this chapter are: Abide in the place of God's full and perfect will for us, which will gradually turn us into princes of God on earth – and others will surely recognise us as such.

- 2) Follow the example of scrupulous honesty of our father Abraham in regard to money matters, but also in all other spheres of life and conduct.
- 3) Let us learn from Isaac and Rebekah to apply what Jesus told us – *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you"* particularly regarding courtship and marriage.
- 4) Just as Rebekah received from the servant jewels, earrings, bracelets, raiment and other gifts, so must we receive from the Holy Spirit the gifts necessary for our service in the kingdom. Along with them, the fruit of the Spirit, so that we may live in the beauty of holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, as per Hebrews 12: 14b.
- 5) We are to restrain any tendency to make undue haste, and also avoid lagging behind from inertia, sluggishness or apathy.

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Chapter 29 – Death of Abraham and Abraham in the New Testament.

Just as the Lord had told him nearly a hundred years previously, Abraham died in peace, in a good old age and full of days. (Genesis 15: 15 and 25: 8)

He was a hundred and seventy five, that is, exactly a whole century since he departed from Haran and moved Southwards towards Canaan. (12: 4)

Although it is quite true that some servants of the Lord have had to, and many still have to, die amidst tribulation and even in martyrdom, in general, at least in our western world, and for the time being (!) it is rather the exception.

We believe that it is normal to die in peace, with the Lord's seal of approval – the honour conferred by Him on those who have been truly faithful to the very end of their earthly pilgrimage.

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." (Psalm 37: 37)

A point that must not be overlooked is that before his death, Abraham was careful to leave everything in order, with no loose ends untied.

This is very important. Sometimes things do not go that way, either because death has come suddenly, or else owing to the lack of a right sense of foresight and responsibility.

In such cases, subsequently there can be very unpleasant and awkward consequences, such as contentions over the distribution of inheritance, or other problems of the greatest variety.

As we have seen already, Abraham's main concern was to ensure that his beloved son Isaac should have the right wife fully aware that otherwise he would have serious and painful problems.

The first four verses of Genesis 25 give us the name of other sons Abraham had from Keturah after Sarah's death. And immediately after – in verse 5 – we read that he gave all his wealth to Isaac.

At the same time we see from the following verse that he gave gifts to all the other sons, and while he was yet alive he sent them to the distant east, far away from Isaac.

He knew full well that all God's great promises were focused on him, and he wanted to ensure that none of the other sons could cause contention, let alone usurp the place that belonged to him, thus frustrating the divine purpose.

As we see, in every single aspect Abraham conducted himself in a thoroughly conscientious and responsible way up to the very end.

We will do well to follow his example, especially as we come near the end of our earthly life.

Next we move on to reflect on a few important points arising from New Testament references to him.

"For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham." (Hebrews 2: 16)

This verse clearly speaks of two kinds of created beings in need of redemption: the fallen angels and the human race.

One may reason to the effect that our Lord Jesus could have taken upon Himself the responsibility of obtaining redemption for the former, which would have excluded us, human beings.

Nevertheless, God's justice and righteousness discarded that possibility altogether.

We believe that the main reason is that Satan, who headed the rebellion against God and dragged with him all the fallen angels, was not tempted or influenced by anyone or anything to do so.

It was something that came forth from his own inner being, and which we have endeavoured to explain – as far as possible – in our previous book “God’s questions to man.”

It would be too lengthy to repeat it, but we will simply give the main Scriptures bearing on the subject, so that each reader may examine them and come to the right conclusion. They are Isaiah 14: 12-14, Ezekiel 28: 12 to 15 and 17, and John 8: 44.

The fact that there was no temptation, pressure or influence from an outside source, makes a great and fundamental difference.

As for the fallen angels we are told that they sinned in 2 Peter 2: 4, that they kept not their first estate in Jude 6. and that there is no mercy nor pardon for them.

In Adam and Eve’s fall, as told in Genesis 3, although they were definitely to blame for disobeying the Lord’s express commandment, and so play into the hands of the serpent, the fact remains that it was that wicked serpent that took the initiative and tempted Eve with such guile and malice.

And, praised be the Lord, we consider it well grounded to state that in the eyes of God, the Supreme Judge, despite the shameful fall of our first father and mother, both they and we are less guilty than the fallen angels and that old serpent – the devil, called Satan.

And with deep and trembling gratitude, we celebrate that it has been so. What would have become of us otherwise?

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad.” (John 8: 56)

When the Jews who heard Jesus say these words, they exclaimed: *“...thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?”* (8: 57) in absolute unbelief.

The Master then replied in the next verse *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM.”*

It has always been a point of interest to try to identify precisely what occasion Jesus was referring to – when did Abraham see His day and rejoice?

As has been rightly pointed out, Jesus did not say that Abraham saw Him, but His day.

It has been suggested that it was when Abraham received the promise that he would have a son from Sarah, and that through that son – Isaac – the Lord would confirm His covenant and perpetuate it to his descendants. (Genesis 17: 19)

With due respect to that view, we do not, however, agree with it, since the context does not support it.

“Then Abraham fell upon his face. and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!” (Genesis 17: 17-18)

To be quite fair, it cannot be said that in the Genesis narrative there is a particular point that can be identified as clearly and precisely the occasion referred to by Jesus.

We must accept as a possibility that it might have been something we are not told of in the Bible, but well known to our Lord Jesus.

If we were pressed to try and pinpoint the occasion within the framework of the Scriptures, we would be inclined to say it was when he met Melchizedec, as narrated in Genesis 14: 18-20.

The first thing we read is that Melchizedec took out bread and wine. We have already seen that Hebrews 7: 15 confirms that Melchizedec is a similitude of Christ, although not Christ Himself.

The bread and wine speak clearly of the New Covenant, which could only be in the day of Christ - not before – and that could well be the clue to elucidate what is perhaps a little enigma, although not something to make us worry or lose sleep.

At all events, we are not holding this viewpoint rigidly as the one and only right one, for we acknowledge that the actual occasion is not quite clear and straightforward to identify. And of course, the important point is that Abraham saw that day and rejoiced.

On our part we have seen Him – Jesus – with the eyes of our spirit and faith, by the revelation of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures. We have also seen His day in something of its glorious majesty, and we equally truly rejoice.

But now let us see two rather curious cases of two who could not see Him, and yet the grace of God made it possible for them to see both Him and His day.

Both are in Luke's gospel. The first we take is in the passage in chapter 13 running from verse 10 to 17.

"And behold there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself."

"And when Jesus saw her, she called her unto him, and said unto her, Woman thou art loosed from thine infirmity."

"And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God." (13:11-13)

"And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? (13: 16)

This was not a case of physical sickness. It was a spirit of infirmity which Jesus identified as coming from Satan, which kept her bowed down and incapable of standing upright.

There is no doubt that there are such cases as this – a sickness or illness, but not from physical deficiency, but the wicked working of what the Scripture calls a spirit of infirmity.

We will do well to endeavour to discern aright and differentiate between the one and the other, and not take the extreme view that some hold that every single sickness is the result of a demon's work.

In this particular case, and in keeping with our main thread – Abraham’s fatherhood - we may well imagine the woman bowed down and unable to stand upright. She had lost the dignity of walking normally, and with her forehead lifted

That bondage prevented her from looking upwards and forward, and on that special occasion, from seeing Jesus.

Our dear Master’s power and His great compassion put an end to that terrible scourge, so that she, a daughter of Abraham – as recognised by Jesus - could straighten herself up and see Him and His day – the day of her deliverance from that terrible bondage, and of rejoicing, as Abraham did, and even more, glorify God for such a wonderful miracle.

But now, as we turn to the next one – Zacchaeus – bear with me as I indulge in a tempting digression.

It is said that a young man who had not been saved for long was very desirous of preaching. His knowledge of the Scriptures was not very precise, but as he so insisted it was decided to allow him in a small midweek meeting, with no outsiders present.

He took the story of Zacchaeus, but somehow mistook the name and kept saying Nicodemus instead. A brother sitting close to him whispered “Zachaeus” but the young man at first did not take it in. At last, after the third or fourth time, the penny dropped.

So he found a witty and roguish way to rectify his mistake by saying “and when Jesus came up to the tree he had climbed up, he said, *Nicodemus, what are you doing up there instead of Zacchaeus!!*”

Returning now to sober lines, Zachaeus could not see Jesus because of the surrounding crowd, with doubtless, lots of tall and perhaps wide men and women, he himself being fairly short.

Notwithstanding this, his strong desire to see Jesus prompted him to climb up a sycamore tree, even at the risk of being ridiculed - “What does he think? Climbing up that tree like a little monkey, just to draw everyone’s attention.”

But he did not care, and so he succeeded in getting a choice, vantage position from which he could see Jesus better than all others.

We will not go into details of this beautiful story, which is so unusual, and which also holds much rich truth.

However, we must make the very important point that his being so short, was in symbol a sign that he was short of being righteous in terms of money. Perhaps at first he was not so, but tempted as he handled so much cash, and seeing that most others did so, he too began to charge more than was due and to pocket the excess.

Thus he became wealthy as most other publicans – the tax collectors in those ancient days.

When he had the great privilege of hosting Jesus and having a good look at Him – which was precisely what he had wished – it is quite obvious that something about the kindness and generosity of the dear Master, as well as His strict righteousness, made a deep impression on him.

And so, leaving aside his mean covetousness, he turned into a liberal, bounteous giver – half of all he had was to go to the poor.

He was holding on to the other half, but only to return fourfold that which he had charged in excess.

That was indeed seeing Jesus – seeing His day and rejoicing, plus the beginning of a new way, taking a real step of faith on the path trodden by his father Abraham many centuries before.

As we press on in faith, obedience and true faithfulness to the Lord, we will surely be rewarded with a peaceful and happy fulfillment in the Lord, just like our father Abraham.

Just like his son Zacchaeus and the hunch backed woman of Luke 13, we all had physical or moral bondages which prevented us from seeing Jesus and His day of the dispensation of grace.

But also, just like he came to both of them, He has come to us, and has forgiven, saved and delivered us, so that we too might see Him - His day – the day of grace, salvation, liberty, new life and great joy. –

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Chapter 30.- The insoluble problem wonderfully solved, and the great promise of the Spirit

In this last chapter we now take two more points found in the New Testament. Without them our study of the whole subject would be incomplete.

The first comes from what we usually call the most rich and inspired pen of the great apostle Paul, when he tells us in Galatians 3: 13-14:- *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”*

Several centuries after the Lord had placed Himself on oath to bless Abraham and his seed, the law of God was given through Moses on Mount Sinai.

That law did not abrogate or cancel the promise and oath, but it created a situation whereby we, the heirs of promise were, strange as it may sound, were standing at the same time on two entirely different grounds. i.e. that of the promise and oath on the one hand, and that of the curse of the law on the other.

This becomes plain from what we are told in Deuteronomy 27: 26:-
"Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them," and which Paul cites in similar terms in Galatians 3: 10:- *"...Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."*

Here we have another of the great mysteries and glories of Calvary. So to put it, it was an impossible situation: two entirely contrary principles standing firmly in opposition to each other.

On the one hand, we were destined to the great blessing of God's promise, ratified by His oath.

On the other, there were the strict demands of the mosaic law, impossible to be satisfied by us or any other human being.

And we must not think for one moment that the Lord would turn a blind eye and a deaf ear, as we, human beings tend to do in odd predicaments. He could never, on any account, bypass, let alone ignore, the divine law which He Himself had established.

But praise God – for Him there is no impossible situation or insoluble problem, and this particularly great one we are considering He resolved with His unfathomable wisdom and His eternal and boundless love – and He did it on the great arena of Calvary.

The price that had to be paid for such a thing to happen, was so very high that we shall never be able to grasp it in its full magnitude, so long as we remain in the great limitations of our finite and mortal earthly beings.

It will only be in the after life, when we shall know as we are known, that we shall be able to appreciate and value it in all its immensity and completeness.

The Son of God, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His substance, had to bear on His holy and immaculate manhood, the crushing weight of the penalty of the law, to bear away the curse that lay upon us all.

Only His sacrifice, supreme, infinite and unspeakably great, was able to rescue us from the terrible condition we were in – the great, crushing curse for not fulfilling the great demands of the mosaic law.

And so that great and seemingly impossible blockage was cleared so that the full blessing of Abraham could come our way.

Moving forward now we come to the second point of this chapter. It is something not found, explicitly at least, in the Genesis narrative. And yet it is so fundamental, that without it all the implications of the promise and oath

could not materialise fully in our experience: the wonderful promise of the Spirit.

To make it clearer: all the genetic features inherited from our being in Abraham's loins, are vested, so to put it, in our human frame. However, this of itself is never enough – it needs necessarily the complement of the divine part.

In passing, we should also point out that, amazingly, in God's dealings with mankind the divine part also stands in need of the human, so that through an appropriate combination and interweaving of both, the eternal purposes of God may be fully outworked.

That key promise of the Spirit, made and reiterated so many times in the Old Testament, we now find that Paul relates it in a most definite way to the blessing of Abraham.

"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22: 18)

"That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith." (Galatians 3: 14)

We have cited the latter verse again, placing it immediately after the oath in Genesis, to underline the way in which Paul connects it, showing how it all fits in.

The promise to Abraham ratified by the oath, comes to us all through our Lord Jesus and His fully atoning and redemptive work. But at the same time, we should see that the next link and sequel to that is that we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

In Ephesians 1: 13 Paul's words *"the Holy Spirit of promise"* make it plain that it was what God had promised – and that very many times - in the Old Testament.

As is well known, we are now in the dispensation of grace, in which the Holy Spirit dwells within us permanently, whilst in the Old Covenant this was not so.

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." (John 14: 16-17)

The Holy Spirit has come to introduce us into a new order – not that of the mosaic law, but of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8: 2)

As already pointed out, it is only the grace of the Spirit, in full accord with that law of life in Christ Jesus, that enables us to walk daily in the will of God.

And it is that very grace of the Spirit that can quicken the genetic heritage received from our father Abraham.

Thus each one of the genetic traits that we have considered in all our previous chapters begins to come forth, develop and mature, in the blessed blending and interweaving of the divine and the human, as we have previously seen.

How immensely privileged we are!

On the one hand we have the rich and blessed genetic inheritance from our father Abraham, the outstanding patriarch and friend of God.

On the other, the perfect all sufficient redemptive work of Christ, through which that inheritance is channelled and flows, with the fundamental complement of the Holy Spirit to quicken it, so that it is outworked effectively in our daily life.

We must not fail to note that we are told that the promise of the Spirit is received *by faith*.

At a very early stage we made it clear from Romans 4: 12 that our walk is such – *“...who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham which he had yet being uncircumcised.”*

His first step of faith was taken before he was circumcised, as per the last part of the verse we have just quoted. However, after being circumcised he took many steps of faith, so that his whole pilgrimage was a blessed succession of such.

Therefore, it stands to reason that the blessed climax of all that we have been considering – i.e. receiving the Spirit – should likewise be by faith.

The grace and love of God bestow upon us the vast and rich inheritance, which we have been endeavouring to unfold and explain.

Faith on our part, coupled with obedience, faithfulness and at times also with sacrifice, become the essential and indispensable complement, which makes it possible for it all to crystallise fully in our practical experience and daily living.

Dear reader:- recognise and identify clearly each feature of your genetic heritage.

See it all as coming through the perfect channel of Christ Jesus, and right now receive by faith a fresh communication of the grace of the Holy Spirit, so as to nourish and foster it in every single aspect, that it may come to full fruition in your daily experience.

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EPILOGUE

The heavenly city

Every reader must have noticed that a great deal of what we have gleaned in previous chapters has been from the book of Hebrews.

The last theme which we have taken for our epilogue also finds much of its source in this rich and substantial epistle.

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Hebrews 11: 9-10)

"...and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."

"And truly, if they had been minded of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned."

"But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: whereof God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he had prepared for them a city."
(Hebrews 11: 13b-16)

Reading Genesis, if one does not look carefully when the story of a certain character commences, one may think that the previous one has already died and therefore plays no longer any part in the narrative that follows.

Actually, at least in many cases, this is not so. After the death of one is reported, the story takes on the next one, but quite often it does so at a stage when the previous one is still alive.

This happens, for example, in the case of Adam's death. (Genesis 5: 5) Next the story goes on to his successors or descendants – Seth, Enos, Cainan, etc.

One could therefore think that as all these are spoken of, Adam is no longer alive. However, he was still alive for several further generations – Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, and finally died when Lamech, Noah's father was aged 56.

In passing, it is important to note that by reason of the foregoing, the narrative of what happened in the early chapters of Genesis could have well been passed on to Noah second hand from his father Lamech, who probably or at least possibly, had in turn received it from Adam.

This is a point worth bearing in mind. However, not to stray from our main thread, we shall add no further on it.

Using the same comparison of ages and birth and death, we see that Abraham died when Isaac was 75 and Jacob 15.

In the verse quoted above we are told that he dwelt in tents with them, although not necessarily in the same location, all the time that all three were alive.

This obviously would not have been comfortable and at times rather trying, having to pitch and then dismantle as they moved from place to place.

From a mere practical point of view it would have been much easier and simpler to abide in their own home.

However, there was something much more important than that: they hoped for a city with foundations, with God as its architect and builder.

As we are told from the text cited, had they wished to, they could have easily returned to the land from which they had come.

Nevertheless, they knew full well that it was a place of great corruption and idolatry, and that everything there was false, unreal and lacking in true foundations.

The definition of the city he hoped and longed for is both significant and meaningful.

“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Hebrews 11: 10)

A city with strong foundations, which would not crumble, with nothing left but ruins – so solid and well founded that it could stand firm and intact, and that throughout eternity.

We should remember that the first city was built by Cain. (Genesis 4: 17)

As we have pointed out in previous writings, since then, sooner or later each city built in this poor, since stricken world, has invariably become a place of evil, crime and corruption, which generally go far beyond what is found in country life.

Ur of the Chaldees was certainly no exception. So we may well imagine how Abraham and Sarah, as well as Isaac and Rebekah, would not find it too great a trial to dwell in tents, despite the discomfort of the frequent changes, moving on from one place to another.

They much preferred it, to returning to that evil world which Abraham and Sarah had left behind.

They had a firm and sure hope of a heavenly city, clean, righteous, peaceful and lasting.

Moreover, because of this hope which they held with unwavering faith and conviction, they did not consider themselves citizens of the land in which they were dwelling – instead they counted themselves as strangers and pilgrims.

They were sojourning, on their way to something much, much better – a city designed and built not by someone like Cain, or anyone or anything like it, but by the very eternal and Almighty God, whom they loved and served.

We find it inspiring to reflect on the Lord in his twofold role of architect and builder of the heavenly city.

Sometimes an architect having planned and designed a building, with all the corresponding specifications in terms of measurements, the precise material to be used and the whole layout, may not be quite confident and certain that the building firm will carry out precisely and exactly all his instructions and specifications.

In this portentous task of building the heavenly city, the Lord Himself hath taken good care to be His very self and no other the one in charge of the whole building.

Abraham and all other pilgrims wished and wish for a city with foundations, as we have already seen.

How thoroughly and super abundantly did the Lord respond to their hope and wishes!

“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (Revelation 21: 14)

Small wonder that before choosing His apostles the Lord Jesus spent a whole night in prayer.

And again, how wonderful to see and perceive how our God so graciously takes pains to interpret and bring to fulfillment the deepest longings of such as

are His own in very deed! – and to do much more abundantly than what we ask or think, as Paul puts it near the end of his great prayer in Ephesians 3: 14-21.

Abraham looked forward to a city with foundations, and the Lord wonderfully responded to his longing, by designing and building the heavenly city with no fewer than a round dozen of them!

And what assurance and absolute confidence that it shall never crumble! Quite the opposite, it shall stand firm in its glorious majesty and splendour for evermore.

The description of the great heavenly city which we have in the last chapter of Revelation is truly stupendous.

Next we list its most outstanding features.

- 1) There will be no temple there, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (Revelation 21: 22)
- 2) There will be no need of the sun or of the moon, since the glory of God doth light it up, and the Lamb is the light of it. (Revelation 21: 23)
- 3) And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. (Revelation 21: 25)
- 4) And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:27)
- 5) And God shall wipe away all tears; and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21: 4)
- 6) He that sitteth on the throne said: Behold I make all things new. (Revelation 21: 5)

We leave it to each reader to let his imagination run loose, visualising all the glory, the blessed purity, as well the joy and matchless bliss of all this. Finally, so that we should not have the faintest doubt, but an absolute certainty of this most glorious hope, we are given the divine seal that guarantees its complete and unquestionable truth.

"And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."

(Revelation 21: 5b)

So there we have it – Jerusalem that is above, the heavenly city which is the mother of us all (Galatians 4: 26) – free, holy, beautiful beyond words, as described by the very Holy Spirit through the apostle John's pen, when he was granted the immense privilege of seeing it in advance.

In putting in writing in the two last chapters of Revelation all he saw, he also had the honour of wording the end of the sacred, divine book, with a climax so very wonderful and glorious.

It is the city that Abraham our father wished and longed for, and so very many of his lineage ever since – our heavenly home which our blessed Lord Jesus is preparing (John 14;2-3-) and that, to be sure, with the greatest care and with sublime glories that go far beyond anything we may possibly imagine.

Our father Abraham, with his many steps of faith, has already finished his earthly course, unto an eternal destiny, so ineffable and blissful. Furthermore, many, many men and women throughout the centuries have been following, as worthy pilgrims and true seed of his, in this path which will lead them too, finally, to the same matchless city.

The vision of the glorious heavenly home is unfolded unto you, dear reader, unto the writer of this book, and to the many pilgrims who are at present on their way to the after life.

Let us then hasten our steps, leaving behind whatever may be empty and meaningless, pursuing our course in the steps of our father Abraham with persevering firmness and faith.

When we come to the end of our earthly sojourning we shall receive the wonderful embrace of our beloved Lord Jesus, the seed of Abraham par excellence.

To Him we owe all we have and are, and all we shall have and be throughout all eternity.

To be with Him for ever will be the most exquisite and sublime glory that each one of us could possibly conceive.

And it will be for ever and ever!

The book ends with thirteen stanzas of six lines each. Not pretending to be a poet, I have included them to sum up and summarise the theme with a twofold purpose, i.e. to impress upon the mind of each reader, and enlarge his understanding of the great skill and grace of our wonderful God and Lord, and at the same time stress once more the rich and excellent qualities of Abraham, the father of us all.

In reading many of the poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow – my favourite – I have noticed with admiration how he has translated many poems from Spanish and other languages into English, rendering them in beautiful poetry, despite the great dissimilarity of the languages.

Such a thing is well beyond my very scant poetical resources, so I will not attempt to translate my thirteen stanzas. Instead, I will put the last one in prose.

After exhorting the reader to apprehend fully his being in Abraham, the great organic computer, so to put it, programmed to walk in his footsteps of faith, I end up by saying:

Thus shalt thou be a blessed branch,
Ever green and never fading,
In your secret place of prayer, a true intercessor,
In the fray a victor indeed:

**By promise and oath, an eternal heir,
Of the Kingdom of God, full and complete.**

The end