July 15, 2017

Prison Ministry

**Story of Redemption** (1947) Chapter **9: The Tower of Babel**

Some of the descendants of Noah soon began to apostatize. A portion followed the example of Noah and obeyed God's commandments; others were unbelieving and rebellious, and even these did not believe alike in regard to the Flood. Some disbelieved in the existence of God, and in their own minds accounted for the Flood from natural causes. Others believed that God existed and that He destroyed the antediluvian race by a flood; and their feelings, like Cain's, rose in rebellion against God because He destroyed the people from the earth and cursed the earth the third time by a flood.

Those who were enemies of God felt daily reproved by the righteous conversation and godly lives of those who loved, obeyed, and exalted God. The unbelieving consulted among themselves and agreed to separate from the faithful, whose righteous lives were a continual restraint upon their wicked course. They journeyed a distance from them and selected a large plain wherein to dwell. They built them a city, and then conceived the idea of building a large tower to reach unto the clouds, that they might dwell together in the city and tower, and be no more scattered.

They reasoned that they would secure themselves in case of another flood, for they would build their tower to a much greater height than the waters prevailed in the time of the Flood, and all the world would honor them, and they would be as gods and rule over the people. This tower was calculated to exalt its builders, and was designed to turn the attention of others who should live upon the earth from God to join with them in their idolatry. Before the work of building was accomplished, people dwelt in the tower. Rooms were splendidly furnished, decorated, and devoted to their idols. Those who did not believe in God imagined if their tower could reach unto the clouds, they would be able to discover reasons for the Flood.

They exalted themselves against God. But He would not permit them to complete their work. They had built their tower to a lofty height when the Lord sent two angels to confound them in their work. Men had been appointed for the purpose of receiving word from the workmen at the top of the tower, calling for material for their work, which the first would communicate to the second, and he to the third, until the word reached those on the ground. As the word was passing from one to another in its descent, the angels confounded their language, and when the word reached the workmen upon the ground, material was called for which had not been required. And after the laborious process of getting the material to the workmen at the top of the tower, it was not that which they wished for. Disappointed and enraged, they reproached those whom they supposed were at fault.

After this there was no harmony in their work. Angry with one another, and unable to account for the misunderstanding and strange words among them, they left the work and separated from each other and scattered abroad in tile earth. Up to this time men had spoken but one language. Lightning from heaven, as a token of God's wrath, broke off the top of their tower, casting it to the ground. Thus God would show to rebellious man that He is supreme.

**Story of Redemption** (1947) Chapter **10: Abraham and the Promised Seed**

The Lord selected Abraham to carry out His will. He was directed to leave his idolatrous nation and separate from his kindred. The Lord had revealed Himself to Abraham in his youth and given him understanding and preserved him from idolatry. He designed to make him an example of faith and true devotion for His people who should afterward live upon the earth. His character was marked for integrity, generosity, and hospitality. He commanded respect as a mighty prince among the people. His reverence and love for God, and his strict obedience in performing His will, gained for him the respect of his servants and neighbors. His godly example and righteous course, united with his faithful instructions to his servants and all his household, led them to fear, love, and reverence the God of Abraham.

The Lord appeared to Abraham and promised him that his seed should be like the stars of heaven for number. He also made known to him, through the figure of the horror of great darkness which came upon him, the long, servile bondage of his descendants in Egypt.

In the beginning God gave to Adam one wife, thus showing his order. He never designed that man should have a plurality of wives. Lamech was the first who departed in this respect from God's wise arrangement. He had two wives, which created discord in his family. The envy and jealousy of both made Lamech unhappy. When men began to multiply upon the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, they took them wives of all which they chose. This was one of the great sins of the inhabitants of the old world, which brought the wrath of God upon them. This custom was practiced after the Flood, and became so common that even righteous men fell into the practice and had a plurality of wives. Yet it was no less sin because they became corrupted and departed in this thing from God's order.

The Lord said of Noah and his family, who were saved in the ark, "For thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation." Genesis 7:1. Noah had but one wife, and their united family discipline was blessed of God. Because Noah's sons were righteous they were preserved in the ark with their righteous father. God has not sanctioned polygamy in a single instance. It is contrary to His will. He knew that the happiness of man would be destroyed by it. Abraham's peace was greatly marred by his unhappy marriage with Hagar.

**Wavering at God's Promises**

After Abraham's separation from Lot the Lord said to him, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which 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." "The word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. . . . And Abram said, Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir."

As Abraham had no son, he at first thought that his trusty servant, Eliezer, should become his son by adoption, and his heir. But God informed Abraham that his servant should not be his son and heir, but that he should really have a son. "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."

If Abraham and Sarah had waited in confiding faith for the fulfillment of the promise that they should have a son, much unhappiness would have been avoided. They believed that it would be just as God had promised, but could not believe that Sarah in her old age would have a son. Sarah suggested a plan whereby she thought the promise of God could be fulfilled. She entreated Abraham to take Hagar as his wife. In this they both lacked faith and a perfect trust in the power of God. By hearkening to the voice of Sarah and taking Hagar as his wife Abraham failed to endure the test of his faith in God's unlimited power, and brought upon himself and upon Sarah much unhappiness. The Lord intended to prove the firm faith and reliance of Abraham upon the promises He had made him. {SR 77.2}

**Hagar's Haughtiness**

Hagar was proud and boastful, and carried herself haughtily before Sarah. She flattered herself that she was to be the mother of a great nation God had promised to make of Abraham. And Abraham was compelled to listen to complaints from Sarah in regard to the conduct of Hagar, charging Abraham with wrong in the matter. Abraham is grieved and tells Sarah that Hagar is her servant, and that she can have the control of her, but refuses to send her away, for she is to be the mother of his child, through whom he thinks the promise is to be fulfilled. He informs Sarah that he should not have taken Hagar for his wife if it had not been her special request.

Abraham was also compelled to listen to Hagar's complaints of abuse from Sarah. Abraham is in perplexity. If he seeks to redress the wrongs of Hagar he increases the jealousy and unhappiness of Sarah, his first and much-loved wife. Hagar flees from the face of Sarah. An angel of God meets her and comforts her and also reproves her for her haughty conduct, in bidding her return to her mistress and submit herself under her hands.

After the birth of Ishmael the Lord manifested Himself again to Abraham and said unto him, "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant." Again the Lord repeated by His angel His promise to give Sarah a son, and that she should be a mother of many nations. Abraham did not yet understand the promise of God. His mind immediately rested upon Ishmael, as though through him would come the many nations promised, and he exclaimed, in his affection for his son, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!"

Again the promise is more definitely repeated to Abraham: "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." Angels are sent the second time to Abraham on their way to destroy Sodom, and they repeat the promise more distinctly that Sarah shall have a son.

**The Promised Son**

After the birth of Isaac the great joy manifested by Abraham and Sarah caused Hagar to be very jealous. Ishmael had been instructed by his mother that he was to be especially blessed of God, as the son of Abraham, and to be heir to that which was promised to him. Ishmael partook of his mother's feelings and was angry because of the joy manifested at the birth of Isaac. He despised Isaac, because he thought he was preferred before him. Sarah saw the disposition manifested by Ishmael against her son Isaac, and she was greatly moved. She related to Abraham the disrespectful conduct of Ishmael to her and to her son Isaac, and said to him, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

Abraham was greatly distressed. Ishmael was his son, beloved by him. How could he send him away? He prayed to God in his perplexity, for he knew not what course to take. The Lord informed Abraham, through His angels, to listen to the voice of Sarah his wife, and that he should not let his affections for his son or for Hagar prevent his compliance with her wishes. For this was the only course he could pursue to restore harmony and happiness again to his family. Abraham had the consoling promise from the angel, that Ishmael, although separated from his father's house, should not die nor be forsaken of God, that he should be preserved because he was the son of Abraham. God also promised to make of Ishmael a great nation.

Abraham was of a noble, benevolent disposition, which was manifested in his pleading so earnestly for the people of Sodom. His strong spirit suffered much. He was bowed with grief, and his paternal feelings were deeply moved as he sent away Hagar and his son Ishmael to wander as strangers in a strange land.

If God had sanctioned polygamy, He would not have thus directed Abraham to send away Hagar and her son. He would teach all a lesson in this, that the rights and happiness of the marriage relation are to be ever respected and guarded, even at a great sacrifice. Sarah was the first and only true wife of Abraham. She was entitled to rights, as a wife and mother, which no other could have in the family. She reverenced her husband, calling him lord, but she was jealous lest his affections should be divided with Hagar. God did not rebuke Sarah for the course she pursued. Abraham was reproved by the angels for distrusting God's power, which had led him to take Hagar as his wife and to think that through her the promise would be fulfilled.

**The Supreme Test of Faith**

Again the Lord saw fit to test the faith of Abraham by a most fearful trial. If he had endured the first test and had patiently waited for the promise to be fulfilled in Sarah, and had not taken Hagar as his wife, he would not have been subjected to the closest test that was ever required of man. The Lord bade Abraham, "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."

Abraham did not disbelieve God and hesitate, but early in the morning he took two of his servants and Isaac, his son, and the wood for the burnt offering, and went unto the place of which God had told him. He did not reveal the true nature of his journey to Sarah, knowing that her affection for Isaac would lead her to distrust God and withhold her son. Abraham did not suffer paternal feelings to control him and lead him to rebel against God. The command of God was calculated to stir the depths of his soul. "Take now thy son." Then, as though to probe the heart a little deeper, He added, "Thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest"; that is, the only son of promise, "and offer him . . . for a burnt offering."

Three days this father traveled with his son, having sufficient time to reason and doubt God if he was disposed to doubt. But he did not distrust God. He did not now reason that the promise would be fulfilled through Ishmael, for God plainly told him that through Isaac should the promise be fulfilled.

Abraham believed that Isaac was the son of promise. He also believed that God meant just what He said when He bade him to go offer him as a burnt offering. He staggered not at the promise of God but believed that God, who had in His providence given Sarah a son in her old age, and who had required him to take that son's life, could also give life again and bring up Isaac from the dead.

Abraham left the servants by the way and proposed to go alone with his son to worship some distance from them. He would not permit his servants to accompany them, lest their love for Isaac might lead them to prevent him from carrying out what God had commanded him to do. He took the wood from the hands of his servants and laid it upon the shoulders of his son. He also took the fire and the knife. He was prepared to execute the dreadful mission given him of God. Father and son walked on together.

"And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together." Firmly walked on that stern, loving, suffering father by the side of his son. As they came to the place which God had pointed out to Abraham, he built there an altar and laid the wood in order, ready for the sacrifice, and then informed Isaac of the command of God to offer him as a burnt offering. He repeated to him the promise that God several times had made to him, that through Isaac he should become a great nation, and that in performing the command of God in slaying him, God would fulfill His promise, for He was able to raise him from the dead.

**The Angel's Message**

Isaac believed in God. He had been taught implicit obedience to his father, and he loved and reverenced the God of his father. He could have resisted his father if he had chosen to do so. But after affectionately embracing his father, he submitted to be bound and laid upon the wood. And as his father's hand was raised to slay his son, an angel of God, who had marked all the faithfulness of Abraham on the way to Moriah, called to him out of heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he 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 Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."

Abraham had now fully and nobly borne the test, and by his faithfulness redeemed his lack of perfect trust in God, which lack led him to take Hagar as his wife. After the exhibition of Abraham's faith and confidence, God renewed His promise to him. "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself I have 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." Next Mailing: Story of Redemption Chapter **11: The Marriage of Isaac**