

The Companion of the Way

by

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CHAPTER ONE

FRIEND WITH FRIEND (Genesis 18) - Abraham

I. THE SETTING -- A MAN AND HIS GOD

About midway between the fall of Adam and the Cross of CHRIST, it pleased GOD to reveal Himself to a citizen of Ur, in Mesopotamia, by the name of Abram. The impact upon Abram of that appearing, and its consequence in human destiny, are beyond our power to estimate. The true focal points of history are not the wars of nations, not the uprisings of earth's great ones for their brief day, and not even the much-vaunted eras of man's achievement, but those times when the grace of GOD has intervened for the carrying out of His perfect will toward men. This is seen supremely in the death and resurrection of His Son, our Lord JESUS CHRIST; it is manifested also in many another occasion. The turning of Paul's path from Asia to Europe was of far greater moment than the succession of the Caesars to the imperial power, even as the empowerment at Pentecost of the Church, against which the gates of Hell should not prevail, was of importance transcending utterly the pomp of the proud city of Rome, whose gates the barbarians would storm. So it was with the call of Abram, for GOD chose the man to whom He would say, "**In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed**" (Genesis 12:3). The campaigns of Chedorlaomer -- the Napoleon of his day -- are of interest only to the archaeologist (save as his Waterloo is narrated in Genesis 14), but Abram is "**the father of all them that believe.**"

"**The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham**" (Acts 7:2). It was the vision that drew him from the degrading worship of the false gods of his people, and from the culture of Ur, and its sins, and made him a wanderer in the land of Canaan. However dear had been to him the associations of the past, he turned his back on them all, and left country, kindred, and father's house to become a stranger on earth and at home with GOD. That first vision made him the man of the altar and of the tent: "**And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord**" (Genesis 12:7-8). The tent proclaimed him a sojourner and the altar, a worshiper. The one showed how lightly he held the things of time, for

who would compare tent pegs with the foundations of the eternal city? The other showed how truly he owned the claims of GOD, and prized the divinely given way of approach to Him. Altar and tent together proclaimed a life turned from the seen to the unseen and from the transient to the everlasting, and this because Abram had found everything in GOD.

The Successive Unfoldings of GOD

to Abraham presented a complete panorama of the meeting of life's basic needs.

As life's emptiness and its vanity was met by the revelation of the GOD of glory, so its poverty was satisfied by the knowledge of *El Elyon*, the Most High GOD, possessor of Heaven and earth: **"And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth"** (Genesis 14:19).

As life's helplessness and its dependence found all it could crave in *El Shaddai*, the Almighty GOD: **"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"** (Genesis 17:1), so its mortality was answered by *El Olam*, the everlasting GOD: **"And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God"** (Genesis 21:33).

In the first case the heart found its *attraction* in GOD, in the second, its *wealth* in GOD, in the third, its *strength* in GOD, and in the last, its *home* in GOD.

Tent and altar must ever be associated in life's journey. Pilgrim steps will soon become weary when there is no lifting of the heart Godward and no constant invigoration through fellowship with Him. When there was strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle, and Abram gave the choice of territory to Lot, the latter **"pitched his tent toward Sodom"** (Genesis 13:12), but he erected no altar there. Having no altar to sustain him in his apartness from this evil world, and certainly finding none to the Lord in Sodom, he exchanged the tent for a house there and barely escaped the fearful doom of that city. But Abram the pilgrim **"removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord"** (Genesis 13:18). While Lot was slowly draining the bitter cup of disillusionment in Sodom, Abram was increasing in spiritual prosperity. He dwelt in Hebron, meaning "fellowship," and Mamre, meaning "fatness." In his association with GOD he went from strength to strength. He was victorious over the military prowess of the king of Elam and over the subtle temptation of the king of Sodom. He was given the promise that his seed should be as the stars of Heaven in number, and **"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness"** (Genesis 15:6).

When Abram was ninety nine years of age, GOD revealed Himself to him as the Almighty GOD and rewarded his faithfulness by conferring upon him and upon his wife names of honor in keeping with the new promise to be made to them. His name was changed from Abram to Abraham (father of a multitude), and Sarai his wife received the name of Sarah (princess). When the bewilderment of holy joy flooded his heart with laughter, he received the assurance that Sarah should bear a son, whose name Isaac (laughter) should ever echo his father's joy. With this son GOD would establish His covenant, and with his descendants after him.

In obedience to the divine will, Abraham submitted to the rite of the covenant, and surely -- from a human viewpoint -- all seemed ready for the fulfillment of the promise. But GOD had further desire for Abraham, and purposed for him

a greater dignity,

and a title that should shine with threefold luster in the written Word. Through the years of His gracious dealings with His servant, GOD had been fashioning him to be far more than a servant. GOD designed that Abraham should be His friend. To this lonely old man there was granted the experience of being on such terms with GOD that in the centuries to come he would be recognized as GOD's friend. Even the descendants of Ishmael, though blighted with the curse of Islam, to this day know Abraham as *El Khalil* (a friend of GOD) and called Hebron by this same name (*El Khalil*).

II. THE REVELATION -- THE SACRED INTIMACY

"And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift 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 toward the ground, And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant" (Genesis 18:1-3).

How different were the circumstances of Abraham on that day from those of Adam and Eve as described in Genesis 3:8! **"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden."**

1. By the oaks of Mamre Abraham sat in peace such as is known only by those between whose heart and GOD no cloud remains. Among the trees of Eden Adam and his wife sought to hide their confusion and distress.
2. The divine presence was welcomed by the patriarch with eager joy. From it the guilty pair shrank in shame.
3. They could not walk with GOD in the freshness of **"the cool of the day."** Abraham was privileged to refresh Him in the heat of the day.
4. Theirs was the sorrow and the judgment that came from eating what GOD in His wisdom had forbidden. Abraham experienced the gladness of giving GOD that of which He would eat.
5. They had dishonored the word of GOD. Abraham had believed in the Lord, and it was counted to him for righteousness.
6. They passed on to a fallen race an inheritance of sin and corruption. Abraham became the father of the faithful, the father of all the heirs of promise.

Abraham saw three men standing over against him. That two were angels is evident from the subsequent record, but with them was the Lord of angels and of men. No blinding radiance attached to this appearing; no overpowering majesty laid the patriarch low. No quaking shook the scene, as when the fire flamed on Sinai, or as when in Isaiah's vision the foundations of the thresholds of the temple were moved. It pleased the Lord to be present, with two of His attendants, in the guise of manhood, that nought might hinder His meeting with Abraham as friend with friend. Such nearness was a foretaste of a greater nearness and was indeed an anticipation of the Incarnation, when the same blessed One would become man, taking flesh and blood in order to be made like unto His brethren, and taking upon Him the seed of Abraham, that He might share with His brethren their daily life in its mingled experiences of joy and of sorrow, yet all without sin. In no other circumstances than those of Genesis 18 could Abraham have drawn near to GOD, or talked with Him as he did, or extended to Him the courtesies of hospitality. But these things were all in the desire of GOD, who held His friend so dear.

In the mind of Abraham there was no doubt as to

the Person of his Visitor.

His spiritual senses having been quickened by years of seeking the will of GOD and of appreciation of the revelations given to him, he at once recognized who was to honor him with His company that day. Running to meet the men, and bowing himself to the earth, Abraham addressed first, not three, but only one: "**My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight**" (Genesis 18:3). The form of the word "Lord" being one used for GOD alone.

We remember the same words concerning Noah, that he "**found grace** (i.e. favor) **in the eyes of the Lord**" (Genesis 6:8), and on the lips of Moses, "**if I have found grace in thy sight**" (Exodus 33:13). All was of GOD's grace, nor have we today any other title of blessings who have been "**chosen . . . in him before the foundation of the world**" and "**predestinated . . . unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself . . . to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved**" (Ephesians 1:4-6).

His lively sense of the divine grace shown to him through the many years, and particularly in this coming to him of his Lord, moved Abraham to entreat that the Lord would remain with him awhile. No moments would be so desirable or so fraught with gladness as those in which the Almighty One

Deigned to tarry

with His servant. Such moments partake of eternity, and are not to be measured by earthly hours. "**A day in thy courts is better than a thousand,**" said the psalmist in his homesick longing for the dwelling places of GOD. "**Pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant.**"

Even so in His resurrection ministry was the Lord JESUS besought by two whose heart burned within them. "**Abide with us... And he went in to tarry with them**" (Luke 24:29). Though at that moment their eyes were still holden that they could not know Him, they could not but seek more of the presence of Him who had so stirred them by setting forth from the Scriptures the One whom they loved. How precious to His heart must their words of invitation have been and

their eagerness to hear more of their Lord! How greatly they would rejoice through life that they had been privileged to entertain Him!

In the days of toil and rejection that led to the Cross, the Lord was the welcome guest in the home at Bethany. Inscribed forever in the Scriptures of truth are words which could be said of no palace of earth's great ones, whether of Pilate, or of Caiaphas, or of Herod. "**A certain woman named Martha received him into her house**" (Luke 10:38). No home was so linked with the days of His ministry as was that of Bethany. There three dwelt whom He loved, there He rested, and there He showed Himself to be the Resurrection and the Life. When the day came that He should return to the throne of Heaven, He led His disciples out as far as to Bethany, and was parted from them and carried up. As Bethany had been the place of sweetest earthly fellowship for the lonely Saviour, so did He take leave of His followers just there, that their lives might ever be characterized by that same fellowship.

Addressing the Lord and the two who were with Him, Abraham continued: "**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**" (Genesis 18:4-5). Every courtesy of hospitality was gladly given. The rest, the washing of the feet, the cakes prepared by Sarah, the meal spread under the tree, and the personal attention of the host as he stood by his visitors were surely recorded in the heart of the chief Guest, even as they are recorded for us in His Word.

How different from the joy with which Abraham entertained his visitors was the experience of Lot when he brought the two angels into his house in Sodom! He bade them tarry all night, but they were reluctant to enter, and when they did, the night was made hideous with the violence of the men of the city, and poor Lot was compelled at last to go out to fruitless pleadings with his sons-in-law. For the one who had abandoned first the altar and then the tent, there was no blessedness of welcoming the Lord, but only shame before the messengers of judgment.

It is evident from the expression of Abraham, "**therefore are ye come,**" that he realized that it was for such

Free and Happy Intercourse

and for the gracious words which his Lord would speak unto him that the visit was made. Too often His presence is treated lightly and its wonder unrecognized. It may be that in this respect our hearts are like that of Simon in Luke 7, and that to us also the words are spoken: "**Thou gavest me no water for my feet: . . . Thou gavest me no kiss: . . . My head with oil thou didst not anoint.**" A broken-hearted sinner gave to the Lord JESUS what Simon refused Him, and far more than that, for her attentions to those holy feet were wrought in love, and brought His words of approval, that "**she loved much.**" Will such words be spoken of us by those lips?

It is the fellowship of His people that our GOD so greatly desires. He created man in His own image in order that He might receive from him intelligent and free response to all His ways and thoughts concerning him. Adam chose to act contrary to all the goodness which GOD had shown him and denied Him that which He sought. Then GOD preserved one family from the destruction of the flood and made a fresh start, as it were, with Noah. From the sacrifice upon the altar

erected by him **"the Lord smelled a sweet savour"** (Genesis 8:21), but soon Noah lay in drunkenness, and the fellowship was marred. Ere long the race lapsed for the most part into idolatry, and so in Abraham GOD called a family apart to make a nation which should be **"a peculiar treasure"** unto Him **"above all people"** (Exodus 19:5). But the inception of its national history was disgraced by the worship of the golden calf, and again GOD was denied what He craved.

At last, in the grace of the Incarnation, the beloved Son **"came unto his own, and his own received him not"** (John 1:11). Despising the unparalleled privilege of having their MESSIAH in their midst in such lowliness and in such compassion that He was veritably **"a man of sorrows,"** they led Him to the Cross. Yet His heart sought still for the communion of His erring creatures, and in His ministry to His apostles on the eve of His death, He gave the promise, **"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him"** (John 14:23). In the letters to the seven churches of Asia, however, there is opened up something of the poverty of the response to His desire, but the desire has not waned, and His invitation still holds good: **"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me"** (Revelation 3:20). The heart may still spread its feast for this Guest, and find His company to be Heaven already begun.

Thus Abraham became

The Friend of GOD

The expression occurs first in the prayer of Jehoshaphat, when this king besought the protection of GOD against the multitude of his foes: **"Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?"** (II Chronicles 20:7). Three grounds were advanced in this petition -- the greatness of the divine power and dominion, the gift of the land to the seed of Abraham, and the placing of GOD's name in the house before which they stood in humble entreaty. What a tribute it was to Abraham that one thousand years after the scene by the oaks of Mamre his royal descendant should speak so confidently to GOD concerning His friend and plead his name in the heart of his prayer!

The second use of the title is remarkable in that it was used by GOD Himself through the prophet Isaiah: **"But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend . . . I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away"** (Isaiah 41:8-9). In spite of all the waywardness of GOD's earthly people, Paul could say that GOD had not **"cast away His people"** and that they were **"beloved for the fathers' sakes"** (Romans 11:2, 28). Never would GOD forget that relationship with Abraham. He was not ashamed to own him as His friend, even as He was not ashamed to be called his GOD: **"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city"** (Hebrews 11:16).

Finally, James shows that Abraham's works not only declared the reality of his faith but were such as to vindicate the giving to him of so honorable a title as the Friend of GOD: **"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him**

for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James 2:23).

We must not miss the touch of intimacy in this word "friend." In the language of the Old Testament, it is a part of the verb "to love" and signifies a lover, and is so rendered in our Bible in such passages as: "***My lovers and my friends***" (Psalm 38:11) and "***lover and friend***" (Psalm 88:18). (Italics mine). Abraham was distinctively the lover of GOD, and the intimacy was displayed in GOD's sharing with him His counsel: "**Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?**" (Genesis 18:17). "**The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him**" (Psalm 25:14). This sharing of His thoughts is for us, too, through His sovereign grace, for He has said, "**Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you**" (John 15:15). The experience of these things is conditioned on our obedience. "**Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you**" (John 15:14). "**By faith Abraham . . . obeyed**" (Hebrews 11:8).

At that meal by the tent door, in the shade of the oak, GOD was pleased to cheer His friend by the renewal of the promise that Sarah should bare him a son. Hearing the words of the Lord, Sarah laughed incredulously and was rebuked by Him, and, being afraid, she denied that she had laughed. Nevertheless, the Lord made her laughter the occasion of a further revelation of Himself, and said, "**Is anything too hard for the Lord?**" (Genesis 18:14). Long years after, the words were taken up by Jeremiah in his distress, when bidden to do that which seemed utterly hopeless. Jeremiah said, "**There is nothing too hard for thee,**" and the answer came from GOD in a fresh affirmation of His power: "**Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?**" (Jeremiah 32:17, 27).

But hidden in this question is profound truth. The expression "**too hard**" in Genesis 18:14 is noteworthy as being the first use in Scripture of a word often rendered "wonderful." From this word comes one of the great titles of our Lord JESUS CHRIST. "**His name shall be called Wonderful**" (Isaiah 9:6). "**Is there anything too wonderful for the Lord?**" Not when He is Wonderful in His name, His Person, and all His ways! The whole line by which the MESSIAH came was beset with wonder, and there will be exceeding wonder in the final deliverance of Israel in their darkest hour. Then may they indeed cry, "**Is there anything too hard for the Lord?**" and then will their joyous song be "Wonderful" as they name their Deliverer.

We, too, must sound His praises, for

He is Wonderful in His Incarnation

In Him is fullness of Godhead; in Him is completeness of manhood. In Him the two natures dwell in a bond which can never be sundered, so that He is one person forevermore, and so that all His acts are the acts of His one person.

He is Wonderful in His Humiliation

We see abasement in the manger, abasement that deepens through His path of rejection. But deepest of all is that to which nothing is comparable before or after in the eternity of GOD, the forsakenness of the Blessed One, when He was "**made... to be sin for us, who knew no sin**" (II

Corinthians 5:21).

He is Wonderful in His Exaltation

We look to that high place which is His "**far above all heavens**" and there behold the man, CHRIST JESUS. He is radiant in the majesty of Deity, but it is a human hand, and a nail-printed one, which wields the scepter of all dominion. His brow, once wrung with bitterest anguish, now bears the crown of glory and honor. His face, which was oft wet with tears and once "**marred more than any man,**" is forever the center of all attraction in the Heaven of heavens.

He is Wonderful in His Dealings

with His people. In taking up the captives of sin and setting them free, He makes them vessels of mercy, but He does more than this. He takes them up in all their frailty, in all their imperfection, and in all their proneness to failure, and takes them up as vessels in which to manifest Himself. Let the life be given over to Him in sincerity of purpose and in continuing obedience, and He will display Himself in it, accomplishing those things which are impossible to any save Himself, and drawing men's gaze, not to the yielded servant, but to the almighty Lord.

The great mysteries of the Incarnation, the Cross, and the enthronement were still future when Abraham listened to the voice of his guest, but the same timeless One who spoke with him is He whom we adore in this our day. No promise which He might make to His friend could be a wonder greater than might be expected from such as He. There could be no limit to His capacity to give to His people, but only to theirs to receive.

III. THE BLESSING -- THE FRIEND'S INTERCESSION

The visit drew to its close, and "**the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way**" (Genesis 18:16). Though they needed neither guide nor escort, the Lord was pleased to accept the courtesy with which Abraham went with them. "**And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which 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? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him**" (Genesis 18:17-19). True friendship is marked by mutual trust. Not only had Abraham confidence in GOD, but

GOD Had Confidence

in him. GOD's trust looked to his ordering of his children and his household, and this was soon to be vindicated. So truly did the patriarch order his children that at Moriah Isaac displayed such acquiescence to the divine will that even in the vigor of his young manhood he permitted himself to be bound and laid on the altar for death. So truly did Abraham command his household that his servant performed the task of seeking a bride for Isaac with the utmost fidelity and left for all time an example of true stewardship.

The Lord spoke then of His intention to investigate the condition of Sodom, "**and the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord**" (Genesis 18:22). The two who went on were angels, even as it is recorded later that "**And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground**" (Genesis 19:1). The Lord Himself paused, for His purpose of fellowship with Abraham was not yet complete. That sacred pause, that lingering of Friend with friend, moved Abraham to draw near, and pour out his heart with boldness and yet with reverence. They stood alone, this man and his GOD, in

The Climax of Their Companionship

at that season, and the sixfold intercession began. Boldness of petition increased till the request that the city be spared for the safety of fifty righteous became that for only ten, but the increase of boldness was with fitting humility. The plea was made to the JUDGE of all the earth; the suppliant owned himself but dust and ashes. Intimacy and reverence went hand in hand, as indeed they must ever do in the spiritual life. They who would know more of leaning on JESUS' bosom must know more of lying at His feet.

Abraham progressed from prayer to prayer; GOD went with him from answer to answer. No rebuke came from His lips and no refusal of the earnestness of His friend. He knew the unselfish burden for Lot that rested on Abraham's heart and granted all its desire, so that though the guilty city met its just doom, "**God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow**" (Genesis 19:29). Abraham had requested that the city be spared for the sake of ten righteous; GOD delivered Lot for the sake of one man -- the man who walked with Him and sought nothing for himself.

Then "**the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place**" (Genesis 18:33). The visit was over, but not the blessing. At the time appointed the son of promise was born, and when that son had become a young man, GOD trusted the father with the most extreme test and bade him offer Isaac for a burnt offering. Confident that GOD was able to raise Isaac, even from the dead, and fulfill all the promises through him, Abraham hesitated not. By his obedience he vindicated all GOD's trust and manifested the redeeming, ennobling and empowering impact of the divine grace upon the human heart.

Thus did GOD appear to this man of old and fill his heart with awe and gladness. Thus does He seek to bless us now. Our appreciation of the wonder of our Lord's presence is but fragmentary, and we often fail to respond to His love, but we recount His goodness, and say, "**Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?**" We yearn for the more constant experience of His presence, and pray, "**Abide with us!!**"

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word;
But as Thou dwell'st with Thy disciples, Lord.
Familiar, condescending, patient, free,
Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.

~ end of chapter 1 ~