

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

Copyright © 1878

CHAPTER TWENTY

WE have two distinct points in this chapter: first, the moral degradation to which the child of God sometimes subjects himself in the view of the world; and, secondly, the moral dignity which always belongs to him in the view of God.

Abraham again exhibits the dread of circumstances which the heart can so easily understand.

He sojourns in Gerar, and fears the men of that place. Judging that God was not there, he forgets that he is always with him. He seems to be more occupied with the men of Gerar than with the One who was stronger than they. Forgetting God's ability to protect his wife, he has recourse to the same stratagem which, years before, he had adopted in Egypt.

This is very admonitory.

The father of the faithful was carried away, by taking his eye off God.

He lost for a little his center in God, and, therefore, gave way.

How true it is that we are only strong as we cling to God in the sense of our perfect weakness. So long as we are in the path of his appointment, nothing can harm us.

Had Abraham simply leaned on God, the men of Gerar would not have meddled with him; and it was his privilege to have vindicated God's faithfulness in the midst of the most appalling difficulties. Thus, too, he would have maintained his own dignity as a man of faith.

It is often a source of sorrow to the heart to mark how the children of God dishonor him and, as a consequence, lower themselves before the world by losing the sense of his sufficiency for every emergency. So long as we live in the realization of the truth that all our springs are in God, so long shall we be above the world in every shape and form.

There is nothing so elevating to the whole moral being as faith: it carries one entirely beyond the reach of this world's thoughts; for how can the men of the world, or even worldly-minded Christians, understand the life of faith? Impossible: the springs on which it draws lie far away beyond their comprehension. They live on the surface of present things.

So long as they can see what they deem a proper foundation for hope and confidence, so long they are hopeful and confident; but the idea of resting solely on the promise of an unseen God, they understand not. But the man of faith is calm in the midst of scenes in which nature can see nothing. Hence it is that faith ever seems, in the judgment of nature, such a reckless, improvident, visionary thing. None but those who know God, can ever approve the actings of faith, for none but they really understand the solid and truly reasonable ground of such actings.

In this chapter we find the man of God actually exposing himself to the rebuke and reproach of the men of the world, by reason of his actings when under the power of unbelief. Thus it must ever be. Nothing but faith can impart true elevation to a man's course and character.

We may, it is true, see some who are naturally upright and honorable in their ways, yet nature's uprightness and honor cannot be trusted: they rest on a bad foundation, and are liable to give way at any moment.

It is only faith which can impart a truly elevated moral tone, because it connects the soul in living power with God, the only Source of this morality. And it is a remarkable fact that, in the case of all those whom God has graciously taken up, we see that, when off the path of faith, they sank even lower than other men.

This will account for Abraham's conduct in this part of his history.

But there is another point of much interest and value brought out here.

We find that Abraham had harbored an evil thing for a number of years: he had, it seems, started upon his course with a certain reserve in his soul, which reserve was the result of his want of full, unqualified confidence in God.

Had he been able fully to trust God in reference to Sarah, there would have been no need of any reserve or subterfuge whatever. God would have fenced her round about from every ill; and who can harm those who are the happy subjects of his unslumbering guardianship?

However, through mercy, Abraham is enabled to bring out the root of the whole matter,- to confess and judge it thoroughly, and get rid of it. This is the true way to act.

There can be no real blessing and power till every particle of leaven is brought forth into the light and there trampled under foot. God's patience is exhaustless. He can wait. He can bear with us; but he never will conduct a soul to the culminating point of blessing and power while leaven remains known and unjudged. Thus much as to Abimelech and Abraham.

Let us now look at the moral dignity of the latter, in the view of God. In the history of God's people, whether we look at them as a whole, or as individuals, we are often struck with the amazing difference between what they are in God's view, and what they are in the view of the world.

God sees his people in Christ.

He looks at them through Christ; and hence he sees them **“without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”**

They are as Christ is before God. They are perfected forever, as to their standing in Christ. **“They are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.”**

But, in themselves, they are poor, feeble, imperfect, stumbling, inconsistent creatures; and, inasmuch as it is what they are in themselves, and that alone, that the world takes knowledge of, therefore it is that the difference seems so great between the divine and the human estimate.

Yet it is God’s prerogative to set forth the beauty, the dignity, and the perfection of his people. It is His exclusive prerogative, inasmuch as it is he himself who has bestowed those things.

They are only comely through the comeliness which he has put upon them; and it is therefore due to him to declare what that comeliness is; and truly he does it in a manner worthy of Himself, and never more blessedly than when the enemy comes forth to injure, to curse, or accuse.

Thus, when Balak seeks to curse the seed of Abraham, the Lord’s word is; **“I have not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither have I seen perverseness in Israel.”** **“How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel.”**

Again, when Satan stands forth to resist Joshua, the word is, **“The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, . . . is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”**

Thus he ever puts himself between his people and every tongue that would accuse them.

He does not answer the accusation by a reference to what His people are in themselves, or to what they are in the view of the men of this world, but to what He Himself has made them, and where He set them.

Thus, in Abraham’s case, he might lower himself in the view of Abimelech, king of Gerar; and Abimelech might have to rebuke him, yet, when God comes to deal with the case, he says to Abimelech, **“Behold, thou art but a dead man;”** and of Abraham he says, **“He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee.”**

Yes, with all **“the integrity of his heart, and the innocency of his hands,”** the king of Gerar was **“but a dead man;”** and, moreover, he must be a debtor to the prayers of this erring and inconsistent stranger for the restoration of the health of his household.

Such is the manner of God; He may have many a secret controversy with His child on the ground of his practical ways; but directly the enemy enters a suit against him, the Lord ever pleads His servant’s cause.

“Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.” “He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye.” “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?”

No dart of the enemy can penetrate the shield, behind which the Lord has hidden the very feeblest lamb of his blood-bought flock. He hides His people in His pavilion, sets their feet upon the Rock of ages, lifts their head above their enemies round about, and fills their hearts with the everlasting joy of his salvation.

His name be praised for evermore!

~ end of chapter 20 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
