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INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Third Quarter Lesson 4 July 23 1901

GOD CALLS ABRAHAM—

Genesis 12: 1-9.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.*—Gen. 12: 2.

LEARN BY HEART.

—Vs. 1-3.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—According to Usher's dates in the margins of our Bibles, Abraham was born A. M. (year of the world) 2008, or B. C. 1996, almost exactly half-way between Adam and Christ, 352 years after the flood. He migrated when 70 years old, B. C. 1926, and entered Canaan five years later, 1921.

Places.—(1) Ur of the Chaldees. The ruins of this city, called Mugheir, are six miles west of the Euphrates, near where it is connected with the Tigris, about 120 miles southeast of Babylon. They are now being explored for further light. Here was found the inscription naming Belshazzar as crown prince of Babylon, and showing that the book of Daniel was correct in the use of that name. (2) Haran, a commercial city of Mesopotamia, about 500 miles north of Ur. "It is 240 miles northwest of Ninevah, and 280 miles northeast of Damascus." (3) Palestine.

THE FOUR CENTURIES AFTER THE FLOOD.—We pass over four centuries (427 years) before we come to the next great epoch in the religious history of the world. During this time great progress had been made. The new race had learned many lessons. They had seen the effects of sin. They had records of God's dealings in the past.

1. The world was populated in three different lines by the three sons of Noah: Shem, from whom were derived the Jews and other Semitic races; Ham, from whom the colored races; and Japheth, among whose descendants are the European nations.

2. The diversity of language began or was depicted by the confusion of tongues at Babel, near the present site of Babylon. There are more than three thousand languages and dialects in the world, although the leading languages are less than three hundred. The Bible, in whole or in part, is translated into more than four hundred, including all the principal ones.

3. The dispersion. The people began to scatter widely. They early went as widely apart as Chaldee and Egypt, working out the problems of government and civilization in many independent ways.

ABRAHAM AND HIS EARLY LIFE.—1. His name, "Abram," in Hebrew means exalted father. Afterwards changed to Abraham, Father of a multitude.

2. His father's name was Terah, a descendant of Shem. Abraham was the tenth generation from Noah.

3. He was born in Ur of the Chaldees (see Place) B. C. 1996, two years after the death of Noah.

4. He had two brothers, Nahor and Haran. He married Sarai, at Ur. Abraham had no children before he entered Canaan, but he adopted his nephew Lot, after the death of his father Haran.

5. He lived in Ur till he was 70 years old.

His Environment. 1. In Abraham's time the city of Ur, though now over one hundred miles from the sea, was on the shores of the Persian Gulf.

2. Abraham was surrounded by idolatry. The city of Ur was capital, and the holy city of the Chaldeans. The remains make disclosures regarding the worship of gods, which must shock even those who are familiar with the immoralities frequently fostered by heathen religions. In this age among this people lived the household of Abraham.

3. There were still good influences and religious people. Noah lived till within two years of Abraham's birth. We find Melchizedek later in his history; and there was a real religious life there, however overshadowed by idolatry and worldliness.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM.—Vs. 1-3. Now the Lord (Jehovah) had said. A general statement of the reasons why Abraham emigrated to another country. Get thee out of thy country... unto a land that I will show thee. He would guide him, and show him the way as he went along.

The Reason for the Call. There was danger that the truth would again be lost from the earth, and the race ruin itself through sin. The purpose of the Most High was to choose a man, and in him a family and a nation, to be his witness upon the earth, and the repository of ancient truths and of Messiah's hopes, until the fullness of redeeming time should come. Through the training of this family and nation

should come the redemption of the whole world. Therefore God called Abraham to leave his country and friends, and move northward to the land of Canaan. It would seem necessary to separate Abraham from all the idolatrous influences of friends and country. In a strange land, with no ties binding him to idolatrous friends and customs, he could set up the worship of the true God, and train his family in the true religion.

The Motives Presented. Abraham had a hard duty before him, but God gave him all that was needed to uphold his faith and strengthen him to obey. There are seven promises.

First. *I will make of thee a great nation.* This will compensate for the loss of his country. It was literally fulfilled in the glories of Israel; spiritually, and more largely in the spiritual sons of Abraham, the whole Christian church.

Second. *And... bless thee.* No earthly good can be so great as the blessing of God. God himself is the best of all gifts to man.

Third. *And make thy name great.* Known, honored, loved through all the centuries, and by multitudes of people. He stands before us as a figure second only to one in the whole history of the world.

Fourth. *And thou shalt be a blessing.* A blessing in itself, and a source of blessing to others. He should be famous, not for what he took from men, but for what he gave to men.

Fifth. *And I will bless them that bless thee.* Abraham's cause was to be so identified with God's cause that whosoever favored Abraham favored God and his kingdom. So far as we are the true children of God, this is true also of us.

Sixth. *And curse him that curseth thee.* This is the other side of the same promise. Abraham in character, works, and representative position as the founder of the church was so identified with God that whosoever hated and opposed him hated and opposed God. The good man is not alone. Touch him, and you touch God.

Seventh. *And in thee shall all families be blessed.* By family is meant here, and elsewhere, a people, or nation. All families of the earth be blessed. This promise was fulfilled in the blessings which have come to the world through the Messiah who was "Abraham's seed."

Practical. 1. God gives us exceeding great and precious promises to encourage and strengthen us to leave sin with all its false delights. "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

2. Good men are always a blessing to others. True goodness, like light, must shine.

3. Great lives are trained by great promises. God never calls men for the purpose of making them less than they are. God's calls are upwards; they are calls toward fuller life, purer light, and sweeter joy.

THE FIRST PILGRIM FATHER.—Vs. 4, 5. From the last chapter we learn that Abraham left Ur with his parents, his wife, his brothers, his nephew. The journey was about five hundred miles. Haran was a large commercial city. He remained in Haran till after his father Terah's death, and then the Lord showed him that he was not yet at the end of his journey. So Abraham departed... out of Haran.

After about five years' residence there. To that place his grandson Jacob came for his wife, the descendant of Nahor, Abraham's brother. Sarai. She was ten years younger than Abraham, and his half sister, or possibly, as some think, the same as Leah, Haran's daughter, and therefore Abraham's niece, and sister of Lot. Lot his brother's (Haran's) son. These were, doubtless, worshippers of the one true God with Abraham. And all their substance. Property of all kinds. And the souls... they had gotten in Haran. Servants or adherents, for Abraham was a sheik, or head of a family. A few years later there were 318 armed men in Abraham's establishment (Gen. 14: 14), which implies at least 1,000 souls. Into the land of Canaan they came. A distance of 300 miles. Canaan is named after the son of Ham, a portion of whose descendants settled in Palestine.

The Man of Faith. Abraham stands in history as the father of the faithful. His faith was the source of his obedience (Heb. 11: 8-9). The greatness of his faith can be seen by the difficulties which stood in his way. His faith was tested by

1. The difficulty of being sure that the command came from God. 2. Abraham stood almost alone. The whole tide of opinion was against him. It is hard to stand alone and yet be sure you are right. 3. The command of God entailed no little cost of self denial. To leave home, property, friends, country, and all, to dwell, a pilgrim and a

stranger, in a foreign land, exposed to unknown dangers, required great faith and courage.

4. He did not know even where he was going or just what work God would have him do, or how he could do it.

5. The promises were, many of them, afar off. He had no children, and yet in his children all the world was to be blessed.

6. Abraham must have encountered no little opposition and opposition. His conduct seemed the height of folly to those who had not his knowledge and faith. Abraham's position assailed not only the religion of the people, but their lusts and their crimes and their ill-gotten wealth, and this always quickly excites men against the reformer.

Practical Suggestions. 1. A similar command is virtually given to us. The world around us lies in wickedness; we are to come out from it, and to be crucified to it; we are to regard it as a wilderness through which we are passing as strangers and pilgrims to our Father's house.

2. We know not at first just where we are going, when God calls us from the world to enter into his service. Life and duty and work will unfold themselves to us as we obey the call. Very few of the great workers and leaders in history have done what they planned to do in their early lives. No one knows beforehand the way in which God will lead him; but he knows that if he obeys, blessing will shine upon him all the way, and it will lead to a land overflowing with good things.

VARIED EXPERIENCES.—Vs. 6-9. Passed through. He entered on the north and went toward the south. Sichem. Between Mts. Ebal and Gerizim. Plain of Moreh, rather the oak grove of Moreh. And the Canaanites were... in the land. Another race, that of Ham, and still more idolatrous than the people of Ur. This statement in the text is made to show (1) the seeming difficulties in the way of God's fulfilling his promise; (2) hence the greatness of Abraham's faith; (3) the reason why God again appeared to him to encourage his faith; (4) the reason why Abraham moved on.

Practical. God tries faith to increase it.

Encouragement. And the Lord appeared unto Abram. With a promise so much against all appearances. Thus land was to be the home and inheritance of his descendants. This appearance and promise seem to have been given to Abraham (1) to announce to him that this was the land he had selected for him, according to his former promise; (2) to assure him how the promise would be fulfilled, although Abram had no children, and the land was already occupied by a strong race. And there (in Shechem) builded he an altar unto the Lord. This altar was (1) a proof of his faith in God's promise; (2) a renewed consecration of himself as a worshiper of God; (3) a taking possession of the land in God's name; (4) a testimony to the heathen nations, concerning the one true God and his true worship.

Practical. 1. The good man always carries his religion with him. That is a poor religion which will not travel. Altars of worship in the home and in the town are sources of blessing.

2. Abraham's faith was all-pervasive. In doing ordinary duties, as a farmer, a business man, a chief he manifests a faith that stands forever as a type of true faith. Bethel. Twelve miles north of Jerusalem. And Hai on the east. His encampment was between Bethel and Hai. Hai was five miles east of Bethel and was the scene of the first Israelitish defeat under Joshua (Josh. 7: 2). And called upon the name of the Lord. Showing that the sacrifices on the altars were accompanied with prayer. The South (with a capital S) the southern district of Palestine, on the road toward Egypt.

A Man Who Might Have Been Great.

A little while ago I stood by the grave of the old Napoleon—a magnificent tomb of gilt and gold, fit almost for a deity dead—and gazed upon the sarcophagus of rare and nameless marble, where rest at last the ashes of that restless man. I leaned over the balustrade and thought about the career of the greatest soldier of the modern world.

I saw him walking upon the banks of the Seine contemplating suicide. I saw him at Toulon. I saw him putting down the mob in the streets of Paris. I saw him at the head of the army in Italy. I saw him crossing the bridge at Lodi with the tricolor in his hand. I saw him in Egypt in the shadows of the pyramids. I saw him conquer the Alps and mingle the eagles of France with the eagles of the crags. I saw him at Marengo, at Ulm, and at Austerlitz. I saw him

in Russia when the infantry of the snow and the cavalry of the wild blast scattered his legions like withered leaves. I saw him at Leipsic in defeat and disaster—driven by a million bayonets back upon Paris—clutched like a wild beast—banished to Elba. I saw him escape and retake an empire by the force of his genius. I saw him upon the frightful field of Waterloo, where chance and fate combined to wreck the fortunes of the former king.

And I saw him at St. Helena, with his hands crossed behind him, gazing out upon the sad and solemn sea.

I thought of the orphans and widows he had made—of the tears that had been shed for his glory, and of the only woman who ever loved him pushed from his heart by the cold hand of ambition. And I said I would rather have been a French peasant and worn wooden shoes.

I would rather have lived in a hut with a vine growing over the door, and the grapes growing purple in the kiss of the Autumn sun. I would rather have been that poor peasant, with my loving wife by my side knitting as the day died out of the sky—with my children upon my knees and their arms about me. I would rather have been that man than to have been Napoleon the Great.—Author Unknown.

How Boys Enter the Christian Life.

For convenience, consider the boy as a responsible individual, capable of choice and decision. Until he comes to this place, whatever religious life he seems to have is not his, because he had had no choice in the matter. It is the property of whoever may have poured it into his open, indiscriminating life. What he chooses, accepts, decides upon, is his own.

Boys enter the religious life in at least as many ways as they enter the water for swimming:

1. Some plunge in—a definite decision which settles once for all what their attitude toward right and wrong shall be; what their relation to their God shall be.

2. Some wade in—deliberately, step by step, each step

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