

Looking unto Abraham and Sarah

*“look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you:
for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him” (Isa. 51:2)*

Our Old Testament reading for today contains an exhortation to Israel to look to their beginnings: “look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you”. But it was not natural paternity that the prophet is referring to, rather it is that they should have been spiritual descendants of Abraham and Sarah – walking in the steps of their faith.

Revelation chapter 17 describes those who will be glorified with their Master:

“they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Rev. 17:14).

We can readily see the import of what is here described: there is first a “calling” of men to repent, then there is a selection, or “choosing” of those who have responded well to the calling, who thus constitute the “faithful”. But it is interesting to note when considering these three points, that the only Old Testament character to which each of them is applied, is Abraham.

THE CALLING

Isaiah chapter 51 describes Abraham’s Calling as we have already cited above:

*“Look unto Abraham your father and unto Sarah that bare you: for **I called him** alone, and blessed him, and increased him” (Isa. 51:2).*

The book of Hebrews also describes his faith and calling:

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8).

The believers also are those who are “called”:

*“... we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them **who are the called** according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).*

Just as Abraham was called upon to forsake his family and homeland, so those who would become joined to his Greater Seed as the ecclesial Bride must do likewise: “Hearken O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for his is thy Lord; and worship thou him” (Psa. 45:10-11).

THE CHOOSING

Nehemiah chapter 9 describes how Abraham was “chosen”:

*“Thou art Yahweh the Elohim, who didst **choose** Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham ...” (Neh. 9:7).*

There is a principle of Scripture that out of all those who receive a call to submit to, and obey the Gospel message, only a few will eventually be chosen. So we read expressions such as: “so the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen” (Mat. 20:16). And again, “for many are called, but few are chosen” (Mat. 22:14). The call goes out to mankind through the proclamation of the true Gospel, but there are so few who respond favourably to that calling. In Noah’s day there were only 8 souls saved, out of all the multitudes who lived in his day. We have no reason to suppose that there will again be only a few saved out of the generation living at the time of Messiah’s coming again.

This aspect of being “called” and “chosen” is referred to again by the Apostle elsewhere in this context:

“For ye see your **calling**, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath **chosen** the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ...” (1 Cor. 1:26-27).

A case in point is the example of king David, the shepherd boy – a “stripling” who confounded and destroyed the Giant Goliath, the champion of the Philistines. He was chosen by God to lead the nation as king, “for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Yahweh looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). We must endeavour to heed the calling which comes to us, and have a heart for the things of the Living God.

BEING FAITHFUL

Returning again to Nehemiah, we find the declaration that Yahweh “foundest his heart **faithful** before thee...” (Neh. 9:8). The faithfulness of Abraham is manifest in a number of ways, not least in his confident belief in the promises that were made to him concerning his Seed. So Paul speaks of him:

“Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations ... he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was **strong in faith**, given glory to God, And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:18-21).

These three principles, therefore, characterise the man Abraham. But they are cited and applied together to Messiah’s brethren – which demonstrates that their hope is in the Abrahamic Covenant, as they look to this man’s faith as an example to follow. Walking in the steps of Abraham’s Faith (see Rom. 4:12), they become like him, and trust in the promised blessedness to come through his pre-eminent Seed.

Another way in which these principles of Calling and Choosing work themselves out in the process of salvation, is seen in Israel’s being called out of Egypt, to be a holy nation to Yahweh:

“... thou art an holy people unto Yahweh thy Elohim: Yahweh thy Elohim hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut. 7:6).

Israel were collectively a nation taken out from the midst of another nation (Deut. 4:34), being called out, and delivered by a mighty overthrow. Again, we read:

“thou art a holy people unto Yahweh thy Elohim, and Yahweh hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deut. 14:2).

The principles being brought to bear are clear: Israel were called out of Egypt, and chosen to be a special nation, being elevated above all other nations. How tragic it was then, that they failed to live up to their high calling, choosing instead to follow the ways of the heathen!

But we must not boast against the branches, lest we be found wanting ourselves. We stand by faith, and can be very easily be cut off from the Israelitish Rootstock, which is our Hope. The principles that governed Israel’s calling are also applied to ours:

“ ... Ye are a **chosen** generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the virtues of him who hath **called** you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

FATHER ABRAHAM

Returning to Isaiah 51, we saw that Abraham is spoken of as “your father.” We made the assertion above, that it is not merely natural descent that is described here, but a spiritual relationship. The Jews in Messiah’s day took great pride in their natural descent – but the Lord established that they were not spiritually Abraham’s descendants:

“They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (Jno. 8:39).

Romans chapter 4 also addresses this aspect, saying that he is:

“the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but **who also walk in the steps of that faith** of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:12).

And again speaking of the attainment of the promises:

“... Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also **which is of the faith** of Abraham; who is the father of us all ...” (Rom. 4:16).

The overriding principle is that only those of faith are counted as the promised Seed, and not those of literal descent. As it is written again:

“Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of Promise are counted for the seed.” (Rom. 9:7-8).

We have an illustration of this in the offering up of Isaac, which tested Abraham’s belief in the resurrection of the dead. Genesis 22 describes Isaac as “thine only son Isaac” (Gen. 22:2), and Hebrews 11 speaks of him as “his only begotten son” (Heb. 11:17). Literally speaking, Isaac was not

the only son of Abraham: he already had another son, Ishmael. But the point is that Ishmael turned out to be a man of the flesh and was not therefore of the promised spiritual seed. Hence he is not counted as such in the Divine record.

SARAH

Our quotation in Isaiah 51 describes how that the recipients of this prophecy were not to look to Abraham only, but to Sarah also: "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bear you ...". This principle is alluded to by Peter thus:

"... in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: **whose daughters ye are**, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement" (1 Pet. 3:5-6).

It is clear then, that Sarah also is a mother of the faithful, and her spiritual daughters should emulate her relationship to, and respect for her husband.

The overriding principle regarding Abraham is that of justification by faith. Romans chapter 4 deals with this aspect in some considerable detail: we have just covered a few points. But the basic principle is that we cannot achieve righteousness by ourselves, it has to be imputed to, or given to us by the One in whose blood we wash our symbolic garments (Rev. 7:14) to make them white. We long for the day which Messiah shall come again: not that we feel righteous about ourselves to sufficiently warrant his favour, but that rather because of our faith that we seek to apply to our daily lives, we shall be given righteousness:

"who shall ascend into the hill of Yahweh? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. **He shall receive** the blessing from Yahweh, and **righteousness** from the God of his salvation" (Psa. 24:3-5).

Christopher Maddocks