

# Call of Abraham

## 9.—Call of Abraham. \*[B.C. 2000]

1. At Haran, in the midst of a wicked world, there lived Chaldean named Abraham, a most upright man. God chose him, that through him the knowledge of the true God and the hope in the promised Redeemer might be preserved among men. For this reason, the Lord commanded Abraham to leave his country and his kinsfolk, and go into a strange land. God moreover promised that Abraham should be the father of a great people, and that in him all nations should be blessed.

2. Abraham obeyed, and, with Sarah his wife, and Lot his nephew, together with his servants and flocks, came into Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. Here the Lord appeared to Abraham, and promised to give him and his posterity that land. In gratitude, Abraham built an altar and offered sacrifice to the Lord.

## 10.—The Virtues of Abraham

1. *His Love of Peace.*—In time, because of the scarcity of pasture, quarrels arose between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of his nephew Lot; so Abraham, who loved peace rather than gain, thought it better that he and Lot should part. He gave Lot the choice to go either to the right or to the left. Lot chose the country about the Jordan, and dwelt in Sodom, while Abraham remained at Hebron.

2. *His Disinterestedness.*—Not long after this there came into that country strange kings, who pillaged the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, took Lot captive, and carried off with them all his substance. When Abraham heard this sad news, he gathered together three hundred of his servants, and, pursuing, defeated those kings, delivered Lot, and, recovering all his substance, led him back to his own country.

3. It was on this occasion Abraham was met by Melchisedech, King of Salem, and priest of the Most High, who, offering sacrifice of bread and wine, blessed Abraham. At the same time, the King of Sodom offered Abraham all the booty that had been taken, only to restore the captives, but Abraham would take nothing.

4. In this victory over the foreign kings, we have a type of Christ's victory over the powers of hell. The sacrifice of Melchisedech in bread and wine was a symbol of the Sacrifice of the Mass, which is also offered under the appearances of bread and wine.

5. *Abraham's Faith.*—One night God led Abraham to the door of his tent, and said to him: "Lift up your eyes to heaven, and count the stars if you can; thus shall your posterity be multiplied upon the earth."

6. God again appeared to him, and confirmed His former promise, adding that He would make a *covenant* with him. In return, God required Abraham to serve Him faithfully. To confirm this covenant between them, God promised Abraham a son, whose name should be called Isaac. Abraham believed the word of the Lord, and his faith, confirmed by his works, was imputed to him. It was on this occasion that God prescribed the ceremony of *circumcision*.

## 11.—Abraham's Hospitality

1. During the extreme heat of the day, three strangers approached Abraham's tent. As soon as he saw them, bowing himself to the ground, he said to the most distinguished of them: "My lord, pass not by the door of my tent: stop and rest under the shade of the tree, and I will set before you a little bread, that you may refresh yourself."

2. Then Sarah hastened to make flour-cakes upon the hearth, whilst Abraham chose a tender calf from the flock, and, hastening, gave it to the servants to dress and boil; then he took milk and butter, and the calf and the cakes, and set them before the strangers, while he stood by to serve them.

3. When they had eaten, he who appeared chief among the strangers told Abraham that in a year he would return, and, by that time, Sarah his wife would have a son. When Abraham heard this, he knew that it was God Himself, accompanied by two angels, whom he had entertained.

4. *Abraham's Love of his Neighbor.*—When the three strangers departed, Abraham accompanied them some distance on their journey to Sodom. On the way, the Lord told Abraham of the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, and how He was about to destroy the two wicked cities. When Abraham heard this, full of charity for his erring neighbors, he besought the Lord not to destroy the just with the unjust.

5. Pleading, he besought the Lord to spare the sinful cities of the plain, if there could be found in them fifty just. And when the Lord yielded to his prayer, he yet again and again urged, until the Lord agreed, if ten just could be found, not to destroy Sodom. But ten just could not be found; therefore, on the following morning, came the punishment as terrible in its severity as it was strange in its novelty.

6. The Lord having left the two angels, they came to Lot, in Sodom. On the morrow they led Lot, his wife, and his two daughters forth from the place; then the Lord rained down fire and brimstone on the unfortunate cities, destroying them with all their inhabitants. But Lot's wife, forgetting the command of the angels, looked back, and, for her curiosity, was on the spot turned into a pillar of salt. The country round about was turned into a sulphurous lake—now known as the *Dead Sea*—which will ever remain a monument of the wrath of God for the sins of men.

## 12.—Abraham's Spirit of Self-sacrifice

1. As had been foretold, the year after the destruction of Sodom, Isaac was born. His father loved him most tenderly, because he had been born to him in his old age. One night God, that He might try him, commanded Abraham to take his beloved Isaac and to go up into Mount Moria, and there to sacrifice him.

2. Without a word, Abraham rose, and cutting wood placed it on an ass, and, taking with him his son and two servants, went forth as the Lord had commanded him. On the third day, seeing in the distance the place whither he had been commanded to go, he ordered the servants to rest while he and Isaac would go up the mountain.

3. Then Abraham put the wood on Isaac's shoulders, and they went on together. On the way, Isaac remarked that they had the fire and the wood with them, but they had no victim for the sacrifice. But his father assured him God would provide a victim. When they were come to the place God had showed them, Abraham built an altar, and, placing the wood upon it, bound Isaac and laid him also upon it; then he took the sword to sacrifice his much-loved son.

4. Just as Abraham was about to strike, an angel touched his hand and told him not to harm the boy; that the Lord was satisfied, since for His sake, he had not spared his only begotten son. Abraham

lifted up his eyes and saw behind him a ram sticking among the bushes; taking it, he offered it instead of his son.

5. The angel spoke again to Abraham, telling him the Lord would bless him for this offering he had made; that his posterity would be as numerous as the sand of the sea; and that from him would be born one in whom all nations would be blessed.

## 13.—Isaac Marries Rebecca

1. When Abraham had grown old, he became anxious to choose for his son a wife who feared God. Therefore, calling his faithful servant Eliezer, he sent him into Mesopotamia, that, amongst his own friends and kinsfolk, he might seek for a wife for Isaac. Eliezer took ten camels, and, loading them with his master's goods, departed for the city of Haran, where Abraham's brother, Nachor, lived.

2. When Eliezer approached the city, he made the camels lie down by the wells, where the women were wont to draw water; then he prayed thus to the Lord: "O Lord, this day come to my help and have mercy upon my master Abraham! Soon the young women of this city will come forth to draw water; grant, therefore, that the maid who shall say to me, 'Drink, and I will give thy camels also to drink,' may be, O Lord, the same whom Thou hast provided for Thy servant, Isaac!"

3. Scarce had he finished, when there came from the city a young woman, named Rebecca, as modest as she was beautiful. On her shoulders she carried a pitcher. When she had filled it, Eliezer said to her, "Give me to drink." She answered, "Drink," and kindly offered him her pitcher. Then she said, "I will also draw water for your camels."

4. When the servant heard this, he stood awhile in silent amazement, watching till she had given the camels to drink; then he gave her ear rings and golden bracelets, and asked whose daughter she was, and whether there was room in her father's house for him to lodge. In answer, she told him she was the daughter of Bathuel, the son of Nachor, and, moreover, there was room at her father's, together with plenty of straw and hay. When Eliezer heard this, he adored God, who had brought his journey to so successful an end.

5. He then went to Bathuel's house, but would neither eat nor drink till he had delivered his message. When they all heard for what he had come, and what had happened, Laban, Rebecca's

brother, as also Bathuel, her father, said: "God had directed all these events, and that he should take Rebecca with him."

6. Then Eliezer again adored God, and, bringing forth vessels of silver and gold, and rich garments, gave them to Rebecca. He also gave presents to her mother and her brothers. A banquet was prepared; they ate, drank, and made merry. In the morning Rebecca's parents and her brothers blessed her, and she left her father's home to become the wife of Isaac.

Abraham lived to the advanced age of a hundred and seventy-five years. God blessed him in all his works, and he died full of grace and virtues.

## 14.—Esau and Jacob

1. For twenty years Isaac and Rebecca lived together before God blessed them with children. They prayed to the Lord, and He gave them two sons—Esau, the first-born, and Jacob, the second. Esau was red and hairy, and rough in his manners; but Jacob was smooth, and of a gentle disposition. Esau became a hunter and a husbandman, while Jacob was a shepherd.

2. Isaac loved the bold and courageous Esau, and eat with delight the game which he brought from the chase; but Rebecca loved rather the smooth and gentle Jacob, because God had told her he would yet rule his elder brother.

3. One day Jacob had prepared a dish of lentil pottage, when Esau, who was returning from the chase, met him, and asked him for it. But Jacob refused unless Esau would sell him his birthright. So Esau, thinking lightly of the matter, sold his birthright for a mess of pottage.

This transfer of Esau's birthright to Jacob was symbolical of the Jews, who, in the time of Christ, rejected the Gospel, and their rights were transferred to the Gentiles, who were chosen in their stead.

4. When Isaac had grown old and his eyes were dim, he one day called Esau to his bedside, and told him to go into the fields, and, when he had taken some game, to make him a savory dish, that he might bless him before he died. Rebecca overheard this conversation; as soon as Esau had gone out she called Jacob, and bade him hasten and bring two kids, that she might prepare a dish

for his father, that, carrying it in, he might get his father's blessing instead of Esau.

5. At first Jacob objected, lest his father would discover the fraud, and thus, instead of a blessing, he would receive a curse. But Rebecca overcame his objection, and, clothing him in the skin of a kid, sent him to his father.

Isaac doubted, but calling Jacob to him, and touching him, he said: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." So he eat, and blessed Jacob.

6. Scarce had Jacob gone out when Esau entered with what he had caught in the chase. When Esau heard what had been done, he became very angry, accusing Jacob of having first robbed him of his birthright, and now of his father's blessing. From that day Esau hated Jacob and threatened his life. Rebecca, seeing this, persuaded Jacob to go and stay for a while at Haran, with her brother Laban, until Esau's anger would be appeased. Jacob consented, and immediately started on his journey.

## 15.—Jacob's Flight with Laban

1. Night overtook Jacob on his journey. Wearied, he took a stone and placed it under his head whilst he slept. In his sleep he saw a ladder whose foot rested upon the earth and its top reached up to heaven. He saw, besides, angels ascending and descending upon it, whilst the Lord leaned on its top. The Lord spoke to him and promised to give him, and his posterity after him, the land on which he then slept.

2. When Jacob awoke, he took the stone on which he had slept and set it up for a title; then he poured oil upon it and called the place Bethel, that is, *the house of God*.

[Bethel is a figure of the Church, where Jesus Christ Himself dwells, and in which the angels, more effectually than by this mysterious ladder, carry our prayers to God and bring again His graces to us.]

3. Jacob continued his journey, and came to a well around which three flocks of sheep were lying. He asked the shepherds if they knew Laban. They said they did, and pointed to Rachel, his daughter, who was driving her flocks also to the well. When Jacob saw her, he hastened to take away the stone that covered the well, and helped her to give drink to her flocks. He then told her who he was.

4. When Rachel heard that he was her cousin, she ran home to tell her father, who came in haste to meet Jacob, and, embracing him, led him into his house. Jacob remained twenty years with Laban, tending his flocks. In many ways Laban strove to lessen Jacob's wages; but as often as he strove to injure Jacob, God blessed him, until Jacob became immensely rich. In time, Jacob married Rachel, and also her sister Lea.

*NOTE: Dates at the head of lessons prefixed by an \* are approximate.*

## 16.—Jacob's Return

1. Owing to Jacob's great wealth, Laban became extremely jealous of him. At the command of God, Jacob gathered together all his servants, and his flocks of sheep and of goats and of camels and of asses, and went into his own country. When he arrived at the banks of the Jordan, a river that marks the limits of Canaan, he began to fear the former anger of Esau. He then sent messengers to make peace with him; but without giving an answer, Esau came to meet his brother, accompanied by four hundred men.

2. When Jacob heard this, he was much alarmed, and prayed God to deliver him out of his brother's hands. During the night an angel appeared to him and wrestled with him till the morning. Before the angel left him, he changed his name from Jacob to *Israel*, that is to say, *strong against God*.

3. This contest of the angel with Jacob is a lively figure of the Church. Pagan emperors, heresiarchs, and, above all, hell, have made constant war against her; but as Jacob was not overcome by the angel, neither has the Church been overcome, nor shall she be to the end of time.

4. In the morning Jacob saw Esau coming towards him. He hastened to divide his children and his servants and his flocks into two companies; then, advancing to meet Esau, bowed himself seven times before him. The brothers embraced and wept for joy; Jacob's children, also advancing, bowed themselves before Esau.

5. After a short delay the brothers parted, and Jacob pursued his journey; penetrated with a lively sense of the divine protection, he came into the land of Canaan. When his old father saw him he was much rejoiced, and gave God thanks that his son had returned. Isaac died at the advanced age of a hundred and eighty years, and was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.