

QUESTIONS FROM THE PEW.

BY FRANKLIN N. JEWETT.

PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF FAITH FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THIS topic leads to a consideration of Paul's references to Abraham. His argumentation from the history of Abraham is very prominent, both in Galatians and Romans.

In Gal. iii. 6 we read, "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness." The argument based upon the passage is greatly extended in the fourth chapter of Romans. Chief importance is attached to the fact that Abraham was thus accepted before the rite of circumcision was instituted. Therefore his acceptance with God was not dependent upon it. In Paul's words the argument is, "To Abraham his faith was reckoned for righteousness. How then was it reckoned? When he "was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, "but in uncircumcision: and he received the sign of circumcision, "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was "in uncircumcision: that he might be the father of all them that "believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might "be reckoned unto them; and the father of circumcision to them "who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the "steps of that faith of our father Abraham which he had in circum- "cision. For not through (the) law was the promise to Abraham, "or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world, but through the "righteousness of faith." (Rom. iv. 9, b.-13.)

In Galatians Paul is writing to Gentile converts. They had been led away from faith in Christ as sufficient for salvation, which was the Gospel that Paul had preached to them. They had been told that the observance of the Jewish law, or especially of the rite of circumcision, was essential. Paul is endeavoring to bring them back to their former belief and practice. His position is that their

observance of the Jewish law, so far from being essential to their salvation, would be seriously, if not fatally, detrimental to it. He goes so far as to say (v. 2), "Behold, I Paul say unto you that, if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing."

At this time of course, Christianity had not yet been separated from Judaism. The Christians were continuing with the Jews in the temple worship at Jerusalem; and the former seem to have been quite as zealous for the law as the latter. In the account of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem (Acts xxi. 18-21) we read: "And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he rehearsed one by one the things which God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And they, when they heard it, glorified God; and they said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of them who have believed; and they are all zealous for the law: and they have been informed concerning thee, that thou teachest all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."

It seems very naturally to have been claimed by Jewish Christians that in order to participate in the blessings to be conferred by Christ, who was believed to be Messiah, Gentile nations or individuals must observe the Jewish law, must virtually join, or become, the people of Jehovah. Proselytism was familiar, and involved the fulfilment of such conditions, and, prominently, submission to the rite of circumcision. The Jews were to be a blessing to many or to all nations; but this was, very largely at least, to be due to the acceptance by them of the Jewish law. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Is. ii. 3.) "And the isles (or, coastlands) shall wait for his law." (Is. xlii. 4.)

Now we are told in Genesis that circumcision was instituted to be observed forever. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and between thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. . . . And God said unto Abraham, And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations. This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every male among you shall be circumcised, . . . and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male. . . ., that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath

"broken my covenant." Can there be any doubt about the intended perpetuity of this rite? (Gen. xvii. 7-14.)

A passage from the twelfth chapter of Exodus is also pertinent in this connection as showing the relation between the observance of this rite and participation in the privileges of Israel. Verses 43, 44 and 48 read: "And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover; there shall no alien eat thereof: but every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then he shall eat thereof. . . . And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: but no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof."

The time of Paul's letter to the Galatians was a momentous one in the history of the Church. It was a time of transition and of much conflict. The latter can hardly be considered surprising, in view of the circumstances. The above passage from which Paul quotes, in his use of the faith of Abraham is Gen. xv. 5, 6: "And he (the Lord) brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to tell them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Now the pertinency of Paul's calling attention to Abraham for the purpose of enjoining belief in God is manifest; but the faith which Paul preached was far from being identical with the belief reported of Abraham. The latter was belief in a promise that had been directly made to him by God; Paul was preaching faith in Christ as a sacrificial and sufficient saviour for all who should believe in him as such.

As regards the example of Abraham, could not Paul with equal, in fact with greater, cogency have referred to him as one who unswervingly obeyed every commandment of God, and so have used his history as a conclusive argument *for* the observance of circumcision? How could Abraham's belief in God and his acceptance or merit, because of it be used as an argument for not observing the Lord's ordinances? Was Abraham's reported belief of such a kind that he might, or would, excuse himself from obedience because of it? Certainly not. Then how could his example furnish a valid argument for such neglect at a later date? Why could not the Jews and Judaizing Christians properly say, as they doubtless did say, that those who had faith like Abraham would obey like

Abraham? Faith, of course, leads to obedience; and its possession is a strange reason indeed to give for disobedience.

In further connection with Abraham, Paul's argument in Gal. iii. 15-18 is to be noticed. This argument is made in support of his doctrine of faith in Christ and of the insufficiency of the law. He says that the promises were made to Abraham and his seed, which was Christ. Therefore the coming of the law centuries afterward could not invalidate the promise, considered as a covenant. He says: "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men (i. e., using the "acts and conceptions common among men): Though it be but a "man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh "it void or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham were the promises "spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; "but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. Now this I say; "A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came "four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to "make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance is of the "law, it is no more of promise: but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise."

Obviously the identification of Christ with the "seed" of the promises referred to is essential to the validity of this argument. Paul carefully excludes a plural or collective meaning of the word, and makes it signify *one*, "which is Christ." Has the argument any validity? The word "seed" in such connections, is a collective term, having precisely the meaning of "many," which Paul rejects. To have used the plural form, "seeds," in order to convey the meaning of "many," would have been not only unnecessary but improper. We understand furthermore, that the case is precisely the same in the original Hebrew, that the Hebrew word here has the singular form and collective meaning, the same as the English one. This certainly seems to leave Paul's argument here without foundation, even without reading the original passages at any length. But turning to these, in order to see what meaning the connection, in the several instances, may show for this word *seed*, we read (Gen. xiii. 14-16): "And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot "was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the "place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and "westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, "and to thy seed forever." Gen. xv. 5: "And he brought him forth "abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if "thou be able to tell them; and he said unto him, So shall thy seed "be." Gen. xvii. 7-9: "And I will establish my covenant between me

"and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for
 "an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed
 "after thee. And I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee,
 "the land of thy sojourns, all the land of Canaan, for an ever-
 "lasting possession: and I will be their God. And God said unto
 "Abraham, And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and
 "thy seed after thee throughout their generations." Gen. xxii. 16-
 18: "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done
 "this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in
 "blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy
 "seed, as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the
 "sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and
 "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed (or, bless
 "themselves); because thou hast obeyed my voice."

Could any thing be plainer? May we be excused the superfluity of calling attention again to the latter part of xvii. 9: "And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout *their* generations"?

To say that Christ was the spiritual Israel, and hence was included in the "seed," if admittedly true, would not answer here. Paul's argument is very different. It turns upon the form of a word. It excludes the meaning of "many." It does not admit such conception as that of "their" above. Can it have any validity whatever?

Another passage of prominence in Paul's support of his doctrine from the Old Testament is quoted in Gal. iii. 11 and Romans i. 17. Rom.: "For therein (in the Gospel) is revealed a righteousness of "God from faith unto faith: as it is written. But the righteous shall "live by faith." Gal.: "Now that no man is justified by (or, in) "the law in the sight of God is evident: for the righteous shall live "by faith; and the law is not of faith." The words are taken from Habakkuk ii. 4. Paul uses the passage as a proof text. Does it sustain his proposition? Verses 2-4 are: "And the Lord answered "me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that "he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for the appointed "time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie: though it "tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay. "Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just "shall live by his faith. (Margin, in his faithfulness.)" "Constancy" is also given as a proper translation of the word translated "faith."

If the word means *faith* in the sense of *faithfulness*, fidelity,

constancy, then Paul is entirely wide of the mark in quoting it; for in his doctrine which in the passages under consideration he is especially endeavoring to sustain, a person's constancy, fidelity, faithfulness, as a ground of his justification, are explicitly excluded. We understand that the word in question, if applied to the body as a noun, would mean "firmness," "steadfastness," as in Exod. xvii. 12. Moses's hands, with the assistance of Aaron and Hur, were "steady." The word is used of God in Deut. xxxii. 4: "A God of faithfulness," and it is used of men in Prov. xii. 22: "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord; but they that deal truly, (or do faithfulness) are his delight."

The "vision" in Habakkuk was one of coming destruction, but in the midst of it all, the righteous man should live in his faithfulness, or constancy. He would be saved by it, which is a familiar Old Testament conception. This seems exactly to fit the situation as well as to be in accord with the meaning of the word elsewhere.

This meaning of the word prevails also in its use in Hebrews x. 36-38. The writer is exhorting to confidence and constancy amid severe trials. He says: "For ye have need of patience (or steadfastness), that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise. For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my (or, the) righteous one shall live by faith: And if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure in him." Paul plainly quotes from the common Greek translation of the Old Testament, as does also the writer of Hebrews; and in this the common word for faith is used in this place. This fact, however, has no bearing upon whether or not the original passage sustains Paul's use of it. Can it be said to do so?

Another passage in Paul's support of his special doctrine from the Old Testament is Romans x. 6-9. It may be noted that in this epistle Paul is writing, in part certainly, to Jews; and in chapters ix-xi he is writing of them particularly. That God's people had not accepted their Messiah presented to Paul a very painful problem. How could God's promises so fail of fulfilment? He concludes that the Jews failed to receive the blessing because they sought it by works, by the keeping of the law. He says: "But Israel, following after a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by works." Paul quotes from Deuteronomy to show the contrast.

He prefaces this quotation, however, by giving a portion of Lev. xviii. 5, a passage of course generally well known: "For Moses writeth that the man that doeth the righteousness which is of the

law shall live thereby." But Paul repeatedly says that by works of the law shall no flesh be justified. The seeming opposition between the two statements is adjusted by the claim, both made and implied, that nothing less than perfect obedience would be sufficient, and that this no man can render; "There is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one."

Verses 6-9, above referred to, of the tenth chapter of Romans are: "But the righteousness which is of faith saith thus, Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven (that is to bring Christ down:) or, Who shall descend into the abyss? (that is to bring Christ up from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach: because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

The words in the parentheses are explanatory matter introduced by Paul. The original passage from which Paul quotes, Deut. xxx. 11-14, is: "For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it into us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

We submit that we are here in the midst of ideas which are very different from those which Paul presents by his use of the passage. Here we have the law, the commandment, and the repeated injunction that the people were to do it. Paul leaves this out.

The commandment and the doing of it are still further emphasized by the context in Deuteronomy, both before and after. This point is made so emphatic that further quotations may well be given. The opening verses of the chapter are: "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the peoples, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee." Imme-

diately preceding the passage from which Paul quotes we find, "And
"thou shalt return and obey the voice of the Lord, and do all his
"commandments which I command thee this day. And the Lord
"thy God will make thee plenteous in all the work of thine hand, . . .
"if thou shalt obey the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his com-
"mandments and his statutes which are written in the book of the
"law; if thou turn unto the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and
"with all thy soul." And immediately after the passage we find:
"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and
"evil; in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God,
"to walk in his ways and to keep his commandments and his statutes
"and his judgments, . . . that the Lord thy God may bless thee in
"the land whither thou goest in to possess it."

How can one fail to be convinced that Paul's use of this Deuteronomy passage was most unfortunate?