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THE Bible Record

Vol. 9

FEBRUARY, 1912

No. 2

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in China

The Emphasis in the
1912 Sunday School
Lessons

A False Statement
Answered

Study in Relation
to Missions

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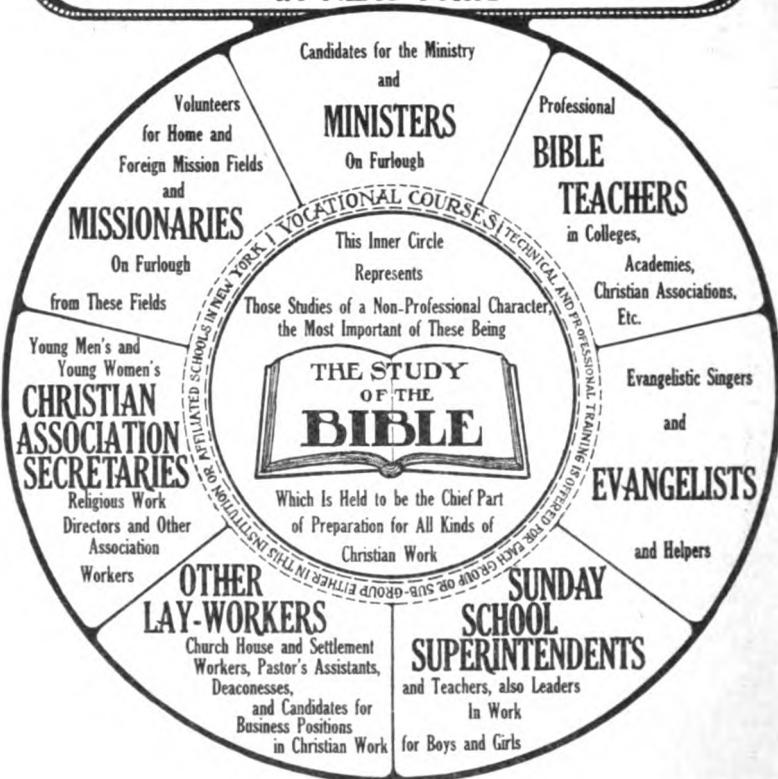
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THE FRIEND OF GOD

By Rev. James Harper, D.D.

[Dr. James Harper, for many years Professor of Systematic Theology in Xenia Theological Seminary, is now a man of ripe age. The editor thinks of him with most affectionate regard as one of his best teachers. We are very glad that from his pen we may hope to have an occasional article.]

James 2:23, "And he was called the friend of God."

In English the expression "friend of God" is ambiguous. It may mean one who is a friend to God, or one to whom God is a friend. The same ambiguity exists in the Greek expression here translated "friend of God." It is quite true that Abraham was a friend, in the sense of being a lover, of God. It is also true that Abraham was a friend of God in the sense of being loved by God. But what is the precise meaning of this phrase? It can not have both meanings, unless by implication.

Some months ago I listened to a sermon on this text, in which the preacher put emphasis mainly on the fact that Abraham was an object of Divine love. But as I listened, the question kept running through my mind, "Is this the primary and exact meaning of the text?"

As already said, resort to the original Greek afforded no solution of the difficulty, for the Greek word for "friend" may be either active or passive in signification; that is, it may denote either one loving or one loved, just as in the case of our English word "friend."

Turning, however, to the two passages in the Old Testament (2 Chron. 20:7 and Is. 41:8) in which Abraham is called "friend of God," and consulting the Hebrew in those instances, we are relieved from doubt; for the expression rendered "my friend" is a *kal*

active participle with a suffix which, literally rendered, would be "my loving one," or "my love."

Confirmatory of this interpretation is the fact that the special incident in Abraham's life with which the encomium upon him is connected is that of his virtual compliance with the divine command to offer up his son, Isaac, upon the altar. This was the supreme test and proof of Abraham's reverence and love for God, and from the skies there came to him the welcome proclamation, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

To be a friend of God in the sense now indicated is a glorious distinction, and emphatically so in a world which is in rebellion against him. To all of us is the opportunity given of proving ourselves to be the children of Abraham in loving and honoring God in the presence of his foes. In this attitude toward God there is a double honor involved; for our friendship to God is a proof and product of His eternal love to us. "We love Him because He first loved us." There are in this world many wonderful sights, soaring mountains, swelling seas, spangled skies; but the most wonderful of all is a sinner saved, an object of the eternal love of God and in whom dwells unquenchable love to God.