

Ministry of Grace

Lesson 5 – The Faithful Promise

Genesis 15:1-21

¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

²But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."

⁴And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." ⁵And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

⁶And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

⁷And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."

⁸But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"

⁹He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

¹⁰And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. ¹¹And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. ¹²As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

¹³Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. ¹⁴But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

¹⁷When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, ¹⁹the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

Synopsis

We have been eye witnesses to the growing faith of Abram as he began leaving his self-focused lifestyle and began maturing as a child of Yahweh. He has just put his own personal life on the line for his nephew, Lot and unselfishly gave back nearly all that had been recovered as a result of his defeat of Chedorlaomer. He also recognized the role that God has played in protecting him by giving one tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek, the High Priest and King of Salem.

After returning to the Oaks of Mamre and to his normal life, Abram was then presented with a vision from Yahweh. After being assured that Yahweh would be his protector and that he would be rewarded, Abram basically said, "I don't want any reward except the son that you have promised me." It appears a number of times in his interactions with God that Abram was singularly focused on wanting God to give him a son. In response to Abram's complaint, Yahweh takes him outside to gaze up at the night sky and asks him to recite the story contained in the constellations, the main focus of which is the promised Messiah. Then he reveals to Abram that this Messiah will be one of his own descendants.

Then, the most significant event in the life of Abram occurred. Abram believed what God told him about the Messiah and as a result of Abram's belief, God declared him to be righteous. In Christian terms, we would say that "Abram got saved!" It wasn't because of his acts of devotion and obedience, but because he believed God's word. And, it's the same way with us today. When we believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins, God declares us to be righteous. Now, let's look at this in more detail.

Genesis 15:1

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

"After these things" – These things included the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the transactions between Abram and both Melchizedek and the king of Sodom.

"word of the LORD" – This is an expression that is used throughout the Old Testament in connection with a vision to indicate a prophetic message. It is not necessarily the same as the New Testament expressions "the Word of God" or "the Word of the Lord" which often denote the second person of the Godhead (Jesus Christ, the Word of God). It is possible that the vision that Abram saw was, in fact, the second person of the Godhead, Jesus preincarnate.

"came to Abram in a vision" – In some cases we are not told how God communicated with Abram. However, in this case we are told specifically that it was in a vision. Vision = Hebrew *makhazeh*, which is based on the verb *khazah*, meaning "to see." And, the word *khazeh*, a seer, is a person who sees divine things which others cannot see.

There are a number of ways in which God revealed His will and His message to Old Testament saints:

1. By a personal appearance of the pre-incarnate form of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead. In the Old Testament, this is often referred to as "the angel of the LORD."
2. By an audible voice, sometimes accompanied with visual signs (like the events at Jesus' baptism where the voice of God was heard and the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove).
3. By a vision which took place during ordinary sleep, or when a person was given a visual representation of someone or something while being fully awake.

4. By the ministry of angels appearing in human bodies, and performing certain miracles to accredit their mission.
5. By the agency of the Spirit of God upon the mind, giving it a strong conception and supernatural persuasion of the truth of the things perceived by the understanding.

This appears to be the third kind, by which Abram saw a vision and heard an audible voice from God.

“Fear not” – What was it that Abram might have been afraid of in these recent events? Certainly there was nothing to fear from either Melchizedek or the king of Sodom. Therefore, this must be referring to fear of reprisal from Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him.

“I am your shield” – God indicated here that He would protect Abram, certainly from Chedorlaomer, but not **just** from Chedorlaomer. Notice also that this is more than just an indication of future protection. It is as if God had said, “I have been your shield and I will always be your shield.” He had already protected Abram (and Sarai) from Pharaoh and He had protected Abram and all who were with him in his conquest of Chedorlaomer. Now God was saying, “Abram, just as I have already protected you, I will continue to protect you.”

“reward” – Hebrew *saw-kawr*, meaning “a payment of wages or reward in the form of money or material goods.” We must view this in the context of the events that had just occurred (risking his life to save others, giving an offering [tithe] to Melchizedek, and refusing to keep any of the goods of the king of Sodom). This payment does not seem to be in response to Abram giving a tithe, or even of giving the people and goods back to the king of Sodom. It appears that it is a result of the faith demonstrated and glory given to God by Abram’s declaration, “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'”

Notice: this is **not** an example of God rewarding Abram for tithing and is it **not** a reward for Abram’s generosity. It is an example of God rewarding Abram for giving Him the credit for what has happened already and for demonstrating faith in God for what He will do in the future (provide for his needs).

“very great” – Not just a payment, nor a large payment, but an especially large payment.

Genesis 15:2, 3

But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."

“But Abram said” – There is some conjecture that the expression of verse two was made to God by Abram before God’s declaration in verse one. They would translate the opening part of verse two as “Abram had said,” which is a valid translation. However, the context of these verses does not seem to support this notion. Abram’s comments in verse two appear to be a response to God’s promise of an exceedingly great reward and verse three appears to be a restatement and refinement of verse two.

Recall that in **Genesis 12:2** God promised to make Abram a great nation in reward for Abram’s having left his place of national origin. Yet, in the ten years or so since that promise, Abram still had no children because Sarai was not able to conceive. Now, upon hearing God’s audible promise of a reward, Abram reminds God that his desire is for a son, not financial wealth.

“Lord GOD” – Hebrew *adonay yahovee*. *Adonay* is from the word *adone*, meaning “a lord or master.” *Adonay* is an emphatic form of the word and is always used to refer to God as Lord. *Yahovee* is a form of *yahovah* (*jvhv*). This form is always used in conjunction with *adonay*. In order to avoid mispronouncing

the name of God, Jews normally substitute *adonay* for *jvhv*. However, when the words *adonay yahovee* appear together, instead of saying *adonay adonay*, they pronounced it as *adonay elohim*.

“what will You give me” – In response to God’s promise of an exceedingly great reward, Abram says, in effect, “The only thing of worth that I want from You is a son!”

“the heir of my house” – According to the customs of the time, if there were no children, then the highest ranking servant would be heir to the possessions and honors of his master.

“Eliezer of Damascus” – Some have conjectured that Abram purchased or was given Eliezer during his journey through Damascus from Haran to Canaan. Not only is there no evidence of this, but the text declares that this heir was born in his household. This could indicate that Abram obtained Eliezer’s mother during his travel through Damascus, resulting in Eliezer’s birth while she was his servant. However, since Abram declares that Eliezer would be his heir, it implies that Eliezer had risen to the position of chief servant. It is extremely unlikely that a servant would rise to such a position in only five or ten years. This indicates that either Eliezer was Abram’s father’s chief servant or that he had been with Abram for a long time, perhaps since the days of life in Ur.

“member of my household” – Literally, the Hebrew text says “a son of my house.”

Genesis 15:4-6

And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Notice that God did not respond to Abram’s initial complaint (Lord GOD, what will You give me) but went on to respond to Abram’s concern about being childless.

“the word of the LORD came to him” – This tells us that God audibly responded to Abram.

“your very own son” – literally, “he who will come from your innards.”

“And he brought him outside” – the text here seems to indicate that God was with Abram in a physical body (pre-incarnate Christ).

“number” – Hebrew *saphar*, meaning “to number, to recount, to relate, or to declare.”

If you recall, back in **Genesis 13:16** God told Abram, “so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.” The words here translated “count” and “counted” are both *manah*, meaning “to count or to number.” If God had intended the same meaning in verse five as He did in **Geneses 13:16**, then why use a different word? However, if God intended a different meaning then this verse could be translated as:

Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and **recount (declare)** the stars if you are able to **recount (declare)** them." And He said to him, "So shall your **seed** be."

From this we see that God was not asking Abram to count-up the number of stars in the sky, He was asking Abram to recite the story as given in the stars. All Abram would have had to do was recount the meaning behind the first constellation, Virgo and its first decan (sub-constallation) to identify the son of the virgin who is to be the Messiah.

As further explanation of this, ever since the writing of three books in the late 1800s, there has been interest in the notion that the constellations are not some pagan depiction, but a story of the gospel message written for all to see. These three books are:

- *Mazzaroth: Or the Constellations* by Frances Rolleston (London: Rivingtons, 1862)
- *Gospel in the Stars* by Joseph Seiss (Philadelphia, 1882)
- *Witness of the Stars* by E.W. Bullinger (London, 1893)

A quick Web search on the phrase “Gospel in the Stars” will produce more than 3,500,000 hits on this subject, with every viewpoint possible from “This really is true!” to “This is a pile of bunk!” In my opinion, two of the best analyses of the subject come from:

Dr. John Pratt, a Christian with degrees in math and physics and a PhD in astronomy:

Review of *Gospel in the Stars* (http://www.johnpratt.com/items/docs/gis/gis_review.html)

Answering Objections to *Gospel in the Stars* (http://www.johnpratt.com/items/docs/gis/gis_qa.html)

Lost Constellation Testifies of Christ

(<http://www.johnpratt.com/items/docs/lds/meridian/2004/prince.html>)

and **Barry Setterfield**:

Is There a Gospel in the Stars? (<http://www.setterfield.org/stargospel.html>)

Although there are many Christians who would dismiss the notion of a gospel in the stars, these two scientists (who are Christians) present some very convincing arguments in support of it.

“So shall your offspring be” – Literally, “so shall your seed (singular) be.” The Apostle Paul even makes a specific point of the fact that the “offspring” referred to here is Christ:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

If God had intended the word “offspring” to refer to all the descendants of Abram (so numerous shall your offspring be) then Paul is wrong in interpreting this as specifically referring to Christ.

Therefore - when Abram recounted the message in the stars, God informed him that his “offspring” (singular) would be as Abram had just described. In other words, God told Abram that his offspring would be the Messiah, the savior of the world. What immediately follows that declaration is:

“And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” – Abram believed that his offspring would be the Messiah, the savior of mankind. Because of his belief in this fact, God declared Abram to be saved (righteous). No less than four times this very verse is quoted in the New Testament (Romans 4:3, Romans 4:22, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23) as an indication that salvation (righteousness) is obtained by faith and not by works of the flesh.

“righteousness” – Hebrew, *tsedaqah*. This word describes the attitude and actions of God as always being right, and it describes the attitudes and actions necessary from man in order to stand in God’s presence and to fellowship with Him. However, Isaiah describes the natural righteousness of every man and woman:

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

The words here translated as “a polluted garment” are literally “menstrual rags.” That’s a pretty graphic (and rather gross) picture of our righteousness apart from faith.

Genesis 15:7-12

And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

“I am the LORD” – Upon Abram’s confession of faith and God’s bestowment of righteousness on him, Yahweh formally introduces Himself to Abram. This is significant in that it introduces a formal relationship between the two. Likewise, when we believe the truth of Christ’s blood offering on the cross as payment for our sins, God makes Himself known to us in a personal manner as the beginning of a relationship and expectation of fellowship between us and Him.

“how am I to know that I shall possess it?” – This was not an expression of doubt on the part of Abram. He was asking God, “What is the sign of this covenant between us?”

“He said to him ...” – The ritual here depicted is not one of sacrificial offering; rather, it is a covenant ritual. According to the ancient Eastern manner of making a covenant (adopted from the Chaldeans), both the contracting parties passed between the divided pieces of the slain animals, thus symbolically attesting that they pledged their very lives to the fulfillment of the agreement they had just made.

“when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away” – There are numerous interpretations regarding the meaning of the “birds of prey” or “vultures.” Some see these as symbolic of heathens trying to destroy the relationship between God and the Jews, or of the enemies of the Jews trying to destroy them and drive them from the land. All such descriptions are pure conjecture. It appears that Abram was obedient to God in preparing the ritual to ratify the covenant and that he had to wait for some time before Jehovah came to complete the ritual. During the time of waiting, Abram simply drove away the birds of prey until the covenant could be properly completed. This may have been a test of his patience or it may simply have been a test of how serious Abraham was in his commitment to his new-found relationship with God.

“As the sun was going down” – Since this follows right after Abram recounted the story of the stars, it is assumed that the recitation of the story in the stars occurred very early in the morning before the sun came up and that this is now the end of that day. Thus, it appears that Abram waited throughout the entire time of daylight, protecting the elements of the covenant from the birds of prey from sunrise to sunset. Perhaps the vision of God referred to in verse one originally occurred to Abram while he was sleeping and continued on after he awoke in the early hours of the morning.

“a deep sleep” – Hebrew *tardemah*, the same word which is used to express the sleep of Adam when Eve was formed (**Genesis 2:21**).

“And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him” – Perhaps as an indication of the troubles that would come upon the descendants of Abram. More likely, however it is an indication of the presence of sinful man before the face of a holy, righteous God, the type of horror and darkness that sinners will experience in the Lake of Fire.

Genesis 15:13-16

Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I

will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

"Know for certain" – Literally, "In knowing, know." In verse eight Abram had asked, "how shall I know?" This is the answer to his question.

"your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years" – The four hundred years does not apply to "they will be afflicted" but to "your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs." The descendants here spoken of begin with Isaac and end with all those who were rescued from bondage in Egypt under the leadership of Moses.

"I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve" – This is a reference to the plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians.

"afterward they shall come out with great possessions" – The Israelites did, indeed, plunder the Egyptians

And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians." (Exodus 3:21-22)

The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. (Exodus 12:35-36)

"you shall go to your fathers in peace" – That is, "you shall not suffer the affliction that your descendants will."

"they shall come back here in the fourth generation" – The four generations spoken of are Kohath (son of Levi), Amram (son of Kohath), Aaron (son of Amram), and Eleazar (son of Aaron). It was after Aaron's death that the children of Israel returned to the Promised Land; thus, Eleazar was the fourth generation.

"the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" – The Amorites were the most powerful tribe among the descendants of Canaan and the name was sometimes used as an expression representing all of the Canaanites. There is much conjecture as to the exact meaning of this expression. It seems to indicate that God allows sinfulness to mount to a certain level before He judges it. At the time of Abram, the Amorites (as exemplified by Mamre, Eschol, and Aner) do not appear to be overtly sinful, but by the time of the conquest of the land by Joshua, they apparently were. By that time the Amorites primarily occupied the land east of the Jordan (kingdoms of Sihon & Og).

Genesis 15:17-21

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

"a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch" - The smoking fire pot was probably the clay vessel that was used both to warm the tent during cold weather and to cook food on. This particular image that Abram observed had smoke coming out of it. Throughout the Bible God manifests Himself as smoke and fire.

“passed between these pieces” - It was a custom of the time that covenants were ratified by the two parties walking between the two halves of slain animals, signifying their commitment to keep the covenant on penalty of death. In this case, however, only God walked between the animal halves, indicating that He alone was making this covenant and He alone was responsible for keeping it.

“I gave this land” or “I have given this land”– Previously God had told Abram “**I will give** the land” but now that the covenant has been ratified He says, “**I have given** this land.”

“from the river of Egypt” – Some believe that this is a reference to the Nile river, while others believe it to be the brook of Egypt (the Wady el Arish) located on the western portion of the Sinai Peninsula. Still others believe it to be the eastern-most branch of the Nile which is called the Egypt River. Only during the reign of Solomon have the descendants of Abram occupied and/or controlled this entire area:

And Solomon had 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots, and 12,000 horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. And he ruled over all the kings from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. (2Chronicles 9:25-26)

“**the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.**” – Only the last four of these are identified elsewhere as Canaanites. These apparently were all the clans who occupied the land at the time that God gave it to Abram and his descendants.

So What?

So Let's Get Real - It's All About Faith!

Back in lesson 3 we were introduced to the idea that we are not rewarded for our obedience, we are rewarded for our faith. In this lesson we see that in spades!

It had been somewhere in the neighborhood of ten to 15 years since God had called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans. And remember what happened after they returned from Egypt, how Abram allowed Lot to choose the best of the land when their herds got so large that they couldn't continue to live together? Abram didn't complain when Lot chose the best and left the rest for him. After that unselfish transaction, God made two promises to Abram. The first was that all the land he could see, north, south, east, and west, would be given to him (including the land that Lot had selected for himself). God said, “**all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.**” Notice what He said, “**I will give to you and your offspring.**” Even before that, when God called Abram out of Haran he had promised Abram, “**I will make of you a great nation.**” Well, in order to have descendants and to become a great nation, one has to have children. So, the second promise God made to Abram after he and Lot had separated was:

I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. (Genesis 13:16)

In other words, God promised Abram that he would have so many descendants that they couldn't be counted. The only problem standing in the way of this promise was the fact that Abram still had no children.

Now, after a masterful military victory over Chedorlaomer's army, and Abram's unselfish treatment of the king of Sodom and all of his subjects, Abram had given God the glory. He hadn't taken credit for anything himself. So, after returning to the grove of Mamre, Abram probably shared with Sarai the details

of the military campaign and the encounter with the two kings just outside the walls of Salem, not sparing any of the details (except, perhaps, the blood and guts).

We all have battles. Sometimes we fight against things we can see. Sometimes we battle against our fallen sin nature. And sometimes, as the Apostle Paul tells us:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

The spiritual battles are often the most frustrating because we can't see who or what we are up against. Sometimes we don't even realize that we are in a battle. But, when we're in the midst of those battles, we often cry out to God for help and our ever faithful God is there to assist us. Once the battle is over, however, we frequently just go back to "normal" and forget about what God has just done for us. Oh, sure, we say thanks to God as we finally get the victory, but it usually stops there. So, let's pause for a minute and think about some of our past battles. How many times have you thanked God for past victories? How many times have you shared your experiences with others declaring how God won the victory for you? That's what God wants! He wants the glory. Faith isn't just believing what God will do, faith is also believing what God has done. Abram knew that, and he not only gave God the credit, he gave the best of the spoils of the victory completely to God, keeping nothing for himself.

Let's use our sanctified imagination again to understand what Abram might have experienced.

Upon returning from the victory, how comforting it must have felt for Abram to rest again in the arms of his beautiful, loving wife, but how much greater it must have been to have experienced the protection and blessing of a loving God. As he drifted off to sleep that night, he may have felt more at peace than he had in weeks, reliving the glorious victory and the kingly encounter. As the night grew on, however, he perhaps grew restless. He tossed and turned in fitful sleep as he envisioned Chedorlaomer and his armies marching against him and attacking him in the middle of the night as he had done to them. How would he ever be able to completely rest again knowing that this powerful king of the east could pounce on him at any moment? He would have to post a continual lookout among his shepherds just in case the army returned. He would have to keep all the fighting equipment in battle-ready condition. He would have to continually train his servants so their fighting skills would be ready at any moment. He would have to ... Finally, he fell back to sleep.

Suddenly, in the wee hours of the morning, Abram was awakened by someone standing in his tent. With his heart beating wildly in his chest, he finally realized that this was not just some man, it was a vision sent from God. That was when he heard the voice of God declare, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

Yes, God had been Abram's shield in the battle and certainly he could trust that God would continue to protect him in the future, but what did He mean by "your reward shall be very great." Abram knew that all he had was the result of God's handiwork. He possessed large flocks of sheep and herds of other animals. He had many slaves and household servants. He was far wealthier than anyone around. Nonetheless, he felt empty because he still didn't have a son. "But God," he said, "I don't have any children. If I died today, Eliezer would inherit everything I have. God, you promised to make my descendants so many that they couldn't be counted."

But wait a minute! Hold it right there! Do you realize what just happened? Without realizing it, in declaring Eliezer to be his heir, Abram was demonstrating his lack of faith in God's promise to make of him a great nation. Isn't it amazing how often we see a great spiritual victory in our lives quickly followed by a lack of faith? Remember Elijah? After defeating all of Jezebel's false prophets, she threatened his

life, but, instead of standing firm against her, Elijah ran for his life. And, when God finally confronted him about it,

He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, **and I, even I only, am left**, and they seek my life, to take it away." (1Kings 19:14)

Well, we know that wasn't true, for God had reserved to Himself seven thousand faithful followers, so Elijah wasn't alone. But, let's not be too hard on Abram or Elijah. How many times have you found yourself wondering where God was when you needed Him? And we have no excuse because we have God's Holy Word available to us at any time. What did Abram have?

It appears that Abram had the stars. Yes, the stars! Unfortunately for us, we live in massive civilization centers that have so much light produced that we can hardly see the stars at night. Not only that, but when it gets dark we go indoors. The only time we are able to see the stars in all their glory is when we get away from civilization. Then, sitting around a campfire to keep warm we look up and are awestruck at the mass of twinkling points of light that litter the sky. How many of the constellations can you identify? The Big Dipper, for sure. Orion, perhaps. Maybe even Canis Major, Tarus, or Scorpio. Did you know that some scholars believe there were 48 constellations that have been known to man since before the flood. Every night after Abram finished his day he was greeted by the starry skies above, and he probably reviewed the message they portrayed every chance he could. As we learned a few lessons back, tradition has it that Abram even taught the meaning of the starry constellations to the Egyptians while he and Sarai were there. So, it probably was no surprise to him when God invited him outside and asked him to recount the story told in the night sky. Once he had finished telling the story of sin, sacrifice, and redemption, identifying the final constellation depicting the coming Messiah, God said, "So shall your seed be!" In other words, God told Abram that the Messiah, the redeemer of mankind was going to be one of his descendants! And, in that moment, Abram believed what God said. And, because of his complete trust in what God had just promised him, God declared Abram to be righteous.

And, it's no different for you and me. Through His word, God promises us that if we believe that Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and that He rose from the dead, we will be saved. When we believe that truth, God declares us righteous, as righteous as Abram, as righteous as Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

But faith doesn't stop there. Our lives as Christians didn't end when we got saved; in fact, that's when our real lives began. And our faith didn't stop there either. The longer we walk this path as a child of God, the more opportunities we have to believe God's promises, the longer we have to study the Bible, the longer we have to learn who God is and what He wants from us. But, let's not forget that life is a faith walk. Let me repeat that; *let's not forget that life is a faith walk*. God wants us to walk by faith, not by sight. That doesn't mean that he wants us to sit in quiet meditation until He tells us specifically what things to do each day. He expects us to live our lives, but He wants us to live our lives for Him. In other words, in all we do, we need to include Him. But what does that really mean? Throughout the Bible our lives are depicted as walking down the path of life. We are constantly confronted with decisions as to which way to go, how fast to go, and when to stop and rest. As we walk through this life, we need to keep God by our side, or more accurately, we need to stay by His side. We need to constantly be talking with Him "pray without ceasing" and we need to be following His direction. The problem is that we can't hear him audibly! Abram heard the voice of God talking to him. We need to listen with our spirit as we read the Bible and as we pray. In fact, it has been said that prayer is more about listening to God than talking to God.

As we walk the path of life, let's commit ourselves to keeping our spiritual ears open. Let's try to spend each day in constant communication with God, and let's give Him thanks and praise for every step we take, and for every blessing (and trial) He brings into our lives.