

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ABRAHAM: LESSONS OF FAITH

- *God appears to Abram.* Acts 7:2-3 and Gen. 12:4 show us that God appeared to Abram and spoke the promises in Gen. 12:1-3 while he lived in Mesopotamia. This personal visit and word from God must have made a great impression upon Abram. God told Abram that he should be a blessing and that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:2-3). It must be that Abram had some realization that the peoples around him who worshipped idols needed salvation from God. He was surely aware of the flood judgment upon a sinful earth and the judgment at Babel upon rebellious man. When Abram came into the promised land God appeared to him a second time, Abraham built an altar in worship to the one true God (Gen. 12:7). He knew a Savior was needed and likely knew of the promise of the seed of Gen. 3:15. The statement in Gen. 12:3 that "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" was clarified in 22:18 to be "in your seed [your descendant]." And this "seed" is singular, referring to the coming Savior, Jesus Christ, as shown in Gal. 3:16.
- *Abram believes the gospel.* This background gives us a way to understand what happened in Gen. 15. At that time, God's words of reassurance came to Abram (Gen. 15:1). However, Abram was puzzled, as God had not given him an heir who was born from him. Abram wondered if his servant was to be his heir (Gen. 15:2-3). But God told him that one born from his own body would be his heir. God took Abram outside to see the stars and assured him that as the stars could not be counted, so his descendants would be (Gen. 15:5-6). At this point, Abram simply believed God's word and this faith was counted to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:6-8). The good news here was all about how God would produce the promised seed (a descendant of Abraham) which would bring in blessing for all peoples. Therefore, the Bible reveals that God preached the gospel to Abram in God's promises about the blessing through the seed (Gal. 3:6-8). The object of Abram's faith was the coming seed, Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself stated: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." (Jn. 8:56).
- *Spiritual lessons.* Gen. 16 shows how Abram and Sarai were tested in their faith. God allowed Sarai to be barren for a time, and her impatience led her to lose faith in God's promise. So she proposed to Abram that he should lie with Hagar. He too failed in his faith here. Hagar pictures the covenant of law, involving human works to be right with God (see Gal. 4:24-25). Abram's relations with Hagar shows how "the flesh" (meaning the natural, fallen man – Gen. 6:3; Gal. 3:2) works together with the law, trying to do works for God and be acceptable to Him. But the flesh trying to carry out things for God always ends in failure and spiritual death (Rom. 7:5). Ishmael was born when Abram was 86 years old. After this failure, the word of God is silent for 13 years about Abram's life. We should never try to carry out God's works or plans by the energy of our natural ability, no matter how capable we may seem to be naturally. God's work is always to be carried out by His power, His grace, through trust in God and His word. Paul said that he labored more than all others, but not by his own natural power, but by God's grace (1 Cor. 15:10). God finally appeared to Abram when he was 99 years old (17:1). At that time God said: "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly." (Gen. 17:1-2) God's name here really means the "All-sufficient God." In other words, God was telling Abram that He would be everything to Abram, all that Abram needed. By walking before God, and depending fully upon Him and His promises, Abram would find his strength and ability in God, not in himself. Abram believed God, even that he would have a son at 100 years old, according to God's word, and he did (17:15-21; 21:1-8; Rom. 4:18-21). It was at this time that God changed his name, indicating a change in character. Abram meant "exalted father," but Abraham means "father of a multitude." The old name, Abram, indicated the life of the old person, the self-life, the natural life of Abram. But, the new name, Abraham, indicates a new life empowered by God's grace. Such a life can give spiritual life to others. God set circumcision as a sign of His covenant with Abraham. Circumcision indicates a cutting off of the flesh, signifying the old life of man, which is accomplished through our identification with Christ in His crucifixion (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:24; Col. 2:11). Our old life being crucified with Christ and our new life being lived out is accomplished by a walk of faith (Gal. 2:20).