

Trusting Promises

Key Verse: *“Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.”*
—Genesis 17:5

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 17

HOW OFTEN HAVE PROMISES been made and not kept? We find that only God can be trusted to keep the promises he makes.

In our lesson for today, we find God appearing to Abram when he was 99 years old, and changing his name to Abraham. God was setting a high standard for his servant when he said, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect.” (Gen. 17:1)

We know that none can be actually ‘perfect’ in their walk with God. We were brought forth “in iniquity” and “in sin” did our “mother conceive” us. (Ps. 51:5) Also, we are told, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” (Rom. 3:10) What is meant then by this command of God to Abram to walk before him and be perfect? One must strive to be righteous in all his acts before God and man. “As he [man] thinketh in his heart, so is he.”—Prov. 23:7

When God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, it was significant. Abram means ‘high or lofty one,’ while Abraham means ‘Father of a multitude.’ This is connected with the meaning of the covenant that was to be made with Abraham, when God said, “My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.” (Gen. 17:4) His promise was, “I will make thee exceeding

fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.”—vs. 6

Then God said, “I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.”—vs. 7

This was an everlasting covenant, a covenant that would span ages, and encompass all of Abraham’s descendants, if he was faithful in following God’s instructions. We find he was faithful. See Genesis 22:1-18. God included the promise to give “all the land of Canaan” for a homeland for Abraham’s seed.—Gen. 17:8

There is a secondary covenant, called the covenant of circumcision, that Abraham and his people were to keep. (vss. 10-14) The cutting of the foreskin of the males was to be the mark, the setting apart, of Abraham’s people. The thought of cutting of the flesh also has a much higher meaning to God’s people. True circumcision is the cutting away from all fleshly hopes, aims, and desires. We read, “He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”—Rom. 2:28,29

God then promises Abraham that he is to have a son. “Then Abraham fell on his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” (Gen. 17:17) Abraham already had borne Ishmael, and he asked God to bless him. God tells him that Ishmael would be blessed, but that his covenant would be made with Isaac.—vss. 20,21

In all this we can be sure that God not only makes, but keeps, his promises. Truly we should echo the sentiments of Abraham and Sarah, that they “judged him [God] faithful who had promised.”—Heb. 11:11 ■