

ABRAM BECOMES ABRAHAM

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Lesson: Genesis 17: 1-9

You remember how Abram loved and trusted the Lord? He loved Him so much that he was willing to do all that the Lord told him to do—even to leave his home and travel to a far country. And this was very hard to do, especially as he did not know where the Lord would lead him. But he set out, and was brought to the Land of Canaan, he, and his entire household. He knew that the Lord his God would not lead him to evil. He was willing to follow and obey whatever the Lord told him to do.

Now Abram took Lot with him, for Lot was the son of Abram's brother, so he was Abram's nephew. So Abram, and his household, and his flocks of sheep; and Lot and his household, and his flocks of sheep made a very large tribe of people and possessions. And when they came to the land of Canaan they found that their shepherds and herdsmen fought together trying to find the best pastures for their flocks and herds. Now Abram and Lot were good men, and they did not want to quarrel. They wanted their servants to live together in peace. So when Abram found that they did fight over the pastureland, he told Lot they must separate and find their own homes and lands. So he took Lot up on a mountain and said: "Choose which land you want to dwell in, and when you have chosen, I will take the other part." Lot chose to live in the lowlands, on the plains, near the great city of Sodom. But Abram pitched his tent on the plain of Mamre, toward the hills. This brought peace to these people.

Again the Lord appeared to Abram, and He promised him that he would be given a son, whose descendants would become great. But Abram and Sarai were old, and they were afraid that the Lord could not keep His promise to them because Sarai was too old (they felt), to have a son. So Sarai brought her maid, Hagar, to raise a son for Abram. And Hagar's son was called Ishmael. But the Lord spoke to Abram again, and said that although Ishmael would become the father of a nation, it was not Ishmael that He referred to as the heir of Abram, the father of a chosen people. Instead, He said that Sarai would be given a son, Isaac, and he was to be the true heir of Abram, and partaker in the Lord's covenant. He was to be the father of the Israelitish nation.

Then a strange thing happened. The Lord changed Abram and Sarai's names. He said that Abram's name should be changed to Abraham, which meant "Father of a multitude." And Sarai's name was to be changed to "Sarah."

Now we know that a name signifies the quality of a person—everything that we know about someone. Let us think of a name for a moment—the name of someone you know. Immediately you bring to mind that person. Or let us think for a moment of the name “Mother.” Everyone of us thinks of our own mother, and she seems to be present in our mind as we think of all the things we know and love about our mothers. So a name stands for the whole quality—everything that we know about a person.

Now Abram had loved the Lord and obeyed Him, and followed wherever the Lord led. So he became a better and stronger and more faithful person as he learned to follow according to the Lord's direction. His qualities had gradually changed. In Ur of the Chaldees, before he began to follow the Lord, he had worshipped false gods—idols of stone and wood. But now he worshipped the Lord God alone. He would not serve idols in any way. And so his spiritual quality had changed as a result of his obedience to the Lord. And his wife had changed with him. So the Lord changed his name to express this new quality. He gave them part of His own Holiest Name, “Jehovah,” to add to their name. He added the letter “H” to the name of Abram, and made it Abraham, and He added this letter “H” to the name of Sarai, and her name became Sarah. Now the Lord added something of His own name to theirs, to show that their new nature or quality had been changed as they put on His teachings—as they learned to follow His leading more and more fully. Their new names stood for their new quality, the new nature that had been given them because of their obedience to the Lord their God.

So Abraham obeyed all that the Lord told him to do, and he and Sarah looked forward to the time when the Lord would give them a son, Isaac, through whom the Lord would establish His people, and His church.

Each one of us must build our nature, our character, here on earth, to prepare for heaven. And first of all we are apt to be selfish, and do some things that are not good. We might turn against some of the Lord's teachings. We might disobey our parents, and fight with one another. But the Lord doesn't want us to do these things. He does not want us to be selfish and evil, to hurt others, or tell lies, or disobey, or to be unhappy ourselves. He knows that the only way we can prepare for heaven is to learn His commandments, and love Him and His teachings, and try to do good and useful things, and try to be obedient and cheerful. And we can only learn these things from the Word, when we read it, or hear about it from our parents and teachers. The Lord wants us to add to our life something from His nature or quality for everything of the Word is part of the Lord's quality or name.

If we will try to obey His teachings, then He can prepare us for heaven, and give us happiness. So it is said that as we learn to do the Lord's wishes, helping others, and doing our work well, then He will write a new name upon us—the name that describes our new heavenly character, which is a gift from the

Lord—part of His character added to us. Thus as Abram's name was changed to show that now he was truly a servant of the Lord, so our nature will be changed to know that great happiness and usefulness of heaven. *Amen.*