

more than that. Yet in Genesis 15, when Abraham was enduring depression and discouragement, the Lord directed him to look at the stars, saying: "Look now toward heaven, and tell (count) the stars, if thou be able to number them." And he said unto him, "So shall thy seed be" (Genesis 15:5).

This must have impressed Abraham as a very strange promise. He could hardly have been ignorant of the fact that all the stars that can be seen with the naked eye from any place in the Near East would total well under 4,000 (and no one in that day would have any reason to think that stars existed that could not be seen with the naked eye). Four thousand might appear like a large number of dots, but it would hardly represent "a great nation."

Abraham may have thought: "Look at the wonderful beauty of the stars. God has promised that I am going to have descendants who will shine like the stars, and will be indeed a heavenly progeny." Yet as he thought it over, he would know that this was a mere rationalization. After all, God had said: "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if thou be able to number them;... so shall thy seed be." It was not a difficult task to number the stars that could be seen with the naked eye. More than three thousand years were yet to pass before the telescope would be invented and it would be possible to learn that there are far more stars than the naked eye can see.

In Genesis 17:5 God promised Abraham that he would become "a father of many nations." This must indeed have seemed incongruous <sup>to</sup> Abraham, after the comparison of his descendants to the number of the stars. Four thousand descendants would not be enough for one great nation, and certainly not enough for many nations.