

Abraham was acutely conscious of the representation of the promised posterity as being as numerous as the grains of dust. When God said the same thing about the stars, Abraham had to take it on faith, trusting that the figure that God had used must be a true one, even though he could not see how this could be so. The very next verse says that Abraham believed in the Lord and He counted it to him for righteousness.

More than a thousand years passed, and Ptolemy wrote his great book in which the stars were listed and catalogued. Any scholar reading Ptolemy's work would know about how many stars there were. Surely if one of these intellectuals had happened to see the Book of Genesis and read the statement to Abraham in which the number of the stars was used as a figure for a tremendous multitude, he would have been inclined to hoot with derision. By this time knowledge of the great culture of Babylonia had largely disappeared. The learned man would probably have said: "What ignorant people lived in those days, to write a book that would use the number of the stars as a figure for an innumerable multitude!"

More than thirteen hundred additional years passed before the answer to the problem was seen. Then a Dutch technician put two lenses together and produced a telescope, and Galileo in Italy used the telescope to examine the stars. To his surprise he saw that in addition to the four thousand stars visible to the naked eye, the telescope revealed the presence of thousands of additional ones. As telescopes were improved, more and more stars became visible, until today it is known that the number of stars in the heavens is actually far greater than the number of grains of sand on the entire globe. The figure that in the light of the knowledge of Abraham's day seemed a poor one for an innumerable posterity is now easily seen to be even better for the purpose than the figure of the grains of sand.