

Genesis 15:1-6 • Abraham's Dual Reward

Introduction

Have you ever thought about the possibility that even though God has revealed your life's direction, that there is still some work He's going to do in your life to properly prepare you to successfully travel that path? In the life of Abraham we are provided an example of how knowledge of the end goal is not enough; there's a process of personal refinement. With God, the means never justify the ends, and the process of working towards the goal is often as important—if not more so—than the goal. God answers prayer and then begins to work on the individual to make them ready for the answer. When the answer is not immediately revealed, it's not that God is late or changed His mind—it's usually that we are still a work in progress.

¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying,

“Do not fear, Abram,
I am a shield to you;
Your reward shall be very great.”

²Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.”

⁴Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” ⁵And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

⁶Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

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[Read v.1-6]

Q: In verse 1, we find the phrase, “After these things....” After what things?

A: “These things” point to the events of the previous chapter. Chapter 14 tells of a local uprising that took place around Abraham and inadvertently involved his nephew Lot. Certain city-states, including Sodom, the city that Lot had settled in, tired of paying tribute to more powerful kings, formed an alliance and rebelled against a more dominant alliance led by Chedorlaomer. A battle ensued in the Valley of Siddim, an area somewhere near the Dead Sea. The rebels lost and their cities were plundered. Part of the plunder involved capturing civilians and taking them back to become future slaves. Lot, a wealthy citizen of Sodom, and his family became part of the plunder.

Fortunately, Abram heard of his nephew's plight and gathering together his own small army, together with militia from neighboring cities, journeyed 150 miles north and rescued Lot, his relatives and possessions. This rescue against a much larger force was nothing short of miraculous.

Such a military action, however, put Abram at great risk for future reprisals by King Chedorlaomer and his allies. Upon his return, therefore, Abram was greeted by the King of Sodom and Melchizedek, king of Salem (the city later known as Jerusalem). They recognized that Abram was a blessed man, for only someone blessed by “God Most High” could have accomplished such a rescue.

[Read v.1]

Q: In what manner did “the word of the Lord” come to Abram? (Compare this to other encounters Abram has had with God in 12:1, 12:7, and 13:14).

*Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you;
—Genesis 12:1*

*The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.
—Genesis 12:7*

*The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward;
—Genesis 13:14*

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A: God appeared to Abram in a vision. Why God appeared to Abram in a vision is not clear, but one possible reason rests in God's opening words, "Do not fear...." On no previous encounter of Abram with God is the word "fear" used. But Abram may have been afraid that by directly confronting someone as powerful and vengeful as Chedorlaomer, Abram was jeopardizing God's previous promises, particularly the promise in 12:7, "To your descendants I will give this land." It is also possible that Abram may have become very afraid that God Himself would be angry with him for the actions he took in chapter 14.

Application questions:

1. *How can fear interfere with faith?*

2. *Is there anything you do presently or have done in the past that you believe may jeopardize God's promises for you? (E.g., is there a sin you've committed that you believe may be causing you to not receive God's blessings?)*

Q: In light of the above, why does God reassure Abram with the words, "I am a shield to you"?

A: God is assuring Abram that no matter how great the strength of the enemy, God's strength is greater. God Himself will be Abram's shield. Not only does Abram need not fear his enemy, neither does he need to fear God. God is **for** him, not **against** him.

Application: *Read the last phrase of Matthew 28:20 and also Romans 8:35-39. Do you feel that God is for you or against you? Is that fear based on feeling or fact? Read on.*

teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
—Matthew 28:20

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
—Romans 8:35-39

Q: What else does God tell Abram in verse one?

A: "Your reward shall be very great." The NIV translates the verse as "I am your shield, your very great reward." While this translation is possible, the more probable "Your reward shall be very great" is based on Abram's response in verse 2. God surprises Abram by informing him that instead of a reprisal from Chedorlaomer, Abram can expect a reward from God. This leads to the second question about this phrase.

[Continued on next page.]

Q: Why does God promise a “reward” to Abram? Was it because he gave a tenth of the spoil to Melchizedek, because he conquered his enemies, or because he risked everything to win back his nephew?

A: God promises a reward to Abram—that is, something special over and above the land—because Abram was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his relative Lot.

When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

--Genesis 14:14

Lot became a double captive. When the land was divided between Abram and Lot, “Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan” (13:11) which at that time was “well-watered everywhere” (v. 10). The principle commercial city of the area, however, Sodom, was the also the most wicked city and destined for judgment. Its lure, however, made Lot a captive to commerce and worldly values in spite of its wickedness; thus, he was a captive to the world. He became a double captive when taken by Chedorlaomer.

Figuratively, Lot represents mankind held captive to the world and eventually to the Enemy. Abraham pre-figures God’s rescue of mankind from the world and from the “snare of the devil.” (1 Timothy 3:7) Unbeknownst to Abram, he acted as God acts; rescuing the helpless from bondage.

²Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.”

⁴Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.”

[Read v.2-3]

Q: When God announces to Abram that he has a great reward coming, what reward does Abram immediately think of in verses 2 & 3?

A: Abram immediately recalls God’s opening promise in 12:1: “I will make your name great...” Abraham has probably experienced many years of disappointment over not having born any children; that is, heirs. Yet remembering that God will make him a “great nation,” he logically concludes that someone living in his household will be his heir.

[Read v.4]

Q: What does God say Abram’s reward will be in verse 4?

A: One who will come forth from his own body; that is, a direct descendant of his flesh.

Application questions:

1. Is there often a difference between how we expect or want God to bless us than how he **actually does** bless us?

2. In what ways do we rush after the lesser blessings of our own design than waiting patiently for the greater blessings of God’s design? How does this principle apply to dating, courtship and marriage? How does this principle apply to perseverance and patience?

3. How do our ideas frequently differ from God’s plans for our lives?

⁵And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

[Read v.5]

Q: In verse 5, how does Abram respond to God in terms of God’s promise in verse 4?

A: He doesn’t respond verbally. He doesn’t ask how or when or why.

⁶Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

[Read v.6]

Q: How does Abram respond to God's promise in verse 6?

A: He simply believed God. He trusted God concerning the promise God made.

Q: What does God do for Abram in response to his faith?

A: God declares Abram "righteous."

Q: What is the meaning of righteous?

A: It simply means "being right with God." For all of Abram's past, present and future faults, he will be in a right standing with God simply on the basis that he trusted in, relied upon, and adhered to God's promise.

Q: Now, how many rewards did Abram actually receive, and which of the rewards was personally greater?

A: Abram received two rewards. His first reward was for rescuing his nephew as if he were his own son: his reward was to bear a son of his own flesh. His second reward was for believing God's promise: his reward was to be declared right with God.

Applications:

- 1. Of the two rewards, which do you think was personally the more important to Abram in the long run? Which would you rather have?*
- 2. Is it possible that simply by believing God you can have both rewards?*