

Series: God & Abraham #1276

Title: Genesis 15.1

Abram Feared

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. I am glad you are here, as we begin another new week with one another. And we return now to this ancient yet extraordinarily relevant text in Genesis chapter 15, and verse 1. You have noticed that we are making an investment of time in this verse, because it is *loaded* in nutrients that *we* need to receive from God. If you do not think that Abram and his life and times have any relevance for you, then I urge you to be with us all this week. And I certainly hope you were listening for the last couple of weeks, at least.

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Let me get this nutrient rich text back on your mind after the weekend. I hope you can join me in your Bible at Genesis 15, verse 1, **"After 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.'"** We have covered quite a bit of what the Lord, I believe a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ, says to Abram, and on Friday we were talking about how these words, "Do not fear, Abram" sound so much like what Christ says to His people. That is certainly applicable to us.

What or who do you fear? Fear is a very real, a very human emotion. And all of us experience this in our lives. Actually many people live in a constant state of fear. But for the person who believes God, for the person who lives *in* Christ Jesus, and for the person who has the Holy Spirit abiding within – there is nothing, there is no one to fear. In the Bible God told Jacob not to fear, God told Daniel not to fear, He told Joseph (the human father of Jesus) not to be afraid, Zacharias was told not to fear, Mary (the human mother of Jesus) was told not to fear, Paul was told not to fear, and the early church was told not to fear, and on and on this goes. On Friday we looked at other examples.

So, what are you afraid of? Whom do you fear? Think about this as we continue, and I want to draw your attention to this. The Hebrew word here for "fear" – this is not the first time it is used in the Bible. Back in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 10 the first man, Adam, says this to God when the Lord comes to find him after Adam's sin. I am reading Genesis 3, verse 10, **"[Adam] said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.'"**

That word for "afraid" is the same word used in Genesis 15, verse 1 for "fear." *But*, here in Genesis 15, this is the first time in the Bible that "Do not fear" is used. So, we have another first! While the Lord will repeatedly tell His people "do not fear," here (to Abram) is the first time He says it. What we learn from all of Scripture is that in the relationship between God and us there will be many occasions in which we need to hear from God that we should not fear. We must not be afraid.

The human experience in the Bible is the same human experience we now have outside of the Bible, and thus the Word of God speaks to us in our present circumstances. I want you to know that if you are afraid, you are welcome to come before the One and Only Living God and to find in Him your freedom from fear. And, now we will see *how* God proves to Abram that he should not be afraid. Listen for clues as to *why* you can do the same in your own dynamic relationship with this same Almighty God.

Going back to Genesis 15, verse 1, I immediately notice something that I find insightful into the being of God. The Lord says to Abram "Do not fear" and quite obviously this should be enough. God speaks. We listen. We believe what God says. *However*, notice that God knows He is dealing a human person, a weak man in Abram, and so the Lord goes further. And He offers Abram two proofs that Abram must not fear. *Why* should Abram believe God and not live in fear? Here's *why*.

Please, please notice the way in which God gives *Himself*, personally to this man Abram. Verse 1 continues, "I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." The Lord tells Abram, first, "I am a shield to you." God is the shield. And the Lord tells Abram, second, "Your reward shall be very great." God is the reward. Now Abram has two reasons, two proofs, for *why* he must not fear. God knows us better

than we know ourselves and He is completely aware that we people need very firm assurances. And so the Lord offers Himself, personally and unreservedly, to this man Abraham.

Now, what I want to do (and this will carry us into tomorrow), what I want to do is to first identify what Abram feared. Then, I want to come back to God's promises: to be Abram's shield and to be Abram's very great reward. The reason for me putting these thoughts to you in this order is because I think when you see that Abram had a concrete fear, you will then be able to identify what is your concrete fear (or fears, plural) and you will find that identifying that (or those) will help you in seeing how God will deliver you from that which makes you afraid. May the Holy Spirit speak to you through what is written here.

In order for God to say, "Do not fear, Abram" it makes sense that Abram was wrestling with some fear. And it seems obvious to me what that was, but you would be amazed at how many of those who comment on this passage want to associate that fear with what happened in the previous chapter (Genesis 14). If you studied that chapter with us, then you remember Abram and his small army of trained men defeated the armies of the northeast, rescuing Lot and the booty. So, the question is posed, did Abram fear retaliation from those armies? Did he think they would return and crush him?

And concerning when God says, "Your reward shall be very great," did God mean to compensate financially for the treasure that Abram had declined to accept from the surviving and rescued king of Sodom? Remember verses 22 and 23 of Genesis 14, **"Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, ²³ that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, 'I have made Abram rich.'"** Is Genesis 15 now God saying, "I'll make up for what you lost in your refusal to accept monetary reward from the king of Sodom. I will now reward you with more material possessions and wealth. Do not be afraid, Abram." Friends, I do not think so.

I believe what Abram fears *and* how God responds to that fear is not based on what happened previously in chapter 14, but rather what is present in chapter 15. Abram's specific fear was that he was going to be childless. And when the Lord says, "I am a shield to you" and "Your reward shall be very great," what God is addressing is the fear of being without a male heir, a son. Let me prove this by reading ahead to verses 2 and 3 of Genesis chapter 15.

"Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' ³ And Abram said, 'Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.'" This, as we shall in greater detail, is Abram's lament, his complaint, and really his *fear* articulated to the Lord God. "O dear God, I am afraid that since my wife Sarai is not pregnant and we have no children, and we are rapidly aging, I fear that my servant Eliezer, he of Damascus, must be my heir." This is the concrete fear (in verses 2 and 3). And so the Lord gets ahead of Abram in verse 1 by pre-empting with two concrete promises. "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."

I believe we have to link verse 1 to verses 2 and 3 of *this same chapter*.

God always speaks specifically to our concrete and very real fears. And we will return here and talk more about this tomorrow because God Is.

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