

Genesis 15:1-6

After these events the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. He said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

²Abram said, “LORD God what can you give me, since I remain childless, and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³Abram also said, “Look, you have given me no offspring, so a servant born in my house will be my heir.”

⁴Just then, the word of the LORD came to him. God said, “This man will not be your heir, but instead one who will come out of your own body will be your heir.” ⁵The LORD then brought him outside and said, “Now look toward the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” He said to Abram, “This is what your descendants will be like.” ⁶Abram believed in the LORD, and the LORD credited it to him as righteousness.

By Faith...

I.

At what point in life do you just want to settle down and be done? Retire? There comes a point when you just want to reflect back on a lifetime of achievements—and perhaps a few hiccups along the way—and have a sense of satisfaction that everything has gone at least reasonably well. What is that age, do you think?

I would imagine that most people want to start looking back and reflecting before the age of 75. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how long Abram and Sarai had been married when he was 75, but they still had no children. It was at the age of 75 that God told Abram to pack up his belongings and move. There was no satellite navigation system in the dashboard of his camels, nor a hand-held Garmin GPS unit. He didn't even have a map, not that it would have done him any good since God didn't give him so much as the destination, just “Go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great... ³ All the families of the earth will be blessed in you.” (Genesis 12:1-3, EHV).

Abram packed up his wife and belongings; he gathered his servants and all their belongings, and even convinced his nephew Lot and his family to go along. They made it to this previously-unknown-destination without maps or navigational aids other than the Lord. God appeared to him again and told Abram: “I will give this land to your descendants” (Genesis 12:7, EHV). Well...God had gotten him here according to his promise. Abram believed that he would have the land as an inheritance, just as he had believed God's promise about becoming a great nation.

In our Second Lesson for today, the writer to the Hebrews tells us: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance, and he left without knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8, EHV). He picked up and moved, knowing not where. He trusted God's promise that he would have descendants, even though he was 75 and didn't have any children. That's *some* faith Abraham had, isn't it?

Years went by. Things happened. Hebrews summarizes some of those events with just this statement: “By faith he lived as a stranger in the Promised Land, as if it did not belong to him, dwelling in tents” (Hebrews 11:9, EHV).

This is the point at which the First Lesson from Genesis picks up the account. “After these events the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. He said, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward’” (Genesis 15:1, EHV). During the events of those years he had already spent in Canaan, God had already proven to Abram that he

was his shield. Abram had been able to defeat enemies and had prospered in the land. Now God tells him that *God himself* is Abram's very great reward.

That's great. Just great. What, in fact, could be better than *that*? God is your reward? God is your greatest treasure? That is *awesome!*

II.

Thanks, Lord, I realize just how awesome it is that you are my great reward, my most treasured possession, the best thing I have in life, but I've got a couple questions. "Abram said, 'LORD God what can you give me, since I remain childless, and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?'³ Abram also said, 'Look, you have given me no offspring, so a servant born in my house will be my heir'" (Genesis 15:2-3, EHV).

By faith Abraham... That's what the writer to the Hebrews said in the Second Lesson. By faith. Does faith have questions? Does faith waver? Does faith wonder?

"Just then, the word of the LORD came to him. God said, 'This man will not be your heir, but instead one who will come out of your own body will be your heir'⁵ The LORD then brought him outside and said, 'Now look toward the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' He said to Abram, 'This is what your descendants will be like'" (Genesis 15:4-5, EHV).

God made the promise clearer than he had to Abram a few years earlier. The heir who would receive all Abram's property wasn't going to be some servant that he would adopt to make him the official heir, but a child from his own body. This was big news.

"Abram believed in the LORD, and the LORD credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6, EHV).

Does faith have questions? Does faith wonder? Abram believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

But there were more hiccups to come in Abram's life of faith. More years went by, and still there was no son. He had to wonder, "Did I hear God correctly? Did I understand what he meant? Maybe he meant something different." In time Abram and Sarai were convinced it must be the case, because neither of them were getting any younger. Sarai encouraged Abram to father a child through Sarai's servant Hagar.

24 years after he had moved to Canaan and when Ishmael, the son born to Hagar, was 13 years old, God repeated his promise. He renamed Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah and made this promise: "I will bless her and even give you a son by her. Yes, I will bless her, and she will be a mother of nations. Kings of many peoples will come from her" (Genesis 17:16, EHV).

Does faith have questions? Does faith wonder?

Upon hearing the promise reiterated, Abraham tried to bargain with God. Don't promise the impossible, Lord. It's enough that you have given me Ishmael. "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart, 'Will a child be born to someone who is one hundred years old? Will Sarah, who is ninety years old, give birth?'"¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, 'Oh, let Ishmael live in your presence!'" (Genesis 17:17-18, EHV).

Does faith have questions? Does faith wonder? Abraham's did. I'll bet yours has had questions and wavered and wondered from time to time, too.

III.

"Faith is being sure about what we hope for, being convinced about things we do not see.² For by this faith the ancients were commended in Scripture" (Hebrews 11:1-2, EHV). "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward" (Genesis 15:1, EHV).

How *can* you be sure of what you hope for? How *can* you be convinced about things you

do not see? How *can* you look to God as your shield and your very great reward?

Faith isn't something you *do*, faith is something you *have*. Faith isn't something you *produce*, faith is something you have been *given*.

"Abram believed in the LORD, and the LORD credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6, EHV).

Abram, who later became Abraham, believed impossible things. Some of those impossible things Abraham was privileged to see in his lifetime. Isaac was born—the son who was the son of the promise. Some things Abraham had to look forward to with the eyes of God-given faith, like the fact that the Savior would eventually come from the line of descendants that started with Isaac. He had to simply believe that this eventual Christchild would be his Savior, and that all nations of the earth—all *people* of the earth—would be blessed by that One descendant who would pay for the sins of us all.

"Abram believed in the LORD, and the LORD credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6, EHV). That's the same faith *you* have in the same Savior Abraham trusted thousands of years before that Savior, Jesus, was born. Jesus lived and died to pay for the sins and questions and doubts his earthly ancestor Abraham had, as well as for the sins and questions and doubts Abraham's spiritual descendants like you and I have.

Abraham got his faith the same way you and I get ours—God gave it to him. "Faith is being sure about what we hope for, being convinced about things we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1, EHV). You can't have that kind of faith in God unless it is given to you. You can't be sure about the hope of heaven, or convinced of the salvation won on the cross by Jesus that you weren't there to see unless that faith has been planted in your heart by God himself.

IV.

Abraham learned things along the way. His faith grew stronger. As the years rolled along, he was allowed to see more and more fulfillments of God's promises.

God tested Abraham. (Genesis 22). God directed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the son who was the bearer of the promise of a Messiah to come. Abraham had days to think about what he was doing as a small company of people journeyed to the place God required him to go for the sacrifice. Abraham told no one of God's command, only he knew what was really going on. Isaac lay on the altar of sacrifice. The knife was held unwaveringly in Abraham's uplifted hand, when God said: "Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Genesis 22:12, EHV). The writer to the Hebrews says of Abraham's faith in that moment: "He reasoned that God also had the ability to raise him from the dead, and in a figurative sense, Abraham did receive him back from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19, EHV).

Does faith have questions? Does faith wonder? Is faith uncertain at times? How strong Abraham's faith had become! How unwavering it was by the time God's direction came to sacrifice Isaac. It grew and became stronger because Abraham continued to trust in the Lord. He continued to look to the promises of God as sure and certain. "[Abraham] was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10, EHV).

Continue to put your hope in the Lord and his promises, even while you ask questions of God. Keep on listening to the Lord and his promises. Keep on growing stronger in your faith that is sure of what we hope for and convinced about things we do not see.

The sure hope of heaven is there because of your Lord Jesus. God bless your life of faith while you look forward to the city that has foundations—the city of eternal bliss in heaven with God. Continue to live by faith. Amen.