

# Genesis 15:1—God Is Our Shield, Our Exceedingly Great Reward

## Memory Verse

Genesis 15:6 NKJV—*Justification by faith*

And he [Abram] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 15:6 NLT

And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

## Outline (Genesis 15:1)

1. Abraham becomes discouraged and afraid after his great victory: Trials, temptations, and discouragement often follow after victory
2. Application: What does God promise to shield believers from in the New Testament?

## **Genesis 15:1-20 NKJV**

**After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”**

**<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” <sup>3</sup> Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”**

**<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” <sup>5</sup> Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”**

**<sup>6</sup> And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.**

**<sup>7</sup> Then He said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”**

**<sup>8</sup> And he said, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”**

**<sup>9</sup> So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” <sup>10</sup> Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. <sup>11</sup> And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.**

**<sup>12</sup> Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup> Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup> But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”**

**<sup>17</sup> And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.**

**<sup>18</sup> On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying:**

**“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—<sup>19</sup> the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”**

## **1. Abraham becomes discouraged and afraid after his great victory: Trials, temptations, and discouragement often follow after victory**

**Genesis 15:1 NKJV**

**After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”**

*God speaks to Abram’s fears and doubts with a promise*

v 1 **After these things:** What had just happened to Abram? Here is a summary of the previous chapter. Four kings from the north, from four kingdoms/countries located along the Euphrates river, had defeated the 5 kings of the plain, the rich, fertile land south and east of the dead sea. This area is where the people of Sodom and Gomorrah lived, and of course, Lot had decided to make his home among them, because that’s where he could make the most money. The four kings from the north had taken Lot and many of the inhabitants of the plain captive and were travelling back home to their countries around the Euphrates river. Abram learns that Lot has been captured, and then completes a daring night time raid—his “army” of 318 household servants defeats the combined armies of 4 powerful kings who have just wiped out many other nations. He brings Lot, the other captives, and all the spoil back home. He then meets with Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, who brought out bread and wine, and blesses Abram. Abram then gives one tenth (10%) of all the spoils of the victory to Melchizedek. Finally, Abram chooses to forfeit what is rightfully his, and gives all the rest of the spoils of war back to the king of Sodom, not keeping anything for himself.

v 1 **The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:** This time, God communicates to Abram by a vision. A vision is similar to a dream, but you are awake.

*Trials and temptations often follow after victory*

v 1 **Saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram:** Abram had good reason to be afraid from a human perspective. Abram had just defeated four power hungry and brutal kings—an amazing victory. However, they would surely be thinking of how to get back at Abraham. Abram had no form of protection—he didn’t live in a city where he could hide behind walls and locked gates—he lived in a tent in the countryside. Again, from a human perspective, he was all alone and vulnerable.

This emotional low that follows a spiritual high is very common. Jame Montgomery Boice explains this well.

“That God said, “Fear not,” to Abram indicates Abram was fearful. This is not surprising. After all, in the wake of his spiritual victory in resisting the material temptation of the riches offered him by the king of Sodom, as well as his military victory in rescuing Lot, Abram hit an emotional slump. This happens. Challenge often follows victory. Think of Jesus. When He was baptised in the Jordan, He heard a voice from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.” Then, the Holy Spirit came upon Him and empowered Him for ministry. (Matthew 3:16, 17). It was a great day. But immediately following this, He was driven into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan, to wrestle against the enemy for forty days (Matthew 4). Also, think of Elijah after the victory at Mt Carmel—he was really down. Therefore, don’t be surprised, if, after you experience victory spiritually, like Abram you face a time of discouragement emotionally.

“Fear not.” This is the first time this glorious command appears in Scripture. But it is certainly not the last...

- “Fear not,” the angel said to a flock of frightened shepherds (Luke 2:10).
- “Fear not,” Jesus said to a crew of seasick disciples (Mark 4:40).
- “Fear not,” the angel said to a disheartened Paul (Acts 27:24).”

Finding comfort and security in the promises of God

v 1 **I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward:** God doesn’t just say “Fear not”, or “don’t be afraid”—God always give us a good reason to not be afraid, to put away our fear. Consider what God promised Abram—it was exactly what Abram needed to hear.

Since God is our shield, we can enjoy the peace of God in all circumstances

v 1 **I am your shield:** God promised to be Abram’s protection against the retribution of the four kings from the Euphrates river region. Obviously God is much more powerful than any human army, so this would have been a great comfort to Abram—he could sleep well at night—Abram could experience both peace *with* God, and the peace *of* God. As believers, Jesus has also promised us this gift of the peace of God. Like Abram, the disciples were very fearful—their association with Jesus meant that they had many powerful enemies. Also, Jesus had just told them that He would be crucified—their world was falling apart. But Jesus didn't leave them in that fearful and helpless state. Instead, He gives them a gift that the world cannot take away.

John 14:27 AMP

Peace I leave with you; My [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. [Stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed; and do not permit yourselves to be fearful and intimidated and cowardly and unsettled.]

John 14:27 NLT

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”

John 14:27 HCSB

“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Your heart must not be troubled or fearful.

First reward: complete joy, peace, satisfaction, and contentment

v 1 **I am... your exceedingly great reward:** As we have learned previously, Abram struggled with covetousness—money or wealth had been more important to him than obeying God, and even his wife. But now Abram had given up his right to a lot of wealth—the combined wealth of five kings and their kingdoms (the five kings of the plain, including Sodom and Gomorrah). Abram was right to do this so he would not be in debt to the king of Sodom, and therefore be under the king’s influence. However, it would have been hard for Abram to let go of all that wealth. So what does God say? “**I am... your reward**”. God promises Abram something so much greater than material wealth—Himself.

“God told Abram that though he had sacrificed for His sake, he would not be the loser for it. God would more than make up what Abram gave unto the LORD.” (David Guzik)

What does this mean? Simply put, while wealth can buy some pleasure and satisfaction, it is both temporary and very limited. However, God offers something so much better—joy and satisfaction that is both eternal and completely satisfying. Of course, this is found in relationship with God. Happy is the man who comes to the place where he discovers that

God is all he needs—he will give up seeking those things that can only partially and temporarily satisfy. Abram has given up a lot of physical wealth, and now, as a result, he will be much more able to experience, as much as a man can while living on this earth, the joys of heaven.

Psalm 16:11 NKJV

You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16:11 NLT

You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of Your presence and the pleasures of living with You forever.

Remember, what God gives, the world cannot take away. God is promising Abram that, no matter what his circumstances, he could be completely satisfied. A good example of this is to compare two children. The first child is a spoilt kid with a screen, any toys they want, and access to any food they want—but they are generally unhappy and discontent. The second child is from Africa. This child has a very restricted diet, very few clothes or other possessions, lives in a tent in a refugee camp, and yet is so happy and content as he plays soccer on a dirt field with his friends with a makeshift soccer ball made of cardboard and sticky tape.

What is the difference between these two children? One child has been taught to seek happiness and fulfilment from what they own and what pleasurable activities they can partake in—this is western materialistic thinking—and it's obvious that it only leads to depression because we become so selfish and self-focused. However, the African child finds contentment in his relationships with his friends and family—he doesn't care if he can't have what he wants when he wants it, or whether or not he gets what he wants to eat—he is just content to be alive and enjoys the time with his friends and family, sharing the little that he has.

Materialism is such a curse: Those who worship mammon (money or wealth) will never experience the peace of God. Abram saw the king of Sodom living it up in a palace, while he lived in a tent. God reminds Abram of just who was really better off. As Jesus said, "And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? (Mark 8:36 NLT)

*Second reward: Co-heirs with Christ—all believers will one day together inherit all things*

This is another way that God is our **exceedingly great reward**. As we have studied previously, Romans 8:16-17 says that we are heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:16-17 NKJV

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs [co-heirs] with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

If there are four children whose parents die, and they are all individually heirs of their parents, then they will each get a one fourth share of their parents estate. However, if they are co-heirs or joint heirs, then they they will together possess all that their parents owned.

Since God owns all things, and we are co-heirs with Christ, it means that God will share all of creation with us—all that God has will belong to all believers jointly. Believers will fully realise this reality when we come back with Christ at the end of the Tribulation and reign with Him for a thousand years.

### Third reward: we share in the character and attributes of God

God just loves giving, and the third way He gives is to make us like Himself. God is holy, so God shares His holiness with us. God is wise, so God shares His wisdom with us. God is righteous, so God shares His righteousness with us. God is love, so God shares His love with us. We become like God is because we are *in Christ*, and His Spirit lives in us and is transforming us into His glorious image.

1 Corinthians 1:30 HCSB

But it is from Him that you are in Christ Jesus, Who became God-given wisdom for us—our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT

So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—Who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into His glorious image.

It really is worth considering just how much better off a believer is compared to a non-believer. Remember, God Himself is our reward, so let's not forget all the benefits and gifts that are ours because we belong to Him.

God the great I AM: He will be for us whatever we need Him to be—He will meet our every need

v 1 **I Am**: This is the first of the numerous great I Am statements in the Bible. God becomes for us whatever we need Him to be—He will meet our every need. The name of God is revealed in Exodus 3:14 as “I Am Who I Am”, meaning the eternal, ever present, self existing, and unchanging God. Jesus revealed Himself as the Great I Am in John 8:58, and made many “I Am” statements, e.g., “*I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst*” (John 6:35 NKJV). What does Abram need at this point in his life? Protection and reward, so God comes to Abram and says, **I am your shield** [protection], **your exceedingly great reward** [you will find everything you need in relationship with Me].

“Those who come to the Lord not looking for something *from* Him, but simply to cling to Him find all kinds of blessing in all sorts of areas they never expected. Are you disappointed with God because you asked Him for something you have yet to receive? Maybe it's because you're looking for some *thing [or relationship]*. God loves you too much to toss a boxed little package your way. The issue is bigger; and He wants you to discover today that *He* will satisfy your need; that *He* will be your reward.” (James Montgomery Boice)

## 2. Application: What does God promise to shield believers from in the New Testament?

Firstly, we need to ask an important question. God said to Abram, “**I am your shield**”. But even though Abram would now be safe as long as he continued to live according to God's plan for his life, it doesn't mean that Abram would sleep well at night—Abram must first choose to trust God's promise of, “**I am your shield**”, before he could experience the peace of mind that God was offering him. So the question we must ask is, “What or who is my shield”, or “Who Do I Trust?”

“Are you shielded as Abram was? Is God your shield? Do you trust Him? Many men and women trust other things. They trust the government or their investments, their friends, family, wealth, or popularity. But these things ultimately disappoint the one who trusts them. If you want a real shield, trust God.” (James Montgomery Boice)

Now let’s look at some of the things against which God promises to shield the one who trusts Him.

A. **God promises to shield the believer from his enemies:** David is a good example of someone who trusted God to shield him and deliver him from his enemies. David had many enemies: foreign nations, people in his own nation, his own government, and even in his own family—his own sons. Remember that they were David’s enemies because David served God: When we faithfully represent God to a lost world, there will be some, many even, who will reject the truth and end up hating us. But remember, they aren’t really hating us, but God, the One whom we represent. These were all opportunities for David to, not just learn about, but also experience, the promised protective power of God. Listen to what David sang about God being his shield (for homework, read all of 2 Samuel chapter 22—it’s an awesome and exciting read).

2 Samuel 22:1-4, 17-22, NLT

David sang this song to the LORD on the day the LORD rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul. <sup>2</sup> He sang: “The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my Saviour; <sup>3</sup> my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. He is my refuge, my Saviour, the One who saves me from violence. <sup>4</sup> I called on the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and He saved me from my enemies. ...

<sup>17</sup> “He reached down from heaven and rescued me; He drew me out of deep waters.

<sup>18</sup> He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and were too strong for me. <sup>19</sup> They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress, but the LORD supported me. <sup>20</sup> He led me to a place of safety; He rescued me because He delights in me. <sup>21</sup> The LORD rewarded me for doing right; He restored me because of my innocence. <sup>22</sup> For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not turned from my God to follow evil. ...

<sup>31</sup> “God’s way is perfect. All the LORD’s promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to Him for protection. <sup>32</sup> For who is God except the LORD? Who but our God is a solid rock? <sup>33</sup> God is my strong fortress, and He makes my way perfect [mature, blameless].”

However, keep in mind that God won’t protect us from the consequences of our sin, as David makes clear. Paul in Galatians tells us to watch out, because we will reap what we sow—our sin will come back to bite us. Hagar is a good example of this in Abram’s life (we will learn about her in the coming weeks).

Galatians 6:7-10 NLT

Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. <sup>8</sup> Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. <sup>9</sup> So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.

Also, there will be some things that God will allow us to go through as a part of His good and perfect plan for our lives—there are many godly men and women in the Scripture who suffered greatly as they obeyed God, and King David was one of them. However, God was always in control and used their suffering for His glory and for their own benefit (in the long run).

1 Peter 3:14 NLT

But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 NLT

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. <sup>4</sup> He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. <sup>5</sup> For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with His comfort through Christ.

- B. **God promises to shield the believer against Satan:** Scripture tells us that the devil is our adversary. It also shows us that to experience God's protection there is something we must do.

1 Peter 5:8-9 NLT

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.

James 4:6-10 NLT

And He [God] gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

<sup>7</sup> So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. <sup>9</sup> Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up in honour.

Again, this doesn't mean that there won't be times when God will allow Satan to attack us. However, as we learn from the example of Job, Satan is completely limited to do only what God allows him to do—only those things which are a part of God's good and perfect plan for our lives. **"There is nothing that Satan will ever be able to do to you that will not first pass through the will of God, who allows it only in order to bring about a spiritual victory"** (James Montgomery Boice).

- C. **God is our shield against temptation:** Paul reveals a glorious promise regarding temptation in his first letter to the Corinthian church.

1 Corinthians 10:13 NLT

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure.

“This verse says two things. The first is that no temptation is ever going to come into your life that is too strong for you. God promises that you will never experience temptations you cannot overcome. Are you tempted by sex, by a chance to be dishonest and escape detection, by a cutthroat way to achieve promotion, by an occasion to gossip? If you are, God knows that, and he knows that you can bear that temptation. You must say, “Lord, I claim your promise that no temptation will come to me that is beyond my overcoming it. Help me to overcome it through your strength and show me the way of deliverance.”

The second thing that Paul says about temptation is that God always makes a way for us to bear up under it. The trouble with most people is that they do not look for the way to escape but instead become fascinated by the temptation, like the bird fascinated by the snake that is about to devour it. Do you do that? If so, you need to get out of the habit. Learn to look for God’s deliverance. Then your life will go on from strength to strength, and you will realize that God is your shield against temptation.” (James Montgomery Boice)

- D. **God is our shield against bitterness and unforgiveness:** The letter to the Philippians was written by Paul as he is chained to a guard in a cell that was nothing more than a small cave or hole in the ground. However, you won’t find a hint of bitterness or unforgiveness. Instead you will find Paul rejoicing as he realises that his suffering has a purpose—many more people are being emboldened to share their faith, and so more people are hearing the gospel for the first time. Paul may be confined to a prison cell, but the gospel is not. Caesar Nero thought that by putting Paul in prison he was hindering the spread of the gospel; but the opposite happened—God is always in control!

Philippians 1:12-14 AMP

Now I want you to know and continue to rest assured, brethren, that what [has happened] to me [this imprisonment] has actually only served to advance and give a renewed impetus to the [spreading of the] good news (the Gospel).

<sup>13</sup> So much is this a fact that throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest [here] my imprisonment has become generally known to be in Christ [that I am a prisoner in His service and for Him].

<sup>14</sup> And [also] most of the brethren have derived fresh confidence in the Lord because of my chains and are much more bold to speak and publish fearlessly the Word of God [acting with more freedom and indifference to the consequences].

Here is a much more recent story, as documented by the film, *The Least of These*, which powerfully illustrates how God can shield us from bitterness and unforgiveness. It was released in 2019 and recounts the true story of Graham Staines, an Australian missionary working in India helping lepers for many years. He was falsely accused and then murdered in 1999 along with his sons, Philip, 10, and Timothy, 6, who were burned alive. Gladys, his wife, then forgave the man who caused Graham’s death when he came back to ask her for forgiveness. She asked him if he had any children. He told her he had a child on the way. She then gave him a gift for the baby. Truly, God was her shield against bitterness. He can be yours too.

Gladys can relate to Paul—her husband’s death and her faith-filled forgiving response to her immense suffering only caused millions more to hear the gospel, and inspired many other believers to become missionaries. May we also be willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel, knowing that until our race is over, we are invincible. May we also enjoy the journey of becoming more and more like Christ as God continues to give Himself to us—He is our reward.