

Christmas 2 The Gospel of Christmas in the Old Testament

Based on - The Gospel Abraham Believed

Genesis 15:1–6

By Armin J. Panning

This second sermon reviews and restates the Gospel Abraham believed.

One occasionally hears the expression, “Nothing is sure in this world except death and taxes.” There can be little doubt about the continuing presence of death and taxes, but these are not the only certainties.

In a sin-filled world we can be absolutely sure of yet another certainty, and that is fear. Recall fallen Adam’s attempt to account for his hiding from God with the words, “**I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid.**” As the first in this series of advent sermons has pointed out, the antidote to sin-induced fear is the Christmas gospel, the promise of a Saviour that was first given in Genesis 3:15.

The Christmas gospel has always served to allay fear. Note the “Do not be afraid” spoken to Mary (Lk 1:30), to Joseph (Mt 1:20), and to the shepherds (Lk 2:10).

Genesis 15 begins; **After this the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.**

Verse 1: **After what?**

Chapter 14 indicates what “this” is. In many ways these were very good days for Abram. He had been successful in battle (14:1–17); he had been blessed by Melchizedek (18–20); he was rich and prosperous (21–23).

But even “after this” all was not well with the Abram. He was afraid.

God came to him and said, **“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield (Protector against harm and evil), your very great reward (Provider of good).”**

God’s gentle encouragement draws from Abram the reason for his fear: no son; no heir; no chance for fulfilment of the glorious promises given him at his call (Gen 12:1f.). Hence Abram’s plaintive question, **“O Lord, what can you give me?”** Verses 2 & 3: **“I remain childless”**

The problems were real. God doesn’t minimize them or put Abram down for not being able to resolve them. Rather he himself brings the remedy. God’s answer is a promise—actually the repetition of a promise given earlier. The servant Eliezer will not inherit and take over Abram’s house. Abram himself will bear a son! Verse 4: **“a son...from your own body”**

God’s promise goes far beyond foretelling merely Isaac’s birth. Not just one son but many descendants will come from Abram’s line. The promises of land and family will be abundantly fulfilled. Verse 5: **“Count the stars...so shall your offspring be.”**

But that isn’t all – listen to what Paul writes to the Galatians: - 3:16 **The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say and to seeds, meaning many people, but and to your seed, meaning one person, who is Christ.**

Somehow Abram understood God’s promises. He knew them to be speaking of the messiah promised to Adam and Eve.

God promised to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham’s singular seed, that is, through the Christ.

Jesus said: **“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad”** (John 8:56).

But Christ's day was still 2,000 years off in the future. How could Abram "see" it? The answer, of course, is: by faith as it says in Genesis 15:6

"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Verse 6

There was nothing Abram could do, or that he needed to do. God promised; Abram took him at his word, and God credited it to him as righteousness.

So what Abraham celebrated was not something to be boxed up and put in his attic to be pulled out once a year.

What he celebrated was the life-compelling, day-to-day practical truth about a coming saviour, the messiah, Jesus' coming. It is a truth with timeless value.

Abraham celebrated the biblical hope that was passed down to him.

Remember Jesus said in John 8:56 that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, referring to Abraham's forward-looking faith in the Saviour.

He rejoiced in the promises of the coming Saviour and the privilege of being an ancestor of that Saviour.

Abraham saw Christmas and it made him glad and it should make us glad.

Jesus is the Saviour not of Jews only, but of all peoples.

When announcing Jesus' birth to the shepherds in Luke 2:10, **"the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people."**

Not just the Jews or social elites, but for all the people.

Later, magi came from the east to worship the child born King of the Jews, because He would bring blessing to all peoples.

The Christmas message of the promised Seed serves as the unassailable basis for God's encouragement, **"Do not be afraid."**

Thank God for His answer to our sin.

The "Christmas gospel" of the Seed of Eve.

The "Christmas gospel" of the Seed of Abraham.

Conclusion

Do Not Be Afraid **I am your shield**

It is a common experience that just when all seems to be going well, trials and tribulations follow as it did for Abram.

Military success/Melchizedek's blessing/wealth (Gen. 14)

"after this" (15:1) came fear and apprehension on Abram's part because of his childlessness (2,3) problems were real (age/barrenness, etc.)

apparent conflict with the promises which Abram had received

valid causes for fear

God's intervention (4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: ... a son coming from your own body will be your heir.)

no initiative on Abram's part; God takes hold!

God promises to be a "shield" (Protector)

protection from the threat of Eliezer's taking over

protection from the threat of childlessness and unfulfilled promises

In our lives, the problems and difficulties are real. Often they admit of no human solution, but God still says, **I am your shield. I will protect you.**

The promise was not just for Abram

Abram's seed, is to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (12:3)

God was promising a Saviour (Christmas gospel)

The promise centered on the Seed, not seeds (Ga 3:16)

Abram realized and understood the promise as referring to Christ (John 8:56)

Abram accepted the promise and received its blessings by faith (6)

Abram was justified by faith in Christ. The same plan of salvation still applies as Paul wrote. "**The words, 'it was credited to him' were written not for him (Abram) alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead**" (Ro 4:23-24).

The Christ child looks so meek and lowly lying in the manger, but he is the one who lived the perfect life for us, who died in our place and who was raised again to assure us that our sins are forgiven, that everything which causes us fear can be dismissed, that an eternity of bliss in heaven awaits us.

The messiah can give us the same assurance, "**Do not be afraid. I am your shield, your very great reward.**"

Unless otherwise identified scripture references are from the New International Version © Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Note: I use many sources in preparation. If unacknowledged material has been used, I apologise. Please let me know (via contact tab) and I will add the acknowledgment when updating this material.