

Genesis 15:1-4

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Abram questions God because he is still childless and without an heir. God reassures him.

After these things links the last event in chapter 14, in which Abram rejected the offer of the king of Sodom for the victory spoils of battle as a reward. This is the first time in which God's revelation is called *the word of the Lord*. It is also the first conversation expressed in words between God and man after the fall in the Garden of Eden and the third appearance of God to Abram since his arrival in the land of Canaan ([Genesis 12:7](#), [13:14-17](#)).

The use of *in a vision* is one of the means by which God interacts with his servants. The word "vision" is the Hebrew word *Machazeh* meaning to see or perceive supernaturally. This word is only used four times in the Old Testament.

God told Abram, *do not fear*. People tend to have a fearful response when God actually appears to them ([Matthew 1:20](#); [Luke 1:13,30](#), [2:10](#); [Acts 18:9](#)). God gives Abram fitting words of comfort and consolation. Also, he possibly feared revenge from the kings he had defeated in the battle described in the previous chapter.

God says, *I am a shield to you*, showing His divine protection. The Hebrew word for "shield" is *Magen* and it indicates some kind of protection. In the face of hostilities, Abram can rest in the protection that grants him victory. Abram was reminded the God who had defeated his enemies would continue to protect him ([Psalm 7:10](#), [84:9](#)). This is interesting in that Abram won the battle by fighting and winning. It was clearly a strenuous effort that required courage and determination. But God reminds Abram that success came from God working through him.

Abram is also told, *your reward shall be very great*. The Hebrew word "Sakar" is translated here into the English word *reward* and means a laborer's wages or pay ([Ezekiel 29:19](#)). It refers to a reward for faithfulness ([Numbers 18:31](#); [Jeremiah 31:16](#)). Abram had just exhibited that he trusted God over man when he went to battle on behalf of his nephew, then declined to keep

the possessions he recovered in the battle, lest he be beholden to the king of wicked Sodom ([Genesis 14:22-24](#)).

So when God promises him a great reward, God is likely reacting to this and other exhibitions of faith in action. Abram put his faith into action, trusting God, and God promises that his *reward will be very great*. It will become apparent soon why God uses the term *very great*, since Abram will be promised a great and lasting kingdom. In [Genesis 15:6](#) we will be told that Abram was reckoned or counted as righteous in God's sight because he believed God's promise. The acceptance in God's sight was connected to a simple belief of the heart, apart from actions. But God's rewards are based on what we do. So Abraham was accepted as righteous due to his belief and was promised a great reward because he put his faith into action.

We have then in this passage the distinction between being accepted as righteous in the sight of God by faith versus being rewarded for faithfulness. God rewards faith in action, the reward is based on God's approval of our behavior when our belief becomes a tangible work. It is like a parent who rewards their child for good behavior. However, no act can ever make us accepted in God's sight. That requires perfection, which no human besides Christ can achieve. Being accepted as righteous in the sight of God is apart from any works or deeds. It is based solely on belief in the heart. This is like a parent loving their children unconditionally. God accepts us without condition, apart from our behavior, if we only believe.

Abram said, "O Lord God." This is the first time it is recorded that Abram addresses God. "Lord God" translates the Hebrew word for Lord (Adonai) and the name Yahweh (God). Adonai means master or owner. It is a title that shows God's supreme authority and power. The title Adonai emphasizes that God protects, provides for, and directs us. Abram still recognized the master-servant relationship. He does not compromise his attitude of respect and reverence for God. He has had a great victory, but still recognizes who is really in charge. With unquestioning obedience, Abram had broken his ties with his family and became a wanderer in a strange land. His life had been repeatedly in danger. The years were rolling by and the promise of an heir had not materialized. But he still respected God as his master.

The name Yahweh focuses on His eternal existence and relationship to His covenant people, Israel ([Exodus 3:6,14-15, 33:19](#); [Leviticus 26:45](#)). The Israelites consider it the proper name of God. Referring to the existence of Yahweh, the New Testament states He is "the One who was, who is, and who always will be" ([Revelation 11:17](#), "the self-existing one"). Yahweh particularly

stresses the absolute faithfulness of God. God had promised the patriarchs that he would be their God, that he would be with them, would deliver and bless them, keep them, and give them a land and inheritance. God continually demonstrated His character: merciful, gracious, patient, full of loving-kindness, truthful, faithful, forgiving, just, and righteous ([Exodus 34:6](#)).

Reasonably and respectfully, Abram had a question for God regarding this great reward: *What will You give me, since I am childless?* The promise of numerous descendants was still unfulfilled. How could Abram gain a reward that was “great” when he did not have a son to be his heir? This clearly caused him concern. Abram’s many possessions are of little use if there is not a family heir, and it’s hard to imagine a reward that is *very great* with no descendants. Abram the man of faith, ponders the uncertainty of the future. He asks God a question. In verse 8, he also asks, *how may I know that I will possess it?* God is apparently fine being asked this question, and addresses these two concerns in this chapter.

According to long-standing custom, a man who was childless could adopt someone to be the heir of his house to receive his estate, and give him a proper burial. If the man later had a child, then the natural child would replace the adopted heir as the principle heir.

Since Abram had no children, he noted that *one born in my house is my heir*. God makes it clear to Abram this will not remain the case. Rather *one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir*. Here God assures Abram that he will have a natural born son of his own, although He does not yet specify that the mother of the heir will be Sarai (as He will do in chapter 17).

Biblical Text:

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.” ² 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.” ⁴ Then 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.”