

Great Reassurance from God

At our recent Church Members Meeting, we were looking at more lessons from the life of Abraham.

*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."
[Genesis 15.1]*

Abram had recently been through a prolonged period of stress and difficulties.

- It had begun back in chapter 12 when he had obeyed God's call to leave the land of his parents, to go to a land as yet unknown to him.
- But as so often happens, no sooner had he stepped out in obedient faith than he ran into unforeseen difficulties. The land God had led him into was soon struck by a severe famine (12.10).
- So Abram decided to move down to Egypt where there was plenty of food. But he got into a scrape with Pharaoh over his wife, whom he had deceitfully tried to pass off as his sister (12.19).
- Then back in Canaan, his nephew Lot chose the most fertile part of Canaan to live in, which meant Abram was left with the more difficult hill-country for his livestock (ch13).
- Lot's choice turned out to be a disastrous one, however, and he soon found himself captured by a coalition of forces who swept down from the north against Sodom and Gomorrah (ch14). Uncle Abram chased after these forces, defeated them, and rescued Lot. But now he perhaps feared fierce reprisals against him for his act of bravery.

So it was *'after this'* – after all the trials and tribulations Abram had been through - that *the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision*, to reassure him.

As we too step out in obedient faith, we often need a word of reassurance from the Lord. We may find our difficulties are multiplied. But that doesn't mean we're on the wrong track. It may be firm evidence that we are on the right track, and having to engage in a spiritual battle to see God's purposes move forward.

God's word of reassurance came to Abram in three parts:

(a) *Don't be afraid*

Abram was understandably fearful of possible reprisals from the coalition of kings he had just defeated. But into the midst of his turmoil of confused thoughts, God breathed his word of peace: *fear not; don't be afraid*. Did you know that this is

one of the most frequently repeated commands of Scripture? The call 'not to be afraid' occurs some 90 times in the Bible! When we're on the Lord's side, when God has promised, *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,"* we can say with confidence, ***"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*** [Heb 13.5-6]

(b) *God is our Shield*

The reason we are not to give in to our natural fears is that God has promised to be a shield around about us. The person who boldly sets out in faith in obedience to God's call often feels very vulnerable and horribly exposed. That's why the picture of God being like a shield around us is so precious.

(c) *God is our reward*

Abram is also reminded that God himself will be his *very great reward*. It is not simply that God will *give* Abram a reward. God himself *is* that reward. Abram is called *'the friend of God'* in James 2.23, in a direct reference to this passage. A deeper fellowship with God is the reward for obedient faith. Abram would never be the loser, however great the difficulties he might face in the future – and there were plenty waiting for him round the corner (count them all in chapters 16-24!). But for these, he would always have God as his friend. And the same is true for us as we respond in obedient faith to the Lord's call on our life. A deeper fellowship with Christ will always be our *'very great reward'*.

Great Responsive Faith from Abram

For all God's reassurances, Abram was still mystified as to *how* God's promises would be fulfilled both in and through him, so long as he and Sarah remained childless (Gen 15. 2-3).

*"Abram was learning the basic lesson that every true believer is taught: **God's delays are not his denials,**"* writes Joyce Baldwin in her excellent commentary on Genesis 12-50 (Bible Speaks Today series, IVP).

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ, Paul reminds us in 2 Cor 1.20. *And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.* The Hebrew word 'Amen' comes from the same root as the word for 'believe' – and Abram's faith is singled out for special mention in verse 6.

*Abram believed the LORD,
and He credited it to him as righteousness.*

"He was fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised," says Paul in Romans 4.21. Abram could have pointed to excellent reasons for doubting God's Word – his own advanced age and that of Sarah, his wife, not to mention their childlessness for so many years. What hope was there of having children at their age? ***Unbelief comes readily, but faith triumphs over it.***

Abram was convinced in the depth of his being that the LORD is always true to his word. Abram had received a specific promise from God, but he could do nothing to bring it to pass. He was helpless, and so was his wife. There was so much about this promise that seemed to mock him. Yet his response was to look to the greatness of the one who had made it, and to accept that ***God had taken on the responsibility for its fulfilment.*** Faith rests on the fact that God is faithful, and ***when we take God at his word, we prove that faithfulness.***

Paul says that verse 6 here was written for the benefit of us Christians – *for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead* (Rom 4.23-24). God's reliability will never let anyone down. And those who know the way of faith will find God leading them into new and challenging circumstances in which we will be called to trust him even more.

Great Challenges for Us

These lessons are all very relevant for us as we look to the Lord to provide the financial resources we need for our building refurbishment project.

Just as God's promise was renewed to Abram (Genesis 15.4-5), so we look back to the promise God gave us as a Church back in March 2001.

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland ... because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

[Isaiah 43.18-21]

We believe God has an on-going purpose for DRBC that is yet to be fully realised. So, we look to him to provide the means for it to be fully realised, just as Abram did (v6).

REFURBISHMENT PLANS

Several important decisions were taken at our recent Church Members Meeting.

- We approved the plans our architect, Michael

Drage had drawn up, for internal and external ramping and new toilet facilities to enable us to comply with new accessibility legislation for public buildings. The plans had been on display for several weeks in the church for members to view.

- We accepted a quotation from Beacon Builders to carry out the work, as theirs was the lowest of the three submitted.
- We set a target figure of just over £40,000 for our fund-raising purposes, made up as follows:

Building costs as estimated	
(including £1,000) contingency	£33,429
Contingency reserve @ 10% of building cost	
(£3,343, less £1,000 included in estimate)	£2,343
Architects fees @ 10% of building cost	
(excl contingency) + VAT	£3,928
Planning permission fees	£500
TOTAL REQUIRED:	£40,200

- We agreed that all the money for carrying out the work should be in place before authorising the builders to commence.
- Money in hand for the project is as follows:

Set aside from our General Fund	£19,000
Grant received for Feasibility Study	£500
Promised from Community Chest	£2000
Less money spent on Feasibility Study	- £3126
Less money spent on roof repairs	- £469
BALANCE IN HAND FOR WORK:	£17,905

- Some of this money has already been spent on architect's fees (£1,234) and some will be required to be set aside for urgent roof repairs (estimated to be in the region of £10,000). The Church Members' Meeting gave approval for Michael Drage to prepare roof drawings for tendering purposes, and quotations should be with us by the end of this month.
- So, the current shortfall is at least £22,295 plus whatever we need to spend on the urgent roof repairs. **We are therefore asking external funders to contribute £30,000 towards our anticipated shortfall.** I will be posting off funding applications early this month.

The giving of our members has been generous and sacrificial over the past two years. ***So please join us in praying that the Lord will "throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that we will not have room enough for it!"*** [Malachi 3.10].

Thank you for your continuing prayerful support for us.

David Hunt