

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Dear Friends,

Few Bible topics are as dreadfully misunderstood and therefore errantly believed and taught as the topic of Biblical rewards. Perhaps this problem makes it all the more compelling that we turn to the Bible instead of this errant teaching, and learn its teaching. Often a "Reward" represents the interest of the "Rewarder" far more than the value of the item rewarded. If we believe the Lord values our willing, godly, faith-empowered, faith-directed conduct, we should rightly expect to find that Scripture reminds us; our God places a high value "Reward" before us.

The contemporary errant teaching ignores Scripture's teaching that our eternity with the Lord is an inheritance, lovingly reserved and given by the Lord to His chosen family. We do not work now to add more stars in our eternal crowns. If we follow Scripture's teaching and focus, we shall steadfastly rejoice in our secure inheritance, and we shall also work in faith, self-lessly, for the glory of our Lord and the service of His children, leaving the results, the "Reward," wholly in His hands. Folks who lean toward any form of fatalism in their belief about God cannot tolerate that this word--and topic--appear often throughout Scripture. Belief in a robotic, irresistible, and divinely programmed "100% all of God" obedience leaves no rational basis for a Biblical reward, so fatalists manifest an intense dislike for the idea, often wholly denying that it is even taught in Scripture. Perhaps in this, as in so many other points of that belief, they manifest just how alien their belief is to Biblical doctrine. We shall, with this brief note, leave both errant ideas to their frustrations at their conflict with Scripture, talking to themselves because the word and right doctrine appears so often in Scripture, and turn our focus on God's teaching in Scripture.

When God spoke the words of our study passage to Abraham, the patriarch had obvious reasons to at least consider a dangerous threat from powerful men. He had just defeated a group of powerful rulers to free his nephew Lot from their captivity. He had a reputation by that time in his sojourn, but likely his reputation was of a traveler, a sojourner, not a warrior.

If we apply this lesson to our faith and to our lives today, do we have any reason to fear the hostility of wicked--and powerful--men toward us because of our faith? I suspect we do. What's new? Really! Abraham didn't preach sermons and write angry shouting messages about the latest conspiracy theories. Instead, he turned to his God, and Abraham's God turned to His servant, Abraham. Real or imagined, would you prefer to face your present adversaries alone or with God on your side? Shout and vent your frustrations against them, and the Lord may well sit in the background and let you see just how empty that strategy really is. Turn to Him and quietly give Him your fears, ah, and He just might send you the same kind of assuring message He gave to Abraham on this occasion.

In the outcome of our life sojourn choices, the Lord often allows us two very different options. 1) Choose your own path, and He will allow you to see how utterly weak you are. 2) Turn to Him, and stay your course on the "Faith-way," and He will step into your life, and deliver you with a strong right hand. When Chrysler Corporation teetered on the verge of bankruptcy many decades ago, they eventually hired a skilled businessman, Lee Iacocca, as their president. He defied all the prophets of doom, and actually turned the company around. After the success was quite clear, Iacocca was featured in one of the most effective advertising campaigns I've ever seen. He promoted some of his new model

cars, spoke briefly about the turnaround of the company, and then he spoke powerful words to his competition, "Either lead, follow, or get out of the way!" These words might wisely apply to us in our pursuit of a godly path in the midst of a disturbing world. We may choose to bumble around with our own vented frustrations and angry shouts into the wind against our supposed adversaries. Or we may quietly stand aside and, in faith, turn to the Lord as both our "Shield" and our "Exceeding great reward." One choice brings promised defeat. The other brings promised peace and deliverance. Which do we choose today?

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

God's Reward to the Faithful

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. (Genesis 15:1)

Although our contemporary Christian culture has sadly corrupted the Bible doctrine of "Rewards," we would be just as errant to deny them as to misrepresent them. Given the frequency with which Scripture uses the word, only a devoted fatalist would attempt wholly to deny the Biblical topic altogether. Over the last few weeks, my mind has been drawn to the theme of Biblical motivation. What are the godly, faith-prompted motivations to believers to guide and incite them to walk the faith-way and to serve God? As I continued meditating on this theme, the topic of Biblical rewards surfaced as the bedrock principle on which we should build all our motivation to serve the Lord and live in faith. Is there a Biblical link between faith and rewards? Indeed there is.

*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a **rewarder** of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6; emphasis added)*

This verse establishes two foundational principles on which all true, Biblical faith lifestyle must build.

1. *...he that cometh to God must believe that he is.* The Christian life is not a fantasy. It is a life based on the most basic and necessary reality we might consider. **God is!** Two words, but oh so important to a sensible, balanced view of God and of life.
2. *...and that **he is a rewarder** of them that diligently seek him.* This point establishes the premise of my present reflections. If someone who claims to be a believer in Jesus does not truly believe these dual essentials, he lives with a paralyzed faith, or no Biblical faith at all.

In the basic operations of faith, the Lord reveals to His seeking child these two principles. If we hope to grow closer to Him, to truly begin our pursuit along the path of faith, we must come to believe these two principles in our relationship with the Lord. Otherwise, we deceive ourselves and travel one of the countless non-faith paths the world constantly parades before our eyes.

My present thought is to try methodically to follow this word through its significant appearances in Scripture to learn from Scripture, rather than attempt to correct Scripture, or revise it.

Abraham's walk of faith did not begin in a church revival or evangelistic gathering. According to Jewish tradition, and implied by Joshua 24:2, the Lord first confronted Abraham when he was involved with his family in idolatry. He spoke to Abraham and called him to leave that way of life. The closing verses of Genesis 11 describe Abraham's first step. In his attempt to begin the separation from his idolatrous family by moving from Ur to Haran, the patriarch may have been surprised when his father and family moved with him. Often, when believers begin their migration from carnality to the

faith-way, they may experience similar companionship. Eventually the path of faith becomes odious to those who do not believe, and it tends, when followed faithfully over time, to prompt a progressive and distinct separation of us from the ungodly world in which we live. The Lord calls His children to migrate apart from this world and its sinful influence.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. (2 Corinthians 6:17)

However, when Abraham decided to leave Haran, his family remained, and the pilgrim of faith continued his journey with his God in earnest. (Hebrews 11:8) With one sad exception (His sojourn into Egypt), whenever Abraham paused, even briefly on his sojourn, he built an altar and worshipped God. Several years later, Abraham became aware that his nephew, Lot, had fallen upon hard times, so the noble patriarch of faith took bold steps to deliver Lot. Involved in that rather unusual episode, (Closing verses of Genesis 14) we read of Abraham's encounter with Melchisedec, who becomes a lively type of Jesus, God's one and only true priest.

The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever After the order of Melchizedek. (Psalm 110:4)

Abraham was a skilled sojourner. He was not so experienced as a warrior. In the slaughter of the kings to free Lot, Abraham may well have made some powerful enemies. Any one of them could quietly attack him and his band whenever they wished. The Lord's "*Fear not*" words likely gave Abraham great comfort in this setting.

I am thy shield... God didn't tell Abraham that He would provide a shield for the patriarch. He promised to **be** Abraham's personal shield. He would stand between Abraham and any adversary that considered attacking him. Could Abraham have a better shield?

...and thy exceeding great reward. Again, the Lord didn't tell Abraham that He would give Abraham a reward. He told Abraham that **He would be** the patriarch's "*...exceeding great reward.*" In human interactions, you often hear the complaint, "It just isn't fair." The complaint may be valid, or it may be more a reflection of the complainant's unhealthy state of mind. The more we come to understand that our God **is our "Reward"** the more we insulate ourselves from these self-first attitudes. If our God protects, blesses, and "Rewards" us, how can we complain about anything?

God comes to the individual still through the Spirit Whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them to us. And in doing so the law is observed which we see illustrated here. God comes to a man with further encouragement and light for a new step when he has conscientiously used the light he already has. (Expositor's Bible)

In the same act, God wisely gives added light to His children who use the light He has already given them, withholding that light from His children who refuse to use the light He has given them.

What a full verse we have before us! Our God gave Abraham full assurance of two necessary things. When the patriarch faced danger of any kind from any source, God would be his personal defense, his "Shield." And the more the patriarch refined his faith and walked its path in his life the more God would be his personal reward. Abraham need not fret over "Fair." God personally would be his "Reward." Could he possibly ask for more? Could he possibly feel slighted? Never!

Notice the verb tense, "**I am**," not "*I shall be*." Biblical rewards relate to children of God in the "Here and now," not in the hereafter. Take comfort, folks. Each time we go out of ourselves and do a godly act of service or kindness for another person, we unknowingly choose our "Reward." We may step up and demand it for ourselves, what Abraham refused to do with the spoils of his victory. Or we may quietly trust our Lord to "Reward" us according to His kind care for us. Claiming—demanding—

what we think we deserve will often reduce us to petty, “Me-first” status. Oh, we’ll get what we “Deserve” most of the time, but we shall likely be sadly disappointed when we realize that we did not deserve nearly as much as we thought. We often inflate what we think we deserve. I recall a cliché from many years ago. When someone at work exhibited an inflated opinion of himself and his value to his employer, I occasionally would hear another employee quip, “If he could buy himself for what he is really worth, and sell himself for what he thinks he is worth, he’d be a millionaire.” Be careful demanding what you think you “Deserve.” You might just receive it!

The Hebrew word translated “reward” in this passage is quite specific.

1) hire, wages, 1a) wages, 1b) reward, pay, 1c) fare, fee, passage-money. (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Dictionary)

A payment of wages or reward for services. (Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible)

Do not miss a key point in this context. When given the opportunity that victors in battle were given, to claim the spoils of their victory, Abraham declined to take anything at all for himself. The man of God chose nothing for self but received his God’s promise of abundance. Consider a New Testament passage in Jesus’ own words.

*He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, **he shall in no wise lose his reward.*** (Matthew 10:40-42; emphasis added)

Jesus taught the same principle that He demonstrated to Abraham. First, let’s evaluate our thinking carefully. If we hold to ideas that leave no basis for Biblical “Rewards,” we are out of step with God and with His Book. Secondly, the lifestyle of faith trusts the Lord to “Reward” us according to His loving Fatherly care for us. He provides our needs from His riches in glory by Jesus. (Philippians 4:19) However, if we insist on claiming what we think we deserve, He may just step back and allow us to receive it, a choice we shall soon regret.

In Jesus’ lesson above, the disciple whom Jesus tells us shall not “...lose his reward” is more focused on giving than on receiving! His goal is to see that thirsty little one, and to give him/her a cup of cold water, not for personal praise or gain, but “...only in the name of a disciple.” And what does Jesus tell us results from this self-less act of service. That disciple “...shall in no wise lose his reward.” Do not overlook the implication. If we choose the opposite path, “I want what is coming to me,” we shall lose that blessed reward which the Lord lovingly gives to His faithful, self-less and obedient child who serves Him for His glory. Which do we choose?

Elder Joe Holder