

THY SHIELD AND THY REWARD.

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward." – Gen. 15:1.

THESE words were addressed to the "father of the faithful," and as a heritage they descend to his children – to all those who are of the faith of Abraham (Gal. 3:7; Rom. 4:16), whether of the fleshly or the spiritual seed. Abram had entered into covenant relationship with God. God had called him to separate himself from his native country and kindred and friends to follow the course of his providential leadings toward an unknown land. And Abram, in full reliance on the promise of God, had obediently severed the familiar social and business ties, and, with his wife and family and father and nephew who shared his faith and obedience to God, started on his pilgrimage to the unknown land. And having entered the land and received the promise – "All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed forever," etc. – though he was not then permitted to own a foot of it, he wandered up and down in it as a pilgrim and stranger, encountering difficulties, too, in coming in contact with the godless inhabitants of the land and with the Egyptians, yet always believing that what God had promised he was able and willing also to perform in his own good time and way.

But that which taxed Abram's faith most was that, as the years rolled by, not only was the promise of the land delayed, but also the promised heirs who should inherit it; for not even one heir had yet come.

It was in one of these seasons of discouragement – though not of despair, for Abram never relaxed his faith, but trusted and hoped still when in darkness and perplexity – that God in a vision graciously encouraged his fainting heart with the above words of cheer and hope – "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward."

Then Abram was permitted to inquire into the mysterious ways of God and received the renewed assurance that the promise had not been forgotten, and that his hope would certainly be realized.

We find a very similar fatherly providence in the case of Jacob, who also, in the faith of Abraham, had forsaken all to follow the Lord's leading. In a time of great perplexity and trial of faith the Lord appeared to him in a vision prophetic of the future glory of his Kingdom and of the communication of its heavenly and earthly phases, and again confirmed his covenant unto him (Gen. 28:10-15); and Jacob arose from his sleep on the stony pillow, bearing in mind the bright vision of the Kingdom glory – of the messengers of God ascending and descending upon **[R1906 : page 287]** the ladder suspended 'twixt earth and heaven – refreshed and comforted, saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not....This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." – Gen. 28:16-19.

Thus God has always been watchful over his people, never suffering them to be tempted or tried beyond their power of endurance, yet permitting them often to be very severely tested. The consolation here offered to Abraham is that offered to all who are of the faith of Abraham, and its parallel in the New Testament is that precious statement of our Lord (John 14:21-23), "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him,...and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." So in the midst of all the temptations and trials that beset us in our earthly pilgrimage, while we walk by faith toward the blessed inheritance reserved for the overcoming saints, we also may recognize the voice of our God, saying, "Fear not: I am thy shield, and thine exceeding great reward."

"Fear not," beloved; "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment" (1 John 4:18); "If God be for us, who can be against us?" or "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" Say in your heart as did Paul, "I am persuaded

that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." – Rom. 8:31-39.

Do hosts of foes oppose themselves – place obstacles in your way, hinder your influence and seek to dishearten you by heaping upon you reproaches, and do circumstances seem to conspire against you to fill your heart with alarm and dread? say to your soul, "Fear not," "hope thou in God," and mark his loving providences as –

"Through waves and clouds and storms,
He gently clears thy way," –

until a blessed acquaintance with God through such experiences develops in the heart that perfect love that casteth **[R1906 : page 288]** out fear. Then shall you enter more and more fully into the blessed rest of faith, and like the eagle that soars above the storm cloud, live at such an altitude of Christian experience as to enable you to rejoice in the Lord always and in everything to give thanks.

"Fear not, I am thy shield," saith Jehovah. Then "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God." He would not have one of his children live in an atmosphere of tormenting fear, but would have them happy and always rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the sons of God, free from all fear and corroding care by simply trusting in him, ever remembering the blessed promise – "The Lord Jehovah is a sun and shield [to shine upon our pathway and into our hearts and to protect us from all the fiery darts of the wicked]: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." – Psa. 42:5; 84:11.

"I am [also] thy exceeding great reward." Notice, the promise is not put in the future tense, having reference to the promised glory of his people in the ages to come; but it is present, "I am," etc. Yes, the abiding presence of God, manifested to the hearts of his people now,

even to-day, in the midst of its cares, its vexations, its labors, its trials of faith, patience and endurance, this is the blessed present privilege of all his saints. And not only the presence of God, but also of his dear Son, our Lord and Savior, is also vouchsafed to us so long as we faithfully maintain our covenant relations with him.

Should the child of God, the heir of glory, the inheritor of all the exceeding great and precious promises, and the present companion of Divinity itself which condescends to our low estate, ever feel desolate or forsaken or alone? or fear that his love will ever forsake or leave him to be tossed helplessly upon the billows of misfortune at the mercy of the prince of this world who now worketh in the hearts of the children of disobedience? Ah, no! Greater is he that is for us than all they that can be against us. We are not alone in the world; for we have the blessed promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." (Heb. 13:5.) Nor is the smallest interest of ours overlooked. – Matt. 10:29-31.

How truly "*exceeding great*" is this present "reward" of the faithful saints who are daily and hourly walking with God – going about the Father's business, spreading abroad the honor of his name, meekly bearing the reproaches of Christ, enduring hardness as good soldiers in his service and taking up their cross daily and following in the Master's footprints. Truly we can say to the world, as did our Lord, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." The world cannot comprehend our joy, nor know the sweets of this fellowship with God and with his dear Son; for "The secret of the Lord is [only] with them that fear him." – Psa. 25:14.

This joy in the Lord is, however, also compatible with much suffering; for the saints are all to be made perfect through suffering, which was true also of those who shall constitute the earthly phase of the Kingdom. And, like their Lord, Christ Jesus, they will all be considered of the world as "smitten of God and afflicted." This is because the world cannot comprehend either the plan or methods of God for the refining and perfecting of the gold that shall by and by

shine in the glorious Temple of God. Consequently, like faithful Abraham, we must be content to walk with God by faith and not by sight, like him hoping to the end for the promise, not expecting here to realize aught but the earnest of our inheritance, which we have in the present reward of the divine presence and approval.
