

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18
Now and not yet

This week, we dip into the middle part of the story of one of the early figures of faith – Abram (later called Abraham). God called Abram, promising him many descendants and a new land to live in. We pick up the story after Abram has won a battle against four kings to rescue his nephew, Lot. God tells Abram he will receive a great reward. Abram, though, wonders what the point of that is when he has no descendants to share it with. God responds, ‘I am a shield to you’ and reaffirms the promise of many descendants and a new land to live in – God’s promise is both present and future, both now and not yet.



Write

Go through a calendar or diary for the rest of the year ahead, and on random dates write a promise from God (e.g. ‘I will protect you’).



Give Search online for a charity that supports elderly people who are on their own and give a small donation.

Plant

You will need: large seeds such as sunflowers, pots, compost. Examine the seed. It is already something beautiful, yet it contains the promise of something even more beautiful that is still to come. Plant the seed, and water it and watch the promise within it become a reality.

Bible notes



This part of Abram’s (later Abraham) life comes early on in the ‘big story’ of the people of God. The story begins when Abram, Joseph’s great-grandfather, is called by God to leave his home and set off on a journey, destination unknown, with the promise that he will become a great nation. When he reaches Canaan, God promises Abram that this land will belong to his descendants. The events of this passage occur sometime later, after further journeying, some hazardous encounters and reiteration of God’s promise. Up to this point Abram has trusted God, including (in the preceding passage) choosing God rather than the creating of a new ally. However, his doubts are rising and, when God tells him not to be afraid, they come to the fore as Abram admits he cannot see a way for God’s promises to come true. The ritual with the animals is part of a common commitment-making ceremony in the ancient Near East, a way of sealing a solemn agreement. Passing between the two halves of the slaughtered animal was a declaration of the seriousness of intention, inviting God to do to the promiser what had been done to the animal if the commitment was broken. God’s timing may not be what Abram would wish, but Abram is asked to trust that God will keep the promise of innumerable descendants. In the verses missing from the lectionary reading, verses 13-16, God goes further, foretelling to Abram the time when his descendants will be slaves in another land, and when God will rescue them and return them to this land that has been promised to Abram. We look back knowing the rest of this story – of Joseph, slavery, Moses and the Exodus and wilderness wandering – but for Abram this is all part of the ‘not yet’.

First impressions

- What strikes you about this image (taken by the Webb telescope)?
- Have you ever had a promise that seemed impossible, fulfilled?
- What does God promise us right now, and what are we promised for the future?



Pray

May the Lord bless my week with hope and courage. May my ‘now’ and ‘not yet’ be held in God’s loving hands. Amen.



LOOK

Go outside one night when it is dark and clear. Look up at the stars. Reflect on how many there are and how far the universe stretches and give thanks to God. Reflect on the things you find impossible, and take comfort that for God, all things are possible.