

Toward a Biblical Theology of Rewards

By

Christie Yih

January 21, 2004

Toward a Biblical Theology of Rewards

In the Bible, God promises rewards and blessings to His children who remain faithful and obedient. As Christians, how are we to understand these rewards and respond to them? Do we view them as primary motivating factors to live an obedient, righteous life pleasing to God? Or do we view them as mere bonuses or “icing on the cake” when we reach Heaven? The following survey of rewards found in the Old and New Testaments will help us understand God’s overall system of rewards and how it impacts our lives.

First, we will define what is meant in the Bible by “rewards,” using Hebrew and Greek words to understand its nuances. Secondly, we will explore God’s system of rewards and punishments, and how it operates in this life as well as the life to come. Thirdly, in looking ahead to eternal rewards, we will discuss numerous ways in which we can store up treasures in Heaven. Finally, we will explore implications for the believer, and what a theology of rewards reveals to us about God Himself.

The Definition of Rewards

The dictionary defines the word, “reward,” as “something given or received in recompense for worthy behavior,” or “a satisfying return or result; profit.”¹ We can think of a reward as being something we would consider to be gain that has been given to us in order to repay and reinforce our positive behavior.

The theme of rewards is prevalent throughout the Bible. The NIV translation of the Bible uses the English word, “reward,” about 76 times. The Old and New Testaments use a number of Hebrew and Greek words to convey the word, “reward.” They include words that would be translated into English as “fruit,” “repay,” “complete,” “pay off,” “recompense,” “render,” “wages,” and “riches.”

PERI – Fruit

One basic idea of reward is expressed through the Hebrew word, “peri,” which appears 120 times in the Old Testament. It refers to the “product” or “result” of an action. The poetic meaning of ‘peri’ is ‘fruit.’ Proverbs 31 describes the wise woman who buys and plants a field with her earnings or the “fruit of her hands” (v. 16). In other words, she is to be rewarded by receiving the ‘product’ of her hands (v. 31). Isaiah declares, “Say to the righteous that it will go well with them, for they will eat the fruit of their actions” (Isaiah 3:10). In the same vein, *peri* can also connote a negative product of a displeasing action: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov. 18:21). Therefore, rewards can be thought of as deserving results of certain deeds.

The Context of Rewards: God’s Accounting System

Weighing Against the Absolute Standard – the Character of God

In order for us to understand rewards, we need to understand their context. The context of rewards is God’s system of accounting, and the governing principles within this system come from God’s value system, indeed His very character. God’s judgments are weighed against His character of holiness. His judgments are absolute because He is absolute, consistent and immutable, ever true to Himself. He cannot accept anything that goes contrary to Him. Therefore, God judges anything that falls short of His holy and perfect nature to be deficient and punishable because it goes against Him. But anything that rightly reflects His character is affirmed and rewarded. God’s ultimate reference point for His value system is Himself.

Because God created us, we live under His value system, which calls us to a standard of holiness and righteousness. God’s system of rewards and punishments comes in the form of our Law. It sets the standard and shows us what is right and wrong, thus indicating His underlying value system as well as His very character and nature. Good and worthy behavior, which brings glory to Him, is distinguished and rewarded. Evil behavior that is done in rebellion against God is

¹ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, 2000.
Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

punished.² “So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” (Mal. 3:18). This gives us a sense of consequence for our actions.

In the Old Testament, God’s law was spelled out plainly, so that Israel would have no excuse: “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known” (Deut 11:26-28). From this, it might be construed that God’s accounting is very black-and-white and superficial. However, besides judging whether the final outcome is righteousness or wickedness, God also takes into account our efforts and struggles along the way.

Weighing Against Relative Circumstances – Recompense

God also weighs experiences, such that if one goes through a difficult or trying experience while attempting to be obedient to God, a reward is given to compensate for the sacrifice or struggle. As humans, we operate under the same principles of recompense and reward. This is why wages³ are given in exchange for labor. If someone is hired to perform a certain task, he is compensated with wages for his time and energy in the least. “Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due” (Romans 4:4).

In 1 Samuel 17, King Saul knew that killing Goliath would be no easy feat. In fact, there was a great risk involved – the cost of life and the shame of Israel’s enslavement. But because the action of challenging Goliath was critical, King Saul needed to present a large enough reward to motivate potential challengers by balancing out the perceived cost. So King Saul offered to anyone who killed Goliath his daughter in marriage and tax exemption (1 Sam 17:25). Therefore, when someone gives up time, energy, or money, the one who benefits from this expense can give a reward in order to recuperate or make up for that loss. This can be seen in terms of completing a balance in accounting.

It is interesting to note that in Hebrew, the idea of completion goes with the idea of rewards and repayment. ‘*Salam*’ means “to finish, complete, repay, reward.”⁴ The Hebrew root denotes perfection in the sense that a condition or action is ‘complete.’ ‘*Salam*’ connotes closure in actions and relationships, leaving nothing undone such that there is injustice. The concept of meeting one’s obligation in full was basic in human relationships. Israel’s social law required that the person causing injury or loss “...shall surely make it good” (Exod. 22:14). Debts were not to be left unpaid. In some instances, an offender “...shall pay double unto his neighbor” (Exod. 22:9). Recognizing that living a righteous life may require personal sacrifices in a world that is wicked, God gives us assurance that there will be closure and that “...to the righteous good shall be repaid” (Prov. 13:21).⁵

Weighing Against Relative Capacity – The Handicap System

God takes into account the differences of individuals, in their ability to overcome trials and in their capacity for obedience. In Mark 25:14-30, the servants in the parable of the talents are given unequal amounts and are rewarded in different amounts. In Mark 12:41-44, Jesus observes the poor widow whose pennies were deemed more than the offerings of the rich,

² “For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality” (Col 4:3).

³ The Greek word, ‘*mithos*,’ means ‘wages’ and is generally translated as “reward.” Wages are deserved pay for hard work done.

⁴ The NASB translates ‘*salam*’ with such words as ‘fulfill,’ ‘repay,’ ‘reward,’ ‘retribution,’ ‘restitution,’ and ‘recompense.’

⁵ The idea of payback implies a system of accounting that is based on a value system of justice. Three Greek words connote the idea of repayment: 1) *apodidomi*, “to give back,” is translated, “I will repay” in Luke 10:35. 2) *antapodidomi*, “to give in return for,” is also translated “I will repay” in Rom. 12:19. 3) *apotino* or *apotio* signify “to pay off” and is used in Philemon 19 by Paul who promises to ‘repay’ whatever Philemon was owed. These words also carry the idea of “repayment” by way of a fine or punishment.

because God judges gifts and offerings by looking at people's means. God judges people differently, because although God's commands are the same for all, each person is given a unique set of traits, circumstances, and capacities with which to be faithful. God has different expectations for people, which meter his judgments. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more" (Luke 12:48). Rewards will be different, according to what people accomplished on earth versus their capacity for accomplishment. "Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor 3:8).

The Timing of Judgment and Rewards

God's system of accounting operates in two timeframes. One is here in this life, and the other is after death into eternity. Rewards and punishments can be received in this life, or in the life to come.

On Earth

God allows consequences of actions to be manifested here on earth. In the Old Testament, there was more emphasis on rewards and punishments being meted out in this life. Signs of disapproval and God's wrath came in the form of disastrous circumstances. These would often be triumphant enemies, sickness, death, exile, and curses. Sodom and Gomorrah received fatal judgment on earth for their wickedness. Eli's two sons were struck dead instantaneously for disrespecting the sacrifices of God. While God often brought imminent judgment against evil, He also promised swift blessings to reward present righteousness. "So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today – to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul – then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied" (Deut 11:13-15). Rewards in this life were easy to recognize, being in the form of God's blessings and favor: prosperity, long life, safety from enemies, food, etc. "As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper" (2 Chron. 26:5). For many of the Israelites, prosperity on earth was taken as a sign of assurance that they were right with God. It signified His approval and favor.

In Eternity

The New Testament emphasizes a time of accounting to come, after our lives on earth. God is not obligated to settle accounts on earth. He works according to His own timing. All people will have to go through an accounting of their lives that will take place in eternity, on Judgment Day. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:9-10).⁶

In the great White Throne Judgment, two sets of books will be opened to judge all people (Rev. 20:11-15) and everything hidden will be revealed (Luke 12:2). God will separate the sheep from the goats and there will be a stark contrast between God's judgment of the wicked and the righteous. "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:5-11). Rewards and punishment will be given in eternity, based on deeds done in the temporal realm.

⁶ Also, "And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth" (Rev. 11:18).

When the Psalmist observes wicked men prospering, he takes comfort in knowing that punishment will come later from a just God (Psalm 9:15, 17). But the righteous put their hope in the greater rewards to come in eternity. “Judgment is coming upon all men, and God promises great reward for those who have served him faithfully” (Rev 11:18). The first reward that the righteous will receive will be eternal life, which God promises for all who believe in Him (John 3:16). In addition to eternal life and salvation from death, God promises the reward of rulership, to reign with Christ and to sit down with Him on His throne (Rev. 20:6; 3:21). As ‘prizes’ for running the race, we will be given crowns, which are symbolic of rulers. More specifically, these crowns are:

- 1) The Crown of Life – given for faithfulness to Christ in persecution or martyrdom (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10);
- 2) The Incorruptible Crown – given for determination, discipline, and victory in the Christian life (1 Cor 9:24-25);
- 3) The Crown of Rejoicing – given for pouring oneself into others in evangelism and discipleship (1 Thess. 2:19; Phil 4:1);
- 4) The Crown of Glory – given for faithfully representing Christ in a position of spiritual leadership (1 Peter 5:1-4);
- 5) The Crown of Righteousness – given for joyfully purifying and readying yourself to meet Christ at His return (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Looking Ahead to Eternal Rewards

We are tempted to store up treasures on earth and to derive comfort from earthly rewards. But Jesus teaches, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:19-21). We are to seek eternal rewards, which are of greater value than earthly rewards. “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26)

Just as we operate under a system of rewards and values here on earth, God calls us to apply it on a broader scale by remembering that the ultimate accounting happens in eternity. So we are to await repayment for our deeds until after death. Many Biblical characters have been lifted up as examples to us to such eternal hope and perspective. For instance, Moses “regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward” (Heb 11:26).

Jesus condemns the Pharisees for seeking the praise of men more than of God. When these hypocritical men pray, fast, or give to the poor in public, Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full” here on earth (Matt. 6:16). By contrast, Jesus teaches to give to the poor, pray, and fast in secret, because “your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18). Similarly, in the context of work, we are to conduct our work “not with external service, as those who merely please men” (Col 3:22), but with the hopeful attitude that our greater reward is coming later. Even someone like a slave in a lowly position can have such hope and dignity in their work. Paul writes to them, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Col 3:23-24).

Looking ahead to future rewards coincides with looking ahead to the coming King. According to Old Testament prophecies: “See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him” (Isa. 40:10). The believer is called to be always vigilant, anticipating the return of Jesus. With Christ’s return come rewards! “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds” (Matt. 16:27). The risen Christ Himself declares, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:12).

Earning Rewards

"I, the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve" (Jer 17:10). How can we earn rewards? What kinds of things does God deem worthy of a reward?

Repentance

Time and again, God promised Israel the reward of His covenant blessings should they repent and obey God's laws. "Wash and make yourselves clean," warns Isaiah. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land" (Isa. 1:16). Paul, in his ministry to the Gentiles, recognized that God's inheritance would be given to those who repent. His goal was "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18).

Following Christ

In the book of Mark, Jesus challenged a rich man: "One thing you lack...Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Mk. 10:21). Christ promises reward upon His return for anyone who denies himself, takes up his cross, and follows Him (Matt. 16:24-27). He declares, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven" (Mt. 10:32). The reward for following Christ will be to partake in His coming Kingdom.⁷

Obedience

God's commands are often given with a promise. In the Old Testament, God emphasizes to His people Israel that obedience to His laws will surely be rewarded. After spelling out clearly in the Ten Commandments His standard for obedience and righteousness, He explicates exactly what kind of rewards follow. First of all, His love – He promises to "[show] love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex 20:6). Secondly, a blessing to the land in the form of productivity, fruit, and peace all around – "Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety" (Lev 25:18-19). God also promises His people prosperity⁸ in long life and increased progeny in the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey⁹. All these rewards for obedience were expected to occur in the present, on earth. In the New Testament, children who obey and honor their parents are promised a reward: "that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth" (Eph 6:1-3).

Righteousness (Good Deeds)

Paul writes, "Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Tim. 6:18-19). Doing righteous deeds, especially when it is the least easy or natural to accomplish them, will receive great rewards. "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Pet 3:9). The apostles constantly charged believers to pursuing a life of godliness in light of the second coming of Christ (2 Pet 3:11-14; 2 Cor 5:9-10).

⁷ "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pe 1:10-11).

⁸ Deut 4:40 – "Keep my decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time."

⁹ Deut 6:3, 18 – "Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you."

There is to be a quiet confidence in each believer, "knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free" (Eph 6:8).

Perseverance and Patience

What fuels the perseverance and patience that are needed to overcome various trials is the hope believers have in the promises of God. "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised" (Heb 10:36). Salvation is promised to those who stand firm: "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the ends will be saved" (Mk 13:13; also Rom 2:6-7). Believers are encouraged to consider it joy when they encounter persecution, as it is an opportunity to demonstrate perseverance and earn rewards:

"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets" (Luke 6:23). (Also Matt 5:12).

Faithfulness through incredible trials will be rewarded with a crown in eternity: "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Even when believers had their possessions confiscated by persecuting authorities, they could be comforted knowing they had "better and lasting possessions" (Heb 10:34).

The believer is also not to begrudge the work of the Lord, as Paul encourages, "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary" (Gal. 6:9). In Revelation 3, Jesus promises to him who overcomes, sonship and the right to rule with Him (also Rev 21:7). Because God knows the trials believers go through, He will reward those who remain faithful to the course despite trying circumstances.

Love Enemies

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men" (Luke 6:35). "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (Matt. 5:46).

Deliver the Oppressed

"This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people" (Jer 22:3). One way to earn rewards is to serve those who cannot repay you. Then, your reward is reserved in Heaven. Jesus tells the prophetic story of those people who healed the sick and visited prisoners in jail without knowing that they did this unto the Lord Jesus. Their reward is to inherit the kingdom prepared for them (Matt. 25).

Honesty and Truth

"You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Deut 25:15). In the New Testament, Jesus commands Zaccheus who repents and lives an honest life by repaying those he cheated. During the growth of the Church, the apostles fought hard against heresy and lies that spread among new believers. They cautioned, "Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward" (2 John 8).

Generosity

Generosity is a gauge of gratitude, and gratitude is a gauge of spiritual health and dependency on God. God loves a cheerful giver and will bestow blessings on him. "Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to" (Deut 15:10). God rewards

giving to the poor in secret (Matt. 6:3-4), so that praise from men will not steal the heavenly reward that is due. God especially rewards generosity shown to those who are not in a position to repay, for God will repay and delights in doing so: "When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (Deut 24:19). Jesus reiterates this principle in His teachings: "But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:13-14).

Service to God's Kingdom

God is partial to His children. Whoever serves His children and advances His Kingdom's work will be rewarded. "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward" (Matt. 10:42, NIV). (Also Mark 9:41).

Implications for the Believer

How does a theology on rewards affect our lives as believers? It causes us to have an eternal perspective and not to put our stakes in this life. It reminds us that we are sojourners in this world and that our sole purpose is to prepare for eternity with God. This has profound implications on our daily lives.

First, understanding that God is our judge allows us to have a healthy fear of the Lord and to focus on pleasing Him only, and not others (2 Cor. 5:9-10). Because He is the ultimate judge, we are in no position to judge others: "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10-12).

Secondly, we can view rewards as incentives for obedience. From the previous section discussing how we can earn rewards, it is clear that rewards accompany obeying God's commands to be faithful, righteous, persevering, generous, and Christ-like. This gives us hope in the midst of trials or suffering. We can also derive joy from knowing that we have a generous God who delights in rewarding His children for their good deeds.

Thirdly, God's system of accounting gives us assurance in God's justice. We can take comfort that although it may seem that the wicked triumph during our time here on earth, God will avenge the righteous. The Psalmist rests on the assurance that God is a fair judge who settles accounts in eternity. "A man shall say, 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth'" (Ps. 58:11). Therefore, vengeance is the Lord's. Paul writes, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds" (2 Tim 4:14).

Lastly, an understanding of rewards should spark an attitude of gratitude and humility in us. In fact, the alternative, not believing in the existence of reward, is deemed arrogant in Malachi 3:13-16. How can we think there is no 'profit' in keeping God's charge and serving him? As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe" (Heb 12:28).

God's Character Revealed

God's system of rewards and punishments ultimately points to His character and values. In all things, He is in the business of revealing Himself to us, for His own glory. First of all, He is a rewarder, described as '*misthapodotes*' in Greek, or "one who pays wages." This word is used by metonymy in Heb 11:6 of God, as the 'Rewarder' of those who seek after Him. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). He is generous and gracious, looking for opportunities to bless and reward His children as a loving Father. We also learn that God is a relational God. In a system of rewards, there is always more than one person and at least two – the Giver and the Receiver of rewards. This assumes a relationship.

The Psalmist links God's giving of rewards to His character traits of strength and love: "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done." (Psalm 62:11-12). "And lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, for You recompense a man according to his work" (Psalm 62:12).

Also, God is just. His justice will prevail over the injustices of this life. The Judgment that will take place in eternity will reveal a powerful God who will repay for both good and evil deeds. There is no partiality with God – Rom 2:6-11, 16. Col 3:25 – God will not show favoritism, either for the unfaithful slave or for the unjust master.

God – The Ultimate Reward

In the end, the ultimate reward is God Himself. God is love, and we were created to share in His love and be in intimate communion with Him. In fact, the very first mention of "reward" is found in the Genesis 15:1: The Lord says, "I am your shield, your very great reward." In declaring His covenant to the people of Israel, God presents Himself as their reward for obedience: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." (Lev 26:12). This seemed satisfying enough of a reward for Ruth, who left her homeland and her chances of remarrying, for she responded, "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16). In Hebrews' list of faith examples, the author describes people who made similar decisions as Ruth did, as well as God's response to them: "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16).

King David, the man after God's own heart, also anticipates His coming reward being an ever-intimate relationship with His Lord. He writes: "As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake" (Psalm 17:15). Being face-to-face with the Lord in eternity is sufficient a reward for David.

Therefore, as Christians, we are to live our lives with eternity in sight. This should motivate us toward obedience and righteousness, as we move closer day by day to our God, who is both our Rewarder and our ultimate Reward.