

The Obedience of Faith

Genesis 12:1-9

Intro: The history of redemption begins just as the history of creation began: with God speaking.

Respond to the Word of the Lord in faith.

I. God's Word brings blessing to those who leave all and follow him (12:1-3).

Emphasis: The Word of the Lord which comes to Abraham and brings blessing through his obedience.

A. *Faith is necessary to receiving God's call (12:1).*

1. The Lord is specific about what Abram is to leave, but gives very little information about where he is going.
2. This required great faith in the Lord which Abram had as confirmed by (Gen. 15:1; Heb. 11:8).
3. Just as Abram's faith was evidenced in obedience, so our faith must be evidenced in our obedience. To do what God has said is the best evidence that we believe what he has spoken.

B. *The obedience of faith brings blessing (12:2-3).*

1. The idea of "blessing" is significant in this passage (as evidenced by its being used five times).
2. Obedience will bring God's blessing to Abraham who will in turn bring God's to Israel, and through them, to the entire world.
3. These seven elements all fill out the meaning of "bless" and are summed up in three concepts: prosperity, potency/fertility, and victory (Waltke, *Genesis*, 205).
 - a. The elements come to fruition in the last (seventh) statement: all the families of the earth.
 - b. The "seed" (singular, cf. Gal 3:16), through whom the Lord will bring this blessing is not Isaac or Jacob, but Jesus Christ.
 - c. The word "families" is modified by "all." There is already an inclusive idea at work which will come to fruition in the NT as the Gentiles are grafted into the true Israel and will be fully realized in the last days (cf. Rev. 5:9).
4. Abraham is blessed so that he can in turn be a blessing (12:2d).
 - a. Abraham is blessed by God so that he can be a blessing to others.
 - b. Here "blessing" is an imperative and carries a spiritual sense.
 - c. This "blessing" also involves the knowledge of God which Abram must transmit to those who will be blessed.
 - d. This knowledge and blessing cannot be separated from faith and obedience.
 - e. The phrase "I will bless" in v. 3 reveals the wideness of God's grace: it is a statement of resolve with many intended recipients. God is the first evangelist and the first missionary, setting Abraham apart to proclaim his name.
5. God's blessing which will go through Abraham to the world come with safeguards to Abraham (12:3).
 - a. "Cursing" involves the rejection or a holding in contempt Abraham's faith which "cursing" will in turn bring a "curse" to them, which is a rejection or being cut off from God's blessing.
 - b. Abraham is the channel of blessing to the entire world (Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8).

II. God's Word works obedience in those who believe it (12:4-7a).

Emphasis: Abraham is obedient to the call of God.

A. *Faith obeys (12:4-5).*

1. The word for "departed" is a form of the same word for "get out" in v. 1 (it is used again in v. 5).
2. Allen Ross lists three important aspects of Abraham's obedience in relation to this faith:
 - a. Abram went in obedience to the Lord: "as the Lord had spoken" (v. 4). This is not just simple migration; it is the obedience of faith.

- b. Abram and Sarai were well advanced in age and she was barren, thus emphasizing their faith in responding in this way to the Lord's promise.
 - c. Abram took everything and everyone with him. He is truly breaking all ties. He is also assuming responsibility for those under his care. This one would not do without great faith in God and his promises.
3. The NT parallel is Jesus' calls to those who would be his disciples to forsake all and to follow him (Matt. 16:33; Luke 9:23).
 - a. This is a ruthless abandonment of all that was your past.
 - b. This abandonment leads to fulfillment. As you empty yourself and your life of what was, God fills you and your life with his own blessing.
 4. The expression "the people they had acquired" implies that Abram had been spreading his faith in Haran (it could not refer to slaves or, obviously, children).

B. Obedience will always be met with opposition (12:6).

1. "Moreh" means "teacher" and a terebinth tree was often the site of a pagan place of worship. It may have been a place where instruction in the pagan religion was given.
2. This may explain the significance of the following statement about the Canaanites still being in the land.
 - a. This adds a second challenge to Abraham's faith, the first being his wife's barrenness.
 - b. Abraham is in the heart of the land of promise, but the land of promise was already possessed, and possessed by those upon whom the curse was already attached.
 - c. The promise would not be realized without difficulty which would in turn require greater faith.

C. God's Word confirms the promises of God by recording God's faithfulness.

1. The Lord appears to Abraham once he is on the land to confirm his promises.
2. The Lord does not appear to us today as he did then, though he has "appeared" in the form of his Son (Heb. 1:2).
3. Understanding the Bible as the history of God's covenant faithfulness reminds us that God's promises come to pass.
4. The NT confirms that the resurrection is the confirmation of God's promises (Rom. 1:2-4).

III. God's Word leads to proclamation and worship (12:7b-9).

Emphases: Abraham's worshipful response to the promises of God.

A. Abraham did not possess the land of promise, but he was convinced that it was true.

1. Abraham was a sojourner and pilgrim in the land of promise (Heb. 11:9).
2. We, too, must live as pilgrims in this world though the promises of God to be freed from sin, doubt, pain, etc. are true and we believe them.

B. Abraham responded to the promise by worshipping the Lord.

1. The phrase "called on the name of the Lord" (cf. 4:26) means literally: "proclaim the name of the Lord by name." (Luther translated it "preached.")
2. The "name" of the Lord is his attributes and activities. The Lord promised to make Abram's name great and Abram's response is to proclaim the "name" of the Lord.

Conclusion: Those who trust the Lord demonstrate their faith by forsaking everything to worship the Lord and follow his program to bless the world.