

They Speak Of Me

*²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,
he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
(Luke 24:27. ESV)*

*³⁹ You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;
and these are they which testify of Me.
(John 5:39. NKJV)*

The Journey Of Faith

June 1st, 2014

Genesis 12:4-9

Hebrews 11:8-10

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to Genesis 12:4-9. We're continuing on with the story of Abraham which the New Testament holds up to our attention as a template for the journey of faith. Hear now from God's holy, inspired and inerrant Word:

Genesis 12:4-9 (ESV)

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,

⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Bible scholars generally agree that in this passage God introduces to his people the theme of journey as a metaphor for understanding the life of faith. They get that from the inspired commentary of the New Testament which says about this passage:

Hebrews 11:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Abraham was a pilgrim. The old King James version has “by faith he sojourned in the land of promise”. This passage, in Genesis 12 is really an introduction to the journey of faith and we will look at it this morning in that light. By reading this travel narrative of Abraham very carefully, as indeed the Bible wants us to do, we are learning a great deal about the journey of faith, let me see if I can pull a few of those things to the surface for your reflection.

On The Journey Of Faith...

First of all, on the journey of faith, like Abraham:

1. We have to leave “our father’s house”

Abraham’s father appears to have migrated to Haran and the text explicitly says that for Abraham to follow God he had to leave his father’s land; and he did. He left what he knew, he left his source of income, he left his friends and family in order to follow God. That’s how it very often is when we are called to walk with the Lord. Jesus did not come to change that, in fact he said:

Matthew 10:34-37 (ESV)

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ...

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

The call of God in this world will always be a call of division and separation. It will separate families; it will require you to sever relationships and to forge new ones. If you’ve ever been through Mile 1 or if you’ve ever taken people through Mile 1 then you know that we teach this to new believers. Chapter 14 – Edit Your Associations. We talk about how coming to faith in Christ will generally involve a complete shuffling and reordering of your family circle. Jesus knew that, this is why he said that the church must become a new family. He applied that even to himself. One time he was teaching in a crowded house and his own mother and brothers came to

fetch him; they had heard disturbing rumours about his preaching and had been made aware that the authorities in Jerusalem were out to get him so they come to take him home for some detox and discussion and a person comes and tells Jesus:

Mark 3:32-34 (ESV)

“Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.”

³³ And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”

³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”

This is why in the New Testament the church is commonly called the “household of faith” or “the brotherhood” and fellow Christians are referred to as “brothers” or “brothers and sisters”. The church is a new family and you will often need that very much because following God results in losing friends and leaving family. It did for Abraham, and says Jesus, it will for us.

Secondly, on the journey of faith, like Abraham:

2. We have to proceed on the Word of God

Look again at Genesis 12:4:

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him

As we mentioned last week, God never gives us all the information. He didn't tell Abraham where exactly to go, he just said go, that a way. He didn't tell him what he'd be doing there or how long it would be before he properly took possession. There were a lot of pieces missing from the puzzle but Abraham knew that to walk by faith is to walk according to the Word of the Lord. The fundamental distinction of the true disciple is that we trust not in our own judgment, rather we trust in the Word of God.

Isaiah 66:2b (ESV)

But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Again, this is not one of the things that Jesus came to change, in fact, Jesus said:

Luke 6:46 (ESV)

⁴⁶ “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”

People today like to talk about how walking with God is all about relationship not religion, its all about love not law. Well not so fast. Jesus said:

John 15:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Apparently for Jesus relationship was dependent upon obedience. You don't get to be in a relationship with Jesus, you don't get to call yourself a Christ follower unless you are actually FOLLOWING and determined to keep his every word. By the way, John, to whom Jesus said that and who wrote it down in John 15:14, apparently did not misunderstand the meaning of that saying. He wrote in one of his letters, you read it last week in the RMM readings:

2 John 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments;

If you want to say that Christianity is all about love, that's fine, just make sure you define love the way the Bible does. As for Abraham, so for us, if we walk with the Lord, we walk according to His Word.

Thirdly, as for Abraham, so for us, in the walk of faith:

3. We must believe in the impossible

There is a tiny little detail we mustn't miss in verse 4:

Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

You would think that if God is going to build a new nation from which to give birth to the promised Messiah, he might choose a younger and more fertile man. Instead he chooses Abram. A man well past his prime, shall we say. A man married to a woman who has already gone through menopause. That's not me being crude, that detail is supplied in chapter 18 verse 11. God chooses an older man and a post menopausal woman as the founders of this new race of people. Rationally speaking, that is not a good choice. If we were sending a pod to Mars on a

one-way ticket to start a human colony there we probably wouldn't stock that pod with folks from the Atrium – right? We would send 20 year olds. But God doesn't operate according to conventional wisdom. God is in the business of doing the impossible through the improbable. Look around you. This church is full of improbable people doing impossible things by God's grace for God's glory. That's what it means to walk with the Lord; that's why its called faith. For crying out loud, we follow a guy who died on a cross and rose from the dead! Everything we know about biology screams out that this is impossible and yet he appeared to many and his disciples touched his hands and his feet and they looked into his eyes and said: "My Lord, and my God". (John 20:28). The walk of faith has always required a belief in the impossible by the power and promise of God.

Fourthly, in the walk of faith:

4. We must think multi-generationally

Abram was 75 years old. He must have understood that most if not all of what God had promised to do through him would have to involve his children and his grandchildren. And in that he was right. In fact very little of what God promised came to pass in the actual lifetime of Abraham. Abraham never in his life actually established a permanent residence in Canaan. He was a tent dweller and a wanderer all his days. But his children and his children's children crossed the Jordan, conquered Jericho and went through the land of Canaan like a plague with the Lord driving out their enemies before them. Abraham didn't see that day, but he believed in that day. He had a multi-generational perspective on things and so should we. Peter said that in the first ever Christian sermon. Speaking to Jewish persons, interestingly enough, he said:

Acts 2:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ **For the promise is for you and for your children** and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

When God calls you, you better believe he's not just calling you; he's calling you, your children and your children's children.

If I may be so bold, let me suggest that this is one of the ways that the mind of the modern Evangelical has been conquered by the spirit of the age. We think as individuals. We think always under the tyranny of the immediate and the personal. Do you know that in the days of our Puritan ancestors you could come under church discipline for failing to catechize your children? If a father was found negligent in teaching the Gospel to his children he could fall under the discipline of the church, can you imagine such a thing? We have a training event on June 5th at RCC campus for parents interested in learning how to do family devotions with their children – I wonder if you will be there? Do you understand that if God called you in all likelihood he means to call your children and your grandchildren? And yet, God works through ordinary means. His Sovereign purpose never excuses you from your personal responsibility. He means to call your children and your children’s children THROUGH YOU. You are the ordinary means, your reading of Scripture, your catechizing, your prayers and your pleading are the ordinary means through which he means to do this extraordinary thing. Think multi-generationally, the promises are for you and your children, in our day, as in Abraham’s day.

Fifthly, as we walk the walk of faith, as with Abraham:

5. We seek to include others

Look at verse 5:

Genesis 12:5 (ESV)

⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan.

The wording of verse 5 is a little bit tricky and it could mean “the souls they had won or gained in Haran” as per the KJV or with the ESV the “people they had acquired” meaning their household servants. Either way, the point is that God uses the people he calls to draw other people into the blessings and the promises, starting, as we just said, with our own family and working out from there. Matthew Henry comments on this passage saying:

“Those that go to Canaan need not go alone ... Those who serve and follow God themselves should do all they can to bring others to serve and follow him too. These souls they are said to have ‘gained’. We must reckon ourselves true gainers if we can but win souls to Christ”.¹

The walk of faith in the wider world is meant to be a gathering walk. As with Abraham, we seek to bring others.

Sixthly, in the walk of faith:

6. We will face temptation and we will have to declare

Look at verse 6:

Genesis 12:6 (ESV)

⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at **Shechem, to the oak of Moreh**. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

Shechem in the Bible is often a place of decision. Multiple times in the Bible God brings people to Shechem, a valley pass between two mountains, in order that they might choose which way they will go. Will they walk with God or will they walk with the nations? In Deuteronomy 11 God says:

Deuteronomy 11:29-30 (ESV)

²⁹ And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set **the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal**.

³⁰ Are they not beyond the Jordan, west of the road, toward the going down of the sun, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, **beside the oak of Moreh**?

Do you see that? Same place. God tells Moses to bring Abraham’s great grandchildren back to the place of decision. Between the two mountains, by the Oak of Moreh. Set before them blessing and cursing. Set before them they way of God and the way of the nations and call them to decide.

That’s not the last time this happens either. In Joshua 24 as Joshua is about to die, he brings the great great grandchildren of Abraham back to this exact spot:

¹ Matthew Henry, *Genesis To Deuteronomy*, Matthew Henry’s Commentary (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1935), 85-86.

Joshua 24:1-15 (ESV)

¹ Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel **to Shechem** and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God.

² And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.

³ Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many....

Joshua brings the people to this spot, the valley of decision and he takes them back to the start of their story in the journey of Abraham. He goes on to speak about that story and how the promises of God developed and brought them many blessings. We pick it up down in verse 14:

¹⁴ “Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, **choose this day whom you will serve**, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

God brings his people again and again to the valley of decision and he calls on them to declare. He shows them the way of the nations. Look. Look at Canaan. Don't turn away. See their wealth, see their pride, see their sexual liberty. In chapter 13 we have the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Look at those cities Abraham! That is the way of the nations! Complete sexual licence leading to social chaos! Is that what you want? If so choose it now. Make your choice. Pick a side. If you walk with me, you walk apart. There will be enemies. There will be hardships. You will be in the minority. But I will be with you.

My dear friends, there is a sickness in the Evangelical camp and it is the sickness of a divided heart. We want to be friends with Canaan while we with God. And God in our day has brought us back to the Oak at Moreh. He has brought us to the valley of decision and he is demanding that we declare. This moment always comes at some point on the walk of faith. Choose what you will, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Lastly, in the walk of faith, in Abraham's day, as in ours:

7. We will be strengthened by the Presence and the Promises of the Lord

Genesis 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.”

How do you find the strength to say no to the world and yes to God? You don't find that strength inside yourself. If you still think you do, then God will no doubt have plans to rob you of that deception. He will no doubt permit you to find yourself in some manner of temptation that blinds your eyes and dumbs your brain. He will put you out in the deep water and wait for you to cry for help. Abraham didn't resist the temptations of Canaan by strength of will, he did it by the presence and promise of God. The Lord appeared. The Lord spoke. It is the presence and the word of God that preserve God's people in the valley of decision.

Do you remember that story in Pilgrim's Progress when Christian is locked inside the Dungeon of Giant Despair? Do you remember how he finally got out? He remembered that he had been given the Key of Promise and he took it out, inserted it into the lock and immediately he was free from his trial and returned to the path of faith. The promises of the Lord sustain us in the sufferings of faith. Jesus knew this and he applied it to the encouragement of his disciples:

Matthew 19:28-29 (ESV)

²⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

Jesus doesn't say to people: Follow me, it will cost you everything and I'll give you nothing in return. No. He says, follow me, it will cost you everything and I will give you everything in return. If you don't understand the need for promises, then you have probably never paid a price. If you're really walking with the Lord, then you know two things very well. You know the value and the blessing of the presence and the promises of Almighty God.

Abraham, in the valley of decision, was ministered to by the presence and promise of God. That ministry enabled him to worship and to carry on in his walk of faith. Our story ends:

Genesis 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

Excursus On The Land

Now, in a perfect world, this is where we would end the message, but, as you may have guessed, this is not a perfect world. In preaching you have to pay attention to the positive and the negative aspects of the task. Positive preaching means adding content, providing exhortation and building clarity and confidence – that’s good and I hope we’ve done that today. Negative preaching is where we push a little bit on what is going sideways at the time. Negative preaching means shooing away the squirrels and throwing a few rocks at the wolves in sheep’s clothing. Towards that end we need to point out that:

1. The land was promised NOT to Abraham but to his Seed

Look at verse 7:

Genesis 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.”

The word translated as “offspring” there is *zera* which is also translated as “seed”. We mustn’t read this verse as though Jesus never came and the New Testament was never written. We have specific commentary on this verse and on this word in the New Testament:

Galatians 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "*And to your Seed,*" **who is Christ.**

Who is the promise of the land made to? The Seed of Abraham. Who is the Seed of Abraham? Jesus Christ! Therefore, who is the only person who has an enduring covenantal claim on the land of Palestine? Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews! The land belongs to him! Let’s just be very clear on that. It is very common to hear Evangelicals say that the modern nation of Israel has a covenantal, eternal claim on the land of Palestine. That is not true. Jesus has an eternal covenantal claim on the land of Palestine. The right of Israel to live in the land is dependent now on the state of their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, I’m not saying that modern day Israel doesn’t have the right to live in Palestine. Israel has the same rights as a Country that Canada has. Her citizens have the right to ride the bus without getting blown up by suicide bombers and her government has the right to respond to terrorist

aggression in a firm and effective manner; just as Ottawa has that right and that duty to protect our life and liberty in the City of Orillia. They have exactly those same rights, but no greater. They do not have a DIVINE and COVENANTAL right to the land. Those rights clearly belong to Jesus.

2. God promised to establish Israel in the land. And he did.

People will sometimes say that God must put ethnic Israel in possession of all of the land of Palestine sometime in the future because he promised that he would do that. That is almost true. God promised to do that but here is the thing – HE DID DO THAT! Look at 1 Kings 8:56. When Solomon dedicated the temple he said this:

1 Kings 8:56a (ESV)

⁵⁶ “Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. **Not one word has failed of all his good promise**

In the days of Solomon, the nation of Israel possessed all that God had promised. They occupied the land. But even Solomon understood that keeping the land was not their “right”, it would require them to maintain a right relationship with the Lord. In his prayer on the very same day, he envisioned a time when they would betray the Lord and as a consequence LOSE THE LAND and he asked the Lord to be merciful if the people should repent:

1 Kings 8:46-49 (ESV)

⁴⁶ “If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, **so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near,**

⁴⁷ yet if they turn . . . and repent and plead with you... ⁴⁹ then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause

In his prayer on that day it is very clear that Solomon believed 3 things that we in the Evangelical church should also believe:

- i. God kept his promise to Israel and establish them in the land.
- ii. Keeping the land would require Israel to maintain a right relationship with God.
- iii. If they lost the land, their best recourse was not to assert their rights, it was to humble themselves sincerely and repent.

I get nervous when I hear Evangelicals talking about the “rights of Israel” to the land. The Bible is pretty clear – Jesus is promised everything and Jesus has claimed everything through his victory on the cross. Sinners don’t have rights. Sinners cling to the cross in repentance and faith be they Jew or Gentile, that’s the Gospel.

Fourthly and lastly:

4. The land was never the end of Abraham’s hope. It was a type of things to come.

The ever quotable Matthew Henry has a good word on this point as well. Speaking of the land he says:

“It is a grant in reversion to his seed, which yet, it should seem, Abram understood also as a grant to himself of a better land in reversion, of which this was a type; for he looked for a heavenly country, Hebrews 11:16.”²

Abraham knew that there was something better beyond the land that the land pointed to.

Christians ought to know that too. The end of our hope is not geopolitical advance for the nation of Israel. The end of our hope is life with Christ, abundant and everlasting in the new heavens and the new earth. Any inheritance we have in that place, rests on our abiding in Christ. For the Jew and for the Gentile alike. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

² Ibid.; 87.