

ABRAM'S OBEDIENCE (12:4-9)

You have to love the symmetry between verses 1 and 4. In verse 1, we read, "The Lord said to Abram, "Go." Verse 4 tells us, "Abram went." Abram didn't simply say, "You know what, Sarai; I believe God can do everything he promised, let's just sit here and see what he can do." He must have said something like, "Come on Sarai, we are going to put one foot in front of another and watch God's promises unfold as we follow him." Paul was right, "faith involves believing God (Romans 4:3)." James was right, "believing God always leads to obedience (James 2:2)."

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

1. What does Abram's story teach us about the vital connection between "faith and works" (or grace and obedience)?
2. The fact that Abram builds an altar reminds us of everything we lost in the fall and the wonderful provision of God's grace. In Genesis 1 and 2, we are created to live in God's presence and to enjoy his blessing. In Genesis 3, we are banned from God's presence. We lost easy access to God and forfeited his blessing. God, however, makes a way. We can come into God's presence by means of an altar and a sacrifice. How does Abram's altar foreshadow God's provision in Christ?
3. What is significant about the fact that Abram builds altars in Shechem and Bethel?
4. What is significant about the fact that no altar is mentioned in the Negev, and the scene is followed by Abram's first (among many) crises of faith?



Abraham passed off the scene well over 4,000 years ago. When he was alive, he lived in a tent and raised sheep (by all accounts, he had a lot of them). What in the world does that have to do with us?

More than we dare imagine.

If we are in Christ, we have a deep connection with Abraham. Paul tells us, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29)." The promises God made to this ancient Bedouin have been fulfilled in Christ and extended to us. They are the bedrock of who we are and how we respond to God's grace. His story is our story. Knowing his story will dramatically shape how we know, love, and follow Christ.

ABRAM'S FAMILY (11:27-32)

While we tend to hurry past the genealogies in Scripture, they serve an essential role in the biblical story. They ground the story in history and introduce key players and tensions in the story. Abram's story begins with Abram's family.

²⁷ This is the account of Terah's family line.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. ²⁸ While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. ²⁹ Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.

³¹ Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there.

³² Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

1. If you are familiar with Abram's story, you will probably recognize the names of Abram, Sarai, and Lot. Milkah and Nahor will reappear later in the story as well (Genesis 22:20, 23; 24:15, 24). What do we learn about Abram, Sarai, and Lot from the opening narrative?
2. The land of Canaan also figures prominently in the story (see verses 4-7 below). Interestingly, Terah was taking his family to the land of Canaan before their journey stalls out in Haran. What are some of the reasons their journey may have stalled out?
3. What are some distractions that threaten to forestall our obedience to Christ?
4. What are the tensions that will need to be resolved as the story continues?

GOD'S PROMISE (12:1-3)

The promises God makes to Abraham will become the heart of the Biblical Story. The tension in the rest of the Old Testament will focus on the fulfillment and threats to these promises. The promises, however, begin with a command. Without Abram's obedience to God's command, the promises God made to Abram would have never been fulfilled.

12:1 The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

2 "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ⁱ 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

1. It is not uncommon for us to uproot and move to another part of the country. It was very rare, however, in the ancient world. Abram's identity would have been inextricably tied to his country, his people, and his household. God's call to Abram involved a move from the comfortable and familiar to the uncomfortable and unfamiliar. How does God's call to Abram reflect his call to each one of us (You might want to consider Matthew 10:37-38 and John 12:25-26, or even more dramatically Luke 14:25-26)?

2. What do you make of the fact that God didn't tell Abram exactly where he was leading him, he simply said, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you?"
3. Any inconvenience Abram may have experienced paled in comparison to God's promise. There are several outstanding literary features to God's promise. There are seven carefully structured clauses in the promise. The number seven is associated with perfection and completeness in the Hebrew text. The word "bless" is mentioned five times. In Genesis 3-11, the emphasis is on the curse (also mentioned five times). The phrase "I will" also occur five times. They emphasize what God will do for Abram, rather than what Abram will do for God. How do these structural features add to the impact of God's promise?
4. What exactly does God promise Abram?
5. We are fond of phrases like "success" and "good fortune." The biblical concept of "Blessing" is different. How would you describe the fundamental difference between "God's blessing" and our notions of success?
6. According to these verses, why is God making these promises to Abram?
7. Paul tells us these promises are fulfilled in Christ and extended to us as children of God and the "seed of Abraham (see Galatians 3:7-9; 16; 26-29)." How does Paul's perspective change the way we read and understand these promises?
8. How do these promises apply to us?