

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)*

Heirs According To The Promise

May 25th, 2014

Genesis 12:1-3

Galatians 3:1-29

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to Genesis 12:1-3. This morning we are going to slow down a bit compared with the pace we set for the first 3 weeks and that's because the Biblical narrative starts to slow down. The story of Adam is covered in your Bible in basically 2.5 chapters, the story of Noah covers 5 chapters, the story of Abraham however, covers 12 chapters and so, obviously that dictates a change of approach. We'll let each story in the narrative speak for itself and then at the end we will attempt to summarize those insights, in terms of who God is, who we are and how this narrative anticipates the work of God in Christ to secure our redemption. Does that make sense? Alright, let me read to you now from God's holy, inspired and inerrant word:

Genesis 12:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

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

It would be difficult to think of a passage in the Old Testament that is treated in the New Testament with greater significance than this one. In terms of the Biblical storyline, Genesis 12 is a big rock. One of the things you need to know about the Bible is that within the Bible revelation is progressive, that is it grows in content and clarity as the story moves along; and this story represents a quantum leap forward in Gospel content and clarity. Over the last three weeks we've been talking a lot about "the protoevangelium" or "the first giving of the Gospel" which is found in Genesis 3.

Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

This is the first sign of hope after the tragedy of the fall. The fall changes everything and now into that despair and devastation, God speaks a word of promise. He says that a Seed of the woman will come and defeat the devil, at some cost to himself, and restore unto humanity all that was lost in the fall. That's great news, but its thin news in terms of definitive content. Who will this seed be? When will he come? How will we recognize him? What will he do? How can we get in on that? None of those questions are answered in the first giving of the Gospel but as the story rolls on, like a snowball, the Gospel picks up content and clarity until finally we are ready to see, believe and declare with John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". Genesis 12:1-3 is the first big expansion on the promise. We are supposed to see it as the first major step forward in God's plan to undo and reverse the curse upon all creation; there all kinds of literary hints towards that end. If you read Genesis 1-11 very carefully you will notice that the word "curse" is used 5 times. If you read Genesis 12:1-3 very carefully you will notice the word "blessing" 5 times¹. This story is about reversing the curse.

We don't know much about how that will happen yet, more information is coming, but this passage is absolutely critical for a right understanding of how God works ultimately in Christ to redeem a people for himself. We're going to read it carefully, we're going to pay attention to the near context as additional data is given over the next couple of chapters in Genesis and we're going to read it backwards through the inspired commentary of the New Testament. And we'll begin by noticing what this text teaches about God.

¹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, Kingdom Through Covenant (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 2012), 242.

What This Passage Teaches Us About God:

First of all we can't help but notice in this story the unavoidable fact that:

1. God elects

God chooses people through which to accomplish his purposes of redemption and the reasons behind his election are never shared with the reader. The text begins with the words:

¹ Now the LORD said **to Abram**

Why does God choose Abram and not Nahor or Haran, Abram's brothers? Why this brother and not those brothers? That question comes up again and again and again in the Bible. Why Isaac and not Ishmael? Why Jacob and not Esau? We would love it if that were answered but it isn't, instead the Bible says, speaking about Jacob and Esau:

Romans 9:11-16 (ESV)

¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—

¹² she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

¹³ As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!

¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

That's a hard truth isn't it? We don't know why God chooses to help some believe and be saved and not others. We don't know and we can kill ourselves trying to know what cannot be known! Here's what we know. All people should know God, all people should see God at work in Christ to secure their salvation, all people should confess their sins and call on Christ but they don't. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness so that they can be gods unto themselves. They should, they must but they don't apart from the grace of God. Those are hard truths but those ARE BIBLE TRUTHS and don't you dare deny them just because you can't understand them! To do that is to commit original sin all over again, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so that you can decide for yourself that which is good and evil, fair and unfair, right and wrong. Don't do it. There are lots of things we can't understand but that doesn't make them any more or less true. God elects. That truth is on every page of your Bible.

Secondly we see in this text that:

2. God enables

Notice the obvious contrast here between Abraham and Adam. In the garden God gave Adam a command:

Genesis 1:28 (ESV)

And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion ...

God gave Adam and Eve commands and it seems, he had every expectation that they would and could keep those commands. That is a very important doctrine and we state that explicitly in our own FBC Statement of Faith in the section on Creation and Fall:

He created man, male and female, being made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts, **and power to fulfill it**, and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change.

Adam and Eve were able to obey in the garden before the fall and so God rightly deals with them in terms of commands. But things are different now on the other side of the fall. Every inclination of the human heart is ONLY EVIL ALL THE TIME according to Genesis 6:5 and so when God deals with Abraham he deals in promise and he deals in help; look again at verse 2 of Genesis 12:

Genesis 12:2 (ESV)

² And **I will make of you** a great nation, and **I will bless you and make your name great**, so that you will be a blessing.

A few chapters later God clarifies further saying:

Genesis 17:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of **a multitude** of nations.

⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for **I have made you the father of a multitude** of nations.

⁶ **I will make you exceedingly fruitful**, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.

God commanded Adam to be fruitful and multiply, now he tells Abraham: “I will multiply you and I will make you exceedingly fruitful”. Command has become promise and grace. Mankind is no longer able to obey – they lost their power to fulfill it – so unless God is to consign all of humanity to hell – as he would be well within his rights to do – he must now condescend to do for man what man is unable to do for himself.

Augustine put it this way and it has yet to be improved upon: “What God commands, he also enables”. That’s what we are supposed to see in this text! That’s why all the commands are supported and surrounded by promises – it isn’t that man is free to disobey – these covenants are explicitly NOT unconditional as you sometimes hear – rather it is that every command is now supported by promise and grace. Mercy triumphs over judgment. Grace gets the last word. God enables his chosen to obey, in the story of Abraham and in our story as Paul says in Ephesians:

Ephesians 1:4 (NKJV)

⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

Old Testament and New, God is a God who commands and who enables that which he commands.

Thirdly, we notice that:

3. God embeds

God injects blessing into curse. God brings change and reversal from within. He says to Abraham:

in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3b. ESV)

Later that “in you” is clarified; God says in Genesis 22:

Genesis 22:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed

Happily we have New Testament commentary on the exact meaning of “in your seed” in Galatians 3. The Apostle Paul says:

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.

Listen to me very carefully, ultimately this promise to bless the whole world and undo the curse is not about Abraham and it is not about Israel – ultimately it is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Abraham is a blessing to the world because he carries in his body the line of Christ. From him, physically speaking, will come the Promised Seed. The child, born of a woman, who will defeat the devil, undo the curse and take us back to God. The promise is about Jesus! There is no question about that, if you want to consider yourself an orthodox Bible believing Christian. I am astonished to hear Evangelicals speak of this verse as though it terminates in the nation of Israel. To believe that is to believe something other than the Gospel of the New Testament. Every promise of God is yes and amen in CHRIST – Amen? In Christ, not in Israel. Be very careful here lest you believe a different Gospel. The promise of God is embedded in a man and later in a nation. But the man is not the blessing and neither is the nation. Ultimately the blessing of God that reverses the curse is none other than the God-man, God in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

Fourthly lets be careful to notice that:

4. God exalts

God raises a banner and draws people to himself. God promises that Abraham will be the agent by which God draws and blesses others:

Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV)

² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God says to Abraham that he is going to lift him up, he is going to exalt him and make his name great SO THAT he will be a blessing. The grammar here is difficult and a variety of translations have been suggested but the essential meaning is clear. God determines to exalt Abraham toward

the end that the nations will be blessed. Later in Jewish history this promise was largely localized around the ministry of the temple. God was great in Israel in the temple and the temple was exalted, or made great unto the end that the peoples of the earth would see, come and be blessed. We catch a glimpse of that in Isaiah 2:

Isaiah 2:2-5 (ESV)

² It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,
³ and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The house of the Lord will be exalted in Israel and all the nations will come, for out of Zion shall go the law and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem! Amen. God lifts up in order to bless others. Now, reading that backwards through the New Testament we see that once again those promises ultimately come to rest on Jesus Christ. Jesus, having said already “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19) goes on to say:

John 12:32 (ESV)

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Ultimately the promise to lift up and draw all people unto blessing and life is fulfilled not in Abraham, not in Israel, not in the temple, but in the body of Jesus Christ upon a bloody Roman cross. It is to Christ crucified we must look in faith, in order to be saved.

Lastly, in terms of what we learn about God here, we want to notice that:

5. God expands (the scope of his mercy)

Look at verses 2-3:

Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV)

² And I will make of you a great nation, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

This is a very interesting verse. God says that he is going to make a great nation out of Abraham but he uses an unexpected word here. He uses the word *goy* a word that the Jews use for the

Gentiles. You may have heard a Jewish person refer to a Gentile as a *goya*; the Hebrew word for the Gentile nations is *goyim*. The word the Jews use for themselves is *am* which means “people”. Jews are “people”, the Gentiles are *goyim* but here, God tells Abraham that he is going to make of him a great big pile of *goyim*, a great heap of Gentiles we might say. He is going to make this nation from all the families of the earth, he uses the word *mishpachah* which really means “clans” or “tribes” or perhaps even “cities”². God seems to be saying that he is going to take people from all of these small groups, peoples who were no peoples, and he is going to knit them together into one big, family of God. Jews, Gentiles of every colour, shape and stripe are going to come together in the new family of God; this is going to happen somehow, through the person and agency of Abraham.

Once again in the New Testament we see this promise land on Jesus Christ. Paul says in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:11-22 (ESV)

¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—

¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ...

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

There is no more Jew and Gentile – there is no more “am” and “goyim”, that dividing wall has been broken down! God has done what he promised. He has drawn in people who were far off – strangers to the covenants of promise and without God in the world – and in Christ he has brought them near. He has made them one and we are now saints and fellow citizens and members of the household of God. The promise and election of God have been dramatically expanded in Christ. There is A Wideness in God’s Mercy now, as the old hymn declared and this is the wideness.

In Galatians 3 Paul says:

² As suggested in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, Kingdom Through Covenant (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 2012), 244.

Galatians 3:26-29 (ESV)

²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

In Christ there are no second class citizens – there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile – we are all sons of God through faith, heirs according to the promise! To deny the essential equality of all God's people in Christ is to preach another Gospel, plain and simple. It frightens me when I hear so called Evangelicals talking about Jewish Christians as though they are a special class of citizen in the Kingdom of God – it absolutely terrifies me when I hear so called Evangelicals talk about unsaved Jews as though they are likewise a special class of believer all unto themselves apart from Christ – that is a whole other Gospel. The Gospel of the Bible is that there is no further distinction in Christ; all are sons of God through faith. Not sons and slaves or sons and nephews, or sons and associates – all are sons, meaning all are full heirs to the promise of the Father. In Christ. There is no distinction. The mercy of God is wide.

Now, that is the main thing which we must see in this text and we know that because that is how this text is generally commented upon in the New Testament. However, there is one further use of this text that we should pay attention to. In Hebrews 11 the walk of Abraham with God is held up as an authorized model for understanding our own walk as believers. Therefore in much less detail, let's quickly note some things from this passage about the walk of faith.

Observations Concerning The Walk Of Faith:

First of all, concerning the walk and way of faith we notice that:

1. It begins with grace

We covered this ground when we spoke of how God elects and enables but let's just say one more time, from our perspective that we were without hope and without God in the world. We were dead in our trespasses and sin. We had lost our power to obey and believe the Lord. But God in Christ had mercy on us. That is the Gospel and I know it drives some of you crazy. You

want it to start with you. You want it to be based somehow on your decisions, your choices, your merits but it isn't. If your understanding of the Gospel begins with anything other than the gracious initiative of a merciful God it isn't the Gospel.

Secondly, concerning the walk of faith:

2. It proceeds on the Word of God, not on rational certainty

God told Abram to go to a land that he would show him. And Abram went. There is a lot of content lacking in that call. Abram's travel was not based on a reasoned choice preferring option God to option other. He was told next to nothing but he was told by God. My friends, God never supplies all the information. If he did, you'd be walking by sight and not by faith. Its only faith and its only obedience in the absence of explicit proof and in the absence of parallel inclinations, I might add. Don't tell me about how your orientation frees you from the need to obey. My orientations rarely parallel the Word of God – that's what makes it faith! We live by the Word of God, not our own moral reasoning or our own desires and inclinations. We go before we know, and that's what makes it faith.

Thirdly,

3. It requires a break with the past

Abraham had to leave his father's household and leave his native land in order to walk in the promises of God. As with Noah last week, we remember that there is no salvation unto God unless it be accompanied by a death unto the world.

4. It maintains a hope for the future

The Book of Hebrews says that ultimately Abraham looked forward to something bigger and better even than the land of Canaan:

Hebrews 11:10 (ESV)

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

The New Testament tells us that this city does not exist on the earth, but rather descends from the heavens. How does the Bible end? Is it with glory days in the earthly city of Jerusalem? Are people worshipping in a restored temple on the earth? No. The Bible ends with these words:

Revelation 21:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Real Christians are excited about something far more profound than the triumph of earthly Israel and their hope has nothing to do with red heifers and rebuilt temples, rather our hope is in heaven from which we await a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.

Lastly, like Abraham, our walk of faith, initiated by grace and sustained by the Word of God is ultimately:

5. It is for the glory of God and the good of all people

We are saved not just from hell, not just from sin and its ravages but we are ultimately saved for the glory of God and for the good of all people. Jesus told us to make disciples by GOING INTO ALL THE WORLD; he said this Gospel of repentance and remission of sins MUST BE PREACHED TO ALL NATIONS IN MY NAME. Jesus is the Seed of Abraham who brings blessing to the world. He was sent for this reason but he said to his church:

John 20:21 (ESV)

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

The Great Commission is really a call to go and bring. We go and bring people to Jesus. He is the Seed. He is the sent one, but he sends us. Go and bring people to the one who has defeated the devil, defeated death, defeated sin and has brought us back to one another and back to God. That's what Abraham's walk was about and that is our walk needs to be about. Gathering up people who will walk with us, by the grace of God, into the glory of God so as to enjoy God forever. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

