

“By faith (Abraham) stayed as a foreigner” Hebrews chapter 11 verse 9

Often when God calls on us to do something or go somewhere, our imaginations start to run wild. We think it's going to be great. We visualise abundant fruitfulness, manifestations of spiritual power and authority, people coming to faith in numbers.

But then what happens when little or nothing seems to happen, when we act in obedience to what God has called us to do, and it all seems to fall apart, or we don't receive as much as we thought God promised?

Abraham set out to the land that God led him to, and arrived there, but I wonder how he felt when he found out that people were already living there and that the place was not to be his permanent home? Or that all that he would see of the offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore that he had been promised turned out to be only one child?

Abraham, it seems, did not immediately turn round and go back to where he had come from, concluding that he had not heard from God after all. He stayed where he was, despite the fact that and his family had to continue living as nomads and foreigners in tents in a land that had been promised to him but belonged to someone else.

We are told why he did that. He did it because he knew that the promises of God never fail, and that if we do not see them fulfilled right now, then we will do later, and if not later, then in their complete unlimited perfection in a future beyond our earthbound perspective. He knew that God's promise of a land for him and his descendants may well wait for a future generation in this world, but that there was also a greater fulfilment of it; another 'city', a spiritual home, “whose architect and builder is God.”

This brings to mind two of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, both of whom were told the same thing when sent with God's word to the Jews; to Jeremiah he said, “When you speak all these things to them, they will not listen to you. When you call to them, they will not answer you.” and to Ezekiel, “Go to your people, the exiles; speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Lord God says,' whether they listen or refuse to listen.” We could forgive them for going less than enthusiastically to their work.

So we would do well not to impose our human expectations on the outcomes of what God tells us to do. God knows what he wants to achieve from our obedience, and it may look nothing like what we might imagine or expect. It might even look like failure to us. Faith tells us, not that we will always see for ourselves the fulfilment of God's promises, but rather that none of the promises of God ever fails to be fully realised.

Prayer

*Father, your promises are always carried out according to your will and purpose. I know that I have no natural right to witness their fulfilment, only the call of faithful obedience to do the things you command me to do, knowing that they will achieve their ultimate purpose according to your perfect plan, so that your name will be glorified and honoured. In Jesus name, amen.*

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