

Sunday - JANUARY 8, 2017

Preparation

Today is the first day of a new week. We have made it one week into our 365 days of pursuing a deeper relationship with Christ and are preparing to embark on the second week of our journey through the pages of God's word. By way of preparation for the upcoming week, be sure to remember the context of the stories we've been reading. Albeit only 15 chapters through Genesis, the ground covered is quite foundational in its application. As we look forward to the week to come, we left off in Genesis 15 with God promising a nation through the seed of Abraham. We pick up in chapter 16 with Abraham and Sarah, and her thoughts and actions toward giving Abraham a son. The decisions, and the results thereof, we find in the next few chapters will prove to be history altering decisions.

There are many principles we'll learn together as we go through this devotional. There are also principles we might already have an understanding of that we find God seeming to further establish them in our lives. One principle that we could all improve upon and would prove beneficial in all areas of life is the principle of prayer. Oftentimes it appears that prayer is overlooked. Reading through the Old Testament, we often see phrases such as, "called upon the LORD", or "called upon the name of the LORD". We find that prayer was, without doubt, an integral part of history, and furthermore, an essential and irreplaceable aspect of man's relationship with God. There is no moment of our lives that prayer is unacceptable, or useless. The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "Pray without ceasing." There could be no better time for us to pray than when we daily approach the word of God. As we open up the holy Book, we should find ourselves on our face to God earnestly pleading for God to "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." (Psalm 119:18) Prayer is how we communicate to God. First and foremost is for God to be Lord of our lives, reigning on the thrones of our hearts. May our lives reflect just that: God's kingdom come in each of our hearts, on this day!

Monday – January 9, 2017

TODAY'S READING: GENESIS 16-18

OVERVIEW:

Birth of Ishmael of Hagar; Abram's name changed; the covenant of circumcision; Sarai's name changed; Isaac promised to Abraham and Sarah; Abraham's prayer for Sodom.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

God had already promised Abram a son (15:4), but 10 long years had passed and Abram and Sarai were still childless, and neither of them were, at this point, a spring chicken! Abram was 85 and Sarai was 76!

Rather than trust the Word of God by faith, Sarai turned to the world for help and sought to fulfill God's will in the power of the flesh. (Sound familiar?) Sarai offered Abram her personal Egyptian maid, Hagar, to be assured of a seed for Abraham. (Note: The Hurrian laws from that period describe this as a custom of the day. If a son was born of that union, it would be regarded as the wife's.) At the age of 86, Abram did receive a son, Ishmael, by Hagar.

Sarai's dreadful decision points to one of the most difficult lessons of the Christian life; learning to wait upon the Lord (Isa. 28:16). Sometimes God places us in a position of testing our faith, and we may have to wait two weeks, two years, or as in Abram's case, 25 years for our prayers to be answered.

The product of Abram and Sarai's decision to run ahead of God, attempting to carry out God's will through carnal means should teach us that there are painful consequences of trusting the power of the flesh. To this day, Ishmael (the Arabs) and Isaac (the Jews) are at war with each other and the conflict will continue until the second coming of Christ. (*"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other..."* – Gal. 5:17)

What prayer are you trusting God to answer, or what promise are you trusting God to fulfill in which you might be tempted to get ahead of God and try to bring about in the power of the flesh?

In chapter 17, note that Abram was 99 years old and Sarah was 90. It is humanly impossible for Sarah to give birth to a child. But God revealed to Abraham in 17:1 – *“I am the Almighty God.”* In chapter 18 and verse 14 God asked him, *“Is any thing too hard for the Lord?”* Remember that today with what you’re trusting God to fulfill. What is impossible with men is possible with God! (Matt. 19:26)

Note that through Ishmael and Isaac, God is already pointing to the fact that He rejects the first birth (that which is born of the flesh), and accepts the second birth, (that which is impossible with men, but is possible only with God... the spiritual birth) – See John 3:3-6.

Some interesting things to note...God gives Abram a seal of His covenant with him (circumcision).

God gives to those who are children of Abraham by faith in Christ, a seal of His covenant with us (the Holy Spirit – Eph. 1:13).

God changed the name of Abram and Sarai. Abram, which means, “high father,” is changed to Abraham, meaning “father of many nations,” reflecting his new relationship to God, as well as his new identity based on God’s promise of seed. Sarai, which means, “my princess,” is changed to Sarah, which simply means “princess.” The limiting personal pronoun “my” is dropped from the meaning of her name since she would be the ancestress of the promised nations and kings. As the seed of Abraham (Rom. 4:11), God changed our name the moment we placed our faith in Christ (see Acts 11:26; Rev. 3:12) to reflect our new relationship with Him, and our new identity in Him!

God enters into an everlasting, unconditional covenant with Abraham (17:7-8). The promise was not dependent upon Abraham’s faithfulness to God, but the faithfulness of God to his own name, and His faithfulness to the promise of His Word to Abraham. As Abraham’s

children (Gal. 3:6-7), God entered into an everlasting, unconditional covenant with us (John 3:16; Rom. 8:37-39). God's promise of salvation to us is not dependent upon our faithfulness to God (or we'd all lose it!), but upon God's faithfulness to His own name, and His faithfulness to the promise of His Word to us (praise the Lord!).

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the ANGEL OF THE LORD – Gen. 16:7

Note: The angel of the Lord is a preincarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those, like Hagar in this passage, who had an encounter with the Angel of the Lord recognized that in seeing this Angel, they had seen God (Gen. 22:11-18; 31:11-13; Ex. 3:2-5; Num. 22:22-35; Judges 6:11-23; 13:2-5; I Kings 19:5-7). Interestingly, the Angel of the Lord does not appear after the birth of Christ.

As the SEED OF ISAAC – Gen. 17:19 (Luke 2:23-24; Heb. 11:18)

Tuesday – January 10, 2017

TODAY’S READING: GENESIS 19-21

OVERVIEW:

The visit of the two angels to Lot; Sodom destroyed; Lot’s wife; Lot and his daughters; Abraham and Sarah sojourn in Gerar; the conflict between Abraham and Abimilech over Sarah; the birth of Isaac; Hagar and Ishmael; the covenant between Abraham and Abimilech.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

There is plenty to learn from the life of Lot. It is easy to read over the simple phrase in 19:1, *“and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom,”* and miss the incredible significance. Lot *“sitting in the gate of Sodom”* didn’t happen overnight. It was the culmination of a gradual downward spiral into a life of carnality, worldliness, and ungodliness. The downward spiral into a life of sin follows the pattern God very carefully outlines through Lot’s life. Don’t miss the message!

Lot *“LIFTED UP HIS EYES”* toward Sodom. (13:10)

Lot *“PITCHED HIS TENT”* toward Sodom. (13:13)

Lot *“DWELT”* in Sodom. (14:12)

Lot *“SAT IN THE GATE”* of Sodom. (19:1)

And even after God confirmed it’s destruction,

Lot *“LINGERED”* in Sodom. (19:15-16)

This pattern is repeated continuously in the lives of many in Scripture, and in the lives of many believers right up to the present day. Seldom are Christians suddenly overtaken by the world. As in the case of Lot, it begins with FRIENDSHIP with the world (James 4:4); then becomes LOVING the things of the world (I John 2:15); until finally, the things of the world simply become a part of the fabric of who we are, so that we

are ENGULFED by the things of the world (Eph. 2:2), much like we were before God delivered us out of Satan's diabolical system of evil (II Tim. 2:26).

When Abraham gave Lot the choice of the land he wanted (13:8-11), Sodom appeared to Lot to be a place of peace, prosperity, and protection. It turned out to be a place of conflict, compromise, and casualty. Lot went in to Sodom with his communion, his wife, his testimony, his character, and his wealth, and came out with none of them!

Lot, who lost everything to the fire of God's judgment (19:15-29), pictures for us the life of a worldly believer who loses everything to the fire of God's judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ (I Cor. 3:11-15). God affirms through Peter (II Peter 2:7-8) that Lot, (like many believers today), was "saved," "yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:15).

Just a brief note to husbands and fathers – Lot's life screams out the urgent warning of how the decisions we make effect our wives and children (19:26, 30-38). Beware!

The story of Lot's wife is a sermon in itself. Jesus said it very succinctly, "*Remember Lot's wife.*" (Luke 17:32). What a power-packed three-word sermon! The Lord Jesus Christ holds her up as an example and warning to all who reject His offer of salvation.

The atrocity that was schemed and carried out by Lot's daughters (19:30-38) began the Moabites and Ammonites. These two nations will consistently be a thorn in Israel's side (Num. 25:1-3; I Kings 11:33), once again, teaching us that there are always painful consequences to sin.

It seems unthinkable that Abraham would try to pass off Sarah as his sister (Gen. 19) within 20 years of making the same mistake with Pharaoh, until we realize that God spends a great deal of time, and extends a great deal of mercy teaching us the same lessons over and over again.

In chapter 21, God proves His faithfulness to His Word. Isaac, the miracle child of promise is born to Abraham and Sarah.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In ISAAC – Gen. 21:12 (Gen. 17:19; Gal. 3:16)

Wednesday – January 11, 2017

TODAY'S READING: GENESIS 22-24

OVERVIEW:

Abraham's willingness to offer his only son, Isaac; God's reaffirmation of His covenant with Abraham; Sarah's death; Isaac's marriage to Rebekah.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Genesis 22 is one of the greatest chapters of the entire Bible. It lifts the curtain for the dress rehearsal of Calvary. In this chapter, God takes out His Divine brush, and paints an unbelievably beautiful picture of the offering of His only begotten Son.

Note the incredible similarities...Isaac's birth was prophesied in Gen. 18:10 – *“Sarah thy wife shall have a son.”*

Christ's birth was prophesied in Isa. 7:14 – *“Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.”*

Isaac's birthday was preset – Gen. 21:2 says that Isaac was born *“at the set time of which God had spoken to Abraham.”* Jesus' birthday was preset – Gal. 4:4 says, *“But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman.”*

Isaac received his name before his birth – Gen. 17:19 says that God told Abraham, *“Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son... and thou shalt call his name Isaac.”* Jesus received His name before His birth – Matt. 1:21 says that God told Joseph, *“And she (Mary) shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus.”*

Isaac was conceived by a miracle – (Gen. 18:11-14). Christ was conceived by a miracle – (Luke 1:34-37).

Isaac was the only begotten son of his father – (Gen. 22:2; Heb. 11:17). Jesus was the only begotten Son of His Father – (John 3:16).

There was a particular place God had in mind for Abraham to offer his son. Gen. 22:2 says that it was on one of the mountains in the land of Moriah. Moriah means “chosen by Jehovah.” The passage doesn’t tell us which mountain, but we’ve already seen enough of the picture to know which mountain in particular “Jehovah had chosen”! Gen. 22:3 says, *“And Abraham... and Isaac his son... went unto the place of which God had told him.”* Luke 23:33 says, *“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him.”*

Both Isaac and Jesus raised from the dead. Isaac raised from the dead, figuratively, after three days (Gen. 22:3-4; Heb. 11:19). Jesus, of course, raised from the dead, literally, after three days (I Cor. 15:3-4).

Isaac walks to the place of sacrifice the Lord had shown his father, carrying the wood that was to be used for his own execution (Gen. 22:5-6). Jesus walked to the place of sacrifice shown Him of His Father, carrying the wood that was to be used for His own execution (*John 19:17 – “And he (Jesus), bearing his cross went forth into a place... which*

is called... Golgotha”).

Note that the instrument of sacrifice didn’t fall upon Isaac in Gen. 22:9-14. That’s because he was just the picture! One day, 1900 years later, it would fall on the Lord Jesus Christ. Check out the answer Abraham gives his son in verse 8, to the question he asked about where was the lamb to be offered as the sacrifice for sin (v. 7) *“Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering (sacrifice for sin.)”* Of course, there was the immediate fulfillment in the ram caught in the thicket in verse 13 (i.e. a male lamb wearing a crown of thorns!). But there is a prophetic fulfillment as well! Note that Abraham did not say, *“God will provide a lamb for himself.”* He distinctly said, *“God will provide himself a lamb”!* Of course, Jesus was the fulfillment of the picture. John said, *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”* (*John 1:29*)

As you stand in awe of God and His incredible, supernatural Word with me, keep this in mind: If ever there was a promise that God might have reneged on (an obvious impossibility, but work with me...); if ever there was a promise that God might have changed His mind about, it would have been this one! If he kept this one, you can rest assured that He is going to keep all of the other ones. Paul put it this way in Rom. 8:32 – *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”*

Hallelujah to ‘ya!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In ISAAC’S WILLINGNESS TO BE OFFERED – Gen. 22:1-14 (Jn 3:16; Luke 23:33; Heb. 11:19; Jn 1:29)

In ISAAC’S RELATIONSHIP TO HIS BRIDE – Gen. 24

Note: In Gen. 24, Abraham (as already seen, a picture of God the Father) sends out his unnamed servant (which is a picture of the Holy Spirit, who is not come to glorify his own name, John 16:13-14), to find a bride for his only begotten son. The servant returns, coincidentally enough, with a Gentile bride (a picture of the church) who comes into the tent of Sarah (a picture of the nation of Israel) after she died.

Thursday – January 12, 2017

TODAY'S READING: GENESIS 25-27

OVERVIEW:

The death of Abraham; the birth of Jacob and Esau; Esau sells his birthright; Isaac sojourns in Gerar; Isaac blesses Jacob with the Abrahamic Covenant.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

After the death of Abraham, Isaac finds himself in the same predicament his father was in some 50 years previous. He is the recipient of God's promise of seed, but his wife of 20 years remains barren. The fulfillment of God's covenant promise demanded that Isaac and Rebekah have sons. Rather than follow the sin of his father, Isaac learns to *"intreat the Lord"* (25:21) for the very thing that his father had looked to the world and the flesh to provide. (Praise the Lord, the Scripture says the sins of the fathers (Ex. 34:7; Num 14:18) are VISITED upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. When a VISITOR comes to your door, you don't have to let them in! Do note, however, that when the sin of his father visits in chapter 26 and verse 7, Isaac responds just as his father, Abraham, had done. He seeks to pass off his wife as his sister. Always be on guard against the sins your father was susceptible to!)

As a result of Isaac's faithful prayers, God grants Isaac and Rebekah conception. Rebekah sensed a struggle within her womb, and enquired of the Lord as to the meaning. The Lord explained in 25:23, *"Two nations are in thy womb (Israel and Edom), and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger."* God comments further in Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:13 – *"Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."*

As seen previously in the story of Ishmael and Isaac, God continuously finds ways to point us to the fact that he rejects the first

birth (*“that which is born of the flesh”* – John 3:6a) and accepts the second birth (*“that which is born of the Spirit”* – John 3:6b). This time God points us to that fact in the picture He paints through His record of the lives of Jacob and Esau.

But there is also another incredible picture that God paints through the bizarre story in Genesis 27 of the firstborn blessing coming to Jacob, the younger, instead of Esau, the older. Christ, our older brother, (Heb. 2:11), the One to whom belonged the firstborn blessing (Col. 1:15; Rom 8:29), was cursed (II Cor. 5:20), and rejected of His Father (Matt. 27:46), that the firstborn blessing might come upon us!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

The SEED THROUGH WHOM THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD
WOULD BE BLESSED – Gen. 26:4 (Gal. 3:16) In ESAU – Gen. 25:23
(Mal. 1:2-3; Gal. 3:13)

Friday – January 13, 2017

TODAY'S READING: GENESIS 28-31

OVERVIEW:

Isaac confers the Abrahamic covenant upon Jacob; the vision of Jacob's ladder; Jacob's journey to Haran; Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel; Laban's jealousy; Jacob flees.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The remainder of the Book of Genesis focuses primarily on Jacob. Joseph will most certainly be spotlighted, but his story is actually contained within the context of the account of Jacob's life.

The name Jacob means "supplanter" (i.e. deceiver, schemer, conniver.) As we have already seen in chapter 25 and 27, he more than lived up to his name. Jacob is a graphic picture of the worldly/fleshly believer who trusts the arm of the flesh to provide what God, in many cases, is more than willing and fully intending to provide by His own hand. For example, what Jacob's mother deviously schemed and Jacob deceitfully carried out in order to obtain the firstborn blessing from Isaac in chapter 27 was totally unnecessary, because God had already determined and had already clearly revealed to Rebekah that the firstborn blessing was to be Jacob's when Jacob and Esau were yet in her womb (see 25:20-23). We do not know *how* God would have accomplished bestowing the blessing upon Jacob since it appears that Isaac was intending to be willfully disobedient to God's Word by giving the blessing to Esau, but God most certainly could and would have been able to pull it off without Rebekah and Jacob's deception and dishonesty. As Bob Jones, Sr. used to say, "*It is never right to do wrong in order to do something right.*"

As we have already seen through the first half of the Book of

Genesis, and will continue to see in the midst of our journey through the remainder of the Word of God, there are always painful consequences to sin. Although Jacob received the “blessing” from Isaac in chapter 27, his deception in obtaining it brought “cursing” (conflict) upon him. For example:

Esau wanted and intended to kill him, causing Jacob to run in fear for the next 20 years. Once he left his home in chapter 28 in his attempt to flee from Esau, he never saw his beloved mother again. He was deceived by his uncle Laban. (The “supplanter” was “supplanted:” the “conniver” was “connived.” i.e. He reaped what he sowed.) His family life was riddled with conflict (*Prov. 11:29 – “He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind.”*). Beware!

As Jacob leaves his home in chapter 28 on his way to Haran, he comes to Bethel. As he lays down to get some rest from the long journey, he uses a stone as a pillow and has a very unusual, but very significant dream... the infamous “Jacob’s ladder.” The dream verified that God was going to give Jacob *by His Spirit*, what Jacob was striving so tenaciously to gain *by his own flesh*. Jacob was the one to whom God intended to establish the Abrahamic Covenant all along.

In chapter 29, Jacob, “the deceiver”, becomes “the deceived” by his own father-in-law Laban, and thus the statement, “*what goes around comes around*”! By the time chapter 29 ends, Jacob has two wives, and in chapter 30, he falls prey to “the sins of the fathers” in great Abrahamic fashion, taking the handmaid of each of his wives through which to have children. The result, as can be imagined, is great conflict, and yet it is through Jacob’s relationship with these four women, his 12 sons were born, and through whom God established the 12 tribes of Israel.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In JACOB'S LADDER – Gen. 28:11-12

Note: Genesis 28:11-12 foreshadows that the promises would culminate in something that would bridge heaven and earth. In John 1:43-51, Jesus identifies Himself as the Ladder. He is the One who opens heaven for us and brings heaven's blessing to our lives. He alone is the One who can bring us to the Father.

In the BIRTH OF JOSEPH – Gen. 30:23-24 (Gen. 50:20; Matt. 1:21; I Tim 1:15; John 3:16)

Note: Joseph was born into the world to save and preserve his people.

As the ANGEL OF GOD – Gen. 31:11

Saturday – January 14th, 2017

Reflection

In the past five days of pursuit we saw some good changes when names were changed to reflect a new relationship with God (Genesis 17:5, 15); when God changed the sacrifice of Isaac to the substitution of the Ram (Genesis 22:12-13); when God allowed births (Genesis 16:15; 19:37-38; 21:3; 25:24-26 and more); and brought about marriages (Genesis 24:67; 29:25,29). These were what we consider all good changes. But then there were also some of what we consider not-so-good changes as death came to some, physically (Genesis 19:26; Genesis 23:2; 25:8) while spiritually a type of death came to others, such as when Isaac was offered on the altar of sacrifice (Genesis 22:9) and when Esau sold his birthright (Genesis 25:34).

Change happens in our lives sometimes by our own choosing but other times it is out of our control. We often see change as bad but it is not always so; sometimes, indeed many times, change is good. How we accept change will oftentimes affect the end result of the change.

Malachi 3:6 states, "...I am the LORD, I change not..." which would indicate that any change orchestrated by God is always intended to have a good result (whether we ever see it or not) as we are the ones who must change, and indeed do change, one way or another. However, God leaves the result of the change is up to us by the way we accept the change He is allowing or working in or around us. The result or consequences are determined by whether we choose to accept the change(s) willingly or receive it rebelliously.

Sarai brought about a change when she influenced her husband to have a child with someone else rather than wait upon God to

bring about the “change.” Isaac, on the other hand, waited on God to bring to him his bride which resulted in his “change” from single-hood. By just these two comparisons we can easily see that the result of the change will oftentimes (if not always) be determined by who is instigating the change; by whose idea the change was originated, and then by who brings about the change. It will always be best for us to wait and allow God to bring about change rather than us working to bring it about.

In our pursuit of a deeper relationship with God and his word, we must desire to be changed from who we are to who He desires us to be. Our sovereign God is the only one who knows what is needed in our lives to bring about that change. We must, however, understand that with change sadness and grief may also come, we would do

well to embrace change and allow God to work as He knows best always remembering Isaiah 40:31, “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

So, today, reflect on the changes that we read this past week and consider God’s working through each, even when it was man bringing about the change. Then reflect on changes in your own life to realize who was at work bringing about the change. When it was out of your control, you had no say in the matter, realize it was God’s sovereign and perhaps unseen hand at work to accomplish His will. When the change was instigated by you, has the result been revealed or is it yet to be revealed? Regardless, confess your fault to God and then trust Him with the result as you wait on Him to have His way in you as you pursue Christ.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

Genesis 18:19 “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”

Genesis 19:26 “But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.”

Genesis 22:12 “And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

Genesis 27:13 “And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them.”

Genesis 28:15 “And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”