

JANUARY 10

In yesterday's reading when Abraham was going to offer Isaac, the angel of the Lord spoke to him. Now, what I'm going to say is meant to be an encouragement for you to take time and observe and get curious. If you missed this, that's OK. It is something to learn. Texts like these are what form our theology, literally "knowledge of God." You don't have to read theology or go to a seminary. All you have to do is take time with your Bible.

Who is the angel of the Lord? I mentioned a couple of days ago that He is often recognized as God in human form. How do you know? Read what He says to Abraham. These are not the words of a messenger, an angel. The speaker is saying what only God can say.

Why do people say this is God the Son before He became flesh? This is where just reading the entire Bible through over years helps. You know from Paul and Jesus and others, that no one has ever seen God, the Father. No one has ever seen the Spirit. But the Son has been seen. It makes sense, and the Son is the only candidate; but it only makes sense if you've read these texts and grappled with some of the "apparent" inconsistencies, i.e., "No one has ever seen God? But they saw that angel and people saw Jesus and Jesus was God and.....Whoa, the angel of the Lord is God who can be seen, or God the Son in human form."

Genesis 23:1-24:51

Genesis 23

Notice that Sarah lived to be 127, that means she lived to see her son grow for ___ years. That's like another lifetime. God blessed her last years in such a way that it removed the pain and longing of those barren years.

As disciples we need to be continually building for the future. What special thing could you do in your own life, if the Lord were to approve and grant you the time? What could you begin doing today, little by little, that would deepen your relationship with Him and make you a better maker of disciples? I'm 59 and I could die tomorrow, but God could also give me another 30 years. Thirty years is like another lifetime. The Lord has graciously given me two big projects to work on (and you're reading one of them) that I hope will deepen my love for Jesus, give glory to God in bearing fruit and help me present myself to Him and His work as an approved workman. What you could do in just one or two years would be incredible. Look to the Lord, ask and pray, and when He gives you the idea, just do it. Our years are to be lived with Christ, building into the lives of others, not sitting, amusing ourselves or mourning our aging bodies and coming deaths. Tomorrow, we'll see this "wasted time" with Isaac, who appears to have prepared for death long before he was buried. What a shame.

Vs. 1-20 This shows that Abraham was respected by the people of the land. Abe arrived when he was 75 and lived until he was 175. He wasn't just a man. He was like a small cultural entity in Canaan. Note the strength and humility of Abraham. He was strong, faithful and humble and a witness to his neighbors. He was honest and patient. This is the only piece of real estate Abe owned in the land that was to be his. What a guy.

Genesis 24

There are great lessons for you in this section and I won't say much. I remember having my quiet time one morning in a restaurant at the intersection of I-80 and I-35. It was the fall of 1987. My car broke down the Sunday evening before, and I missed presenting my missionary stuff at a church. Disappointing. So now my car was being fixed and I'd soon be on my way to GEM's headquarters in Illinois. When I read this portion, I was encouraged by God's sovereignty and His mercy to Abraham's servant. I was touched and it calmed my heart. Reading the Bible is to

be valued. Spending time with your Father over a cup of coffee with His Word penetrating your heart is priceless.

So, if you read your Bible every year, you'd read this section and think back to last year and go, "I know about you!" But if you didn't you won't, because you can't. Next year, when you read this and you meet Rebekah and Laban again, remember what you learn about both of them in the next several chapters. It might add some "insight" to their actions here. Obviously, what I'll share with you is my take on things. There are very few, "squeaky clean," people in the Bible. Most were just normal sinners with some faith. As disciples we need to live in the Word so that their stories and God's working with them can make an impact on us. That's why He wrote it down for us.

Vs. 1-9 Notice that Abe didn't want Isaac to have a woman from Canaan. The people were pretty corrupt. Isaac and Rebekah would learn this the hard way. Also, Abe didn't want Isaac taken back to Haran. Years later, Jacob went there and almost didn't make it back.

V. 8 Abraham was willing to leave this all to the sovereignty of God.

Vs. 10-14 The guy I love here is Abe's servant, _____. You've already heard his name, but, if you remember, you'll see it next year (it took me a couple years to remember to look). What a great guy, and blessed to have this kind of faith and to see this kind of answer. He is a model of what it means to be a disciple (slave, servant, ambassador) of Jesus. I am always impressed at the depth of his faith and devotion.

I could be wrong, but I think this is the first time God's *steadfast love* is mentioned in the Bible, and it comes from this incredible disciple and man of God.

Vs. 15-28 You know, God doesn't always have to answer like this, but He always can. We always applaud God when He answers with a miracle like this; but if He can do this all the time, it should make us think when He doesn't answer like this. It doesn't mean He is sleeping on the job, or that we've made a mistake, but it does mean we need to be paying careful attention to what He wants from us. Just think, God could have made Sarah pregnant when she was 65, but He waited until she was 90.

V. 27 Thanks to Laura, I just noticed in my reading this year, that this is the first mention in the Bible of God's *steadfast love and faithfulness* being linked together (ESV, vs. 27 & 49). You may want to search for these the rest of the year as you read your Bible daily.

Vs. 29-51 Recounting the story of God's gracious provision should never get "old" for us. We will get to know both Rebekah and Laban in the stories that follow. They were two peas in a pod. Neither of them were close followers of the Lord. I'm almost surprised that Eliezer got out of there, but he knew the Lord and he was following God in deep passion and devotion.

Matthew 8:1-17

Matthew will begin to show Jesus' authority over sickness (which attracted crowds), over nature and over the spiritual world. Then Jesus will claim authority as the human king who will reign eternally over Israel and the entire earth. At this point, Jesus has been preaching and making disciples for a year. Now, as His ministry and popularity grow, He will use every event and confrontation to train the Twelve.

Vs. 1-4 Lepers were not cleansed every day; in fact, this is the first Israelite we know of who was ever healed of leprosy. Jesus commanded the leper to allow his healing to be a sign for Israel. Matthew's focus was to show the Messiah's power and authority. It is Luke who tells us that this guy didn't obey, and as a result, Jesus' ministry was hampered.

Vs. 5-13 Now this is a contrast. The last guy to be healed was a Jew. This miracle will be done for a Roman centurion's Gentile servant. It is hard to find a place where Jesus Himself marvels at

anything. Here is a Gentile who has amazing faith and understanding. If this centurion hadn't been loved by the Jews, Jesus would have caught some flak for what He said in vs. 11-12. Matthew shows here that the Messiah's healing is extended to Gentiles. By the way, all of the centurions in the Bible are good guys.

Vs. 14-15 I always smile when I read this. I can see Jesus finding out that the mother-in-law was sick and that Peter was going to cook, and saying, "No, I've got a better idea." He healed her and she made supper. Jesus heals Pete's mother-in-law and then He becomes the ER ward for all of Capernaum. Matthew, very focused, gets to his point, that this healing ministry was the fulfillment of another prophecy of the Messiah. Your job is to find the passage Matthew is referring to, and read the entire chapter. As the teacher, so the disciple. We are to model and live for what our Savior did in that chapter.

Psalm 9:13-20

Vs. 13-14 Now David came to his request for help. One of the repeated lines of reasoning in Psalms is, "It would be good to save me because I can't praise you before men if I'm dead." (roughly paraphrased).

Vs. 15-16 God had done this again and again in human history, but David was living by faith in God's promise to judge the unrighteous.

Vs. 17-18 David learned that present injustice and suffering didn't mean God had gone away or was disapproving. David knew he could always count on God, but not knowing God's will and purpose meant that he needed to wait and cry out. And as a result, Israel got some great worship songs and we have these very deep psalms.

Vs. 19-20 This is David's plea for God to take action. Apparently David felt the threat was very near.

For us as disciples, rather than freaking out when "life" happens, we can train ourselves to pray that the Lord would use the experience to give us hearts of praise to express what the Lord has done to those who don't yet know Him and to those who are becoming disciples who are making disciples.

Proverbs 3:1-6

If you haven't memorized Proverbs 3:5-6, make that your meditation and assignment. These are two of the easiest verses in the Bible to memorize and two of the hardest to follow.

On the same day in our reading, we find another example of *steadfast love and faithfulness* being linked together.