

JANUARY 6

Just to keep things in perspective let me remind you that it is more important for you to read The One Year Bible than for you to read these notes. I'm writing to give some background to the text and hopefully some motivation.

At this point in the year it is important for you to find a time and a place to read. You need to develop the habit. They say that anything you do 19 times in a row begins a pattern. If you miss a day, make the adjustments and learn from it, but don't get discouraged. This is the time to begin that pattern because everything we'll be reading for the next month is pretty interesting. Find ways to motivate yourself. I mark the pages at the top with a number for the year as I finish each page. Go out and celebrate a completed month. If you find a time to read that is best for you, don't compromise. Enjoy knowing that what you are reading is seeping into your heart through the Spirit, and God is pleased that you're taking the time to sit before Him.

Genesis 13:5-15:21

As far as beginnings go, this is another important section of Genesis. God is telling Israel where things came from and how certain things came to be. In this section, again, the history of God's work to save mankind takes a giant step forward.

Genesis 13:5-18

Vs. 1-7 The stuff they gained from the time in Egypt eventually caused a problem between Abe and Lot. Bigger is not always better and I'm sure there are many individuals, couples, businesses and churches that could say, "Things were better when things were simpler, before we got that house or building or became involved in that activity." As disciples following Christ, once we know what we are supposed to be doing, and what pleases and serves Christ in making disciples, we need to be careful about attractive things that distract us or consume us.

Notice in v. 7 that it says the Canaanites and Perizzites were in the land. That also meant that grazing land was not easy to find because others were laying claim to their own territories.

Vs. 8-13 This would be a tragic parting for Lot. Apparently the conflict was fueled by the herdsmen and neither Lot nor Abraham could control the direction their possessions were taking them. Finally, Abe stepped in to the conflict.

V. 8 Abraham showed his security in God by allowing Lot to make the first choice. He also showed meekness, that is, strength and authority that expresses itself in gentleness and patience. Abraham, as the elder man, could have told Lot what to do.

V. 13 Lot's choice eventually ruined him. It wasn't just that he was greedy for more pastureland, but he was drawn to the attraction of the city. Lot was a rich man. How cool is it to be rich in the wilderness? Your money is not liquid. You have to wait on caravans to buy stuff, and no one can tell you how cool you are. If being rich is important to us, we need people and goods and comfort to realize richness. Lot eventually moved from herding and living in tents, to living in a nice house in Sodom. It could be that he even became the mayor (or some official) in Sodom. Cool. He wasn't forced to move into or near Sodom; but, inch by inch, this little decision had a huge impact and he ended up in Sodom. He didn't save Sodom; in fact, they ruined him, although the root of this was already in his heart.

Abraham showed that true meekness is strength. Again, as disciples, where does our security come from? Are we content to allow our lives to be simple and simply shaped by God and following Christ in His harvest? Or is following Christ OK as long as we can be first in line, and have a voice and a reputation, and get the breaks we deserve or at least get our rights recognized?

Vs. 14-18 After they separated and Abraham gave up the choice for the "best" land, only then did God confirm Abraham. Sometimes you have to make the decision to accept what God has for you in following, before He confirms His will.

Notice that God took Abraham away from Lot to travel the land. The area around the oaks of Mamre will become an important place later for Abraham. Notice that when he settled there, *he built an altar* to honor God.

Genesis 14

Vs. 1-12 As we'll see in Scripture, God often allows a challenge or disaster to happen to lead us to blessing. That is what happens here. This event didn't directly affect Abe until v. 12.

Vs. 13-16 Abraham lived in tents his entire life in Canaan. Actually though, with all his livestock and servants, it was a small city. This was not "camping" and it definitely wasn't easy to move. If Abe took 318 men with him (born in his house) to save Lot, there were probably women and 2.5 children per couple too. They could have easily been 1000+ people. I'm sure Abraham was a scheduled stop by the merchant caravans that passed through. Eventually Abe & Co. became a known entity in Canaan, with Abe as the leader. He/they became known as *Hebrews*.

V. 14 This mention of *Dan* suggests that God had already given Moses some idea how the land would be allocated. The tribe of Dan had their land in northern Israel.

Abraham with his servants and his allies defeated a much bigger army and brought everything back. Now Abraham was a military force to be reckoned with.

Vs. 17-20 This is a small section, but huge in the plan of redemption.

As close as Abe's relationship with God was, he understood that Melchizedek was a priest of God and submitted to him. It appears, too, that Melchizedek taught Abraham something about God in the way he addressed God.

If you do a word search in the Bible on Melchizedek, you'll find some interesting stuff. Psalm 110 is written by David and is a prophetic description of the Messiah. The Messiah is said to be a priest of the order of Melchizedek. In Hebrews a lot of information is given about Melchizedek. Because Jesus is a priest of the order of Melchizedek, it means that although Jesus humanly couldn't be a priest because he wasn't from the tribe of Levi, He is a priest superior to the Levitical priesthood. Because of the way Melchizedek is spoken of, mysteriously and without origin, some people think that this Melchizedek that Abe is talking to is a manifestation of God the Son before He became incarnate as Jesus. Notice that he greeted Abe with bread and wine. Jesus would have done something like that.

I had a university professor go after me one time, because, in his thinking, some people didn't have a chance to learn about God. I said that God had His way of making sure people heard if they sought Him, and suddenly I thought of Melchizedek. I told him that unknown to us, suddenly this guy pops up in Genesis who has been telling all sorts of people about God. Also, later, you find a guy like Balaam (who is not a role model for your kids) but was known as a prophet of God. There may have been thousands of these guys who we don't know about, who traveled with the other language groups, scattered across the earth. We have to trust that God made sure people had a chance to know about Him and to respond to Him. Here we meet one of them and he's a priest of the *God Most High*.

Vs. 21-24 Abraham was open to Melchizedek, but was distant and resistant to the king of Sodom. If Abraham had taken anything from him, it would have signaled an obligation to Sodom. Sodom was a bad place. He refused to take any of the wealth of what had been recaptured. As disciples, it is important to know who to connect with and whose influence to avoid. That's not being legalistic, just realistic.

V. 22 Notice that Abraham pledges himself to God with the very words he just heard from Melchizedek.

Genesis 15

This is a great chapter in the Bible.

V. 1 So, why would God come to Abraham and tell him not to fear, that He would be Abe's shield and reward? The words in the ESV, *your reward shall be very great*, can mean, as in the KJV, NKJV and NIV, "your great reward;" that is, God Himself was Abraham's reward.

Abraham had now made a name for himself, but that's not always good. Those who wanted to raid Canaan now knew they would have to deal with Abraham. That meant that "Abe's town" had become a military target. Also, in the time that passed, maybe Abe regretted not having taken some of the booty. In any event, this is how you can understand God's words to him in the NIV, *I am your shield and your very great reward*. Apparently Abe needed a hug.

Vs. 2-3 It is hard to imagine how hard the waiting was for Abraham. God had promised; Abe had gone. God made him wait. Waiting is part of following as a disciple and doesn't mean you've missed God's will. What a great lesson. Abe would have more lessons on waiting and so will we. Becoming fruit-bearing disciples is not for the weak-of-heart or those who imagine instant success.

Yet notice here how deeply Abraham's desire and desperation had grown. The promise and the waiting intensified and tested his faith. Remember what God did to Adam before He made Eve. He gave Adam something to do that revealed his need and created a longing. We shouldn't be surprised when God does that with us.

Now comes a very important part of biblical and redemptive history. I'll hit the high points, but make as many observations as possible.

Vs. 4-6 Notice that God takes Abe beyond a single child to an uncountable multitude. Abraham's faith was incredible. In spite of the waiting and disappointment, when God restates the promise, telling Abe to look at the stars, Abe looks up and believes God...***and it was counted to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:3)***. This belief was based on his faith in God and His promise, but the actual "being right before God" was still future, waiting for Christ to make payment for sin and satisfy the justice of God. Faith saves, not works, and salvation by faith is built on the death and resurrection of Christ.

Vs. 7-11 Abraham's question in v. 8 launches this "cutting of the covenant." According to custom they were to kill the animals and cut them up, making a lane between the animal parts. Then both parties of the covenant were to walk through this lane, committing to the agreement, saying that if either one reneged on the contract, that they would end up like the animals. Something like that.

Vs. 12-21 First, God prophetically states what He will do for Abe's offspring in the near future. Then God makes the covenant, but the Abrahamic covenant is unique because only God makes it. In a way, it is more accurate to call it a promise, since a covenant usually had two parties. Abe never strolls the lane, only God. That means that the fulfillment of this covenant has nothing to do with the obedience of Abraham or Israel as a nation; it is solely God's responsibility to fulfill what He has promised. It is an unconditional covenant. This means that all of the promises to Abe and Israel will be fulfilled. None of it depends on Israel's obedience. God will make it work.

So, does the church replace Israel? Only if the Abrahamic Covenant is invalid, and that can only happen if God reneges on His promise. As Paul would say, "By no means!" In Romans 15:8-9, Paul says that the covenant with the patriarchs was confirmed (not fulfilled) in Christ. The fulfillment of Israel's destiny in God's plan is still future. The literal nation of Israel will fulfill God's purpose as a fulfillment, not of the Mosaic Covenant, but as promised to Abraham and then through the prophets.

V. 18 Notice that God tells Abe that He will give Israel the land up to the Euphrates. That has never happened...yet. It will happen during the Millennial Kingdom when Israel fulfills its destiny.

Another way to understand the unconditional quality of this promise, as confirming all redemptive history and promises, is to realize that it too is a part of another promise; that is, the seed of the woman would conquer the seed of the serpent. That promise was absolute, without any input from Adam, Eve, or any person. It became a basis of hope and faith for the believing, but the promise was never dependent upon them. That promise necessitated and incorporated other actions on God's part. The saving of Noah, the promise to Abraham, the establishment of Israel and the law and the promises, the promise to David, the coming of the Christ, His death and resurrection, and our redemption are all parts of that promise. The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. None of what God did was to be done "only if" we responded properly. While we were still weak, lost, dead and blind, Christ died for the ungodly. Our only "part" is to believe and receive.

Isn't that a great message to take into the harvest?

Matthew 5:27-48

For me, it is best to understand what Jesus is saying as instructions to His disciples. The supposed "intensification" of the law given here is not toward rigidity or legalism, but to honesty and realism following Christ on earth. Instead of playing fast and loose in matters of authentic honesty before God and getting by with "religion," we are to realize we are in a serious conflict, and so to live for Him and reach lost people.

Vs. 27-30 These are important for us as disciples especially today, with the ease of getting pornography. We are to have no mercy with things in our lives which cause us to sin. Jesus will use this same example later with the disciples, warning them about things that make them proud.

Vs. 31-32 We are not to treat marriage lightly. God meant for marriage to be permanent, so if a person is devoted to God, he needs to treat marriage the same way. That's hard to do when divorce is so commonplace in our culture. It would appear here that it is allowed to divorce a person for committing adultery because they have broken the marriage covenant. However, these verses are not saying that divorce is necessary.

Vs. 33-37 This matter of taking oaths or making grand declarations in the name of God was a religious thing. I think Jesus is saying to live quietly and humbly before God, obeying what He says.

Vs. 38-48 These verses are probably the purest test of our true understanding of our salvation in Christ. If we know what is happening in the world and understand the spiritual battle, we know what is at stake and how important our testimony is. Jesus Himself was the model for this. Isaiah 53:7-8 says, *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?*

For us and our salvation He willingly allowed Himself to be mistreated. I ask myself why this is so hard for me, but if I want to be His disciple, I have to become more like Him, or as Paul put it in Philippians 3:10, *share his sufferings, becoming like Him in His death*. These verses are the test of being like Him.

V. 42 Notice that this is a command to His disciples. It shows how bound we are to our money and stuff and whether we really believe God can provide. Always keep a few dollars in your pocket to give to someone who is begging.

V. 45 This should be the goal we are working toward.

Vs. 46-47 In a godly sense, we are told to seek these rewards. Probably the best way to keep this in perspective is to remember that we are really seeking to be like our Father and our Lord. That

is reward enough. Hebrews 11:6 says, *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Psalm 6

Vs. 1-3 Although David knew that what he was feeling was because of his enemies, it is hard to be down and not feel like God is rebuking you. How bad do you have to feel to sense it in your bones?

Vs. 4-7 David's life was weak because of his enemies, but he appealed to God to save him based on God's *steadfast love*, not because of anything David had done. This all looks pretty desperate.

Vs. 8-10 David understood that God would accept him and help him.

Not to say that you can't find help in other places, but as disciples, we find that true mercy comes from the Lord; and true confidence comes from being heard by Him as we pour out our hearts. There is a lot of prayer-less ministry and networking that goes on in the name of God, asking only for His stamp of approval, often after the fact.

Proverbs 1:29-33

These are amazing words of warning, especially realizing that the guy who wrote them didn't heed them. The *fear of the Lord*, knowing that this could happen to any of us (and does happen to us), helps us not to treat God's love as something to be taken for granted. He warns us because He loves us. If He didn't spare Solomon or David, why should He spare us for disregarding His Word, His kindness and His love. On the other hand, as disciples working with people in the harvest, what a fantastic relationship to bring people into. If they will follow as disciples, in that process, He will bring order and peace to confused and tragic lives.