

## JANUARY 7

### Genesis 16:1-18:19

Waiting for God is never easy, but it is something God requires of everyone who follows Him. Abraham's faith is amazing, and although he and Sarah will make a "mistake," if you can call it that, we shouldn't be quick to judge. They had been in Canaan now for about 10 years and she couldn't get pregnant. God kept confirming the promise, but there was no baby. Still, they held on to the promise.

#### Genesis 16

Vs. 1-3 Since Hagar was Egyptian, it would be a good guess that they obtained her when they went to Egypt and Abraham lied about Sarah. Regardless of the mistake being made here, this shows a lot of faith on Sarah's part. She and Abraham were both partners in pursuing the promise and following God. I understand from what happens here that God is extremely gracious, forgiving, kind and faithful.

The Spirit has given us the benefit of knowing that Abraham and Sarah never needed to do this. We understand they were driven by sadness and frustration. Those of us who are married know the emotional pressure of trying to get pregnant and what it can bring into a relationship. It is hard to withstand the disappointment.

There is no evidence to suggest they prayed about this decision, but it does say, *Abram listened to the voice of Sarai*. Not that a husband shouldn't listen to his wife, obviously, but in this matter it involved a very clear promise of God and Abraham's personal experience with God. This promise was as good as gold, set in stone, unmovable. Look at Genesis 3:17, *And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife..."* Sometimes it is easier to be "strong" in faith by ourselves, but the test of faith is that we hold to it in the presence of others.

As disciples, we have been told certain things that we know are true. What God says about this world, the heart of man, and the coming judgment of mankind are things that we need to keep in mind. We know we need to be in the Word and that we are to love and follow Christ. These at least are constants, good as gold, set in stone, and unmovable. The Word provides guidance in all the important relationships of life. So, we shouldn't let anything or anyone remove our resolve to follow and obey each day.

Interestingly, in Romans 4:20 it says of Abraham, *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God*. His distrust was not in the promise. The problem was confusion and despair in waiting, not knowing the *means* of how God would fulfill that promise. In the end, what they always understood would be correct. Sarah would have a child.

Vs. 4-6 Imagine how life suddenly got complicated for Abe and Sarah. This kind of marriage was a legal thing to do in that culture. But in doing this, what they had understood as their "dream" (Abe and Sarah and baby) died. She gave her husband to another, younger woman, that pretty little thing they picked up in Egypt. And behold, Hagar became pregnant, meaning Sarah was the problem. Now, this young woman was flaunting it and Abe has grown emotionally connected (in love?) with her. O Weh!

What lessons do you find here about how we can complicate our lives by not waiting on God but seeking other solutions instead? Abe takes no leadership (guilty conscience?) and wimps out. Sarah gets mean. Hagar flees.

Vs. 7-14 God had a sub-plan here for a man named Ishmael, a descendant of Abraham. Also, once God gave His promise to Abraham, He made good on it. Every child born of Abraham became a people. Even in Abe's weakness in seeking the promise, God was still faithful and true

to His promise. Note that Abe's motivation in doing this wasn't lust, like David, or power and lust, like Solomon.

Notice the *angel of the Lord* in v. 7, and notice in v. 10, He says what only God can say. There are many places in the OT where the angel of the Lord is God the Son in human form.

God is tender, though corrective to Hagar, in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham. Ishmael is to be a *wild donkey of a man*, meaning virile, strong, athletic, commanding. He was a guy who could put the soccer ball in the upper left corner of the net, by the post and crossbar, from mid-field; and if he got in the penalty box with the ball, you were finished.

You have to believe that Hagar related this all to Abraham (therefore we have the account) and that this calmed Sarah, who welcomed the returned and humbled Hagar.

Vs. 15-16 Note that Abe was 86 when Ishmael was born. In the next verse he is 99. It is good to pay attention to the dates or ages God gives. We know from Gen 12:4 that Abe was 75 when he left Haran and arrived in Canaan. You can figure out how long it was until the conception of Ishmael. This gives us an idea of time and the incredible struggle the waiting must have been for Abe and Sarah. Can you imagine not getting an answer to your prayer for ten years? And even this answer wasn't the answer.

So what is happening here? God apparently used Ishmael as a small glimmer of hope as they waited, until the true fulfillment, 14 years later. God used this situation to create something in Abe and Sarah that would give them incredible joy when Sarah finally conceived and had her boy. And of course, there is something about God's glory and deep wisdom that is to be taken to heart.

## Genesis 17

Vs. 1-14 In preparation for the fulfillment of His promise, God restates the covenant, changes Abe's name, and gives him the sign of the covenant - circumcision. Remember that the fulfillment of this covenant was unconditional since only God took part in the cutting of the covenant. Circumcision was a required act of obedience for the nation of Israel, but it still was an act of faith to those who believed in God's promise to Abraham whether they belong to Israel or the church.

In Romans Paul will show that circumcision didn't save anyone or make them a child of Abraham. Since Abe was saved by faith before he was circumcised, it was only a sign of faith. The true children of Abraham are those who believe in the promise.

Vs. 15-21 Abe was good with what God was saying up until now, but then God renamed Sarai to Sarah; and the dream, which they had always known was true, flamed to life again. Notice that Abe laughed. I think this was a laugh of joy and of revived, unbelievable hope. Abraham goes into this "testing of the waters" thing with God because he can't believe his ears. He had always known that the promise would be with Sarah. I'll bet he was a happy man.

Vs. 22-27 Notice that Abraham took immediate action regarding circumcision. This would become the national sign of the covenant in Israel, meaning they were under the promise of God. That was a redemptive promise showing that all nations would be blessed through Abraham. This was a sign of faith. The fact that Abraham acted so quickly and resolutely showed both his faith in God and his pursuit of the promise. It was a sign of the promise, cut into every man that would remind them daily of the promise. It is very interesting that God did something like this.

I have to laugh, because the real act of faith wasn't from Abraham; it was from the 300-500+? men in the camp who came out and listened to Abraham tell them of hearing God in the wilderness. Then he pulls out a knife and says, "line up and lift your robes." Whoa! And they obeyed. That's faith. I can't imagine (and don't want to) what that day looked like. No discipleship course that I know of asks for a commitment like that.

## Genesis 18:1-19

This section of reading probably should have stopped at v. 16. God never doubted that Abraham would obey regarding the circumcision. Now it was time to visit Sarah.

Vs. 1-2 This could have been days or weeks later. Notice that Abe and Sarah are at *the oaks of Mamre*. Notice that the visitors sort of just appeared standing some distance away. It also looks like Abe was looking for them.

Vs. 3-8 On the one hand, this is ancient Middle Eastern hospitality. On the other hand, I think Abraham recognized the angel of the Lord, referred to here as "Lord." Abe had met Him before.

I always smile when I read this. It seems like Abe says, "Hey, let me whip together a little something for you to eat," and then he goes out and kills, guts, skins, prepares and cooks an animal. Whoa!

V. 8 Like a good host, he waited on his very honored guests. Can you imagine Jesus showing up with a couple of angels for supper? What would you do? Order a pizza? Pick up some Chinese take-out?

Understand too as a side note, they were not illusions. They all possessed real physical bodies with fingerprints. When they ate, the food went through teeth, into a mouth and down an esophagus, not into a vacuum in their bodies. It didn't take God millions of years to make those bodies. They, as spiritual beings, had no problem making a body in a second, with moving parts and all the latest upgrades. God did that at creation too.

Vs. 9-15 Sarah hears the promise firsthand. The traditional way of understanding the visitors is Christ, pre-incarnate, often described, but not always, as "the angel of the Lord," and two angels. Notice in vs. 10, 13, and 17, *the LORD said*.

Sarah listened at the key-hole as they talked and she laughed in wonder and joy, the same as Abraham. Interestingly, the name of the baby, Isaac, means laughter. We know that this laughter was in joy and wonder. Can you imagine hearing that the thing you have been praying for and waiting for, for 25 years, was going to happen? Apparently Sarah, who was now 89, was having a hard time thinking her body would respond both sexually and maternally. For God, this miracle would be a piece of cake. The Lord showed her kindness and understanding because her lie was told in embarrassment and wonder, not in deceit. For something similar to this, look at Luke 24:36-41.

Just as an interesting note here, think about this. When Jesus was in conflict with the Pharisees in John 8:37-59, He told them that they were responding differently than Abraham, whom they said was their father. Jesus said, "*If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.*" When Jesus told the Pharisees the truth, they didn't respond with faith the way Abraham did when Jesus, as the angel of the Lord, had talked to him here.

Vs. 16-19 This introduces the Lord's discussion with Abraham regarding the destruction of Sodom that will take place in chapter 19. Sodom was a city, but also a region. Abraham would now, tomorrow actually, see how just and gracious God is. And once again, Abe would be trying to save Lot.

As a disciple, what do you take away today, to help you follow Christ in the harvest with joy, faith, and focus? What an amazing and compassionate Lord we follow. He is patient and understanding. His plans have a depth of wisdom that is totally beyond our understanding. He is faithful to His promises and He is unwilling that any should perish. For us, His plan is that He has saved us and sent us into His harvest to reach the lost and make disciples, who make disciples.

## **Matthew 6:1-24**

V. 1 Jesus is showing His disciples that the true power of our walk with Him is in secret. It is Christ in us when no one is looking. This is what shows who we really are in Christ. So much of our faith often revolves around Sunday morning and how the church meets our needs. The church is to be the group in the harvest reaching the world. Following begins with the individual disciple, living authentically with Christ. Jesus is not only dismantling the ideas of the religious routine they had been taught, but He is also encouraging them to seek the Father who will reward them for seeking Him sincerely in secret.

Vs. 2-4 This is giving to others. No one else needs to know that we give.

Vs. 5-6 Jesus first corrects what they have learned from the Pharisees. Prayer is personal, to our Father in secret.

Vs. 7-8 Apparently they knew something about how Gentiles prayed and so Jesus addressed this too.

Vs. 9-13 The Lord's Prayer is a way for a disciple to tune his heart to God as he prays. There is no magic in reciting this prayer in a church service. Since Jesus said the Father already knows what we need, in talking to God, this prayer helps us to keep reality in mind and to understand what is important to Him. The fact that this prayer tunes our attitudes is its brilliance. Jesus could not have given us anything shorter or more comprehensive to guide our thoughts as we pray to our Father. Take some time to think through every phrase.

Vs. 14-15 Jesus is still teaching His disciples about prayer. Just months before His death, Jesus reviewed "the Lord's Prayer," for His disciples in Luke 11:4. There, Jesus wove this message of forgiveness into the prayer. I understand this as a warning against an unforgiving attitude that hinders our prayers and keeps God from listening to us. As disciples working in the harvest in a lost and dying world, to withhold forgiveness, knowing that sin harms all of us, signals a lack of understanding and compassion. God will withhold the "daily cleansing" of our guilt and its consequences if we withhold forgiveness, understanding and compassion from other ruined sinners.

I have experienced and seen that when I harbor bad attitudes toward people who offend me, and do not show them the same forgiveness, understanding, mercy and grace, that my Father shows me, He holds me accountable for my guilt. Life seems dreary and my heart is heavy until I'm willing to forgive. God doesn't play games like this, even with His own children and those serving Him in the harvest. As a man sows, so shall he reap is still in force, regardless of who we are.

Vs. 16-18 If we fast, no one should see it or know about it, except our Father who sees in secret.

Vs. 19-21 Remember that mixed into what Jesus has been telling His disciples is the idea of reward. What is a person really seeking on earth? Where is their real treasure? Our value and reward is often in how we look to others. So, after the warnings of religion for the approval of the public, Jesus shows His disciples where this problem really comes from, seeking reward on earth, either from people or pleasure or money.

Vs. 22-23 To place our value here on earth is totally blind. The "eye" is our understanding or spiritual perception of the truth Jesus is giving us. I think the "body" is our life on earth. Not to be working with the love of Christ to free others, as we have been freed in Christ, is blind. To live now for treasure, pleasure or recognition (even in the church) on earth is darkness. If therefore our understanding and our perception of Christ doesn't allow us to value what God values, this "darkness" is deeper than we know.

V. 24 And Jesus is telling His disciples that this is the real problem. Not to be serving Christ as disciples following Him in the harvest means there is another master being served. Not all Christians are disciples, for this reason.

Discipleship is a choice to follow now, to be hungry now, to live now before our Father who sees in secret. God is patient with us, teaching us that true treasure is not to be found on earth and that we are blessed on earth as we follow our Lord in the harvest, bearing much fruit and so glorifying our Father.

## **Psalm 7**

Very few of us have been in situations where we've needed to pray like this. Few of us have found this much opposition in our walk with Christ. Psalms like these made CS Lewis doubt their inspiration. Yet the Spirit inspired these words of David to show that God understands the crying of our hearts when we face injustice, hate and oppression. God is all for forgiveness and understanding, but even Jesus said there would be judgment and eternal punishment. What is written here shows something of how God feels toward those who harm others, and yet God shows His mercy until the end. As disciples who know the grace of God, we should be like our Father, showing kindness and mercy even to our enemies. And we should cry out to Him, as this psalm encourages.

Vs. 1-2 This threat seems to have gone to David's heart and the danger must have appeared to be very close to him.

Vs. 3-5 To me, this sounds like the application of what Jesus said in the Lord's Prayer, regarding forgiveness. David is saying that if he was guilty of the unkindness or unforgiveness, then it would be just for the penalty to fall on him.

Vs. 6-9 David knows that he is innocent and is asking mankind to be gathered to see God's justice. There is a sense here that David is talking about God's judgment over all people, all of mankind.

Vs. 10-11 David is not only expressing his hope in God, but he, through the Spirit, is expressing the hurt or offense God feels every day from every sin that mankind commits.

Vs. 12-16 Notice how this begins. *If a man does not repent*, God is more than willing to offer forgiveness and He provides a ton of patience. But, there is a day when there is judgment; and often that judgment is according to a person's own sin and behavior.

V. 17 Amen.

## **Proverbs 2:1-5**

Didn't Jesus just tell His disciples about *treasure*? Notice the "if-then" proposition here. If this treasure is important to you and if you receive this word and call out, and seek, and search, then you will understand and find. Jesus said this to His disciples on more than one occasion.

In following Christ, this is what separates the "men from the boys and the women from the girls." Jesus is about to say just this in His sermon to His disciples.

Where is our treasure as disciples? Will our love for Jesus drive us to dig deeper?