

JANUARY 9

Genesis 20:1-22:24

So, we are nine days into the year. How are you doing? Remember: The Word is alive. These notes are not. Work to maintain your daily time reading the Word. If the notes are interesting to you, they will be here when you have time to read them. There are lots of lessons in these passages. As you read, what is the Spirit highlighting for you?

Genesis 20

V. 1 We are never told why Abe & Co. journeyed south. Whatever the reason was, there was no emergency. It seems that Abraham found himself being examined in the kingdom of Abimelech; and once questioned about Sarah, Abe felt threatened and lied. Then one thing led to another. It could be that there was an actual threat once Abraham was approached, because God never rebukes Abraham.

V. 2 Sarah was apparently still a "hot chick" at 90. Never give up!

Vs. 3-7 I'm always amazed at how easily God and Abimelech spoke together. This literally put the fear of God in Abimelech. It is interesting that God protected Sarah. God would have done this even without the lie.

Vs. 8-13 Abraham explains the situation behind the lie that he and Sarah told. Rightfully so, Abimelech is offended and is right in saying that Abe shouldn't have done this. Abe answers that he didn't sense from the people that there was a fear of the Lord in the land. There was fear now.

Vs. 14-18 Abimelech giving gifts to Abe and Sarah was a sign of his innocence and testimony to all the people to keep their hands off of Abraham. Abraham's prayer brought God's blessing back to Abimelech.

If you read between the lines here, I don't think Abimelech was such an innocent guy; and so God used this situation to cause Abimelech and his people to fear God and to respect Abraham.

On the other hand, God protected Abraham from himself. Even a man of faith like Abe had feet of clay. Apparently Abe was proud of his "little" trick, but what we see is that he had a huge area of fear and weakness. You wonder how someone who had seen so much from God could do this. He and Sarah were living in the very fulfillment they had longed for, so why would they fear man and doubt God. There is a root of deceit and trickery here in Abe and Sarah that sprouts in Isaac and blooms in Jacob. But I look at myself, knowing Christ, having the Spirit and the Word and a mission, and I can do the same kind of stuff. This passage is a warning to all who earnestly follow Christ to get the "logs" out of our eyes.

In a way, the "unbeliever" is really the hero here. He had a good, educational encounter with God that would prove useful later with Abraham and Isaac. The event was used by God for many purposes.

Genesis 21

Vs. 1-7 Isn't it interesting that when God told Abe that he and Sarah would have a child, Abe laughed. Then when Sarah heard it from the Lord, she laughed. Isaac means laughter. God understood that the result of what he put Abe and Sarah through would bring laughter of awe and joy when the baby was born. Because of the way God prepared their hearts, these are two parents who would never take the blessing of being parents for granted.

Vs. 6-7 When I read these words it makes me think what an incredibly unique woman Sarah must have been, and we know so little about her.

Vs. 8-13 Apparently Ishmael was mocking and making fun of Isaac. God allowed this situation to take place to move Abe and Sarah to this decision. God approved of sending Hagar and Ishmael away.

Note that God refers to Hagar as *your slave woman*, not "your other wife." Even in God's eyes, Abe only had one wife. Paul would pick up on this reference to the *slave woman* years later when he wrote Galatians.

V. 12 This truth is also used by Paul very powerfully in Romans 9:6ff.

We could go after Sarah for her attitude toward Hagar and Ishmael, but God doesn't. He tells Abe to go with it. Not all disharmony is outside of God's will, and like the thing that happened with Abimelech, He uses this within His working. As disciples working with unbelievers or in churches, things happen relationally beyond our control. People get into conflicts and things break in funny, unexpected ways when there is constant discord. Instead of losing our minds, we need to rest in the Lord and realize He might have a deeper purpose in the thing we're calling a failure or catastrophe.

Vs. 14-21 Notice that God was with Ishmael and blessed him. If you begin to underline the names of different peoples beginning in chapter 10, you see that there were already Egyptians, Canaanites and Philistines and many others. The place was crawling with people. I've heard people say that the major mistake that Abe and Sarah made here was the birth of Ishmael, whose people became the enemies of the Jews. However, later, the Edomites and Moabites and Ammonites were all enemies too, and none were related to Ishmael. It seems to me, from reading the text, the future enemies of the Jews were already in place and God is blessing Ishmael.

Vs. 22-34 Notice that Abimelech initiates this covenant with Abraham. He now knows about Abe and, with the strength of Abe's camp and the fact that God was with him, Abe was a threat to Abimelech.

Abraham is still the man of faith. The recording of this encounter will make sense of what happens to Isaac later. Abraham could have taken the land, or at least conquered Abimelech's kingdom. Abraham's camp probably had more people than Abimelech and Abe's men were proven in battle. Also, because of the size of his herds, Abe needed more territory. He could have "taken" this piece of the promised land without waiting. He endured inconvenience and discomfort to pursue God's promise in waiting. Doesn't that sound strange, to pursue something by waiting? You won't find that in a management book. What a great lesson for us as disciples, choosing to hunger and work in the harvest making disciples, when we could just enjoy "now" and make our own heaven on earth.

Genesis 22

Vs. 1-2 Notice that God *tested* Abe. He didn't tempt him to sin. Apparently it is to be expected that God will "test" us too, to see if what He has given us has become an idol, or if our hearts are wholly His.

Mt. Moriah apparently is where Jerusalem would be built. If you're like me, you wonder if all of what is about to happen took place where Jesus would one day be sacrificed. It could be.

Vs. 3-14 This story is pretty straightforward.

People often wonder if they would have the faith of Abraham, meaning, if God asked them to sacrifice their son if they could do it. Note that Isaac was a teenager. Knowing what teens are like, maybe this is why Abe seems so willing to do it. Bad joke.

Testing is "fitted" to us and our lives following God. To answer the above question, if you had all of Abe's experience with God, had all his faith to wait and believe, lived 25 years without hope and saw the promised child, left home only on the word of God, etc., etc., etc., then, yes,

this test would have been meaningful to you and you would have done what Abe did. And, your name would also be Abraham.

Interestingly here, we are told in Hebrews that Abe knew God could raise Isaac from the dead. Yet with Abimelech, Abe had such fear for his own life. Maybe that is why this test was so great. Abe had to deal with his deepest fear, and, in light of all the Lord had done for him, Abe finally submitted his fear of death to the hand of God.

Vs. 15-19 This test is a high point in redemptive history. Adam was not able to pass a test like this. Now, at that point in history there was a man on earth, who out of love for God and trust in Him, was willing to sacrifice something more dear to him than his own life.

Notice that it was *the angel of the Lord*, Jesus Himself, who spoke. This would be the place where He, the Son, would be sacrificed by His Father for the sins of mankind. Also, Isaac would have heard all of this.

There are lots of lessons for a disciple here. God will test us even though it seems unfair, since we are straining to do what others are not. Fruit will endure and lead to more fruit if the branch is wholly connected to, and abiding in, the vine. Your love and devotion to your Savior is more important than making disciples, reaching the lost and all the "Christian" stuff you do. In Ephesus, they lost their first love, but loved the work, and Jesus wasn't pleased. He threatened to remove them. It is too easy to make an idol of ministry and God's blessing.

Vs. 20-24 This little genealogical note is to give us some info that will soon become important.

Matthew 7:15-29

These are Jesus' final instructions, warnings, and qualifications to His disciples in the sermon. Note that there were not just the Twelve or the 70, but possibly a couple hundred "would be" disciples present.

Vs. 15-20 Jesus is bracing His disciples for the reality of false disciples. He is also getting them to probe their own motives in following Him. In a few years Peter, John, and Paul would all be writing letters to churches warning them about false believers. Disciples are known by the disciples they produce. All disciples are to manifest the love of Christ in the desire to reach the lost and make disciples. Often we think that a person's mouth and words are "fruit." Jesus says we are to seek the glory of the one who sent us. (John 7:18)

Disciples are known by their fruit. Some people come to Christ for themselves, their needs, their name, their comfort, etc. If a person's faith is so private and fruitless as to be invisible, I think James would say, "Faith without works is dead." A disciple has to make sure he is discipling. Following isn't an invisible walk, for as Jesus says, a light is lit to be put on a stand and gives light to all who enter. Jesus doesn't seem to have a category for disciples who are allowed to hide it under a bushel. As disciple makers, we need to be putting it "out there" ourselves and leading others to do the same with their light. Fruit is necessary. Read John 15:1-8 to understand the importance of fruit. To see Jesus' definition of fruit, look at John 12:24.

Vs. 21-23 I'll bet when Jesus told this to His disciples, it took their breath away. It is possible to be involved in ministry and to be lost. Activity is not enough, even in the name of Jesus. Look at the list: they prophesied, they cast out demons, they did mighty works. Holy cow! How did they do that without knowing Christ? I don't know, but it is possible. Note that Jesus doesn't say, "I knew you once, but you got off track." He says, "*I never knew you.*" **Never!** They came to the light to fulfill their own needs, not because of love for Jesus. Look at Acts 8:18-24. Here is a guy who came to the light so he could do miracles.

We need to be very careful and discerning as disciples too, even if we do know and love Jesus. We need, like Abe above, to be very careful that the ministry and God's blessings do not become idols to us and remove us from loving Christ. It happens every day.

Vs. 24-27 The key to living as a disciple is so simple. He who *hears* His words and *does* them is a disciple. Hearing is more than reading, but you can't "hear" them if you don't read them. This is why we're in the Word and why we get people into the Word. But like the parable of the soil and so many of Jesus' parables, we all need to make the effort to attach value to His Words and to following Him. And all of this issues from our love and desire for Him. If we love Jesus, we will read and understand and believe and trust His Word. Responding to our Lord's love moves us to "do" His Word. The "doing" is not duty if you're grateful and in love. I know it's hard, but it shouldn't be a "duty" to tell the dying where we found life.

Vs. 28-29 And like us, the people *were astonished at His teaching*.

Psalm 9:1-12

As a disciple, note that the adoration and praise of God (vs. 1, 2, 9) are only possible because David was oppressed and driven for ten years for following God. Abraham and Sarah could laugh in wonder and joy because they waited for 25 years. We will have this kind of praise, if we pay the price of discipleship, following Christ, reaching the lost, making disciples, who make disciples. Living like this won't make everyone happy. We may have to endure and wait and cry out; but in the end, in order to protect us, the Lord will draw us to His side. That's a good place to be and it makes all of the hardship worth it.

Today we only have the first half of this psalm.

Vs. 1-2 Even though David was still under stress (v. 13), he had seen God deliver him so often that in coming with this new request for help, David had to praise the Lord for the past.

Vs. 3-4 David had seen enemies fall and circumstances change. He knew it wasn't simply because God loved him, but because God is righteous and maintains the cause of those who follow Him.

Vs. 5-8 As God *rebuked the nations*, they fell and were forgotten, but God has, and always will, continue to reign and give justice to the people.

Vs. 9-10 This is David's declaration of God's truth.

Vs. 11-12 This is the praise due God for the truth of those last verses.

Proverbs 2:16-22

Vs. 16-19 For the disciple, being wise, like the "wise man" who built the house above, keeps you from a lot of foolishness. One area of danger that Solomon is about to mention repeatedly is seeking sexual fulfillment in the wrong places. Apparently Solomon was writing this before it actually happened to him.

What would be more relevant to our culture? This world and individuals in it will be in chaos until the Lord returns, because we don't understand our need for completion and how powerful and controlling it is if it is not satisfied according to God's design specs. A lot of devoted disciples, men and women, are ruined here.

Note v. 17 and the mention of faithfulness to her husband and faithfulness to God. This is the same thing God mentions in Malachi 2:14, and is seen in Romans 1:18ff and in the Fall. Faithfulness to God and faithfulness to one's spouse are linked.

V. 19 Notice that those who go this way do not *regain the paths of life*. How many public preachers or people in full-time ministry do you know, who were caught in an affair, and have regained the place they were, either publicly or in their marriage, before they fell into sexual adventure? God is not mocked. He's given us the warning right here.

Vs. 20-22 Amen. David was just talking about righteous judgment. Those who walk with God, in friendship with Him, who love Him, cannot help but be righteous. They become like the Lord and He blesses them as friends.