

The Plan from the Beginning
Daily Bible Reading Plan
Class Notes for Week 3: Genesis Chapters 12-16

For this week's class, there are at least 5 spiritual lessons we can learn from our reading:

1. We are expected to obey God when He gives us direction, even when it means leaving something we feel secure in.
2. Belief and trust in God's promises is manifest righteousness.
3. We should have faith that God will deliver on His promises.
4. Trying to accelerate, modify or improve upon God's plans for us is foolish and leads to problems.
5. Family is more important than fame or wealth.

I. Genesis 12

- Who is Abram?
 - Son of Terah (described as an idolater in Joshua 24:2).
 - Brother to Nahor and Haran (Nahor also name of His grandfather and Haran name of town they lived in after Ur).
 - Uncle of Lot
 - Descendant of Noah's son Shem
 - Originally from Ur, a city southeast of Babylon along the River Euphrates
 - Terah relocated family to Haran, a city about 500 miles northwest of Ur
- Interesting that Abram followed the commandment of God. Why did he recognize God, or know who He was if raised in idolatry?
- God sends out Abram, along with his wife, Sarai; his nephew Lot (not sure why Abram brings him); and all of Abram's servants and possessions; from Haran to the land of Canaan. Abram is 75 years young when this adventure begins.
- A famine in Canaan causes Abram to migrate to Egypt.
- In 12:11-13, Abram conspires with Sarai to deceive Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. He is concerned that Sarai's beauty will attract men and they will knock off her husband to have her. He decides to tell a half-truth (which means that it is also a half lie) to deceive the Egyptians. He and Sarai will claim to be brother and sister. She is in fact, Abram's half-sister (born to Terah, but not same mom as Abram; see Genesis 20:12). Some try to say that Abram therefore did not lie. This excuse does not hold water, as Abram's driving reason for the story was deceit and self-preservation. He also sins by encouraging Sarai to practice deceit and risk sexual violation of their marriage. Did he not trust that God would fulfill his promise and give Abram descendants? Same thought will apply in Ch. 16 and 20.
- Pharaoh does find Sarai a beauty and takes her as his wife. Pharaoh blesses "brother" Abram until great calamities come on Egypt. Pharaoh somehow discerns the cause and confronts Abram. He ejects Abram and his family from Egypt. Pharaoh was merciful here, as most men in that position of power would execute someone who tricked them and brought suffering to their land.

II. Genesis 13

- Back in Canaan. The land does not appear adequate to supply nourishment and space for both the flocks of Abram and his nephew Lot simultaneously.
- Abram, who was the senior, could have pulled rank on Lot and taken the best land for himself. Instead, Abram begins to show flashes of righteousness, generosity and compassion by allowing his younger relative dibs on the choice of land.
- Lot chooses the fertile river valley of the River Jordan, which appears to be a wonderful land to raise livestock. It also contains the city of Sodom, which in the long run is not choice real estate for long term investment. Lot is sometimes viewed in a negative light for this choice, but perhaps he is simply a shrewd businessman who, when given a promising and sensible choice for success, takes it.
- God reassures Abram (who may be a little worried about life in the harsher land) that one day, his descendants would possess all the land Abram could see. Abram settles in Hebron, a city south of Salem (Jerusalem).

III. Genesis 14

- This chapter contains the interesting story of Abram's involvement in the war of five kings versus four kings.
- Chedorlaomer and his three allies conquer much of the Jordan Valley and land surrounding Canaan. They war against the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela.
- When the forces under Chedorlaomer come against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, they defeat them and drive their armies into the tar pits of Siddim. When these victorious forces loot Sodom, they also carry off Lot and his family (presumably into a future of slavery).
- A fugitive escapes the conquest and reports the capture of Lot to Abram (described as "the Hebrew" in v. 13). Abram sets out with 318 men (interestingly the numerical equivalent of Abram's servant Eliezer's name in Hebrew). Abram and his forces, through a military plan of nighttime attack involving flanking and diversion, defeat the forces of Chedorlaomer, recapture the spoils, his nephew Lot and Lot's family/possessions.
- Abram is greeted upon his return by two grateful kings, Bera of Sodom and Melchizedek of Salem. Melchizedek was also a "priest of the most high God". It is not clear on how any man could be a priest since the priesthood had not yet been established. Christ is compared to Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-17 in the view of a priest-king. Melchizedek blesses Abram and Abram gives the king a tenth of the war spoils. The king of Sodom proposes a split of the goods with Abram, but Abram declines, allowing the return of the spoils to their rightful owner. Abram desires no credit for his wealth be given to others (perhaps he wants people to know God alone has blessed Abram with wealth?) and his reason for going to war was not the pursuit of booty, but saving his nephew and family.

IV. Genesis 15

- The Lord comes to Abram in a vision and promises rewards to him and that he will shield Abram. Abram is obviously worried about his inability to produce offspring and believes his inheritance will go to Eliezer of Damascus.
- The Lord tells Abram that he will indeed produce offspring the will be his heir. The Lord states that this offspring will come from Abram's own body. Abram may have needed further details based on his conduct in chapter 16.
- Verse 6 says that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. This credit of faith in God is repeated again by the Holy Spirit in Romans 4:3, 9; Galatians 3:6; Hebrews 11:8-19 and James 2:23.
- God also provides grave news about the enslavement of his descendants for 400 years in a strange land. The Lord does reaffirm His promise by telling Abram that in the fourth generation his descendants would return and possess the land of Canaan.
- The Lord assures Abram that he will enjoy a long life and die in peace

V. Genesis 16

- Sarai remains unable to produce offspring for Abram and decides to allow Abram to have Hagar as "his wife". Can Sarai give her husband another wife? Does this seem in accordance with God's will and make sense with the promise He gave to Abram?
- Hagar gets pregnant and this ability to produce a child for Abram apparently lowers Hagar's esteem of Sarai.
- Sarai complains to Abram about this situation of her own making. Abram tells Sarai that Hagar is her maid and she can do with Hagar what she wants. This seems like a very callous attitude towards the women carrying the only child you have ever managed to produce.
- Sarai takes the less than righteous path and begins to treat Hagar harshly. Hagar flees from Sarai.
- God looks after Hagar and shows her mercy and compassion (she has been thrust into this situation through no design of her own). Verses 7-16 contain a blessing to her and she is told that her son's descendants will be great, even if at the same time, in opposition to his brothers.
- Ishmael is born to Abram when he is 86 years old.