

## The Plan from the Beginning

### Daily Bible Reading Plan

#### Class Notes for Week 4: Genesis Chapters 17-18:15; 20-22

For this week's class, there are at least 4 spiritual lessons we can learn from our reading:

1. Nothing is beyond the power of God, even overcoming physical restraints we do not think possible.
2. When we doubt God's ability to carry out His will, even things that seem impossible to us, we need only to examine the Bible for examples of His power.
3. What do we withhold from God?
4. What has He withheld from us?

#### I. Genesis 17

- God (El Shaddai—"God Almighty") repeats His promise to Abraham about having many descendants and becoming a great nation. This covenant is similar to the one in 15, but sealed differently.
- It has been 13 years since the birth of Ishmael. Does Abraham think that Ishmael is the promised descendant and God feels he needs clarification?
- The covenant is sealed with the sign of circumcision, of Abraham, Ishmael and all the male servants.
- When the promise of a son through Sarah (name changed as well), Abraham laughed, thinking it ridiculous for a man his age and a woman Sarah's age to have a baby. Wonder why in light of Genesis 5?
- Son will be named Yitzhak, or Isaac, meaning "he laughs".
- Abraham pleads that the Lord bless Ishmael and allow the promise to come through him. The Lord promises to bless Ishmael with many descendants (12 princes, similar to twelve tribes from Jacob).

#### II. Genesis 18:1-15

- 3 men come to visit Abraham and Sarah, telling them again about the baby to come. Sarah laughs at the thought in private, saying to herself, how can a baby come to me with a husband so old (v. 12)? Interesting that the Lord asks Abraham why Sarah laughed about a baby being born to her at HER old age (v. 13).

#### III. Genesis 20

- The story of Abraham's first dealings with Abimelech contains the familiar deception by Abraham about his relationship with Sarah we saw in chapter 12. The reason for the deception was the same, to ensure Abraham's safety from the assumed-to-be unrighteous Gentile king.
- The Lord knew Abimelech's heart and did not permit him to commit sin with Sarah. The Lord did warn him to return her to Abraham. This indicates there may have been temptation to keep Sarah as a wife, again giving evidence that she was beautiful, even at her advanced age.
- Interestingly, the word prophet is used for the first time in the Bible to describe Abraham (v. 7).
- Why do you think Abimelech rewards Abraham after scolding him for the deception?

#### IV. Genesis 21

- Isaac is born as promised by God. There is no evidence that the three men returned as stated they would in chapter 18. Jewish legend holds that Isaac was born on Rosh-Hashanah.
- Sarah turns on Hagar and demands that Abraham expel her and Ishmael. She holds such contempt for them that she does not even use their names (v. 10).
- It obvious from the text that this greatly bothered Abraham and that he loved Ishmael. God reassures Abraham that Ishmael's descendants will be great, but to do what Sarah says. It is curious that he does not provide great provisions for them and turns them out into the wilderness.
- The language in verses 16-19 make it seem that Ishmael was an infant, but he was most likely 15-17 years old (14 when Isaac was born and most likely 2-3 years before Isaac was weaned). Perhaps he was weak from lack of water. Some Jewish stories claim that Sarah cast an "evil eye" on him, making him unable to walk.
- Abimelech re-enters the story and makes a covenant of peace with Abraham and settles an affair over a well.

## V. Genesis 22

- This story, sometimes erroneously referred to as the sacrifice of Isaac (obviously, Isaac was not sacrificed), is known as the “Akedah”, or binding. The story is a pivotal one and perhaps the most spiritually challenging and powerful one in the entire Torah.
- God instructs Abraham to take Isaac to a place He will tell him and sacrifice Isaac to Him. God emphasizes strongly: “your son, your favored (or only) son, the one you love”. Favored is a more likely translation since Isaac is in fact, not Abraham’s only son.
- He is sent to the land of Moriah to a mountain God will specify. The exact location is unknown, but in II Chronicles 3:1, the temple location is specified as Mt. Moriah. Today, the location of this near-sacrifice is thought to be inside the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Jews believe this rock may have been the foundation stone which was inside the Holy of Holies in the Second Temple (no ark of the covenant in Second Temple). Muslims believe it is where Mohammad ascended to heaven with Gabriel to receive instructions from God and speak with Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus and God gives him instructions on prayers.
- Abraham starts out early the next morning with no complaint. Why did Abraham plea for the lives of the people in Sodom, but not for his own son? Some say he started out early to obey as quickly as possible, other say to avoid Sarah and an uncomfortable explanation.
- They travel three days (giving Abraham plenty of time to consider his choice). He tells those with him to remain behind so that he and Isaac can go up to worship. This is not a complete deception, as that is in fact, what they were going to do. Perhaps Abraham still had faith God would not require him to carry out the killing of Isaac when Abraham told his servants “WE will return to you (v. 5).
- Poor Isaac has to carry the wood for his own death ritual. Abraham totes the fire (torch?) and knife. Isaac’s age is unknown, but he is obviously old enough to carry enough wood to burn a body and has developed deductive reasoning: “where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”
- Abraham binds Isaac and places him on the arranged wood (must have been pretty stout to control Isaac). Just before he is about to kill Isaac with the knife, an angel of the Lord intercedes. God recognizes that Abraham has matured spiritually and will withhold nothing from Him. The Lord provides a ram for sacrifice and reaffirms His covenant with Abraham.
- We learn of Rebekah’s birth (future wife of Isaac) in 22:23. She is the granddaughter of Abraham’s brother, Nahor.
- It is interesting to consider that Abraham returns to live in Beer-sheba, a city 20 miles south of the location of Sarah’s death in Hebron (23:2). Was Abraham unable to return home and try to explain these events to Sarah?