



BIBLE STORIES EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW

Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ ^ Adult Bible Studies ^ Winter-Spring 2010

January 31, 2010

Abraham and Sarah, Genesis 17-18

Getting Started

God has a plan for Abram, a resident of Ur (in modern day Iraq). After telling him to take his family and go to a place to be named later, God reveals to Abram the full story. He changes Abram's name to Abraham and says Abram's wife will bear a son, beginning a new nation. There is only one little problem. Abraham is one-hundred years old and Sarah, his wife, is ninety. Little wonder that they laugh at God's plan.

What is the story?

By promise, God revealed his plan earlier. In impatience, Abraham asks if the promise will be fulfilled through Eliezer (Gen. 15). Sarah suggests a different solution—having a child through her servant, Hagar (Gen. 16). Sarah's plan works, sort of. Hagar gives birth to Ishmael, but God reminds Abraham that the promised son Isaac will come from Sarah's womb.

In addition to the blessing promise, God declares a covenant with Abraham to deed Canaan to his descendants. This seems to be a good thing, except that Canaanites occupy Canaan.

Remember Canaan? In Noah's story, Ham sins in seeing his father naked, and his son, Canaan (probably continuing in his father's tendencies toward wickedness), received the curse of being a slave to Shem's descendants. Abraham is Shem's descendant.

God puts one condition on the covenant. Abraham must circumcise Isaac, Ishmael, and all of his servants. Since God would be the protector and provider for Abraham and all of his descendants, Abraham's descendants must also circumcise their sons on the eighth day of life. Failure to do so voids the covenant warranty.

Considering Abraham and Sarah's tendency to try to figure things out for themselves, how can God get them to believe His promise? He pays a visit. Abraham invites God and His two companions to refresh themselves and have a meal, not just any meal, a banquet. With Sarah standing near, God repeats to them the promise of a son. Sarah snickers to herself and God hears. Though she lies about laughing, God still declares that Sarah will have her own son. After dinner, God deliberates whether he should inform Abraham of his plans for Sodom and Gomorrah. God tells Abraham that he is troubled by the conditions at Sodom and Gomorrah—two cities on the plain below Abraham's home. The residents are into all sorts of evil and God is on His way to survey the situation. God discusses with Abraham the possibility of the twin cities' destruction. Abraham reacts with shock to learn that God has set his nephew's city for destruction, with everyone inside.

Abraham calls upon God's righteous character, in a nice and polite way, to intercede for any righteous persons in the two cities. It seems abhorrent to him that God would destroy the righteous with the condemned. In Noah's day, God saved the righteous and destroyed the evil.

He begins with a request of not destroying the cities for fifty good people. God relents. Abraham continues, working his way down from forty-five to ten. God patiently relents each time. Not known to Abraham, there are only four righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham's nephew and family.

What does this story say about God?

This story is revealed to Moses and given to Israel somewhere in the desert before entering Canaan. While they have seen God's handiwork, they need to know that their wanderings are just as important as Abraham's. God connects their journey and life to Abraham's as one more step in His plan. They will be the fulfillment of the curse upon Canaan. They are a nation descended from Abraham and heirs to the covenant made with him. They connect God's story, glory and power so their faith will increase and they can accomplish their task.

What about our faith?

God has a plan. It began in creation, continued through the flood, was made apparent in the promise carried out by Israel, and fulfilled in Jesus' journey to the cross. Along the way, men and women like Abraham and Sarah had to be more than just good people. They had to believe in God's ability to help them accomplish extraordinary things. Through the entire story, God works through fallible, weak, human beings like Abraham. He gives them radical commands (like leave everything you have ever known and go somewhere yet to be determined). God still has great plans—plans that involve you and me. Do not be surprised at the illogical, impossible tasks God asks. Do not be afraid to confront God about how you feel about His plans. He understands how hard they sound. Remember, he made a senior-citizen couple into parents of a nation. You may be surprised at the stories he can make come true for you.

Monday - Read Genesis 12 and 15 and *Getting Started*

1. List the promises to Abram in these passages.
2. What do these passages have to say about Abram and God?

Tuesday - Read Genesis 16 and *What's the story?*

1. What does this passage say about Abram and Sarai's belief in God's ability to keep His promises?
2. What does God's handling of Hagar's situation say about Him?

Wednesday - Read Genesis 17

1. List God's promises to Abraham in this passage and compare it with the earlier promises. What is different and what is similar?
2. What does God's continued support of His promises to Abraham say about Him?

Thursday - Read Genesis 18 and *What does this story say about God?*

1. This passage includes a descriptive account of Abraham's hospitality. Why is that important?
2. What does the discussion about Sodom and Gomorrah say about the relationship of Abraham and God?

Friday - Read Romans 4, 12 and *Now, what about our faith?*

1. How does Paul describe Abraham's faith and the covenant?
2. What does Paul say that affects those things God may ask or be asking of you? Think on this and pray for God's will to be revealed. If you are comfortable, discuss this question with your class.