

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 1.3%

I hope your week two studies are going well and that you are finding the program beneficial and worth your time.

The group has continued to grow with people joining daily. We are now up to 479 in the group. Many of those emails have more than one person in the study, so we easily have 500 to 600 people all studying together God's Word. I find the camaraderie exciting and I hope you do too!

One of our local elders, James Malizia, has been putting this reading program into a format that can be played out loud. In future weeks I will attempt to get this to him sooner so that he can do his work and send me his email with the audio files and I can send the two together in the future. For this week, I will forward his email with the audio recordings to the entire group for anyone who would like that option. I was also asked for a PDF version to be attached each week so that it can be enlarged for those who have trouble reading this font size.

Please note: this week you will need to read two chapters on Thursday and Friday. I hope you enjoy your week 3 study!

Weekly Readings will cover: Genesis 16 through 24

Sunday: Genesis 16

Monday: Genesis 17

Tuesday: Genesis 18

Wednesday: Genesis 19

Thursday: Genesis 20 & 21

Friday: Genesis 22 & 23

Saturday: Genesis 24

### **3 YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 3**

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

#### **Day 15 - SUNDAY: November 6<sup>th</sup>**

Genesis 16

Daily Deep Dive:

Abram is now 85 & Sarai 75 years old. Ten years have passed since God had promised to make Abram a great nation (Gen 12:4), yet they remain childless. Barrenness in this culture was extremely difficult. Being able to have children was seen as a gift from God and therefore if you could not have children, you were thought to be punished or cursed by God. This would lead to a woman to experience reproach or "social death."

The bible shows us how hard it was on women of that society to not be able to have children. Consider these verses (place yourself in these women's shoes):

Gen 30:1 – Barren Rachel says "Give me children, or else I die!"

In the previous chapter, Leah, who feels unloved/unwanted by her husband, clearly feels her husband will love her for giving him sons. Notice what she says:

Gen 29:32 So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."

Gen 29:33 Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I *am* unloved, He has therefore given me this *son* also." And she called his name Simeon.

Gen 29:34 She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons."

Therefore his name was called Levi.

In 1 Samuel we can read about the anguish of Hannah (Samuel's mother) who at this time is barren.

In 1 Samuel 1:6 it states "And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb."

1Sa 1:7 So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat.

1Sa 1:8 Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"

1Sa 1:10 And she *was* in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish.

1Sa 1:11 Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."

It's clear from these scriptures that barrenness was extremely difficult.

It's from this difficult place that we find Sarai 10 years later.

Verse 1 – Introduces us to Hagar. Bible translations tell us she is Egyptian (which is accurate), but I found it interesting that the Hebrew word used here (Mitsriy) comes from the root (Mitsrayim) which if you will remember back to Gen 10:6, Noah's son Ham had four sons, one of them being Mizraim. Bible dictionaries tell us that Mizraim settled in Egypt and his family name becomes known as "Egyptians". I find these family connections interesting.

Commentaries bring out that Sarai probably obtained Hagar from the Pharaoh in Gen 12:16.

Verse 2 – Notice that Sarai attributes her barrenness as something God is actively withholding from her. "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing *children.*"

Verse 3 - So Sarai suggest Abram have a child through her servant Hagar. Here's what the UCG reading program says about this cultural practice:

"No doubt Sarai longed for the fulfillment of the promise, just as Abram did. But with no fulfillment in sight, Sarai began to consider other options. Was not Hagar able to bear children? Did not God promise Abram a son without limiting Himself to providing the son through Sarai? Perhaps the promised son would come through Hagar. Besides, if it was not God's will, wouldn't He simply close up Hagar's womb? So goes human reasoning. Impatience produced the "solution" to the problem: Abram should go into Hagar and father children by her. That Abram offered no resistance to the idea seems to suggest that he, too, found the reasoning compelling.

This might strike us today as a very strange way to attempt to solve the problem. There is, however, more than meets the eye here—a cultural factor that would have provided a rationalization for Abram and Sarai. Dr. Eugene Merrill explains in his book *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*: "Certain peculiar actions of Abram and his wife in Genesis 15 and 16 require some attention to ancient Near Eastern custom and law, especially a few Hurrian practices attested in the Nuzi tablets [documents from northern Mesopotamia of the patriarchal age].... [An] example is Sarai's barrenness and the steps she took to ensure offspring in spite of it (Genesis 16:1-6). She simply offered her slave girl Hagar to Abram as a surrogate mother, and the child of that union, Ishmael, came to be regarded as the son of Abram and Sarai. This...is paralleled by Nuzi texts which describe the same remedy for a similar situation" (1987, pp. 38-39)." [END]

Verse 6 – Hagar didn't ask for this situation. She is simply a servant being forced into a bad situation. The name Hagar means "Flight" and here we see that Hagar flees after being treated harshly from Sarai.

Verse 10 – God gives Hagar a divine prophecy of her son and his descendants.

Verse 11 – God tells Hagar to name her son "Ishmael" meaning "God will hear." Who would the descendants of Ishmael become?

From the UCG booklet “The Middle East in Bible Prophecy”, it states: “This description of Hagar's descendants is significant because many of today's Arabs are Ishmaelites—descendants of this same Ishmael, whose father was Abraham. Muhammad, the founder and prophet of Islam, was descended from Kedar, one of the 12 sons of Ishmael (Ismail in Arabic). Today 22 nations in the Middle East and North Africa are Arabic nations, most of whose people are adherents of Islam. An additional 35 countries are members of the Islamic Conference, most of them with Islamic governments, but whose people are of different descent.” [END]

Let’s end today’s study with another excerpt from the UCG reading program: “Ishmael would ultimately become the father of many of the Arab peoples so that, even today, we still live with the tragic results of Sarai’s solution—i.e., major facets of the perpetual Middle East conflict.

The lesson ought to be obvious. What would have happened if Sarai and Abram had simply waited for God to provide the solution? Perhaps generations of strife could have been avoided. The geopolitical scene today might be very different, with the ever-present threat of war much diminished. We must learn to live with what God gives us, trusting that if He has made a promise He will fulfill it at just the right time and in just the right way. Man cannot bring about the fulfillment of God’s promises on his own. To attempt to do so is presumptuous and inevitably leads to misery. But to patiently wait for God to act, knowing that He *cannot* lie, builds faith and character, and avoids what could be generations of strife.” [END]

#### Day 16 - MONDAY: November 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 17

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 1 – Abram is now 99 years old. 13 years have passed since Ishmael was born. We are now 24 years from the time that God first promised to make Abram into a great nation. We can be critical of Abram and Sarai taking matters into their own hands at times, but this wait would have been excruciating. Sarai, 24 years later, still has no child. She is now 89 years old.

Verse 2 – God has made a number of Covenants already in the bible. Covenants in simple terms are binding agreements between two or more individuals and govern their relationship. They contain terms that allow the agreement to be in place and usually contained a sign that made the covenant binding.

God initiates this covenant and sets the terms with Abram.

Verse 5 – Abram’s name is changed from Abram meaning “Exalted father” to Abraham meaning “father of a multitude of nations” which we see God promised Abraham as part of this covenant (verse 4 & 6).

The UCG Bible Reading program states the following about their new names: “Genesis 17 also records the renaming of Abram and Sarai. Up to Genesis 16 the Scriptures always use the birth names *Abram*, which means “Exalted Father,” and *Sarai*, meaning “Princess.” But, here in Genesis 17, God bestows new names on them. *Abraham* means “Father of a Multitude” and *Sarah*, while still retaining the sense of “Princess,” seems to mean one of an even higher station (e.g., it is derived from the same word translated “queen” in Isaiah 49:23). Interestingly, both new names differ from Abram and Sarai by the addition of one letter in the Hebrew—the letter *He*, pronounced, like the English *H*, as a breath of air, which is often a symbol of God’s Spirit. Though there may be no significance to this, becoming new persons and circumcision can both picture spiritual conversion. In any event, whether Abraham and Sarah received the indwelling of God’s Spirit at this particular time or not, we do know for certain that they did receive it at some point (compare 1 Peter 1:11)—for they will be in the Kingdom of God, and only the converted have that honor (Romans 8:9, Romans 8:11).” [END]

Verse 7 – God promises that this covenant wasn’t just to Abraham, but also to his descendants forever to be their God. There were certainly physical blessings that God promised to Abraham and his descendants, but these promises went beyond the physical and pointed to even greater spiritual promises (Gal 3:6-9, 29) that would come through Jesus Christ and apply to God’s church today.

Verse 10 – A term of God’s covenant with Abraham and the descendants was that every male child would be circumcised. The Jewish people took this sign very seriously, because without this sign, they had no covenant with God (had no relationship) and without them being circumcised, the agreement was in breach. We still get circumcised today, but under the New Covenant, it is different. Paul said in Romans 2:29 that “but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter”. Paul also told the church in Colossians 2:11 & 12 “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

Under the New Covenant, we enter into this covenant with God through baptism and God seals the covenant by giving us His Holy Spirit. It is God’s Holy Spirit that makes us His people (Rom 8:9).

The UCG bible reading program brings out a neat scientific fact about circumcision on the eighth day as God commanded:

“Once again, the promises to Abram are expanded, this time to include a multitude of nations and kings. As a token of His covenant with Abram’s descendants, God commanded circumcision. It is a visible sign in the flesh of every male Israelite that they are part of a family with whom God has a special relationship and for whom God has a special work. Every male is to be circumcised on the eighth day of life. It is interesting to note that in male babies vitamin K—the blood clotting factor—rises sharply from birth and peaks on the eighth day, before declining to the normal level. While this could not have been known by Abram and the Israelites, it was perfectly well-known to God.” [END]

Verse 19 – After Abraham proposes that the promise might be fulfilled through Ishmael, God makes it clear, that Sarah was going to be a mother. God also instructs them to name the boy Isaac, meaning “he laughs”. God makes clear that his covenant with extend down through Isaac.

Verse 20 – God also blesses Ishmael and he would have 12 princes who names can be found in Gen 25:12-16.

Verse 23 – Immediate obedience at now 99 years of age.

Verse 25 – Ishmael is now 13 and would be 14 when Isaac was born. Quite the age gap between siblings.

### Day 17 - TUESDAY: November 8<sup>th</sup>

#### Genesis 18

#### Daily Deep Dive:

We will start with a couple sections from the UCG Reading Program today:

“While Abraham sat in the shade of his tent, he saw three men approaching. Subsequent events show them to be the preincarnate Christ and two angels. It was the custom in those days that one had an obligation to treat well any visitor who happened upon one’s camp. Indeed, this custom prevails to this day among the nomadic Bedouin of the Middle East and was much in evidence in the early decades of the 20th century. To neglect to welcome and provide for a visitor was esteemed a great insult and a mark of a man of worthless character. So when Abraham, a 99-year old man, saw the men, “he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground” (verse 2).

In the opinion of one source: “The writer of Hebrews used this account to encourage hospitality to strangers, ‘for by so doing some have unwittingly

entertained angels' (Hebrew 13:2). Abraham's words *My Lord* suggest that he suspected the identity of the visitors, but perhaps he was not sure until later of the full significance of the event" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Genesis 18:2-3).

In fulfilling his social duty, though he may have been going above and beyond if he recognized his guests, it is, in any case, interesting to note what Abraham said as compared to what he actually provided. He said: "Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring [you] a morsel of bread" (verses 4-5). But notice what Abraham actually told Sarah to prepare: not just a little water and a morsel of bread but three measures of fine meal kneaded into dough and baked into cakes, a dressed young calf, butter and milk. That was a very sizable quantity of food—indeed, a veritable feast! From this the rabbis derive a simple lesson: promise little but deliver much." [END]

Verse 14 – Another great line of the Bible and one we must remember often: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" The answer is obviously "no", but we often put limits on what God can do in our mind, even if it's unintentionally.

Verse 20 – This verse states "their sin is very grave." What was Sodom and Gomorrah's sin? There were many. Before we focus on some of their sexual sins, notice what Ezekiel records in Ezekiel 16:49-50: "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw *fit.*"

God lists pride, having too much time on their hands and in their abundance, not helping those who were in need. He continues that they were haughty (slightly different from pride) and they committed abominations.

I think we would all be wise to think through this list and examine where pride, haughtiness, idleness and where we have the capacity to help others more than we take.

Jewish historian Josephus records this about Sodom (*Antiquities Jews*, Book 1, Chapter 11):

"ABOUT this time the Sodomites grew proud, on account of their riches and great wealth; they became unjust towards men, and impious towards God, insomuch that they did not call to mind the advantages they received from him: they hated

strangers, and abused themselves with Sodomitical practices. God was therefore much displeased at them, and determined to punish them for their pride, and to overthrow their city, and to lay waste their country, until there should neither plant nor fruit grow out of it” [END]

In the book of Luke it compares the events of the last days of Sodom to how it will be right before the return of Jesus Christ.

**Luk 17:28** Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built;

**Luk 17:29** but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed *them* all.

**Luk 17:30** Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

We should not delay in making any of the necessary changes in our lives because we might be tempted to think we have plenty of time still before the return of Jesus Christ.

What about Sodom and Gomorrah’s sexual sins:

I will paste in a section from the “Book of Jasher”. Disclaimer: This book is not a part of Biblical cannon and parts of the book contradict some facts of the Bible. However, it does seem to contain some accurate traditions that were passed down over time and I believe in this particular case to bring to light some information about Sodom and Gomorrah.

Book of Jasher:

11 In those days all the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the whole five cities, were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord and they provoked the Lord with their abominations, ...and their wickedness and crimes were in those days great before the Lord

12 And they had in their land a very extensive valley, about half a day’s walk, and in it there were fountains of water and a great deal of herbage surrounding the water.

13 And all the people of Sodom and Gomorrah went there four times in the year [Sun worship – summer & winter solstice, and the spring and autumn equinox], with their women and children and all belonging to them, and they rejoiced there with timbrels and dances.

14 And in the time of rejoicing they would all rise and lay hold of their neighbor’s women, and some, the virgin daughters of their neighbors, and they enjoyed them, and each man saw his woman and daughter in the hands of his neighbor and did not say a word. “ [END]



Due to all these sins, God chose to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

This chapter ends with Abraham interceding for Sodom in verses 22 to 33. Here's what the UCG reading program says about these verses:

"The account of Abraham reasoning with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah reveals much about both God and Abraham. As mentioned before, the phrase "come down" often indicates the serious nature of a personal intervention by God, usually in judgment. That God Himself would leave heaven and personally come to make an inspection shows His diligence in administering justice, as well as His close involvement with the affairs of man. And the fact that He was ready to repeal the sentence if He found only 10 righteous inhabitants shows His great mercy. Furthermore, that God would reveal His intentions to Abraham demonstrates that God desires interaction with His people. God is interested in our opinions and He is willing to reason with us. We too can talk to God in prayer. Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Matthew 7:7). God hears and answers our prayers. He even changes His plans at times in response to our prayers. Interestingly, God disclosing His business to Abraham, who will later be called a prophet (Genesis 20:7), brings to mind Amos 3:7, which states, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servant the prophets." We also see reflected in the account something of the nature and character of Abraham—that he could be bold toward God, generous to his guests and merciful toward even the sinful inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah." [END]

### Day 18 - WEDNESDAY: November 9<sup>th</sup>

#### Genesis 19

#### Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 2 – It was common for men to wrap themselves in cloaks and sleep in street when they didn't know anyone and there wasn't an inn available (JFB).

Verse 3 – He made "unleavened bread". A number of commentators believe this was during the Days of Unleavened bread, as is also stated by Jewish Rabbi Jarchi. Did God give instruction & were the Holy Days kept by the faithful few even prior to the events of the Exodus?

Verse 8 – Lot has two virgin daughters, as well as married daughters (verse 14). This verse has long been troubling to me and still is. I've heard various ideas and read about the hospitality in eastern nations with which they say Lot was bound. I still don't understand it or have a good explanation of this section.

Here's what the UCG reading program says about this situation:

"Sodom has clearly been a corrupting influence upon Lot and his family. In order to save his unknown guests, Lot offers to bring his unmarried daughters out to the threatening mob. Of course, it is possible that this was a ploy to give his guests a chance to escape. Nevertheless, even drawing such attention to his daughters put them at grave risk. Either way, it is clear that Lot was not putting his trust in God. Of interest, it may be noticed that Lot apparently had at least two other daughters who were married (verse 14). Yet being under the authority of their scoffing husbands, they do not escape the city's destruction.

As for the utter depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as the other cities of the plain, it was fully confirmed by the visit of the two angels. When confronted with the phrase "Sodom and Gomorrah," most identify their sin as being homosexuality. But that was not their only grievous sin. In Ezekiel 16 God says that their sins included "pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; [and] neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me" (verses 49-50). Considering Abraham's example of humility and diligence in care of the visitors he received in Genesis 18, we can see from Ezekiel's condemnation that Sodom and Gomorrah had transgressed the basic boundaries of morality and social custom. Their entire lifestyle was one of self-exaltation and indulgence, indifference to others and social injustice.

Consider for a moment our modern societies. Never have we been wealthier, more secure in our daily needs, with so vast an array of leisure options. But, at the same time, we are plagued with poverty, homelessness, corrupt politicians, unjust laws, courts more concerned with procedure and the rights of criminals than with justice, and social systems and customs that violate God's instructions. Surprising as it may sound, even many churches' popular religious practices are nothing more than a recycling of ancient pagan customs God repeatedly condemns in the Scriptures. While God desires for mankind to repent—to humbly turn to Him and begin living His way of life—it will be necessary that He "come down" again in judgment for that to occur on a broad scale. Yet God is slow to anger and abundant in mercy—and for that we should be truly thankful." [END]

Verse 11 – God strike the men with blindness reminding us that God has numerous ways to handle any difficulty.

Verse 14 – How sad that Lot’s sons-in-law and his married daughters did not heed Lot’s words. How hard it must have been on Lot, his wife and his two unmarried daughters to know their family was going to die. They must have been distraught.

Verse 16 – How loving that the angels took them by the hand and brought them out of the city while they struggled to leave. I think we can place ourselves in their shoes, especially considering they had family remaining behind, and realize how difficult it would be to leave.

Verse 17 tells us they were clearly instructed to “not look behind”.

Josephus records the following about this event (Antiquities Jews, Book 1, Chapter 11): “But Lot's wife continually turning back to view the city as she went from it, and being too nicely inquisitive what would become of it, although God had forbidden her so to do, was changed into a pillar of salt; for I have seen it, and it remains at this day.”

At the end of this chapter, we come to events recorded in verses 30 through 38. This seems strange to us, but after reading the event recorded by Josephus, it helped me understand why these two young ladies thought this was their only option (it of course wasn’t).

Josephus wrote “But his daughters, thinking that all mankind were destroyed, approached to their father, though taking care not to be perceived. This they did, that human kind might not utterly fail: and they bare sons; the son of the elder was named Moab, Which denotes one derived from his father; the younger bare Ammon, which name denotes one derived from a kinsman. The former of whom was the father of the Moabites, which is even still a great nation; the latter was the father of the Ammonites; and both of them are inhabitants of Celesyria. And such was the departure of Lot from among the Sodomites.” [END]

### Day 19 - THURSDAY: November 10<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 20 & 21

Daily Deep Dive:

In Genesis 20:2 it states “She is my sister.” In verse 12 it says “She *is* the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.”

Adam Clarke commentary records “Ebn Batrick, in his annals, among other ancient traditions has preserved the following: “Terah first married Yona, by whom he had Abraham; afterwards he married Tehevita, by whom he had Sarah.”

Verse 7 – It’s interesting to me that God requires Abimelech to go to Abraham and have Abraham pray for him to be healed, which we see in Verse 17 that

Abraham prays for his healing and God then heals them all. God could have just healed him, but chose to work through this manner which brings to mind James 5:14-15 which says "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."

The UCG reading program states the following about Genesis 20:

"In this chapter we find the second incident in which Abraham identifies Sarah as his sister. The first time was the incident with the Egyptian pharaoh in Genesis 12. Now, in Genesis 20, he does the same thing with another ruler, Abimelech. While in neither case was this a complete lie, as Sarah was his half-sister, the intent was nevertheless one of outright deception. Interestingly, the strategy backfires in both circumstances. Repeating the same mistake is not unusual for any of us. Sometimes it takes multiple times before we learn our lesson. And like everyone else, Abraham and Sarah had to grow in faith. Sometimes we think that our own "prudence" is compatible with faith when, in fact, it is not. Perhaps this is what was behind the action of Abraham and Sarah. In any event, these incidents affirm to us that God will protect His people in spite of our weaknesses or the unforeseen twists of circumstance. We all make mistakes or wrong choices. In some cases, there may be consequences. But ultimately, God will work things out for our good (Romans 8:28)." [END]

Genesis 21:5 – Abraham is now 100, and Sarah is now 90 years old when God in His faithfulness fulfills His promise and through a miracle allows Sarah to have a child. Abraham & Sarah had to wait 25 years for this promise to be fulfilled. Imagine all they learned during that time about reliance on God, God's faithfulness, God's ability to do miracles, and God's perfect timing.

Verse 8 – This appears to be at either 2 or 3 years old. John Gill commentary states "Jarchi and Ben Melech say that Isaac was weaned twenty four months after his birth; a chronologer of theirs says (q) it was in the hundred and third year of Abraham, that is, when Isaac was three years old, which agrees with the Apocrypha:"But she bowing herself toward him, laughing the cruel tyrant to scorn, spake in her country language on this manner; O my son, have pity upon me that bare thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee such three years, and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age, and endured the troubles of education." (2 Maccabees 7:27)" [END]

Verse 21 – Remember that Hagar was Egyptian (Gen 16:1) and it makes sense that she would find her son a wife from her people.

Verse 27 & 32 – Both of these verses state “made a covenant”. As mentioned before the Hebrew here for “made” literally means “cut a covenant”.

Adam Clarke commentary states “then they slew an animal, poured out the blood as a sacrifice to God, and then passed between the pieces.”

John Gill commentary states “cut the sacrifice in pieces and passed between them, in token of the compact and agreement they entered into with each other; signifying that whoever broke it deserved to be cut in pieces as those creatures were.”

Verse 33 – Beersheba means “Well of the sevenfold oath”

Here is the UCG reading program about the contention between Sarah and Hagar: “But the birth of the promised son did not lead to peace and joy. Instead, the fruit of Abraham and Sarah’s attempt to fulfill God’s promise through Hagar was now beginning to be borne. Strife rent the household of Abraham, with Sarah seeking to ensure Isaac’s preeminence and resenting Abraham’s love for Ishmael, his other son. Although the narrative presents the entire transaction in a relatively brief space, it is likely that the tensions in the household had been building for quite some time. Ishmael’s ill treatment of Isaac was merely the straw that broke the camel’s back.

Abraham was distressed by the entire affair. He truly loved Ishmael (Genesis 17:18) and, given God’s pointed mention of Hagar in Genesis 21:12, Abraham may have had tender feelings toward her. He probably tried everything he could to keep peace in the house. But it was to no avail. In this circumstance, God told Abraham to heed the words of Sarah. Whether or not Sarah had a right to feel and behave as she did, God’s plan necessitated the separation of Ishmael from the household.

In requiring the separation, however, God reassured Abraham that Ishmael would be blessed, “because he is your seed” (verse 13). In other words, although God had not obligated Himself to provide for Ishmael, nor bless him, God would graciously bless Ishmael because God loved Abraham and Abraham loved

Ishmael. God's grace sometimes falls on others because of His love toward His people. When we become His children, God's love and affection is extended to more than simply ourselves. Because He loves us and we love others, God, for our sake, sometimes extends His protection and blessing to those we love. This is born out explicitly in 1 Corinthians 7:14, where Paul tells us that an unbelieving spouse is sanctified by the believer—an extension of God's love toward us. So, though we are separated from the world by the plan and call of God, nevertheless we are given the sure knowledge that *because* of our separation to God, our unconverted loved ones will often share in the overflow of God's grace.

We should also stress in this context the kinds of problems that can arise whenever we depart from God's pattern for marriage—that a man and woman unite for life in a loving monogamous relationship (Matthew 19:5-6). As we see from the example of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar—here in Genesis 21 and earlier in chapter 16—relationships contrary to this pattern lead to heartache, jealousy, bitterness and misery. We see many of the same problems again when we come to the life of Abraham's grandson Jacob. These stark examples should remind us of the kinds of consequences we saddle ourselves and others with when we decide to ignore God's laws and instructions.” [END]

#### Day 20 - FRIDAY: November 11<sup>th</sup>

##### Genesis 22 & 23

##### Daily Deep Dive:

Genesis 22: We come to the sacrifice of Isaac chapter. Imagine waiting 25 years to be blessed by God with a child and then at some point have God require you to sacrifice that child. I had always pictured Isaac as a fairly young child, but Jewish historian Josephus states that Isaac was 25 years old when this occurred.

Notice what the UCG Bible reading states about this chapter:

“The offering of Isaac is one of the best-known stories of the Bible. In fact, it has become synonymous with faith and obedience.

Why would God need to test Abraham? The answer is implied in verse 12: “For now I know that you fear God.” As mentioned in one of our previous readings, Genesis weaves together several recurring themes. Two of those themes are the sovereignty of God and our submission to Him. Did Abraham *really* have a proper fear of God—respect for who God was, His divine power and awesome purpose? Did he really believe and trust in God from his innermost being? Or was Abraham

merely obedient because some instant gratification was in it for him? Would Abraham obey when it appeared greatly to his present disadvantage to do so? Obedience, of and by itself, is not necessarily a sign of love or submission. One can obey out of terror or pursuit of material gain. How would God know? A test was required.

What must Abraham have been thinking? He didn't delay to obey (he rose *early* the next morning), but as he and Isaac journeyed to Moriah his mind was not on the weather. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us what Abraham was thinking: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (KJV).

Abraham *accounted* that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill His promise that Abraham's primary line of descent would be through Isaac—rather than through any of Abraham's other children. The Greek word translated "accounting" signifies exactly what it appears to mean—to add up. Abraham was adding up the situation as he proceeded to Moriah. He was considering God's promise, God's integrity, God's character—adding up all the facts and coming to the conclusion that God would have to resurrect Isaac. Abraham's faith was being built by a sober consideration of *who God was!*

Abraham's confidence can even be seen in Genesis 22. He tells his servants, "Stay here with the donkey, the lad and I will go yonder and worship, *and WE will come back to you*" (verse 5)—that is, he told them that he *and* Isaac would return. Indeed, Abraham truly believed it. His willingness to put the knife to Isaac's throat proved both his obedience and his faith, while proving also that he had an intelligent faith and a submission to God's sovereignty *not* based on a pursuit of selfish advantage.

But Abraham was not the only one being tested. It seems that Isaac, too, was being tested. Would he submit to his father's apparently crazy intentions? Would he struggle against his father? Isaac's response was simple submission. There is not a hint of resistance given, not a contrary word spoken. Isaac foreshadows the unquestioned obedience and willing submission of Christ to God. Jesus never resisted His Father's will. Though His death would be humiliating and painful in

the extreme, Jesus was committed to doing his Father's will— "*Thy will be done*" (Matthew 26:39, 42)" [END]

Genesis 23:

Verse 1 – Sarah was 90 when she gave birth to Isaac meaning that she was allowed to be a mother for 37 years of Isaac's life.

Verse 6 – NKJV states "You are a mighty prince among us". The Literal Standard Translation (LST) & Young's Literal Translation (YLT) both translates it "A prince of God". Others translate it as "a great leader" (ERV), "an important man" (CEV). The Hebrew is "elohiym nasi". Elohiym is most often (2,346 times) translated "God" but can also be "god" (in a general sense – 244 times) and occasionally is translated "judge, great, mighty, etc...". Nasi is most often translated "prince", and less often "captain, chief, ruler". You'll likely remember from our study of Genesis 1, that Elohiym is plural. If we take the most common translations we would get "Gods prince" or "prince of Gods". No matter the exact title, it is very clear that Abraham was highly thought of by these individuals, and his connection to the True Gods (God the Father and the Word who would later become Jesus Christ) was clearly understood.

The UCG Bible reading plan gives much depth into the cultural practice found in this chapter:

"The transactions recorded in this chapter are insightful for their picturesque detail and cultural accuracy.

At one time various scholars declared the Hittites (descendants of Heth, mentioned in Genesis 10:15) to be fiction because archaeologists and historians could find no trace of them outside the Bible. Thus, in their reasoning, the Bible was also a fiction. But then came revolutionary archaeological finds that conclusively proved the Hittites were not imaginary but instead ruled a large and powerful empire centered in modern-day Turkey but with extensive holdings in upper Mesopotamia, down the eastern Mediterranean coast and even in Egypt for a time. Much of the archaeological data on the Hittites comes from voluminous cuneiform tablets detailing business transactions. Interestingly, those tablets show that Hittite title deeds to land made particular mention of the



number of trees on the property, just as recorded in verse 17—a small detail that provides startling confirmation of the accuracy of the Genesis record.

The actions and dialogue recorded between Abraham and the Hittites provide a marvelous picture not only of Abraham's personal comportment but also of the complex rules of approach common to much of Middle Eastern culture. Abraham calls himself a stranger and sojourner when he addresses the council of the sons of Heth. The word translated stranger is *ger*. The *ger* was similar to what we call a resident alien, and it carried the idea of submissive dependency upon the host. That Abraham would so characterize himself before a council who knew him to be a "mighty prince among us" (verse 6) shows not only his humility but also the cultural practice of self-humiliation. This self-humiliation is reinforced by Abraham twice bowing himself before the people.

The dialogue between Abraham and Ephron also preserves the very strong Middle Eastern flavor of the whole transaction. Abraham requested the council of the sons of Heth to "intercede for me" (as the Hebrew literally says) with Ephron, at once showing deference and submission befitting his status as a *ger*. Ephron, in fact, was already sitting before Abraham (for verse 10 should be translated, "And Ephron *sat* among the sons of Heth"), but to show his deference Abraham does not directly address him. Now the haggling for a price begins.

Although the conversation does not appear to be haggling, it actually is—only it is done in such a way as to cause each party to the negotiation, Abraham and Ephron, to appear to be righteous and generous. Ephron, with great show, implores Abraham to take the land without payment, an offer that he fully expects Abraham to politely refuse. Indeed, according to the culture of the day, Abraham *had* to refuse. It should be noted here, though, that Abraham had only asked for the cave at the end of Ephron's field. Ephron's response meant that if Abraham wanted the cave, he was going to have to buy the whole field. In reply, Abraham offers to buy the field, but he does not name a price—for to do so would have transgressed proper etiquette by putting Ephron in the awkward position of appearing to put the bite on a mourning man if the price were not to his liking. Ephron then replies, again with an award-winning display of "magnanimity," naming as expected a price for the land that was somewhat excessive but characterizing it as an inconsiderable sum.

Normally, Abraham's next move would be to "generously" offer a lower amount, leading Ephron to come down on his price. The haggling would continue until a satisfactory deal was struck. But in this circumstance, Abraham simply pays the first price Ephron names. Perhaps he wanted all to witness that his acquiring of this property was more than fair. No doubt, he wanted the land right away—and that there be no question about ownership. With the negotiations ended, Abraham acquires the property for a burial place. Remarkably, with all that God promised Abraham, this was the only piece of land the Bible records him ever personally owning during his lifetime." [END]

### Day 21 - SATURDAY: November 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 24

Daily Deep Dive:

We see in verse 3, 4, 6 that Abraham is clear to his servant that Isaac isn't to marry a foreign woman and Isaac isn't to go back to the country that Abraham was called out of.

We later in the Old Testament see clearly that God did not want His people marrying foreign men/women and why: Notice Deuteronomy 7:3-4 "Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods;"

As we saw at the beginning with Adam & Eve, spouses have our hearts and can lead us away from obeying God. We see God is clearly concerned about this and gives plain instructions that Israel was not to marry foreigners and more specifically with individuals with false religious beliefs.

King Solomon serves as a strong example of this negative influence. In 1 Kings 11:1 it states "But King Solomon loved many foreign women," and then in verse 3 it says "and his wives turned away his heart."

In the New Testament, we clearly see God's intent for those He has called into the truth:

In 2 Corinthians 6:14-15 it states, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?"

In the first letter to Corinth, Paul tells widows that if their spouse dies that "she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. (1 Cor 7:39).

Abraham is shown to be very wise here.

The Jewish book, Seder Olam Rabba (A 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE book of biblical dates) records that Rebekah was 14 years old when she became Isaac's wife. That seems very young to us, but women often married right at puberty as they reached child bearing years.

From the UCG Bible reading program about the Abraham seeking a wife for his son:

“Three years have passed since the death of Sarah. Abraham is now 140 years old; Isaac is 40. Feeling his age, and now more sensible that his own time may be short, Abraham begins the process of acquiring a wife for his son. Arranged marriages have become a thing of the past in most, though not all, modern cultures. But in Abraham's day one of the duties of a father was to ensure that a proper mate was selected for his children, especially his sons.

The selection of a wife for a son, especially the firstborn and heir to the position of head of the family, was a serious undertaking. The right woman had to be selected, ensuring the continued stability and prosperity of the family. In some cases the father himself negotiated the purchase of a bride, but in other cases the services of an intermediary (called a *malach*, angel or messenger, in Hebrew) were employed. Abraham is now old, so he entrusts the responsibility to the steward of his household, here identified as the “the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had” (verse 2). Most likely this is Eliezer, whom Abraham mentioned in Genesis 15:2-3 as his heir before he fathered children—although it is possible that Eliezer has died by this point. In any case, Abraham imposes a most solemn oath upon his servant, instructing him to return to Abraham's country and kindred in the city of Nahor in northern Mesopotamia, and from them to select a wife. He is strictly forbidden to take Isaac with him.”  
[END]