

Reading Schedule for February 25 – March 3, 2019

The promised child is born this week. Then his dad offers him as a sacrifice, the mom dies, and life goes on. This is quite a drama, and we will see how the narrative unfolds. The Bible does not hide the flaws of human nature.

February 25 – Genesis 18: “Then Abraham spoke up again: ‘Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes . . .’” (v.27) This verse begins a dialogue of prayer that is especially inspiring to me. Do you think God changes his mind? There is no way that God changes his mind, but he does change Abraham’s mind. The principle of saving the city with ten righteous people was absolutely on the heart of God. But it wasn’t true. The Lord knew the outcome, and he brought Abraham along so that he would see the situation like God sees it. I think of prayer in that way. The New Testament has several promises that relate to prayer and God’s will. In John 15:7 Jesus says, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” How can that be true? That means I am praying in step with God’s will because his Word is shaping my prayers. That’s what I see in this amazing story of Abraham pleading for his nephew Lot. What do you take away from this story?

February 26 – Genesis 19: “But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” (v.26) There are several things about this story that are upsetting to me. This is one of them. However, I do get the sense that Lot was not especially righteous himself. It seems like he lived so long, and so contented among ungodly people that he no longer believed God’s message of destruction. It also seems to me that Lot was rescued because of his connection to Abraham, not because of the purity of his heart. It could be also that God saved Lot, his wife and two daughters, because Abraham prayed; that makes sense to me. This is a very stark example of looking back instead of moving forward. You can’t make progress in your relationship with God as long as you are holding onto pieces of your old life; looking back instead of moving forward. How do you respond to this sobering story about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah?

February 27 – Genesis 20: “Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife.” (v.12) Abraham lies about his wife again. Some of those old sins creep back into our lives so easily. His ability to trust God in this kind of situation is very weak. God protects Sarah, but no thanks to her husband. Abraham thought the worst might happen, but yet God was at work on Abraham’s behalf. He didn’t deserve it, but God was gracious again. He’s going to use this man. He’s going to bless him with a child. In many situations, Abraham has a great deal of faith. God will continue to work on his life, as we will see in a monumental story of him sacrificing his son in two days. What do you learn from this repeated story in Abraham’s life?

February 28 – Genesis 21: “Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.” (v.2) The birth of Isaac is a miracle. Who could believe that Abraham would have a son at 100 years of age, and likewise Sarah birth a child at 90 years of age? But as the Bible clearly

says, nothing with God is impossible. Our big problems seem so huge at times, but God can handle them. This story is meant to build your faith, as well as carry on the line of God’s covenant promises to bring the Messiah to this world. The name Isaac means laughter. Sarah admits that the Lord has caused her to laugh with joy as she has the privilege of being a nursing mother. Previously, she had let doubt, worry and fear dominate her response to God’s promise. But her experience shows us that God can be trusted no matter what. There is more to this chapter. What else stands out to you?

March 1 – Genesis 22: “Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.” (v.13) There is no question that we can see a picture of God in this story offering his Son our behalf. There is also a parallel between the ram offered as a substitute for Isaac and Christ being offered on the cross portrayed in this monumental story. Abraham stopped short of sacrificing his own son, but God did not spare his own Son. He allowed him to die on the cross for the redemption that we all need. This is a picture of the Gospel. I appreciate Abraham’s faith and his willingness to obey the Lord. That is a clear message. But the story primarily points me to the wonderful provision of Jesus and the hope of eternity found in him. How do you respond to this amazing event?

March 2 – Genesis 23: “Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead.” (v.6) I am drawn to the respect that Abraham has acquired because of his noble character. Strangers offered to help him because they respected him. His reputation was above reproach. These are qualities that I want in my life and I know you want in your life. As we interact with people in the community, we make an impression. As followers of Christ, the impression we give is very important. God could use our interactions in everyday life to point people to himself. Abraham wanted to honor his wife by giving her a proper burial. How do you respond to this seemingly insignificant chapter, compared to what we have been reading previously?

March 3 – Genesis 24: “‘Drink, my lord,’ she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.” (v.18) Finding the right wife is a very important aspect of any man’s life. The same could be said for finding the right husband. Right away, the servant of the Lord recognized Rebekah because of her servant’s heart. Just think of this task of carrying these heavy watering jars. Seeing Rebekah go to work, Eliezer knew this was a woman with a heart for doing far more than the bare minimum. It is not surprising then that she would be the woman that God had chosen for Isaac. As soon as Abraham’s servant knew that God had answered his prayer, he thanked God for his goodness and guidance. When the Lord answers your prayers, be sure to appreciate his goodness to you also. If you are single, ask God to lead you to the right spouse, and be patient. How do you respond to this long narrative about Isaac and Rebekah?

PRAYER: Pray for our Middle School students as they are on retreat this weekend, learning about the Christian life.