

Reading Schedule for January 16-22, 2017

I am confident that God is blessing you as you commit yourself to reading God's Word and praying 10 minutes a day. The focus of our 10 minutes of prayer is on the spiritual vitality and mission of our church called New Harvest. But possibly, you are enjoying it so much that you will want to continue praying 10 minutes a day throughout this year. Oftentimes, I will pray just what I read from God's Word. I will have words of appreciation for what I received from God's Word, and I will have words of commitment that I might live according to the Word of God. This week we will read about Abraham. If you want to get a glimpse of how significant Abraham's faith is for us as New Testament believers, please read Hebrews 11:8-19!

January 16 – Genesis 12:1-9: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (v.3) This short reading today is primarily to focus on the words that the Lord said to Abram. In this passage we read that God would bless Abram so that he could be a blessing for others. This is where we get the phrase, "Blessed to be a blessing." But Abram would first need to obey the Lord. This promise was contingent upon Abram saying "Yes" to God. The Lord would use someone else if Abram didn't follow through. But Abram obeyed and God fulfilled his promise and build a great nation from Abram's family. The Lord may be wanting to lead you to a greater place of usefulness and ministry; and he is just waiting for you to obey. How are you blessed to be a blessing?

January 17 – Genesis 12:10-20: "So Pharaoh summoned Abram. 'What have you done to me?' he said. 'Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?'" (v.18) The obedience of Abram does not mean that he is completely strong in his resilience to trust God. He was acting out of fear in this event as he lies about his wife and says she is his sister. He put Sarai's life in jeopardy because he feared for his own life. Abram had some legitimate reasons to be afraid because Pharaoh may want his beautiful wife, Sarai, to be in his harem. This could not be possible if Abram was still alive. But the bottom line is that Abram lost faith in God's protection, and yet God would still protect him. How do you understand Abram's weakness? What causes you to fear rather than trust that God will take care of you?

January 18 – Genesis 13:1-18: "So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company . . ." (v.11) Lot would be vulnerable to selfishness. We see something of his weakness in this story. He was greedy, wanting the best for himself. Abram's character is more noble. Because of it, God would entrust him to an expanding territory and great blessings. This reminds me of Cain and Abel. Obviously the Lord was not pleased with Lot, similar to Cain. But Abel and Abram sound alike in English, and they had a similar heart for God. Abram would be the father of faith, and God would bless him many times over. You do not need to push your way to expand your territory. God will bless you in just the right way. You can trust him. Do you agree? How do you respond to this story?

January 19 – Genesis 14:1-24: "'And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything." (v.20) This is the first mention in the Bible about sharing a tenth as a reflection

of gratitude for God's provision. The Lord blessed Abram and Abram reflects a proper response. It was a tradition to give a tenth of one's earnings to the gods. Abram followed this tradition, and refused to take any booty from the king of Sodom. This is a powerful reflection of appreciation and spiritual insight to the fact that God is the provider of all good things. How do you respond to the story of Abram's kindness to Lot and his generosity to Melchizedek?

January 20 – Genesis 15:1-21: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (v.6) This is a famous New Testament truth. Abram was affirmed solely because of his faith. We have already seen that Abram was vulnerable to fear and lying. He was not perfect. But he did demonstrate a great deal of trust, which resulted in right-standing with God. Hebrews tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God, so the opposite is true. Faith is such a pleasure to God; it pleases Him immensely. Abram believed God in spite of Lot getting the best land, and in spite of the fact that he was old, as God promised him a child. Abram is our example that a right relationship with God is based on faith and faith alone. Even in the Old Testament, God is amazingly gracious. How do you respond to this interaction between Abram and God? What does it teach you?

January 21 – Genesis 16:1-16: "So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife." (v.3) I didn't remember this part of the story, that Hagar was Sarai's idea. Sarai felt so much shame about not being able to bear Abram children that she even gave her maid servant to him so that he could have children. Obviously, she had trouble believing that God would honor his promise. This lack of faith would cause serious problems in the future. Ishmael would be the father of Islam, and the forerunner of the Muslim approach to God. Unlike his mother, he would live a life of hostility toward others. This selfish decision from Sarai is still affecting our world today. What do you notice in this story that gets your attention? How might God be speaking to you through it?

January 22 – Genesis 17:1-27: "Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?'" (v.17) God continues to promise Abraham a child through his wife Sarah, but it seems beyond his imagination. This man of faith could not conceive how God would fulfill this promise when he and his wife are so old. But our God is a covenant God, and had promised Abraham a child, and he will follow through within the next year. When God seems to want the impossible, you and I begin to doubt his faithfulness. But like Abraham and Sarah, we can trust him. Abraham showed his cynicism by laughing, yet God did not give up on Abraham. I have days that are weaker in faith, and God does not give up on me. I appreciate the faithfulness of God and the fact that he is a covenant promising God. How does that help you? What else do you learn from this chapter? How did God speak to you through the reading this week?

Prayers: Pray for spiritual resolutions that will continue beyond January 18th, which is the statistical date where 90% of our resolutions fall apart. Also pray for our first Food Bank of the New Year this Saturday.