

### Reading Schedule for January 23-29, 2017

Some of these chapters may be familiar to you, with some challenging storylines like Sodom and Gomorrah, one of the most interesting prayers in the Bible from Abraham, a repeat of Abraham's weakness, the promised son is born, as well as God tells Abraham to sacrifice his own son. This will surely be an inspiring week as we learn from Abraham through weakness and amazing faith.

**January 23 – Genesis 18:1-15:** "Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.' But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'" (v.15) Sarah was close to 90 years old. This promise seemed like an impossibility. But I really loved the line in verse 14, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" The answer is absolutely not. Abraham and Sarah would be examples of God's ability to do anything. I am so happy their story is in the Bible because it is meant to build up our faith. Sarah was afraid, and so she had a hard time being honest. When our inner thoughts and emotions are exposed of wrongdoing, we tend to hide. This does not help anything, and only keeps us stuck. Be honest with God, believe in the impossible and watch your faith grow. Do you agree? How do you respond to this interesting reading today?

**January 24 – Genesis 18:16-33:** "Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?' (v.23) This begins a dialogue that is so fascinating. It appears that Abraham changes God's mind. Of course that's not true. God was allowing Abraham to ask these kind of questions in order to shape Abraham's thinking. I have found honest prayer to be something that God uses to transform my mind and heart. During the intimacy of prayer, God has the power to shape my thinking. That is what I see him doing in this dialogue. I love that it is a dialogue. So much of prayer is us talking to God. I hope you get a glimpse of the interaction between the Lord and Abraham as an indication of the possibilities of deep prayer with God. Abraham had a clear understanding of the mercy of God because of the honest conversation they had. I encourage you to practice listening. It won't be easy at first, but it will be worth the effort. How do you respond to this amazing interaction of prayer?

**January 25 – Genesis 19:1-38:** "But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt." (v.26) This is probably the hardest part of the story. But it just shows that Lot's wife was more attached to the culture of Sodom and Gomorrah than to her commitment to God. In some ways she was clinging to the past, and somewhat unwilling to let it go. The sin was so obvious, and the wickedness was so extensive, it is surprising that she was still pulled in that direction. But that is a lesson for us. The sins of our past can still have power to pull us. Just think, there were not even ten righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah who trusted God and lived for him. It appears not even Lot's wife had a heart for God. How do you respond to this devastating story of sin and wickedness? What do you learn for your own life?

**January 26 – Genesis 20:1-18:** "Abraham replied, 'I said to myself, "There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'" (v.11) We have heard this story before. As we read on in Genesis we will hear this storyline again with Isaac. It is so interesting that Abraham, as a hero of our faith, did not learn this lesson that he could trust God. In fact, by giving into the temptation again, he was turning a sinful act into a sinful pattern of lying whenever he suspected his life was in danger. He would hand this down to his son as well. We have vulnerable spots in our own lives which, if we are not

honest, will be repeated time and again. Abraham needed to repent of this misunderstanding about God's faithfulness in protecting him. Do you agree? How might Abraham's vulnerability apply to your life?

**January 27 – Genesis 21:1-34:** "Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.'" (v.6) Laughter is good medicine. When God said he was going to provide them a child, he would fulfill his promise. God always honors his promises. Sarah could have enjoyed more laughter before Isaac was born if she had learned the spiritual principle that God would be faithful to his promise. The way to bring peace and assurance to a doubting heart is to focus on God's promises. Trust him to do what he says. I am glad that Sarah is happy and that Isaac's name means laughter. This happened so many years ago and I am still happy for Sarah. I want to absorb this story into my heart and have renewed confidence that God will be faithful and always honor his promises. Does this help you? How do you respond? Is there anything else in this chapter that got your attention? Why?

**January 28 – Genesis 22:1-24:** "Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about." (v.3) Abraham responded to God in obedience. He traveled 50 miles to Mount Moriah near the site of Jerusalem. I visited the place where they believe Abraham offered Isaac. This is a culmination of Abraham's faith, showing that faith and obedience go hand in hand. He didn't hesitate at all. If God asked him to do it, he would trust the Lord even to raise his son from the dead. There is much in this story that points to Jesus the Lamb of God. We needed an offering for our sins. This is one of the more powerful stories in the Bible and shares the continuity of God's character and his plan to rescue us from eternal death. What part of this story stirs your heart? Why? How might God be asking you to apply it to your own life?

**January 29 – Genesis 23:1-20:** "I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead." (v.4) There is much in this story that I don't understand completely. The traditions of Abraham's day were very different, and from what we can understand about them, honoring a dead person was essential to love and respect for that person. An improper burial was the equivalent of a curse. Mourning also was a very important response to the death ritual. Friends and relatives would cry loudly for the whole neighborhood to hear. Friends and relatives would prepare the body for burial, which usually took place on the same day because of the warm climate. Abraham's interaction with Ephron is interesting. I understand that Abraham paid a very large price for the property he purchased. This chapter may not seem as inspiring as many of the others, but it does talk about the reality of life and death. Sarah lived a long life, but as is always the case, she died. The same is true for us. Death is an anticipation of communion with God or something you may dread. I hope you will agree with Paul, "For me, to live is Christ but to die is gain." I hope that's how you think of death. What has God said to you through these inspiring readings this week?

**Prayers: Praying ten minutes a day can shape your heart and mind and prepare you to have a deeper and stronger prayer life. Ask God to help us become people of prayer as we grow in discipleship.**