

JANUARY 8

Genesis 20 & 21

Maybe it's time for a very quick review. The book of Genesis has two divisions: The first part - Genesis 1-11, tells about four events: Creation, the Fall, the Flood, Babel. The key people there were Adam and Eve, Cain, and Abel, and Noah. Its scope was universal - the emphasis was a general revelation and its purpose was to give us a broad overview of the events from the creation of the world to the time of Abram. Genesis 12-50, the second section, is different. The focus here is on four people - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, and nearly one-third of this section is given over to telling us about the life of Abraham. The key to Abraham's life is the covenant, and the key to Abraham's understanding of that covenant is the promise of an heir, through whom he will become the father of many - as many as there are stars in the sky or grains of sand on a beach - and through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. If there is a phrase that captures the essence of Abraham's life, it might well be "blessed to be a blessing." You remembered all of that, didn't you?

Do you ever go golfing? I do from time to time. Every so often, someone in my foursome will crack a ball off the tee and it will go sailing off to the right or the left. Sometimes it will go out of bounds. Well, when one guy hits a terrible shot, often another guy will give him a 'do-over'. The technical term for this is a "Mulligan". I don't know where that name came from, but this guy Mulligan must have been a pretty crummy golfer. Well, in life, sometimes we all need a Mulligan.

In Genesis, Abraham gets a mulligan. (You remember Chapter 12 - Abram and Sarah, down in Egypt - "she's my sister.") Well it turns out in Chapter 20 that Abraham wasn't completely lying! In accordance with an acceptable practice in these Old Testament times, Abram had married his half sister so he thought, "In a jam, I can just say she's my sister." Well that wasn't an acceptable solution. "I told the truth - I just didn't tell all the truth" was not an explanation that God was buying in this situation - and it surely didn't do Sarah any good! Well the issue back in Chapter 12 was one of trust. Abraham was in a tough situation and he was afraid of what might happen and unable or unwilling to trust God, so he lied and created a much more treacherous and dangerous problem. That is what usually happens when we try to figure out a way to extricate ourselves from situations without trusting God.

Since he failed the test of trust the first time he took it, God arranged a retest for our patriarchal father and you know what? He failed it AGAIN! (By the way, Sarah must have been some beautiful woman. As near as I can figure she was about 65 the first time down to Egypt that Abraham lied to Pharaoh. This time in the incident with Abimelech, she's probably nearly 90! Either Sarah was an exceptional beauty or Abraham was a hopeless neurotic!) Forgive my digression! You can see the point I'm making. There are certain lessons that God wants you and me to learn in our lives. They are important lessons. In some cases, everything God wants to do in our lives and in the lives of our families and in our ministries, depends upon us learning those lessons. He will put us into just the right circumstances to test whether or not we've

learned them and if we fail the test, guess what? He'll give us a mulligan. Only, this mulligan went sailing out of bounds just like the first one.

Now I'm pretty sure that you have failed a few tests in your day - I even believe that some of them were probably on the same subject with which Abraham had such a difficult time - TRUSTING GOD. But have you ever failed the exact same test twice?? Come on now - be honest! If you're like me, the answer is yes - and here's the good news - God is so patient, He keeps on working with you (and on you). He's not going to give up even though you've blown it more than twice. Abraham failed the same test twice but He did learn the lesson. I know that because Chapter 22 contains the second retest - only this time the stakes are a whole lot higher and, this time, Abraham passes with flying colors! And after Mt. Moriah, I know that Abraham blessed God for those two awful humiliating encounters with Pharaoh and Abimelech, because it was out of the failures he had learned to trust God!!

Can we pause here for a moment to reflect on the value of reading the Bible the way we are doing it right now? I'm pretty sure that without the discipline of consecutive reading like we're doing right now, I would never ever have seen the connection between Abraham's two recorded failures and the greatest victory of faith he ever had on the day when he said to Isaac, "We can obey because we can trust God. He knows what He's doing! He can prepare a lamb for Himself" or - (and Abraham only thought this, but I know that he did think it because Hebrews 11 says it) "He can raise Isaac from the dead." Abraham had learned through failures to trust God completely.

You might wish to take a few moments today and do a little thinking and praying about the lessons God is trying to teach you in your life. If you don't learn them, you will keep getting shoved into those uncomfortable retests, but more importantly, if you don't learn them, you'll never get to experience the great victory of faith that God wants to lead you into.

This is Mark Ashton, reminding you that "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'[a]"

Peace be with you.