

Mid-week Meditation, October 21, 2020; week of October 18

Genesis 25:12-18

This meditation is going to be a little bit of a review. As you may remember from last week, Abraham has passed away. So, I want to just spend a little time remembering the life of Abraham, and his wife Sarah. They were called by God to come from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land of Canaan. Upon their arrival in the promised land, they were made a promise. The promise was that their descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky, and that the descendants of Abraham would inherit the land of Canaan. Abraham heard the promise, but it was hard for Abraham to believe the part about having offspring since he was old, and his wife, Sarah was barren and beyond the years of child bearing. He wanted to believe, but his humanity kept getting in the way. Abraham struggled with his trust in God during the times in life when he was afraid, and when God's promise seemed to be too hard to believe. Sarah and Abraham struggled for years trying to imagine how such an amazing promise would ever find its reality. Sarah suggested having Abraham marry a younger maidservant, and perhaps that could be the fulfillment of this seemingly impossible promise. But God told them, that there would be a child born to Abraham and Sarah, and he would be the chosen one of Israel. And Ishmael, the offspring of Abraham and the maidservant, Hagar, was sent away, and disowned by Abraham at God's directive. God told Abraham that Isaac, the son that was to be born to Sarah and Abraham, would be Abraham's one and only heir. God reassured Abraham that Ishmael would be provided for, but that Isaac, and only Isaac, was God's chosen. Both Abraham and Sarah had trouble believing this unbelievable promise. So, God said to them, "Is anything too hard for God?" Abraham was honest with God about his difficulties in believing. In fact, he even asked God to swear to a covenant so that Abraham could be certain that God's promise was sure. And even then, Sarah and Abraham had trouble believing what seemed unbelievable. Eventually, Sarah gave birth to a son, and they called him Isaac, as God had commanded. When Isaac grew older, God wanted to be sure that Abraham's faith could be trusted, so he sent Abraham and Isaac to Mt. Moriah and asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. God provided the lamb for the sacrifice in the end, and Isaac was spared. But now, God knew that his servant, Abraham, could be trusted. In this whole lifetime of struggles and faithfulness, we see Abraham and Sarah grow in their faith. They are not perfect, they are human. And perhaps they give us a human picture of how faith in God works. Theirs is a story of how to learn and grow from the doubts and mistakes that people sometimes make. In recent weeks, we saw the story of how Abraham was better at trusting in God during the process of finding a wife for Isaac. He placed his total trust in his servant. We also learn from the faithfulness of Abraham's servant, and from Rebekah and Isaac. At this, the time of Abraham's death, what can we learn? And, how can we grow? There are several important lessons that we should take away from the lives of these faithful servants. I was struck at how many times Abraham and Sarah made the same mistakes, and how many times God was patient with them, and nurtured faithfulness within them. If God is patient with Abraham, the chosen father of our faith, then probably, God will be patient with me, if only I will turn back to him each time I go astray. One verse that I will

take with me from these studies is when God says to Abraham and Sarah in their time of doubt, "Is there anything that is too hard for God?" During times when I get discouraged or when I doubt the potential for God's goodness to emerge in a world that seems so confusing, I can just remember that God said to Abraham and Sarah, when they were ninety and 100 years old, that they would bear a child. When they doubted that, God challenged them by saying, "Is there anything too hard for God?" I guess nothing is impossible if I trust in God. I also was struck by how many stories from these servants who lived about 4000s year ago have so many lessons, and so many relevant parallels to my journey today, and especially as we face the uncertainty of Covid-19. We are not stopping our study here, but we are shifting gears to the lives of Abraham's children and grandchildren. I just thought that a little look back to Sarah and Abraham and their stories might be helpful, or meaningful. We do have one loose end to wrap up before we move on to the life of Isaac and Rebekah, and that loose end is the subject of our passage of scripture for the day. Whatever happened to Ishmael and his family? Well, that is what this passage talks about. The passage starts out by reminding us that Ishmael was born because of Abraham's and Sarah's doubts about the promise of a son. They did not see how it was possible for Sarah to give birth, so they substituted their own wisdom for God's. Abraham was joined with Sarah's maidservant thinking that could help God's promise along. And the end, Ishmael and Hagar are sent away because according to God's directive, Ishmael was to have no part of inheriting the blessing of Abraham. So, with God's blessing, Abraham sends Ishmael and his mother to a land east of Canaan. Isaac alone will be the one chosen to dwell in the land of Canaan. But God promises that he will provide for Ishmael and his family and they will be a family whose heirs are many. This passage says that Ishmael has 12 sons. So, the Land of Ishmael will have 12 tribes just like the land of Israel has 12 tribes arising from the sons of Jacob. So, Abraham's promise that the people of Ishmael would be many, and that they would be blessed was perhaps fulfilled more quickly than the promise God made about Isaac and his descendants about the land of Canaan. Anyway, this passage says that Ishmael lived to the age of 137 and then breathed his last. And just like in the instance of Abraham's death, Ishmael was gathered to his people. Perhaps in God's Kingdom, Abraham and Sarah and the people that proceeded them were now one family. Ishmael was perhaps no longer disowned by Abraham. The passage concludes by telling where the tribes of Ishmael are located, probably along the eastern border of Egypt. Ironically, I am pretty sure that the land described in the passage is the same land that Lot chose to dwell in before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. And, at the very end, it says that all of Ishmael's people lived in hostility toward their brothers. A description that has been traditionally used to describe Ishmael and his descendants.

Let us pray...