

WEEK
2

Sept. 21-27,
2026

Daily Bible readings

Genesis 14:1 - 26:35

The forever priest

Monday, Aug. 19

Genesis 14:1 – 15:21

If your attention wanders in the sea of unpronounceable names this section starts with, be sure to wake up for the end of Chapter 14, which recounts one of the strangest and most mysterious encounters of the Bible.

Abram has defeated kings who had taken Lot captive. Apparently hostage-taking was already a practice in that part of the world as it remains today.

We read that the king of Salem comes to him, bringing bread and wine. “Salem” was already a significant city; its name would later be given some new letters and it would become “Jerusalem.”

Not only are we now in the area that will one day be the heart of Hebrew worship, but we get a model of that worship when the king of Salem, Melchizedek, blesses Abram, and Abram responds by giving him a tenth of everything.

We don’t really know much about the mysterious Melchizedek. This is long before the establishment of the priesthood, yet he is identified as a priest. None of the ritual law has yet been established, yet Abram shows his faithfulness and commitment by tithing to him.

In the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus himself is said to have been “designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.”

Quoting Psalms, the letter also refers to Melchizedek, and consequently Jesus, as a “priest forever.”

His priesthood, through which he served as a bridge between humans and God, didn’t come from the law of Moses, but came before it and will continue without end.

God then promises the childless Abram “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Then, in another verse that will later be a foundation for Christian understanding, the Bible says, “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

Like with the priesthood of Melchizekek, timing is everything. Righteousness cannot depend on obedience to the law of Moses when Abram was credited as righteous long before Moses was even born.

Monday meditation

Proverbs 2:12-15

[Wisdom] will save you from the way of evil, from those who speak perversely, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil,

Daily reflections by Rev. Mark Fleming

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those whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.

Prayer focus

We pray for the wisdom to recognize evil, whatever its appearance, and to choose the right path.

Signs of promise

Tuesday, Sept. 22

Genesis 16:1 – 17:27

Abram and Sarai (who will later be called Sarah), do what many people had done before and we continue to do all too often – they thought God needed their help to accomplish his plans, so they took matters into their own hands.

In a time when people strongly felt the need to have an heir, specifically a male heir, one of the solutions to not having one was for the husband to father a son by a servant, with that son being considered a legitimate heir.

This is the route Abram and Sarai take, with Sarai giving her Egyptian maidservant Hagar to Abram. However, when Hagar conceives, jealousy arises between the two women. Sarai begins to mistreat Hagar, who flees.

An angel appears to Hagar promises her that her son Ishmael, too, will have many descendants. She returns to Abram and Sarai.

Later, God appears to Abram and promises that he will have a son by Sarai, even though they are both of advanced years. One of the signs of this covenant is changing their names to the ones we are more familiar with, Abraham and Sarah.

The promises God makes respond to two deep desires of God's people that continue to be seen through the Bible: a desire for an identity that continues into the future, and a place to call home.

Those promises are addressed in 17:6-8. "I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the genera-

tions to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

The most visible sign of the covenant is that God institutes the requirement that Abraham and all his male descendants be circumcised when they are eight days old, a practice that will continue. Since Abraham and the males in his household are more than eight days old, they are circumcised at the same time, including the now-13-year-old Ishmael.

It is noteworthy that the circumcision requirement extends even to slaves who are part of the household, whether purchased or born into it. Even at this early time, the covenant included people who were not in the line of Abraham.

Many Christian traditions, including our own, consider baptism to be the equivalent of circumcision. Colossians 2:11-12 supports this, saying, "In him [Christ] you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

As was the case with circumcision, these traditions consider baptism as an infant to be normative, but will baptise older persons who convert to the faith later.

Historically it is significant that the Islamic faith considers Ishmael to be the ancestor of the Arab peoples...some even believe him to be a direct ancestor of the prophet Muhammad.

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In today's meditation from Proverbs, adultery can be understood in both its literal meaning and beyond. The Bible often uses "adultery" to name anything that entices a person away from righteousness, whether into sexual sin or some other sin.

Tuesday meditation

Proverbs 2:16-19

You will be saved from the loose woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the partner of her youth and forgets her sacred covenant, for her way leads down to death and her paths to the shades; those who go to her never come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.

Prayer focus

We pray for the wisdom to recognize and resist the temptations of attractive words and appearance.

Mercy and judgment

Wednesday, Sept. 23

Genesis 18:1 – 19:29

Today we read two familiar but very different stories.

The fulfillment of God's promise to make a great nation from Abraham continues when three visitors come to his home.

In the previous chapter, God spoke directly to Abraham. In this chapter, it isn't as clear – one of the three visitors is referred to by Abraham as "Lord," but that may be used simply as a title of respect, or it could be another direct appearance. In either case, this is God telling Abraham and Sarah that his promise is about to be fulfilled, and Sarah will soon bear a son in spite of their advanced age.

The Lord says in 18:18-19, "Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

The text then moves into the very different story of the destruction of Sodom. The traditional connection of this account to homosexuality is clear in the city's name becoming synonymous with it in "sodomy," but that is not the only sin at work here.

Ezekiel 16:49 refers to the sin of Sodom by saying, "She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy."

Jeremiah 23:14 compares faithless prophets to Sodom, saying, "They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that not one of them turns from their wickedness."

The threats of violence and the failure to protect the stranger show that this is a bad place where disobedience to God's commands is widespread – a good reminder that rejection of God's law seldom shows up in just one isolated action, but takes over lives and even communities.

Before the famous account of Lot fleeing with his wife and daughters, we see the interesting exchange where Abraham bargains with God for the protection of the innocent lives that may be within the city.

This runs counter to the common belief that God has an inflexible future laid out for humanity, and we are simply swept up in the inevitable course of history. Instead, it shows God as being willing to listen to and engage with his people. While God doesn't spare the city, he does provide protection for the members of Lot's family who are willing to receive it.

The outright rejection of that protection by the sons-in-law, and the initial acceptance of it by Lot's wife, that she loses by looking back, seem to suggest some of the same teachings that we will later hear from Jesus (like the parable of the seeds along the path and the caution in Luke that "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.")

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As heavy as these teachings are, today's verses also contain something I've always found amusing: In 18:6-8, Abraham orders a "quick" meal for the visitors. The meal starts with baking bread and slaughtering a calf – not exactly our modern understanding of fast food.

Wednesday meditation

Proverbs 2:20-22

Thus you will walk in the ways of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous.

For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it.

Prayer focus

Lord, direct us to good and righteous friends who challenge us to be faithful to you.

God works through really imperfect people

Thursday, Sept. 24

Genesis 19:30 – 21:21

Somehow the myth developed in modern culture that Christian belief is rooted in a naive, sanitized understanding of human nature. I don't know where that thought comes from, but it doesn't come from anyone who has ever read the Bible.

Lying, drunkenness, incest, jealousy and child abandonment all figure into today's story—and all of those are from people we count as heroes and role models of our faith.

There are a lot of reasons we study the Bible, but one that never gets enough attention is the fact that knowing the stories of those we hold up as heroes shows us how ridiculous it is to fall into believing "God couldn't love me if he knew what I have really done or thought."

We imagine that the sins God can forgive are those along the lines of saying a swear word or telling someone that what they're wearing looks good when it doesn't. But believing that God can only forgive inconsequential offenses underestimates the depth of his love and trivializes his grace.

Yes, God calls us to obedience and to a standard of loving righteousness that is far beyond what we could ever dream of accomplishing, at least under our own power. But the Bible is littered with example after example of God loving and making use of people who have failed him repeatedly and terribly.

We live in a day when people outside the Christian faith often hold to contradictory standards, claiming on the one hand that right and wrong are outdated concepts, while at the same time denying the possibility of repentance or forgiveness. Some sins are celebrated in the name of tolerance, while others demand exclusion from polite society even if the sin was committed many years ago and the person has repented and lived blamelessly since.

The Bible makes it painfully clear that human nature is a messy mix of sin and obedience to God. It is this nature that makes the life of Jesus so exceptional, and makes his gift of cleansing us from both the guilt and the bondage of sin so marvelous.

Thursday meditation

Proverbs 3:1-2

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.

Prayer focus

May I live long and well, Lord. Grant me peace in my soul.

Hard testing

Friday, Sept. 25

Genesis 21:22 – 23:20

The story of God testing Abraham by telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac is a difficult one for modern readers. Almost every part of it is completely at odds with our understanding of the way the world works and should work.

Gaining meaning from the story, though, doesn't depend on accepting that it is OK to offer up your children as burnt sacrifices, but understanding some of the context might get us to the point that we can look beyond our reaction and gain some positive lessons.

The first thing to understand is that death was more familiar to people of that time. Seeing animals slaughtered was a daily oc-

currence even for the youngest of children. When loved ones died it was frequently in the home, not out of sight in a hospital. That didn't make the loss of the person any less, but the fact of death itself was less of a stranger to people.

Second, we'll see later in the Old Testament that the sacrifice of one's own children was practiced by other religions in the region. The concept of that being a test of faith would not have been as shocking to Abraham as it is to us.

As we go through the Old Testament, you'll see several mentions of child sacrifice by the people and religions who surround Israel; the protection of children became a distinctive practice of God's people. Even in the time of the early church, abandoning unwanted children to die from exposure was practiced, and Christians became known for rejecting it.

In 22:17-18, God repeats his promise, "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Third, the story of Abraham is a story of a promise of descendants. In telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, God is testing his willingness to trust in God's promise even to the degree of eliminating what appears to be the only way it can be carried out.

Fourth, when we read this as Christians, we can't help seeing the parallel to God sacrificing his own son and recognizing that the sacrifice God asked a man to be willing to make, God actually made.

Abraham is led into an impossible situation from which he can see no way out. Those are often exactly the situations where we find God has prepared a way.

Later, when Sarah dies of old age, Abraham buys a field in which to bury her, even though the Hittites graciously offer it without cost. Abraham says, "I am a foreigner and stranger among you." In spite of all the violence the Old Testament will bring, the

theme of graciousness to foreigners and travellers will appear frequently.

Friday meditation

Proverbs 3:3-4

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

Prayer focus

God, let love and faithfulness will always be my driving forces.

How I met your mother

Saturday, Sept. 26

Genesis 24:1-67

This is a love story with a twist.

In our time, a love story usually begins with boy-meets-girl and progresses from there. In this love story, the meeting doesn't happen until the very end. The courtship, to the extent it exists, is carried out by others.

Even so, there's a romantic feel to it. You get a sense of who Rebekah is, both charming and strong.

The idea of a marriage being arranged, and the wife being almost purchased, is foreign to us. Yet, Rebekah seems to be a strong person throughout. She is even asked for her input and agrees to go.

Her father and brother agreeing so readily for her to go with Abraham's servant seems casual, but in verse 50 they accept it as being God's will: "This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other."

Later in the Old Testament the law will require that a crime be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. In Matthew 18, Jesus will require two or three witnesses in dealing with sin in the church, and assures his followers that where two or three gather, he will be with them.

Rebekah isn't given over to the servant just on his claim alone to have been guided by God. Laban and Bethuel are also witnesses. It is never safe to take the word of

just one person who claims to represent God's truth—always look for the supporting testimony of their faithful witnesses.

There's no suggestion that Isaac had any part in the decision-making, but in verse 66 we read, "So she became his wife, and he loved her." In a time and place where wives could be seen as mere possessions, the relationship between Isaac and Rebekah was clearly more than that.

Their match combines elements of tradition, law and love—a fitting combination for the literal parents of Israel.

Saturday meditation

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Prayer focus

God, grant me wisdom and understanding, but never allow me to raise them above my faith.

Introducing Jacob

Sunday, Sept. 27

Genesis 25:1 – 26:35

Three generations of this family are critical to understanding God's people, Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In fact, God's people aren't really identifiable as a distinct nation until these three patriarchs. Jacob will later become known as Israel—it is his name that will forever be attached to the family line. (Later, his 12 sons will have their names attached to the 12 tribes of Israel.)

It was to Abraham that God made his covenant: "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed."

While Abraham was the recipient of God's

promise, it wasn't until the life of his grandson Jacob/Israel that it begins to be fully fulfilled. God is faithful, but his timeline is not always as rapid as we would like it to be.

Two characteristics we quickly see in Jacob will be significant: he is competitive, and he turns situations to his advantage. His strength is in his tenacity.

Jacob's struggles with his twin, Esau, begin even before their birth, and Jacob will use his wits to gain the advantage over his slightly older brother.

Once again we see God working to fulfill his promises through the use of someone who is not our ideal of completely godly.

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While all three of these patriarchs were polygamists in line with their culture, it's worth noting that each of them is strongly identified with one particular wife: Abraham with Sarah, Isaac with Rebekah and Jacob with Rachel. Each of these women appear in the story as significant people in themselves, not just as instruments to produce children.

Sunday meditation

Proverbs 3:7-8

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

Prayer focus

Keep me humble with a healthy fear of God and of evil.

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