

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 02: Genesis 15-23

Welcome to week two of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters, and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks. As a reminder, the 52 week outline, including a daily breakdown option is available for you at KarlVaters.com/Bibleoutline. This week, after covering creation last week, and millennia of history last week. I remember last week, in a few short chapters, we covered a ridiculous amount of stuff. Today, this week, the Bible slows down a bit to one family, we were introduced to the first member of that family last week Abram, and we're going to walk through the life of Abram, who becomes Abraham, his son, Isaac, and then his son, Jacob, as we take a look at Genesis 15, through 35 together. So again, as a reminder, from last week, we are in the book of Genesis, which is not just the first book of the Bible, it's also the first book of the Old Testament. It's also the first book of the history books in the Old Testament. And it's also the first book of five books Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy that go by several names, including the Law, the Pentateuch, the Torah, and the books of Moses. This is the first of the five books that were the first books to go on the shelf of the library that today we call the Bible. So in chapters 15 to 23, the first half of the week, we'll be looking exclusively at this man named Abram, or who becomes Abraham.

So last week, we were introduced to this man Abram, and he was chosen by God to start the plan of God's plan to bring humanity and ultimately all of creation back into relationship with God again after the sin of Adam and Eve put us into a place where we were separated from God. The word Abram the name Abram means exalted father. But as we're going to see, he will go into his 90s without having any kids at all. So his story actually began last week, so let's catch you up to where we are. From last week, God gave him a command in chapter 12, verse 1 that actually begins the plot for the entire rest of the Bible.

12:1 says this, "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people, and your father's household, to the land, I will show you'". This is one of the most pivotal verses in the Bible. It's one of the most pivotal sentences in all of human history. In that sentence, God says, If you do this, if you go to the land that I'm promising you, God says, I promise I will bless you, I will bless your descendants, and I will bless every one on Earth through your descendants. Now, at this time, Abraham lived in the city of Ur, which was a great city of its day. It is, currently we know that it was just out it is just outside of modern day Baghdad, but for years, Ur was one of these great mysteries. In fact, skeptics and cynics of the Bible often pointed to the mention of Ur as one of the reasons why the Bible isn't historically accurate, because there was no record of Ur anywhere else. And then in 1849, so just we're talking just a little over 150 years ago, right? In 1849, they discovered this place called Ur, they actually excavated it in the 1920s and 30s. And as I said earlier, it's just outside modern day, Baghdad. So he's called from modern day Baghdad, to modern day, Israel. And to do so he has to cross the Euphrates River, a huge river at the time, which is where actually his descendants get their name, the first name that they're known by is the Hebrews. And Hebrews literally means "those who crossed over". So the beginning of that entire tribe of people begins here. And in fact, Abrams trip to Israel is widely considered the starting point for history. Everything before Abram

crossed over, is really what's called pre-history, we have very little record of it, you have to go back to the fossils, you have to go back to cave paintings and so on. And the point where humanity really starts writing a record of their history is right around that time. It's really the beginning of human history itself.

Now in chapter 15, which we'll start with this week, God makes a covenant with Abram. And in that covenant, he promises to Abram that he will have a child and he's giving a child to this very old couple, Abram and Sarah are in their 90s by the time this happens. The sign of that covenant is going to be circumcision, which we'll see given to them in chapter 17. Then as you go through Abram's life, what you're going to notice is that it's filled with ups like his faith, like the covenants that God makes with him, like his obedience, and it's filled with huge downs like the Hagar/Ishmael thing, which we'll go through in a moment. He lies about his wife being his sister not once, but twice, and really puts her in a dangerous position. And as we go through it, we're gonna see three really messy stories in the life of Abram. And as we talked about last week, we're not going to avoid the mess, we're going to take a look at the mess and talk about it, and not even explain it away.

So the three big messy stories you're going to see this week in the life of Abraham or this. First of all, the story with Hagar and Ishmael. God promises Abram and Sarah, they will have a child and through that child, they will have other children and the whole world will be blessed. But they reached their 90s and there's no kid. So Abram and Sarah decide they're going to help God out. And instead of Abram having a child through Sarah, he has a child through Sarah's servant, Hagar, and that son is named Ishmael. And it turns into a big mess. You'll see it coming this week. And it happens, because instead of taking God at His Word, and trusting that God knows what he's doing, they tried to help God out. And every time we step in and try to help God out, we end up in similar messes. So take a look at the mess that happens with the Hagar and Ishmael story.

The second messy and difficult story is the story in chapter 19 of Sodom and Gomorrah, I encourage you if you are, if you are at all familiar with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. If you heard about it in church before, or maybe you're, you've never been in church, you're reading through the Bible with us for the first time, but you've heard how Christians perceived Sodom and Gomorrah. I'm going to ask you to do your best to just read the story as it sits by itself without any preconceptions. Take note of what the Bible says their sins are and are not. Their sins are real, and they are many, but they may be different than some of your preconceptions, how that's approached. So I really encourage you to read through Chapter 19 without preconceptions. It's impossible to do so without preconceptions, but try to lay them aside as best you can. That's the second messy story.

And the third messy story we're going to tackle this week is when God asks Abraham, Abraham at that point, to sacrifice his son, Isaac. And of course, the sacrifice doesn't go through. But every time I read it, I just put myself in Isaac's place. And I think what was it like looking through Isaac's eyes to see his father and that knife about to kill him until God stopped him from killing him?

Like the story of Noah last week. These are challenging stories. These are messy stories. These are not stories that come with quick and easy answers. But the only way we can even begin to understand the value of them is to go to one of our founding principles of this series, which is, God is the hero of these stories. You cannot see Abraham as the hero of the

Hagar and Ishmael story, or the Sodom and Gomorrah story, or even of the near sacrifice of Isaac story. If you do, you will get the wrong lessons. And it just gets messier. Now, when we see God as the hero of the story, it doesn't completely tidy them up. But it does give them purpose.

Also, I really encourage you as you read through the stories, don't judge them as if our modern day cultural expectations are the normal way of judging people's decisions or morality, or even the things that God tells us to do. In an ancient culture of shame, and sacrifice, all three of these stories, even, not just the people who first loved them out, but the people who read them through for centuries. If you were reading these through in a,6 even today, if you go to the Middle East or Africa or places like that, there are still places in the world today that have a shame and sacrifice culture. The stories look and feel different there than they do here. The things that they get upset about in, for instance, the sacrifice of Isaac story, the things they get upset about in that story are different than we get upset about in North America today. Really, really different. So don't think that just because you look at them and go, Oh, how could I serve a God who does that? You've got to realize it somewhere else in the world today, somebody else has a problem with that story. But it's a completely different problem than you have. Because God is bigger than our expectations. He's bigger than our cultural norms. So I encourage you to try to put those aside as best you can.

Doing this, as I said already, doesn't tidy them up. We're not going to put a nice pretty bow on them. But it does give us a chance to see that maybe God is doing something here that's bigger than anything we can fully understand. I also want you to notice that in chapter 17, Abram's name changes from Abram which means Exalted Father, to Abraham, The Father of Many Nations. And in chapter 17, that happens with the covenant of circumcision. There we also see his wife's name change from Sarai to Sara. Then their son, Isaac, is born. Isaac becomes an adult. And then in chapters 24, 25 and 26 Isaac's story becomes the central focus. Now Isaac is an interesting guy because you don't get many chapters about him and he is told really exclusively as a transitional character. Isaac never stands on his own. Abraham is a huge character. Jacob is a huge character. But Isaac's story comes and goes really, really quickly. And in each of his stories, his story is only told in relationship to other people who appear to be more important in the story. For instance, chapter 24, is exclusively an entirely about his introduction to the woman who would become his wife named Rebecca. In 25 it's about him and his Dad when his Dad dies, about him and his half brother, Ishmael, and about him and his sons, Jacob and Esau. It's never about him by himself. And then in chapter 26, it's about him repeating his father's sin with another foreign king. Every single part of his story, it's only three chapters, and every single part of the story is about transition.

So we can look at that and we can think, in fact, Isaac has kind of been shoved aside sometimes in the story, because the part of the story is short, and it's always relating to others. And immediately after that the focus shifts to his sons, and particularly to his son, Jacob. But pay attention as you read through his story, to see how God uses Isaac, this transitional character, who would be easy to just simply forget about, and to see how God uses him. There are times in our lives, where we look around and we go, everybody else in my life seems to be more important than me. I'm just kind of here to help others. Well, God uses that. God uses transitional characters. And God was known for, for centuries as the God of Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob. That was the only name he was known by. So don't, don't push that aside. And for many of us, we can see our own lives in the life of Isaac.

And then we go in chapters 27 through 35. We'll finish up this coming week's reading, looking at the character of Jacob. And Jacob is another sketchy character in the Bible. His name means heel grabber which is another way in their society of saying he was a cheater. That's literally what his name means. Every time you yell his name out, you're yelling out "cheater", because Jacob was constantly deceiving people. He was constantly ruining his relations, ruining his and other people's relationships. But God continues to use him. So I want you to note really importantly, here also, when you get to chapter 32, you're going to see a name change. His name changes from Jacob, which had been his character up until that point, "the cheater", to Israel, one who wrestles with God, or sometimes one who sees God. And if that name Israel sounds familiar, well, yes. Because it's interesting that it becomes the name of the people. Up until this point, they are the Hebrews. And they are the Hebrews through most of the Old Testament, those who crossed over, but they're also known as the Israelites, and the land that they're given in the covenant is known as Israel even today. So it's really an interesting thing. This week lays out the foundation for really all of Jewish identity, the name The Hebrews, the name The Israelites, the name of the Land of Israel, the patriarchs who started all of this, the covenant that God made with his people, all of it is laid out today. So much of the rest of the story of the Bible is really laid down in foundation this week. So I encourage you to take a close look at it. Notice these things as we're reading through it.

And again, remember, when you read, ask these questions. First of all, what does this tell me about God? How is he the hero in this story? What does this tell me about God's role in our salvation, that his role is total and ours is just simply accepting it? And what is our role and what we'll see in this is, every time people walk in obedience, things go well, every time we pick it up and think we're going to do it. Thanks, God, I'll take it from here. Everything goes bad. Notice how that happens all the way through this week, as we read. Again, notice that God is doing something here we have the option of getting on board or not. But God's story is always going to happen.

Now. That's going to be this coming week. And then next week, the story is going to narrow even more, we're going to take a look at Jacob's sons, particularly one of his sons, Joseph. As we finish up Genesis, the week after this one in Genesis 36 through 50. We're gonna see this amazing man named Joseph. But this week, we really encourage you as you do this 15 through 35. Pay attention to those things. Have a great time as you're reading it, try to read it with as few preconceptions as possible and see what God is doing. We'll see you next week.

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