

GENESIS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Genesis chapter 20 as we continue our study through the Word of God. In our last study we saw the judgment of God come down upon Sodom and it's surrounding cities for their wickedness. We also saw how God spared Lot and his two daughters because God does not judge the righteous with the wicked.

Tonight we will pick up once again with Abraham and Sarah as God is going to test their faith. He knows what is in their heart, this test is not for God to find out, but this test is for Abraham and Sarah so that they may know what is in their heart and they can grow. With that said, let's begin reading in Genesis chapter 20, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study His Word.

GENESIS 20**VERSES 1-2**

1. The city of Gerar is about 12 miles southeast of Gaza, which is near the cost of the Mediterranean Sea and according to Genesis 21:34, this was the land of the Philistines. Now keep in mind that during this time there were not great numbers of Philistines living in the land but they did settle on the coast. Abraham lived around 2166 to 1991 BC and around 1200 BC is when a larger influx of Philistines came into the land of Canaan.

2. Folks, if we don't learn the lessons the first time we go through them, we are bound to go through them again, we are bound to repeat them as we see here with Abraham. Back in Genesis chapter 12 we saw Abraham lie to Pharaoh king of Egypt. He told this king that Sarah was his sister because he was afraid that the king might take her and kill him if he knew they were married because Sarah was very beautiful. Now, he is doing the same thing with Abimelech. Yes, it was a half-truth, she was his half-sister, but it was still a lie and God will call him on this once again! And think about this, he gave his wife to this king like she was a possession instead of the daughter of God! Men, that is a good lesson for us to learn, that your wife is a child of God, the daughter of the King of kings and Lord of lords, thus treat her accordingly!

VERSES 3-7

1. Did you notice what God is doing here? He is doing what Abraham should have been doing, protecting Sarah. And like a father, He is saying, "If you touch her, your DEAD!" Men, if you have a daughter, you probably know the feeling here. Now, why was this such a big deal? Listen to what Barnhouse tells us. He explains it like this: "Suppose Abimelech had taken Sarah and God had not intervened? Two seeds would have been at the door of Sarah's womb, and to this day an element of doubt would cling to the ancestry of our Lord." He makes a very good point.

2. Because Abimelech did not know Sarah was the wife of Abraham God honored the integrity of this man's heart and He will not judge him. But make not mistake about it, the Lord clearly tells him that he needs to return Sarah to Abraham or else!

3. Now if I was God, and I am not, I am not sure I would advertise that Abraham is a prophet for me, but God does this, why? Because God had gifted him and even in his weakness, he was still a prophet for God and now Abimelech is made aware of this. The problem here is that the witness of Abraham is destroyed because of his lack of faith in the Lord protecting them. He had a lapse in faith because the situation was beyond his control. But God is not done with him or Sarah, He will continue to teach them and help them to grow!

VERSES 8-10

1. It is never good when a child of God is rebuked by the unsaved, but that is exactly what we see here. And Abimelech basically tells Abraham, “What were you thinking?” As we are going to see, that was the problem for Abraham!

2. How can we prevent something like this from happening to us, being rebuked by the unsaved? That is simple, by listening to the Lord, by obeying the Lord and when we don't, then by receiving His correction into our life. But God will use the unsaved to correct us at times as He did here with Abraham. We need to trust in what God has promised us and then walk by faith and as you do, you will not give the enemies of God any room to mock God because of your actions.

VERSES 11-13

1. There are a few issues we need to deal with here. First of all Abraham “**thought**” about the situation he was facing instead of praying about it! That is a dangerous thing to do. Secondly, he was making excuses why he did what he did, “**Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife.**” In other words, he didn’t trust God but let the situation dictate his actions. Again, that was not a good thing to do as we can see.

He also tries to justify his sin by saying that Sarah is his sister, which was only a half-truth as I have said. Folk’s, a half-truth is still a half-lie and thus, the end does not justify the means. You see, a lie is still a lie no matter how you slice it!

And here is the kicker. He is blaming God for bringing him into this position in the first place, “**God caused me to wander from my father's house.**” Folks, this is the father of faith and it does give me great hope because it shows me that God is patient and longsuffering with us. In fact, Barnhouse tells us regarding this: “There is a terrible meaning in this verb *wander* which Abraham uses. The Hebrew word occurs exactly fifty times in Scripture and never in a good sense. It is used of animals going astray, of a drunken man reeling, or staggering, of sinful seduction, of a prophet’s lies causing the people to err, of the path of a lying heart. Six other words are translated *wander*, any one of which Abraham might have used, but he used the worst word available.”

2. What should Abraham have done then? He should not have made excuses for his sin but he should have repented. Paul, in II Corinthians 7:9-10 tells us, **“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”** You see, did your sorrow bring you to the place where your actions were changed or are you just sorry for getting caught? Unconfessed sin will only bring dryness to our spiritual lives and it will sap the strength from our physical life.

That is exactly what we see in the life of David during the time that he refused to confess his sin with Bathsheba before God and tried to cover it. In Psalm 32:3-4 we are told of this time and what that unconfessed sin did to him, **“When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.”** It was not until David confessed his sin that his life was restored to him and folk's, when you read Psalm 32, as soon as David confessed his sin, God was standing there with forgiveness! That is the God we serve!

Barnhouse once again tells us, “Abraham should have said: ‘Forgive me, Abimelech, for dishonoring both you and my God. My selfish cowardice overwhelmed me, and I denied my God by fearing that He who called me could not take care of me. He is not as your gods of wood and stone. He is the God of glory. He is the living God, the Creator, the most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. He told me He would be my shield and my exceeding great reward, and supplier of all my needs . . . In sinning against Him, I sinned against you. Forgive me, Abimelech.’” But that is not what Abraham did and God will call him on it!

VERSES 14-18

1. In verse 16 where it says that Sarah was “**rebuked**” you may come to the conclusion that she did something wrong. That is not what this is saying; Abraham was rebuked but not Sarah. The Hebrew word for “**rebuked**” is YAKACH, (yaw-kahh’) and it speaks of being justified. In other words, Abraham was responsible for her and Sarah did not do anything that was wrong. Yes, Sarah did say that Abraham was her brother, but Abraham was truly responsible for her and he dropped the ball! And Abimelech gives to Abraham gifts as a payment for the wrong that this king might have brought upon Sarah. Also, when it says, “**this vindicates you**” it can literally be translated, “it is a covering of the eyes” or a gift given for the purpose of appeasing!

2. The affliction that God had brought upon Abimelech's wife and his female servant's is that they were barren. They could not get pregnant. Now, once Abraham prayed to the Lord, they were healed. Why did Abraham have to pray for this healing? Because Abimelech was not saved, he did not know the Lord and thus, God hears the prayers of his children. I think that is what is going on here. And we also see God teaching Abraham the importance of intercessory prayer, to lift up the needs of others, including those that don't know the Lord! A good lesson for us to learn!

3. As Abraham leaves he does so with gifts from the king, which seems strange. Why did Abimelech do this? Maybe not only to appease Sarah but also that Abraham was a prophet of God and he was honoring him. It also may be like Paul said in Romans 12:20, **“Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’”** In other words, overcome evil with good and in doing so you may cause the sinner to see his error and repent of his ways. It could be that Abimelech blessed Abraham with the idea of him coming to his senses and repenting of his sin.

GENESIS 21**VERSES 1-2**

1. Did God fulfill his promise? You bet He did and it was at God's appointed time.

Folks, God is never in a hurry, He is very patient and His promises never fail. Yes, it has been over 25 years but it was in God's timing. In Genesis 17:21 the Lord told Abraham, **"But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year."** That time has come and Isaac is born and their laughter of unbelief is now turned into a laughter of joy!

2. Now don't come to the conclusion that Abraham was perfect in obedience. What we do see is that God was faithful to His Word and that does not change!

VERSES 3-7

1. Abraham did obey the Lord and called his son Isaac, which means laughter. He also circumcised him on the eighth day as the Lord instructed him to do. Now, did Abraham have to do this? I don't believe he did, but he wanted to obey the Lord, not out of Law but out of love! We too should obey the Lord, not because we have to, not out of the Law, but out of our love for Him!

2. The laughter of Sarah here is not one of disbelief, but of joy over God fulfilling His promises to her and giving her a son. Yes, back in Genesis chapter 18 it was a laugh of unbelief, but no longer! We do see here the faith of Sarah growing as it has been stretched and she is trusting more and more in the Lord. Now, those of you who have witnessed the birth of your child, how did you feel? I was overwhelmed with joy, words couldn't express what I was feeling. Can you just imagine how Sarah felt, God has blessed her, she once was barren for 89 years and now this precious child – ISAAC!

VERSES 8-11

1. Isaac is growing up and he is weaned from his mother's breast. The question is, "What age was Isaac when he was weaned?" Some say they weaned children back then at the age of 5 years and maybe as high as 12 years, which seems a little high to me. But most feel that Isaac was around 3 years old when he was weaned, which would make Ishmael 16 or 17 years old.

2. Now, just because Ishmael is 16 or 17 and Isaac is only 3, don't think there was no sibling rivalry. Ishmael understood what was going on and he is laughing at Isaac, mocking him, putting him down. Interestingly enough that is what Paul tells us in Galatians 4:22-29 as he is illustrating for us the son of the promise, Isaac; and the son of the flesh, Ishmael. We are told, **“For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: ‘Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband.’ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.”**

You see, it is a battle of the flesh and the Spirit, the Law and Grace. Those that adhere to the Law for righteousness will mock those that receive it by Grace. The flesh wars against the Spirit just as Ishmael was coming against Isaac. And we still see that today. The legalists who promote a relationship with God through the Law, the flesh will come against those of us who have a relationship with God by grace in the Spirit! Thus, something must be done, not only in this situation here in Genesis, but in our own life, and it will be done here and it should be done in our own lives!

3. Sarah, who encouraged Abraham to have a child with Hagar, now wants her and her child, Ishmael to go. She wants them out of the house and their lives! That does seem harsh, but the reality is, Law and Grace do not mix. Paul goes on to say in Galatians 4:30-31, **“Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”** It must be done, he must be cast out and that is true in our own lives. Law and Grace do not mix!

Also, the flesh and the Spirit cannot mix, they cannot exist together and the reality is, they will war with each other. Paul tells us in Galatians 5:16-18, **“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”** Thus, crucify the flesh and live a life that is guided by the Spirit of God because the flesh and the Spirit can’t work together just as Law and Grace can’t!

VERSES 12-14

1. By what the Lord is saying to Abraham it would seem that Abraham was unwilling to let Ishmael go, he was his son after all. But God tells Abraham to listen to Sarah and send both Hagar and Ishmael away for the son of the flesh cannot exist with the son of the promise. There can be no peaceful existence with the flesh. The flesh must be put away. Paul put it like this in Galatians 5:24-25, **“And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”**

2. The Lord does encourage Abraham by telling him that Ishmael will become a great nation, and we see that played out with the Arab people of today. But keep in mind that is not what God intended, this is the result of Abraham not obeying the Lord. There is a good illustration of this played out for us in the 1800's in the life of that great and powerful evangelist, D. L. Moody. By the power of God's Spirit in him and upon him thousands upon thousands of people came to know the Lord. Out of his ministry came Moody Memorial Church in Chicago and the Moody Bible Institute where thousands upon thousands of Christians are being trained to serve the Lord. A very powerful ministry to say the least! And yet, we are told:

Yet there's something else D. L. Moody began, about which at the end of his life he said, "God has blessed this, but it is the blessing of Ishmael." His intention was very sincere. His motives were right.

He truly wanted to begin a ministry that would help young men develop their bodies physically, as well as their souls spiritually. But in putting this into play, he was talked into certain compromises – namely that this particular ministry would be overseen by prominent members of the community. Thus, the YMCA was born – blessed to a certain extent, but far from what it could have been.

Ishmael is also blessed, but he will prove to be a perpetual problem to the people of Israel, the descendants of Isaac.

- Jon Courson's Application Commentary Old Testament, Vol. 1, pp. 90-91

Folks, that truly is an important lesson for us to learn and apply to our lives. The flesh and the spirit do not go hand-in-hand, the flesh must be crucified and we must walk in the Spirit!

3. Here is something I also find interesting. Abraham was a wealthy man and he loved Ishmael and yet, he sends Hagar and Ishmael away with bread and water, why? It is possible that Abraham realized that this journey back to Egypt was not going to be completed in the strength of their resources, according to their ability, but by God sustaining them. You see, God promised Abraham that Ishmael would become a great nation, thus, God would have to care for Ishmael to make that a reality!

4. As Hagar and her son Ishmael head out, keep in mind that Ishmael is around 16 or 17 years old at this time, and they head southeast and some 15 miles into the wilderness of Beersheba, which will become the southern most part of the Promise Land. It seems that they were trying to hook up with a road that lead to Egypt that was to the southwest but missed it and now are wandering in the far-reaching desert! Obviously not a good place to be!

VERSES 15-16

1. What does the name “Ishmael” mean? It means “God hears!” And here we see Hagar giving up, her son is on his deathbed, dehydrated, barely alive and she places him under a bush or shrub, in the shade and covered so she will not see him die. Now how did this strong 17-year-old get to this point and his older mom seems to be doing okay? Maybe he gave her the water and bread, caring for her and in the end, it could cost him his life. It is possible, and now we see Hagar weeping and as she does, God is going to hear her hearts cry, as we will see.

VERSES 17-21

1. God not only hears her cry, but the lad or Ishmael as he is fighting for his life. And God calls to Hagar and tells her to “**Fear not.**” Folks, the only way she could not be fearful is that she would have to trust God’s promise to her and her son. Did she believe? I think so because as God calls for her to get up and lift up her son, as soon as she walks in faith, she takes that step of faith, the Lord opens her eyes and she sees a well of water in the desert!

2. Was this a well in the desert that was just covered up and she could not see it until the Lord opened her eyes, He showed her where this well was at? It is possible. But we also can't negate the possibility that God supernaturally provided this well for Hagar and her son. We don't know for sure but in either case, God opened the eyes of Hagar so she could see this well after she took that step of faith. We might put it like this. She first had to take that first step and walk over to her son and lift him up before the second step was revealed to her, the well of water. That is so true in our own lives. That is why the Christian life is called a walk of faith! Step-by-step we go as the Lord leads and he reveals to us things we need to know, things we need to see as we walk with Him!

3. Ishmael grew up in the wilderness of Paran, which is even farther south than the wilderness of Beersheba, maybe 100 miles or so to the south. And here Hagar takes a wife for Ishmael from the land of Egypt! Keep in mind that in the Scriptures Egypt is a type of the world. Thus, we see the flesh unite, not with the Lord but with the world. I believe that is the picture that is being painted for us here! And what a lesson for us to learn, that the world does not want to draw us closer to God but to pull us farther away from Him. Again, the flesh and the Spirit do not mix and thus, Ishmael gets a wife in Egypt!

VERSES 22-24

1. Now some feel that this is not the same Abimelech that we read about in Genesis chapter 20. That can be a possibility but I do believe that this is the same person. The reason I say that is because Abimelech wants Abraham to swear to deal truthfully with him and if you remember back in the last chapter Abraham lied to this man. He said that Sarah was his sister and this king took Sarah into his house not knowing she was the wife of Abraham. Because of that the Lord closed up the wombs of his wife and those in his house, they could not get pregnant. He also dealt kindly with Abraham when the Lord told him that this was Abraham's wife, and he wants Abraham to remember how he treated him the last time they met. Thus, this seems to make sense, that this is the Abimelech from the last chapter. And we see Abraham agree to what Abimelech has told him.

VERSES 25-31

1. Abraham does have a concern, that Abimelech's men have seized a well in the land and they are not allowing Abraham to use it. Obviously water was a commodity in the desert. You would not want to be in the desert without it. And Abimelech tells Abraham that he did not know this was going on, it is a surprise to him and thus, out of this a covenant was made between these two men. To seal this deal Abraham gives to Abimelech some sheep, cattle, seven ewe lambs and this secured the deal, Abraham's right to this well.

Now back in Genesis chapter 20 Abimelech gave Abraham gifts before he left and now it is reversed. I think that Abraham wanted to bless Abimelech also, it was an act of kindness. What an example for us. People may treat us wrongly, but can we still bless them as Abraham did? God wants us to! Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:43-48, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”** Not an easy thing to do but by the power of God’s Spirit working in us and through us, it can be done if we are willing to submit!

2. This area of Beersheba, as I have said, will become the southern boarder of the land of Israel one day!

VERSES 32-34

1. As I have said, the Philistines were in the land but not in the great numbers that they would have later on. But by around 1200 B.C. their numbers increased, right now the time frame of Abraham was 2160 to 1991 B.C., and they lived mostly on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. We are told:

Beer-sheba itself was not in the Philistine territory, but the wilderness-the great wide plain was a common-where the flocks of Abimelech and Abraham equally pastured. The patriarch, whose large establishment required an extensive circuit of pasture land, had more room in Beer-sheba than at Hebron, and hence, it became a chief and favourite residence, his numerous bands of retainers enabling him to keep at bay the Amalekite plunderers, who were settled on the borders of the desert. Wilton has shown ('Negeb') that the expression "many days" signifies at least three years, from a comparison of 1 Kings 2:38 with Gen. 21:34, and of Acts 9:23 with Gal 1:18.

- Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary

2. Also note that Abraham worshiped the Lord by planting a tree. Now, I would safely say that most, if not all of us here would say that this is not an act of worship, but it was for Abraham, the Bible tells us so! You see, worship is truly a matter of the heart and that is then expressed in an outward act as Abraham gave this tree to the Lord. He planted a tree in the desert, with the idea that God would provide. He also planted a tree in the land that God told him to be in, trusting in the Lord once again. Thus, Abraham, in a sense, put his life on the altar of sacrifice and said, "Lord, I will obey and do what you have called me to do!" We will truly see that manifested in our study next time. Here is the thing, what are you giving to the Lord? Are you willing to place your life on the altar of sacrifice for the Lord to be used as He sees fit? Are you willing to walk by faith and follow as He leads? Our lives, how we live them are a form of worship unto the Lord, do not forget that!

3. As I close this evening I want you to notice that in the midst of this trouble that Abraham was in it did not push him away from the Lord but it drew him closer to the Lord! How about you? Are you facing conflict, trouble, and difficulty? And are you allowing that to drive you away from the Lord? If you are then you are listening to the Devil and you are following him instead of the Lord! Allow the things that happen in your life to draw you closer to the Lord because as you draw near the Lord He will draw near to you!