

GENESIS 20-21

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Genesis chapter 20 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

As we have seen, when sin entered this world through Adam that sin separated man from God. And the only solution was for God to step into humanity and pay the debt for our sins and this would be done through the seed of the woman. (Genesis 3:15)

And since that was established, we see that Satan has been trying to destroy this seed of the woman, prevent the Savior from coming.

The focus now is on Abraham and his descendants because it is through this line that the Messiah would come. Yes, this will take place many years in the future, but this is the preparatory work for the coming Messiah, His ultimate birth from the seed of the woman, from Mary!

So God has called this man Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans and he was a pagan prior to God calling him. And now he is following the Lord, as best he could and what we see with Abraham, we too struggle with. Being faithful, trusting in the Lord, walking by faith. These are lessons that God was showing Abraham and the Holy Spirit is showing us.

Warren Wiersbe gives us this insight of what this chapter is all about. He wrote,

“We make our friends and our enemies,” wrote G. K. Chesterton, “but God appoints our next-door neighbor.”

Someone has defined a neighbor as “a person who can get into your house in a minute, but it takes two hours to get him out.”

Neighbors can be a great source of blessing and even grow closer to us than some of our relatives. “Better is a neighbor that is near than a brother far off,” counseled Solomon (Prov 27:10).

However, neighbors can be a problem at times, whether believers or unbelievers. In fact, we can be a problem to our neighbors!

We usually think of Abraham as a man who was always performing great exploits of faith, and we forget that his daily life was somewhat routine. He had to take care of a pregnant wife and a young son, and he needed to manage great flocks and herds and handle the business affairs of the camp. Abraham and his chief steward were responsible for settling the daily disputes and making important decisions.

In addition, there were neighbors to deal with - like Abimelech, the king of Gerar.

In Abraham’s dealings with his neighbors, the patriarch is seen first as a troublemaker (Gen 20) and then as a peacemaker (21:22-34).

As we study these two experiences, we can learn how to relate positively to those who are outside the faith and be better witnesses to them (Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:12; 1 Tim 3:7).

- Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – OT*, p. 79

I think we can relate a lot to Abraham. He had some really high times of great faith and then he had some really low times where he lacked faith, he did not trust the Lord. And that is something that I think we can see in our own lives as well. Again, these are here for our learning that we may grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

That is what Peter reminds us of in II Peter 3:17-18, **“You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”**

Keep your eyes on the Lord, be steadfast and immovable so that you are not led away into sin!

As we saw in our last study, the judgment of God came down upon Sodom and its 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

The city of Gerar is about 12 miles southeast of Gaza, which is near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and according to Genesis 21:34, this was the land of the Philistines.

What is interesting is that many want to make this King, Abimelech an Egyptian, but that is not the area where Abraham and his family journeyed to. This is Philistine territory!

And yes, 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 B. C. and around 1200 B. C. is when a larger influx of Philistines came into the land of Canaan.

And as we read this story it sounds very familiar, and it should. 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 because she was so beautiful and kill him if he found out that they were married.

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!

If you are telling a half-truth, what are you also doing?

You are telling a half lie and if it is a lie, it is wrong.

Think about it. Would you drink a cup of water if it only was filled with half poison?

Of course not, and just think of a lie as poison!

And here's the thing. 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.

God wants us to learn these lessons of faith and He will allow us to go through them until we learn them. And He is very patient!

Not only that, but we need to think about what Abraham was doing here. 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!

So Sarah was placed in this King's harem, with all the other women.

We see this and we don't think much about it. But keep in mind that Sarah is 90 years old at this time, and yet, she was very beautiful.

We don't know how old Abimelech was, some like to say he was probably that old as well and that is why he took Sarah.

Nice thought, but I don't think so. And even if he was that old, I am sure he would have had very young women in his harem.

Something was different about Sarah, not just an outward beauty, but an inward beauty that drew her to this King!

VERSES 3-7

I don't know about you, but can you imagine if you heard God say ***“Indeed you are a dead man because of this woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife”*** I think I would be terrified, and Abimelech was!

Here is something that some don't pick up on and that is 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.

Now we see Abimelech try to defend himself and he did not know her intimately. So, because Abimelech did not know Sarah intimately and he did not know that she was the wife of Abraham, God honored the integrity of this man's heart, and He will not judge him.

But make no mistake about it, the Lord clearly tells him that he needs to return Sarah to Abraham or else!

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!

Do believers sin?

Of course they do. When they walk according to the flesh and not the Spirit. And yes, there are consequences to our sin, God makes us aware of it so we can repent and return and not go back down that path. There is restoration waiting if we only turn around and come to Him!

VERSES 8-10

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!

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, even from an unbeliever!

You see, 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.

Remember David's sin with Bathsheba and then the murder of her husband Uriah, one of David's mighty men.

And Nathan, the prophet reminded David, "**However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme . . .**" II Samuel 12:14.

Our sin dishonors God and those who don't believe in God have been given an opportunity to mock the God we serve because of our behavior. Be careful, be wise, don't do things that would dishonor the Lord!

VERSES 11-13

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.

Sorry, but 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 as he wrote, "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."

And David Guzik put it like this as he puts this perspective on it. He wrote, "This was Abraham's excuse for his sinful deception, but the real problem was that the **fear of God** wasn't in Abraham. If he really respected the LORD, His commandments, His promises, and His protection, then Abraham would have never trusted in his *own* efforts to keep his family safe and together."

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 as you read Psalm 32, as soon as David confessed his sin, God was standing there with forgiveness!

That is the God we serve!

I guess the only good thing about failing in our walk with God is that it reveals our weaknesses and allows us to depend more on God for His strength in the future. Like Paul said, **“... When I’m weak, then I’m strong.”** (II Corinthians 12:10)

I like what Barnhouse says in regard to the response of Abraham. He wrote, “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

In verse 16 where it says that Sarah was “**rebuked**” you may come to the conclusion that she did something wrong.

Well, she did do something wrong, she went along with the plan that her husband Abraham had put forth, and that was wrong.

But 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.

Yes, Sarah did say that Abraham was her brother, but Abraham was truly responsible for her, and he dropped the ball! He was the spiritual leader in the family, but he missed the mark on this one.

I am not excusing what Sarah did, she too was wrong, but the focus here is on Abraham and he was wrong in what he did.

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!

Now, 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.

But 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!

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

Now we read this story of Abraham and we see what God had promised him, that he would have a son and his descendants would be as the sand of the sea.

But here we are, some twenty-five years down the road and nothing. Sarah was 89 and Abraham was 99 years old!

What happened to what God promised them?

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 twenty-five years, but it was in God's timing.

Remember what Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:1, "**To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven.**"

Thus, that promise that God gave to Abraham, what we read in Genesis 17:21, "**But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.**" will come to pass.

And here we see that the time has come, and Isaac is born, and their laughter of unbelief is now turned into a laughter of joy! And when this child is born, Abraham is 100 years old and Sarah 90 years old!

Again, this is the timing of God. And through those years God was teaching and growing their faith. It was in His time that He makes all things beautiful. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Let me also say this. Don't come to the conclusion that Abraham was perfect in obedience. We have seen his many failures and we have seen his success. You see, he was just like us. Not a perfect faith but one that is willing to walk and learn and grow in the Lord.

Now, what we do see is that God was faithful to His Word and that does not change! And what God had promised He was more than able to bring to pass! (Romans 4:21)

VERSES 3-7

What God had promised Abraham and Sarah He brought to pass. And many times, in our own lives, because of some delay, we doubt that what God has promised us He will bring to pass. God does not lie and what may seem like nothing is happening, God is working as we see here with Abraham and Sarah.

And when this child was born, 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!

Now here in Genesis 21:6 we see Sarah laugh and this 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 at the age of 90!

Not only that, but at the age of 90 she is able to nurse Isaac. It would seem like God restored their bodies to be able to not only have a child but then for Sarah to care for this child.

Keep in mind that in this home there is Ishmael and Isaac. Ray Stedman looks at both Ishmael and Isaac and what kind of picture is being painted for us. He wrote,

This is the picture of the joy of fulfillment. At last we have two sons of Abraham living side by side, Isaac and Ishmael.

We don't need to wonder what this means in the life of faith, because in the letter to the Galatians, Paul tells us. He says that Isaac is a picture of that which is born of the Spirit and Ishmael is a picture of that which is born of the flesh (Galatians. 4:28).

Isaac is the result of a life controlled by the Spirit.

What does that mean to us?

Well, in that same letter he tells us, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control," (Galatians 5:22-23a RSV).

These are the Isaacs for which we have been waiting.

Ishmael, on the other hand, stands for the works of the flesh that are outlined in that very same chapter.

Again, we can try to help God out and we can make a mess of things as Abraham and Sarah did. They did not wait upon God but did what they thought should be done and Ishmael was born, and the descendants of Ishmael have been a thorn in the side of Israel even today!

Also, understand that the flesh and the Spirit can't live together because they are opposed to each other. Now we do live in these bodies of flesh so we can't depart from them, but we can feed the Spirit, grow in the Lord and as we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh! (Galatians 5:16)

VERSES 8-11

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 five years and maybe as high as twelve years, which seems a little high to me.

But most feel that Isaac was around three years old when he was weaned, which would make Ishmael sixteen or seventeen years old.

Now, just because Ishmael is sixteen or seventeen years old and Isaac is only three years old, 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. All the attention that once was placed upon Ishmael was now upon Isaac and Ishmael did not like it, not at all.

It is out of this that Paul gives to us a very interesting principle 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 lives, and it will be done here, and it should be done in our own lives!

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.”**

Did you see that? 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!

Again, Ray Stedman sums it up like this for us. He wrote,

Now if Isaac represents the gladsome fullness of the fruit of the Spirit in our life, then Ishmael represents some pet manifestation of our self-life in which we find comfort and delight to which we do not want to surrender.

You see how perfectly this is pictured here in this story - some value which we have long suspected is not what God would have, but which we were reluctant to give up.

Perhaps it is some long-standing habit that we have been defending, such as smoking, or overeating.

I am not making any lists of forbidden things; I am merely saying there can be habits or values in our lives which are really some form of self-indulgence. God may allow them for a time, but the time comes when he says, "Now, these have to go."

It can be anything: It may be some pet doctrine you have been insisting upon, which has been causing division and separation among the brethren.

You've gained a reputation in this field as an authority and you are not going to give it up.

Maybe it is an insistence on a particular mode of baptism, a matter of tithing, some partisan political view - something that separates - which you hold as distinctive.

It may be some friendship, or membership in some lodge or club.

It can be anything that rises from self-indulgence which we defend, protect, justify and delight in, just as Abraham defended, protected and delighted in Ishmael - until the time came when he had to make this choice.

- bit.ly/3zWP3WZ

Again, Law and Grace can't mix together just as the flesh and the Spirit can't live together. They are contrary to each other and thus, the Law and the flesh must be cast out of our lives, we must embrace Grace and the Spirit!

VERSES 12-14

As you read this, I think you see that Sarah is operating out of vindictiveness and cruelty.

But God allows it because He is teaching us that the Law and Grace cannot coexist in the family of God together.

Also, as you read this, as you see what the Lord is saying to Abraham, it would seem that Abraham was unwilling to let Ishmael go. Why? Because Ishmael 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.**”

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!

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 only bread and a skin of 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! Abraham trusted in the promise of God!

So, as Hagar and her son Ishmael head out. Keep in mind that Ishmael is around sixteen or seventeen years old at this time, and they head southeast and some 15 miles into the wilderness of Beersheba, which will become the southernmost part of the Promise Land.

It seems that they were trying to hook up with a road that led 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! And we will see how they are going to find themselves at the end of their ropes you might say! No hope for them in their efforts – ***BUT GOD!***

VERSES 15-16

What a horrible situation that they were in.

And I am not downplaying how bad it was. But let me ask you this. What does the name “*Ishmael*” mean?

It means “*God hears!*”

And what we see here is that Hagar is 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 seventeen-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. Actually, He hears the cry of Ishmael!

VERSES 17-21

This angel that appeared to her from heaven was not the Lord. And the reason I say that is because how this angel speaks, “**... Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.**” Genesis 21:17.

But God does hear the cry of this lad, of 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!

Now, 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 seems like that is what the text is saying. It does not say that God created the well of water but that “**... God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. ...**” Genesis 21:19.

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!

Not only that. But isn’t that what we see in our own lives and what God has done for us?

Think about it. Before we were saved, we were in the wilderness of the old life, and we were blind to the well of Life or we were blind to Jesus.

But when we cried out to Him, He opened our eyes to the Fountain of Living Water that had always been there, but we couldn't see Him.

We are told that 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

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.

How did he lie to Abimelech?

He said that Sarah was his sister, and this King took Sarah into his haram 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.

Henry Morris fills in some of these details for us as he wrote, *“Abimelech, well aware of God's blessing on Abraham, wished to enter into a nonaggression pact with him. Taking his army chief of staff with him, he reminded Abraham that he had dealt kindly with him and had allowed him to dwell in his land. In return, he wanted Abraham to promise that he would not try to injure him or his people.”*

VERSES 25-31

Keep in mind that water was important in that area, so 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.

Again, water was a scarce 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, he did not know that his men took this well from Abraham. 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 the sheep and the cattle may have been used as a sacrifice as they cut this deal.

Remember back in Genesis chapter 20 where 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!

This area of Beersheba, as I have said, will become the southern border of the land of Israel one day! In fact, the Bible speaks of the land of Israel from Dan to Beersheba or from the northern most part to the southern most part!

How does this all apply to us?

Ray Stedman gives to us this insight. He wrote,

Let's take a lesson from dear old Abraham. Abimelech said to him, "Now Abraham, you don't think like we do. You have a different objective." I'm amazed at the insight of this man. He at least saw this about Abraham's life. "You are here as a pilgrim and a stranger passing through, a sojourner. Now, Abraham, please promise that you will not get involved."

And Abraham said, "I'll be glad to." More and more I think this is the position Christians must take today. I want to be clear about this because this is an area in which misunderstanding can easily come. It is a case of the good being an enemy of the best.

All these social programs are very good things and we cannot deny that a Christian is definitely responsible before his God for doing all that he can to alleviate human misery and suffering wherever he finds it. If we are not doing that, we are like the Levite and the Pharisee in the parable of the good Samaritan, (see Luke 10:33). Our Lord taught us to be responsive to these needs.

Nevertheless, we are not to get involved in the programs or the politics. If we do, we have no time left to be what we are supposed to be here on earth.

God never called the church into being in order to make it a means of advancing human and political liberty in this world. This isn't what the church is here for.

It is true that everywhere the church has gone preaching the gospel of Christ greater liberty has followed, but that is because the church has created an atmosphere in which these liberties can exist.

This is the central theme the Word of God would bring forth for us here.

Righteous Abraham, living in this land of the Philistines, was a greater source of strength in defense against the enemy of that land simply by being there and being what he was, a man of God in the midst of that scene, than all the plans, programs, armies, and defenses they were concerned about in their government.

This is true today as well. Our Lord tells us we are to be salt in the earth. We are to be concerned about the changing and transforming of men's lives by the preaching of the gospel.

When the church gives itself to this task it discovers that it has created, and is creating, an atmosphere in which political freedom can flourish. Without that atmosphere, no amount of effort, organizing, committees, programming, and policy-making can ever succeed in establishing it.

When we turn from the best to the next best, good as that may be, we are wasting the time God has called us to invest which will make all the rest possible.

- bit.ly/3zWP3WZ

Good point! I think we are to be active in the things that are going on in our community as well, to be salt and light in these areas. Not to avoid them, but shine in them!

VERSES 32-34

As I have said, the Philistines were in the land but not in the great numbers that they would have had later on.

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 that,

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

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 as we read on as Abraham is called by God to give his son, his only son as a sacrifice to Him!

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!

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, all kinds of difficulty? And, because of all that are you allowing it 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!

Let me close with this, I promise. We are told,

Robert Louis Stevenson tells of a storm that caught a vessel off a rocky coast and threatened to drive it and its passengers to destruction.

In the midst of the terror, one daring man, contrary to orders, went to the deck, made a dangerous passage to the pilot house and saw the steerman, at his post holding the wheel unwaveringly, and inch by inch, turning the ship out, once more, to sea.

The pilot saw the watcher and smiled. Then, the daring passenger went below and gave out a note of cheer: ***“I have seen the face of the pilot, and he smiled. All is well.”***

- Robert Louis Stevenson