

GENESIS

Lesson 21 - Chapters 20 and 21

When last we met, we found that the greatest Patriarch, Abraham, had moved from Hebron down into the reaches of the upper Sinai Peninsula. Though the Scriptures do not say so, the reason for the move was an obvious one, which we would not question if we were Shepherds of flocks: new grazing land and, possibly, new water sources were needed. Yet, we also can know that it was by the guidance of God's own hand that Abraham decided to make such a move.

He moves to an area that, amazingly, has been at the forefront of the evening news for years, and doubly so in the last several weeks: the Gaza strip. The city of Gerar is on the eastern edge of this area; an area ruled by King Abimelech. The King was almost certainly an early Philistine settler. The Gaza Strip makes up the bulk of what was, in Biblical days, Philistia, the nation of the Philistines. The Philistines are probably Israel's most consistent and noteworthy enemies in all Bible history. It is amazing to see that the first encounter with a Philistine in the Bible, though peaceful, occurred very nearly 4000 years ago; and, that Israel's archenemy today, is also the Philistines. How so? Because those people we see attacking Israel at every opportunity, seeking to ultimately destroy her, we call Palestinians. But, Palestinian is but the Greek word for Philistine.

Let's re-read Chapter 20, as we really didn't get very far into last time.

RE-READ GENESIS 20 all

And, we find Abraham is up to his old tricks. Now that he is in a place that he has some trepidation about, he is once again referring to his wife Sarah as his sister. And, as far as Abraham is concerned, why not? In Egypt he came out smelling like a rose, when Pharaoh took Sarah, then gave her back along with a king's ransom, just to stop the plagues that God visited on the Pharaoh.

Well, now he encounters a king the bible calls Abimelech, and essentially the Egypt affair happens all over again. Now, for the record, Abimelech is a fairly common name for that era, so it is kind of a combination title and name.....and it means, "my father is king" (Abba, father, melech, king). And, also just for the record, we'll find another Abimelech in the Bible, during the time of the Israelites in Canaan, a few hundred years into the future. So, don't let it confuse you.....it's not that much different than running into a couple of different John Joneses over a long period of time....why should THAT confuse us?

Well, it's Déjà vu all over again! Abimelech takes Sarah. Now, Sarah was 90 years old at this time. What in the world was this king thinking? The Rabbis deduced that she must have retained all that beauty that attracted the Pharaoh many years earlier, and I suppose that's

possible. More likely, though, was that the king was trying to make an alliance with Abraham in the customary way of that era: marry a family member of the hoped for ally. It's obvious from the story that there was mutual respect and peaceful intentions, not kidnapping that was going on here. There is no indication of force.

We now get this interesting little dialogue between Abimelech and God. And, God comes right to the point: Abimelech, I'm going to kill you because you have taken a married woman. Abimelech argues in his defense that he has not yet had sexual relations with her, and besides he had no idea she was a married woman. God acknowledges that Abimelech was telling the truth, but then goes on to say that it was divine power that kept Abimelech from touching Sarah.....because if he had, then no excuse would have sufficed, death would have been the penalty.

God order Abimelech to give Sarah back, and that Abraham would intercede for him, and if he did that, he would live. If not.....that would be the end of Abimelech's line.

Now, did Abimelech know whom he was talking to? First, this was in a dream. A dream was a standard way of communicating with God in that era, and we're told that in the last days, it will once again become a tool for men interfacing with God.

Perhaps we should not so easily slide by this common communication channel between man and God of a dream. It is interesting that Abimelech was a pagan, and yet God communicated with him. This will not be the last time we see this happening. Often it is implied, if not outright stated, that the Lord God Almighty only communicates with His people; well, the Bible simply doesn't support that teaching. God is sovereign and He is all-powerful; while God does not often move a man against His own will, He will do so when it serves His purposes. Yahweh has absolute control over all things, humans included. It doesn't matter whether that human is a Believer, an adherent of a false or non-god, or even an atheist.

What is also interesting is how readily Abimelech accepted the instruction of a God he did not know. Perhaps if there is anything more personally disastrous than a person who places his or her faith in a false-god, it is one who acknowledges no god whatsoever. Abimelech, though a pagan, had no problem dealing with the spiritual world, nor with a power higher than himself. A person who is convinced that nothing is higher than himself is almost entirely closed to God, by definition.

I would also like to point out, that the world, and history, knows NOTHING of a society or tribe, at ANY era, which did not believe in spirit beings and in a higher authority..... a god of one ilk or another. It was not until that most ridiculously named era.... "The Enlightenment"..... of the 1700's A.D, that man had finally reached a point of depravity as to declare himself the highest of all possible beings of any kind. That is, the Enlightenment was the birth of atheism.

Second point: whereas more than 99% of the time in the OT we find the word "lord" in our Bibles where in the original it was actually God's personal name, Yahweh, that was used, here we find the word Adonai in the original.....Adonai means "lord". So, Abimelech was well aware he was talking to a god, but he didn't know which one except that he was a protector of

Abraham.

We also find that God invokes Abraham as an intercessor.....an intermediary... here, between God and Abimelech. For the idea was that Abraham would plead on Abimelech's behalf, and since Abraham was a righteous man, God would listen. This is not the first time Yahweh has positioned Abraham as mediator between He and mankind; Abraham pled for the hypothetical "righteous" people who lived in the city of Sodom, before God obliterated it. In actuality, Abraham was interceding for Lot. We have in these actions a type and pattern of Moses being developed for us.

As we get into verse 8, we find that Abimelech is a tad put off; Abraham's deceit has nearly cost Abimelech his life! And, Abraham whines that well, in a certain sense Sarah really IS my sister.....of course, it is true she is also my wife. But, I was afraid of you, and I figured this was the best solution..... sorry about that.

And, we get a little tidbit of information that Sarah and Abraham had the same father, but different mothers.

It is fascinating that UNLIKE the situation down in Egypt, Abimelech did NOT kick Abraham out of his country. Rather, he simply added further wealth to Abraham's clan, and asked him to stay.

We also find at the end of this chapter that God "restored" Abimelech and his household. In this context, it means that for some unspecified amount of time, none of Abimelech's wives or concubines produced any children for him. So, this story we just read in a few verses probably played out over a several month period at the least; again, not an unusual characteristic for a Bible story that a couple of verses could cover a long period of time.

GENESIS CHAPTER 21

Before we read this chapter, know that a quarter of a century has passed since the first few verses of Genesis 12, when Yahweh made that list of promises to Abraham..... among which was the promise that from his descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Naturally, the implication was the birth of children to Abraham.....but until now, not one child had been born to Abraham's wife, Sarah. Yes, he had a qualified heir.....a son, Ishmael, who had been born to Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar. But the lord God never takes halfway measures.

READ Gen. 21 all

This list of prophetic promises of God to Abraham compels me to relate to you something the Lord has shown me over the years: as concerns the understanding of God's people about His prophecies, the mistakes men make are not that they cannot find a way relate the eventual fulfillment to the original pronouncement; the mistake is that we do not take God's prophecies literally enough. All of Yahweh's promises to Abraham were literal, and they were literally fulfilled. Abraham **would** have a son.....not a kind-of-son.....not a good-enough heir....but a true

son and a true heir regardless of what the earthly human circumstances might seem to dictate.

And, because of the times in which we live, let me say it again: all of God's prophecies should be taken in the most literal way. Things may be looking dark for Israel right now, but we can be assured that though the whole world continue to line up against them..... even if Israel finally tells the US government that they can't stand much more of our help.... the Jewish people will NOT be expelled from the land. For, the prophecies tell us that once they return.....after Egypt, after Assyria, after Babylon, after the Romans have taken their land from them.... Once they return again (which they have), they'll not be leaving. It doesn't matter how reckless, or how ungrateful they are to the One who brought them home; this is a promise from Yahweh. We can count on it, quite literally.

God kept his promise and Sarai had a child: Yitz'chak (Isaac); Isaac means, "he laughs". The promise, 25 years in the making, was for a child of destiny. Or better, a child of promise. We'll examine shortly the eerie parallels between Isaac and Yahshua.

It is an axiom that God's timing is as important an element to any prophetic happening, as the details of the happening itself. This is why we see the term "God's set times", or "God's appointed times", over and over again throughout the Torah, as we see that term repeated a number of times in chapter 21. In a few months we will study God's "appointed Feasts".....all of which have exact appointed times. Probably no one in here would argue that man has authority to affect or alter or abolish God's appointed times. Those appointed times are woven into the fabric of the Universe and are unchangeable. Yet, it is so curious to me that one of the most basic tenets of Church Doctrine, is that we DO have the authority and ability to change the VERY FIRST appointed time God declared; the very first appointed time that affected even how our planet was produced and then given the ability to sustain life. **NAS Genesis 2:1** ***"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. 2 And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."*** This, of course, marks the 7th day Sabbath..... called in Hebrew, the Shabbat..... one of God's appointed times. And, as we come across these several "appointed or fixed times" we'll find something they all have in common: they have been designated by Yahweh as sanctified, as holy. We'll also soon begin to understand that it is God and God alone who declares that which is holy. Man has no authority to declare anything holy just because a date or event or a place or an activity or a man seems to be unusually good or significant. Importance or relevance in our human eyes accounts for nothing as to what is holy and what is not; for it is by Yahweh's **declaration** that WE who trust His Son have become holy to Him, and so it is with anything. We have only to **discover** from Holy Scripture WHAT His appointed times are, and then to observe them.

So, at the set time....set by God.....Isaac is born to Sarah. And, as had been instructed, Abraham circumcised Isaac on the 8th day after his birth.

The elderly couple was overjoyed; Abraham had just turned 100 years old, and Sarah 90, when Isaac was produced.....it was miracle enough that Abraham could sire a son at that age, or that Sarah who had NEVER, even as a young girl, had a womb that could produce life,

could do so several decades after it was humanly possible.....but it was also a miracle that such an aged woman could even survive the birthing process. And, as verses 6 and 7 show, they were as astonished and dumbfounded as the hundreds and hundreds of people that now formed their clan would have been as well.

In verse 8, we see that when Isaac was weaned (probably somewhere around 3 or 4 years old), they had a great celebration. But, trouble was brewing. Ishmael.....still the much loved son of Abraham..... at around 15 or 16 years old, was apparently constantly taunting the toddler, Isaac. No doubt, Hagar was also giving Sarah a hard time as well as she felt the effect of her diminished standing that began with the birth of Isaac; so Sarah insists to Abraham that Hagar and Ishmael be banished from the clan. To say that Abraham was troubled would be quite an understatement. Actually, Sarah was simply carrying out God's will.....for God told Abraham to do it, and not to be concerned for the boy's welfare; that God would bless Ishmael and keep him safe. And, besides, God says, Isaac is the one who will bear the covenant promise. Here we have another in a long line of divisions, selections, and elections of God: Ishmael and Isaac are separated.

Now, just to add a little to the context of the situation.....there was very good reason that God promised Abraham that Ishmael would be divinely blessed, and divinely prospered. Law codes of this era and this area have been discovered; and the exact case we have here is discussed. Known as the law of Lipit-Ishtar, here's how it works: Abraham had the right to accept or deny Ishmael as an heir to his estate, BECAUSE Ishmael was born to a slave woman. It is obvious by all accounts that Ishmael had been accepted by Abraham as the heir-apparent of the clan. Therefore, Ishmael was to have been given the firstborn's share of Abraham's very substantial wealth; and by this, Hagar, Ishmael's mother, would also have benefited.

However, because Hagar was a slave, the slave's owner had at all times the right to grant freedom to the slave. The slave, Hagar, belonged, legally, to Sarah. When Sarah went to Abraham and told him to cast out Hagar and that son of hers, Ishmael, it was Sarah's legal right to do so. However, when a slave woman was released, it was the choice of the FATHER of her children if those children were to be released along with her. Sarah could NOT legally order Ishmael out.....but she could banish Hagar. Abraham's decision to order Hagar out was not his to make; BUT.....his decision to follow Sarah's desire for Ishmael to also leave most definitely WAS entirely up to Abraham. And, when he agreed to do as Sarah asked, Ishmael's inheritance went down the drain. Ishmael and Hagar, in a moment, went from being wealthy and having authority, to being penniless and homeless.

This was not some vague legal situation that caught Abraham or any of the other players by surprise; the entire scenario we read about here is BASED on their understanding of this law. Therefore, to soothe Abraham, by His grace God promised to supply the earthy portion of the blessing that had just been taken from Ishmael. Therefore, we find that just as Isaac will produce 12 grandsons.....12 princes....called the 12 tribes of Israel, so Ishmael will also be blessed with an equal amount of tribal princes and much wealth. Ishmael received, by God's provision, every bit as much....perhaps even more.....than Isaac. But.....the one thing Ishmael could NOT have was the blessing of God to be the promised son. The heir to the covenant promise was to be Isaac.

Abraham obeys Yahweh, and sends Hagar and Ishmael away. How this must have hurt Abraham. He loved Ishmael; he had counted on Ishmael as his only begotten son for 13 years. I don't know how he did it.

On the verge of dying of thirst, we are told in V17 that Mal'ach Elohim calls out to Hagar: literally, Mal'ach Elohim means the messenger of God. In this case, this was either an Angelic messenger, or it was God Himself. Notice, now, that this messenger did not appear before Hagar.....he simply called out to Hagar from up in heaven. There is nothing that speaks of an appearance. Notice also that we are told "God" (Elohim) heard the cry of the boy.....not the cry of the mother. And, then the messenger of God says that God has heard the boy, and in the next verse says, "I will make a great nation of him".

As with the 3 visitors who came to Abraham a couple of chapters ago, this encounter is mysterious. Was this an angel or was this God? Angels usually make it clear that they are doing the bidding of God; but here the messenger says, "I will make Ishmael a great nation". I don't know the answer, but my opinion is that this was indeed a manifestation of God.....but in what form is difficult to ascertain.

Hagar opens her eyes, swollen from dust, sand, and tears, and sees a water well that has miraculously appeared, and mother and son are saved. A promise is made from God that Ishmael will father a great nation. This is really a reminder of a previous commitment to Ishmael, undoubtedly for Hagar's sake. But, notice that there is NO promise of land; just a nation. And, just to be clear, in Bible terms nations are not about land or territory, they are about people groups.

After the dramatic rescue and promise, the narrative skips to Hagar and Ishmael becoming desert dwellers. They lived in the Paran desert: that is an area roughly between the southern-end of the Dead Sea to about halfway down into the Sinai Peninsula, and eastward into the area that would someday be known as Midian; or more generally, as the Arabian Peninsula. Of course, this is the area that would soon become the root of the Arab nations, but the people who lived in Paran would be what we now call Bedouins, an Arab people.

Now, I don't want to move into the next phase of chapter 21 until we draw some undeniable and obviously purposeful parallels between Isaac.....the son of promise.....and the Messiah, the ultimate son of promise.

Here's just a few more to consider: There was a very lengthy time between the promise of Isaac and it's happening. Same thing for the Messiah. The births of Isaac and Yahshua were both miraculous: Isaac's because of his mother's age and dead womb, Yahshua's because Mary was a virgin. Isaac's name was decided by God before he was born, so was Yahshua's. God set a precise appointed time for Isaac's birth, just as He did for Jesus. There are others that we'll come to shortly.

At this point, the chapter shifts back to Abraham's relationship with that Philistine king, Abimelech. In verse 20 we see Abraham is living in Abimelech's territory.....which had been offered to Abraham some years earlier.

We see a little more determined and stronger Abraham from this point forward. Apparently with the birth of Isaac, Abraham is now more confident in the ability of the Lord to protect Him and keep His promises, and he is more satisfied that if something befalls him and he should die, he has the all-important heir, in Isaac, so that the family will move forward with the promises and blessings of God.

There was a dispute going on between Abraham's clan, and Abimelech's people, over some water wells. And, the wise Abimelech, aware that Abraham had a friend in the highest place, simply wanted to settle the issue before God again threatened him. The negotiations end successfully with the traditional B'rit (covenant) making ceremony, and Abimelech and his military commander who came with him, went back home to Gerar. Then we're told that Abraham stayed in that area for a long time.

Interestingly, the area Abimelech returned to is here referred to as the land of the Philistines. Now, whether there was very many Philistines settled, yet, and whether or not they were even called Philistines is a matter of some argument.