

BACKSLIDINGS TO BLESSINGS | GENESIS 20-21 | PASTOR MARK BOFILL | 9/17/2023

I. Reason (1-9) | II. Rescuing (10-22) | Reality (23-29) | IV. Ramifications (30-38)

INTRO: One of the things I like most about the Bible is that it tells the whole truth. It includes not only the greatest achievements of its heroes; **it also includes their greatest failures!** If we were writing a book about Abraham, this is a chapter we would probably leave out, but the Bible doesn't, for it is a powerful warning that all of God's saints can fail and sin.

I. **DELIVERANCE FROM SIN (GEN 20)** – Here we see A Sinful Saint And A Gracious God!

A. RELAPSE Of Abraham (1-2) – Abraham fell into the same sin as he did in **Gen. 12** when he went down to Egypt. *This is about 25 years later from the incident.* – **GERAR** is a Philistine city, which is about 10 miles south of the Gaza.

- This teaches that we are always in danger of repeating old sins! Be Careful...walk in faith! (**Psalm 19:13-14**), *Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression*¹⁴ *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*

B. REVELATION About Abraham (3-7) – God can use dreams to divinely warn us. He appeared in a dream to explain what was happening to Abimelech. – Actually, God protected Abraham, Abimelech, and Sarah, *by revealing to Abimelech who Sarah really was.* – *God can keep us from sinning (v.6), but it is hard to keep us from ourselves!*

C. REPROOF For Abraham (8-10) – *What were you thinking! (10)* – God will even use **UNBELIEVERS** to reprove His children – *When God divinely intervenes in our lives, we should be quick to heed His warnings! (Have you even been rebuked from a non-believer?)*

D. RATIONALIZATION By Abraham (11-13) – Abraham was stretching the truth to justify what he had done. **But a HALF-TRUTH is a whole lie!** – Abraham was hiding his marital status again! Instead of God, he used FRAUD as his form of protection! (*Effects of lying*)

E. REBUKE Against Abraham (14-16) – Abimelech give as stinging rebuke! acting more like a believer than Abraham was! Abraham was supposed to be a blessing, but instead he brought trouble and others treated him better than he treated them!

- Notice the **SARCASM**, when Abimelech rebuked Sarah... **"Your BROTHER."** (*Shame*)

F. REPENTANCE From Abraham (17a) – For God to hear Abraham's prayer, Abraham had to repent of his sin.

G. RESTORATION Through Abraham (17b-18) – Even though Abraham had not honored God, God still honored him!

CLOSING THOUGHT: As time passes, we too can forget past sins that we have committed; thus setting ourselves up to repeat them again (2 Pet 1:9). When we blow it...Recognize it...then Return to God in Repentant prayer and He will Restore you. (*A Cycle that doesn't have to be repeated*)

II. DEDICATION OF ISAAC (21:1-8) – This section reveals a **Miraculous Accomplishment!** Just a year prior, God had clarified that Abraham would have a son by Sarah and God remained faithful to His Word! – John MacArthur states, *“To this aged couple, exactly as promised, a son was born, and **the 25-year suspense was finally over with the laughter of derision turning to rejoicing; because the barrenness of Sarah had ended!**” Isaac was now born!*

- **How was she able to do it?** *The author of Hebrews makes it clear... “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.” (Heb 11:11)* – **It’s all about faith!** Joy, Mirth, and Laughter entered in because **they believed God’ promise!**
- **As Isaac grew, the held a feast (v.8) Isaac** was between 2-3 years old, no longer dependent on his mother’s breastmilk. This means that **Ishmael** was approximately 16 years old.
- **At this dedication**, many would have attended, and Abraham witnesses to all of his friends that the promises of Jehovah God and were faithful and true!

III. DISMISSAL OF ISHMAEL (21:9-21) – As Isaac grew, so did the consequences of Abraham and Sarah’s work of the Flesh...Ishmael. Sarah’s resentment towards Hagar and Ishmael resurfaced as he teased his little half-brother. The focus of laughter now became a...

A. Mocking ANTAGONISM (9-10) – Because Abraham had taken Hagar as his wife and had Ishmael by her; it led to great antagonism not only between Sarah and Hagar, but Isaac and Ishmael. **Ismael SCOFFED at Isaac** with intense ridicule! *(Momma bear would NOT permit this!)*

- **“CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN!”** – In the NT (**Gal. 4:21-31**), Paul uses this circumstance (*Sarah/Hagar – Isaac/Ismael*) to illustrate the conflict between Law and Grace, and **Flesh and Spirit** i.e., those who are born **“of the flesh”** are the spiritual descendants of Hagar, **bound** to keep the Mosaic Law, which was given on Mt. Sinai, where Ismael actually dwelt. – But those who are **“of the promise”** are those who are free, belonging to the Jerusalem above!
- In (**John 14:2-3**) Jesus tells us that this **“Heavenly Jerusalem”** is now being prepared for us by Jesus Christ, i.e., for those who are like Isaac, children of faith! – **The point is: Children of faith are not bound of the Mosaic Covenant, with terms that are impossible to keep; but under the Abrahamic Covenant they are free by Faith in Jesus Christ.**

B. Matter of Aggravation (11-14) – **Abraham loved Ishmael**, but nowhere do we read that he brought him joy or laughter! From birth, he was a source of contention in his home (**Gen 16**). – **But God** would use this circumstance to assure Abraham that He would turn his **Backslidden Compromise** into **Blessings**, for both his son and his bondwoman, Hagar. – **This gave him peace**, so Abraham **“rose early”** to deal with the matter. *(Notice the skimp provisions – expound)*

C. A Mysterious ANGEL (15-21) – As the *skin of water was depleted*, they found themselves in **a desperate situation**. Ishmael passed out due to dehydration and Hagar couldn’t bear it, so **“she lifted her voice”** as in years prior (**16:13**). Apparently, **the lad also lifted his voice (17)**.

- **This is when God shows up!** *i.e., when people desperately cry out to Him in need of His divine intervention!* (Ps 34:15) *“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.”* – So, a voice came from heaven! It was the same Angel of the Lord that appeared to her when she fled, (16:6-12)... **Jesus Christ!** – He encouraged her, then opened her eyes to a **Well of Water!** – (John 7:37b-38) *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”*
- Even though Isaac was God’s chosen, *“God was with the lad.”* **HE STILL BLESSED ISHMAEL!**

IV. DRAFTING AN AGREEMENT (21:22-32) – As time passed (*approx. 4 years*), **Abimelech recognized the Lord’s blessing was on Abraham**, he wanted to make a covenant with him. He brought **Phichol**, his general with him to assure a non-aggression pact between them. Such a covenant would guarantee control and sharing rights to the **regional water holes**.

A. We see our topic applied here once again...Backslidings to Blessings. Even though Abraham blew his witness earlier, His repentance led to restoration and a right relationship. And in time, **God continued to bless and prosper Abraham**, so much that **his testimony was upheld!** What was it? *“God is with you in all that you do!”* (*Even though you may have blown it in the past, do people recognize that God is with you? In all your dealings, are they righteous?*)

B. Abraham was willing to make the pact (25), but he used this opportunity to clear up a **matter of contention regarding a seized well**, of which Abimelech claimed to know nothing of.

C. They both swore with an oath (24) but to prove that it was a serious matter they took it further by sacrificing animals (*cf. 15:9-10; 21:27*). – **Interestingly enough**, the Hebrew word *“to swear”* means to bind by seven things. And Abraham did just that! **He set aside seven ewe lambs to be a living sacrifice**, which bore witness to the fact that **Abraham dug the well!**

- **BEERSHEBA = Well of Oaths, or Seven.** Thus, the well of Beersheba was to serve as a witness for shared water rights.
- Abimelech and Phichol returned to Philistine (32)

D. A Majestic ADORATION (33-34) – Because of all that God had done for him, Abraham worshipped Him and called His name **GOD EVERLASTING = EL OLAM,**

CLOSING THOUGHT: God’s perfect timing and purposes will always supersede our limited understanding of what we think should happen. Trust Him! God can even take our backsliding and turn it into blessings, but we need to repent!

BACKSLIDINGS: **The Sin** of Abraham in Egypt (12:14-20) was **LYING**, which caused a plague on the non-believing Pharaoh! **The Backsliding of both Abraham and Sarah also included LYING**, which caused non-believing Abimelech to stumble and almost sin. **Their LIE** also effected the Philistine women who weren’t able to bear children as a result of the sin! (*Our sin effects many others!*)

- **Sin easily becomes habitual when we fail to judge sin for what it is!** Some of us actually like play with sins that *“we deem as not harmful.”* **Maybe not yet...be careful!** (Num 32:23) says, *“take note, [when] you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin find you out.”*

BLESSINGS: On the contrary, when Abraham repented and returned to the Lord and walked in his integrity, several blessings are recorded here:

- **Divine Protection (20:6)** **Provisions (20:14)** **Forgiveness (20:17)**
- **Isaac’s Birth (21:2)** **Security for Ishmael (21:13)** **Favor with Abimelech (21:23)**

In (Gen 17:1) you may recall that all God required of Abraham was to *“Walk before Him and be blameless!”* **This is exactly what God calls us to do!**