

Abraham Pt 4

Genesis 20-21

Intro:

A quick reminder;

Abraham is mentioned 154 times in the book of Genesis and 261 times in the Bible. 68 of those times are in the New Testament.

Abraham's story is recorded in Genesis 11 – 25. These 15 chapters follow Abraham through a series of events as God begins to work out the promises first given to him.

Following Abraham, Genesis focuses upon the life of his descendants Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

Background:

When we met Abraham in Chapter 18 -19 he was living in Mamre or Hebron.

Mamre was the area where:

- Abraham moved after his separation from Lot - Genesis 13:18
- Abraham was living when he heard news that Lot was captured in battle – Genesis 14:13
- Where Abraham settled and raised Isaac – Genesis 35:27
- Where Abraham purchased a cave to bury Sarah – Genesis 23:19
- Where Abraham was buried by Isaac and Ishmael – Genesis 25:9

Now Abraham journeys once again toward the south and makes camp in what will later be called **Beersheba**.

Beersheba is mentioned 33 times in the Bible, 10 of those times are in the book of Genesis

Beersheba was the area where:

- Gen 21:14, Beersheba is where Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael out from
- Gen 21:31, Beersheba is where Abraham purchased land from Abimelech and dug a well

- Gen 22:19, Beersheba is where Abraham and Isaac left from to go to Moriah
- Gen 26:23, Beersheba is where God confirmed the covenant with Isaac
- Gen 28:10, Beersheba is where Jacob left from when he fled to Haran
- Gen 46:1, Beersheba is where Jacob stopped to offer to the Lord before going to Egypt

Beersheba sits in the far south of Israel and was used along with Dan to speak of all of Israel:

1Samuel 3:20

And all Israel from **Dan to Beersheba** knew that Samuel *had been* established as a prophet of the LORD.

1Chron 21:2

So David said **to** Joab and **to** the leaders of the people, “Go, number Israel from **Beersheba to Dan**, and bring the number of them **to** me that I may know *it*.”

At the time when Abraham first traveled to Beersheba it was an unoccupied part of Philistine country. He would later name it Beersheba meaning “The Well of the Oath”

The philistines were a seafaring people who originally migrated to the southern coast of Canaan from Crete. As time went on they would establish 5 cities in the area and be a constant source of contention for the nation of Israel.

In these early years it seems that only the city of Gerar had been established and was ruled by Abimelech (this was more likely a title than a name)

The Philistines were known for their idolatry and it was clear at the time of Abraham that they had already established a reputation for being godless. Genesis 20:11

Beersheba is the area where the events we will study tonight take place

Illustrations:

1 Corinthians 10:11

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

When writing to the Corinthians Paul used the Old Testament stories of the children of Israel in the wilderness to illustrate New Testament principles. His reference is specifically to the children of Israel in the wilderness and their failure, but the applications of this verse are much broader. It can refer to all that is recorded for us within Scripture. The Bible records the stories of men and women to provide a backdrop for its doctrines and principles. This is clearly seen in the text before us.

- Genesis 20 serves as a portrait of repentance
- Genesis 21 illustrates the ageless struggle between the flesh and the Spirit
- Genesis 22 clearly portrays the love of God in the offering of His only Begotten Son

Chapter 20

A Detour in the walk of faith

While Lot made his way from Sodom, Abraham journeyed south to what would later become Beersheba.

Prior to arriving in the area, Abraham and his wife concocted a plan to protect themselves against the Philistines; Sarah would pretend to be Abe's sister. This would ensure that Abraham would not be killed and his wife taken.

A few very important lessons are emphasized within the text.

First true beauty is seen in Sarah.

Sarah was no spring chicken. At the time of this event she was nearly 90 years old and had lived the life of a nomad. Yet there was something about her that was attractive to Abraham, the pharaoh and Abimelech.

Peter gives us insight into her true beauty when he describes Sarah as one who was;

- Chaste and godly,

- Who had a gentle and quiet spirit
- Who trusted God
- Peter explains that this is the behavior that will win the heart of a husband to his wife and to The Lord

Second we see the high value God places upon the marriage contract.

Marriage is defined biblically as between one man and one woman in a covenant that was designed to be life-long

This covenant is only broken by death, infidelity or abandonment

The creation of marriage is recorded in Genesis 2:23-24:

"The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

This passage of Scripture gives several points for understanding God's design for marriage.

- First, marriage involves a man and a woman. The Hebrew word for "wife" is gender-specific; it cannot mean anything other than "a woman." There is no passage in Scripture that mentions a marriage involving anything other than a man and a woman.

God reacted very strongly to Abimelech for taking Sarah, the wife of Abraham

Genesis 20:3

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed **you are a dead man** because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife."

Abimelech was in danger of death because he took the wife of another man.

Today the covenant of marriage is disregarded for the most cavalier of reasons.

We even hear people who are involved in a relationship with someone who is married who will justify their actions because they say the person's spouse does not treat them well. Regardless of the failures of Abe as a husband, God still held the contract of marriage in the highest regard.

If you are struggling in your marriage perhaps it is time to place a higher value on the covenant itself and begin treating your spouse as Scripture demands

Thirdly this story is a picture of repentance

Upon hearing from the word of The Lord, Abimelech both cried out to the Lord and changed his behavior

The Lord responded to the cry of Abimelech:

Genesis 20:7

⁷ Now therefore, **restore** the man's wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not **restore** her, know that you shall surely die, you and all *who are yours.*"

The word **restore** means to turn back or to return and is synonymous with the word repentance.

Abimelech's behavior changed when confronted with the word of God.

This should serve as an example to each of us. There are behaviors, attitudes and practices that we have grown accustomed to, as we read the Word of God many of these will be called into question, we should follow the example of this

ancient king and allow the Word to alter the way we live

As the chapter comes to a close it is worth noticing that he was blessed for repenting. His family that had been under the curse of God, was now under the shower of His blessing

Whenever we live outside the borders of Scripture we remove ourselves from the blessing of God. God will never bless what He has forbidden. If we want our relationships to be blessed we must bring them under the authority of the Word.

A basic principle of Scripture is that Repentance always leads to blessing

One last thought before we leave chapter 20

Abraham explains what led to his lapse of faith

Genesis 20:10-11

¹⁰Then Abimelech said to Abraham, “What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?”¹¹And Abraham said, “**Because I thought**, surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife.

The source of Abraham’s faltering faith was Unbiblical thinking

Paul points out that much of the battle we face Spiritually is a battle in the mind. We are constantly bombarded with unbiblical thoughts, to counteract this Paul explains;

2 Corinthians 10:4-6

⁴For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, **bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,**

One way to bring our thoughts into the captivity of Christ is to examine what we are thinking in light of what the Bible

teaches. Abraham failed to do this. Back in chapter 15, Abe received a promise from God that could be applied to any dangerous situation he might face

Genesis 15:1

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

There is no question that the ungodly practices of the Philistines would create a dangerous atmosphere for Abe and his family, but it is also true that God had provided a promise that Abe could trust his life upon.

Whatever we are facing it is critical that we learn to think biblically by bringing our thoughts into the light of the Word of God

Chapter 21 An Ancient Struggle

1 Corinthians 10:11

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

- Chapter 21 is a contrast between one of the high points and one of the lowest points in Abraham's life
- Chapter 21 illustrates the ageless struggle between the flesh and the Spirit

As the chapter begins we find Abraham and Sarah finally realizing the promise that was given to them some 30 years earlier. We read simply:

Genesis 21:1

And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.

What must have seemed like a lifetime to Sarah was all part of the miraculous plan of God for her life. Not a moment later than He had planned, God provided Sarah with her firstborn son Isaac.

The first few verses of the chapter are teeming with joy and Celebration:

- Isaac was born
- Committed to the Lord in circumcision
- Celebrated by Abraham and Sarah as they laughed together
- And after he was weaned a great party was planned to celebrate the child of promise

Sadly it did not take long for this joyous occasion to be interrupted and replaced with a dark and difficult battle

Genesis 21:9

⁹ And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.

The word scoff means to mock, make fun of or to toy with.

Since Isaac means laughter it seems that Ishmael is mocking his name and perhaps the idea that he is the one chosen by God to carry the promise of the Messiah

In what might seem like a very harsh reaction Sarah declares:

Genesis 21:10

¹⁰ Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac."

After the Lord confirmed this, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael off into the wilderness

2000 years later, Paul used this passage to illustrate the ancient struggle between the flesh and the Spirit.

Galatians 4:22-24

²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³ But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴ which things are symbolic.

Ishmael's persecution of Isaac is a picture of how the flesh persecutes the Spirit

Paul went on to say:

Galatians 4:29

²⁹ 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*.

Persecute - To trouble, harass, run after

Was used to describe Paul breathing threats against believers and chasing them down for imprisonment or death

The story of Isaac and Ishmael is the story of the struggle every Christian faces between his flesh and his spirit.

Paul put it this way:

Galatians 5:17

¹⁷ 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.

The flesh refers to the desires that we have that are unholy and destructive.

Paul declares that even as a Christian we can have strong desire for things that are not pleasing to God or helpful for us.

These desires can become so great that they create an actual war within us

Paul spoke of this war being waged within him

Romans 7:23

²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.

It is in the text before us that we learn how to best deal with the flesh

Genesis 21:10

¹⁰Therefore she said to Abraham, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *namely* with Isaac.”

Cast out – Drive away, thrust off or expel

When we follow the story we find that they were sent out into the desert with very little provision.

The only way to deal with the flesh is to starve it. The desires that war within us will not be subdued as long as they are being fed

Paul uses another term in explaining how to deal with the desires of the flesh

Galatians 5:24

²⁴And those *who are* Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Crucified means to impale or stake down. It is a very harsh word and was a very harsh form of death.

If we are going to survive in the battle between flesh and Spirit we are going to have to take drastic measures to deal with the flesh.

Jesus, in one of the most graphic illustrations He ever used declared:

Matthew 5:28-30

²⁸But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Obviously Jesus is speaking figuratively as He declares the need for us to take drastic action against the flesh.

What fronts are you losing battles to the flesh?

What radical decisions can you make that will ensure victory?

Paul Gave 4 other practical tips on how to guarantee victory in the battle between flesh and Spirit

- Galatians 5:1

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

While this passage is talking primarily about those who would return to the religious practices, it also illustrates one of the dangers that we face in the battle between flesh and spirit. That is our tendency to fall back into the sins that we were once set free from. Scripture speaks of easily besetting sins. Those are the ones that tempt us the most. It is all too common for someone who was set free from a particular sin or lifestyle to fall back when their guard is down.

We must be aware of the dangers around us

- Galatians 5:9

⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

It does not take much sin to begin the work of leading us astray, yet we often have the same belief that Lot had; after being set free from Sodom he requested that the Lord take him to a nearby city declaring:

Genesis 19:20

²⁰See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live."

I wonder how many Christians have found themselves wounded by the wayside in their walk with God because they thought that the sin they were playing with was "just a little one"

- Galatians 5:16

¹⁶I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

The word walk is an idiom used often in Scripture to illustrate the way we live.

We are to move forward in our lives by living under the guidance of the Spirit of God

Paul explains that we do this by being “led by the Spirit”

Galatians 5:18

¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

To be led by the Spirit is to allow God to speak to you from His word and into your life

When Jesus was undergoing the temptation from the devil, He responded with that famous passage:

Matthew 4:4

But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.**’”

The word, “word” is a translation of the Greek Rhema and refers to the spoken word of God.

The idea is that God will speak to His kids giving us guidance that will help us avoid the pitfalls that trip us up

If you think you are hearing God speak and the voice is leading you into sin THAT IS NOT THE LORD

- Galatians 6:7-8

⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

There is both a negative and a positive side to this promise

Negatively – if you sow to the flesh you will reap corruption.

The basic idea is that our relationship with God will suffer by sowing to the desires of the flesh

Corruption means to spoil and to wither or shrivel

David spoke of how personal sin, even what we might call “secret sin” turned his vitality into a drought

Psalm 32:4

***4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.***

Not left alone

Leaving the allegory and returning to the narrative of Genesis we find that Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael into the desert with nothing more than a canteen and a loaf of bread.

In the heat of the wilderness the water soon ran out, and in desperation Hagar set her sun under a shrub and began to weep. Apparently while she wept, he must have prayed for we read:

Genesis 21:17

17 And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, “What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.

As they cried out to the Lord in desperation, He once again revealed Himself to her as the Angel of the Lord

These appearances of the Lord are commonly referred to as a “Theophany” or a “Christophany”

That is an appearance of Christ in human form prior to His incarnation.

This is the second time God appeared to Hagar in this way. The first being when God appeared to her when she fled from Sarah after the birth of her son

It is quite comforting to see that while God is working out His supreme plan for bringing the Messiah into the world through Isaac, He is also aware of the struggles a single mother of a teenage son is facing.

God uses His own Word as a source of comfort, guidance and strength

Genesis 21:18

¹⁸Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation.”

The Lord had already promised this to her

He does the same thing with us. In our times of desperation, when we will cry out to the Lord, He will take the promises He has already given us and bring those to our attention.

It is those promises that will guide, comfort and strengthen us in our times of greatest despair.