

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 21

GENESIS 21:1-7 - ISAAC IS BORN

PLENTY OF QUALIFYING STATEMENTS HERE:

- V. 1 - AS HE HAD SAID, AS HE HAD PROMISED
- V. 2 - IN HIS OLD AGE, AT THE APPOINTED TIME WHICH GOD HAD SPOKEN
- V. 3 - WHO WAS BORN TO HIM, WHOM SARAH BORE TO HIM
- V. 4 - AS GOD COMMANDED HIM

MAKE NO MISTAKE, THE TEXT IS REMINDING US WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE. THIS IS THE BIG MOMENT WHEN ALL GOD HAD SAID, ALL THAT HE HAD PROMISED AND ALL THAT ABRAHAM AND SARAH WERE WAITING FOR AND TRUSTING IN COMES TO PASS. THIS IS BIGGER THAN THEIR AGE, THEIR ACTIONS AND THEIR LIVES - IT'S A DEMONSTRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD BEING FULFILLED. ISAAC WAS BORN TO ABRAHAM "AS HE HAD SAID" AND IT WAS "SARAH WHO BORE HIM" (AS OPPOSED TO HAGAR OR ANYONE ELSE), ETC. ETC. THIS WAS FOR A DAY OF REJOICING IN THE NEW BABY, BUT EVEN AS WONDERFUL AS THAT WAS, THIS WAS A DAY OF REJOICING IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS.

V. 6-7 - READING THIS IT SOUNDS LIKE JOY AND RELIEF IN SARAH'S HEART. AT LAST ALL THAT SHE HAS WAITED FOR, PRAYED FOR AND STRUGGLED WITH HAS COME. REMEMBER, SHE HAS WAITED 25 YEARS FOR THIS MOMENT. SHE SEEMS TO BE EXCLAIMING TO HERSELF AND ANYONE LISTENING - "*WHO WOULD EVER THOUGHT THIS DAY WOULD COME?!*"

REMEMBER, OUR FIRST INTRODUCTION TO SARAH WAS LIKE THIS:

GENESIS 11:30 - SARAI WAS BARREN; SHE HAD NO CHILDREN

GENESIS 21:8-13 - HAGAR & SARAH RENEW THEIR RIVALRY

IT'S INTERESTING THAT THIS STORY SHOULD FALL DIRECTLY AFTER THE BIRTH AND WEANING OF ISAAC. IT'S AS IF IT IS A REMINDER THAT EVEN THOUGH GOD IS FAITHFUL, THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR SIN, BAD CHOICES AND LACK OF TRUST IN HIM STILL AFFECT OUR LIVES AND WORLD. DON'T FORGET, THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT ABRAHAM & SARAH'S IMPROVISATION WITH HAGAR (RESULTING IN THE BIRTH OF ISHMAEL) WAS.

ISAAC IS PROBABLY 2-3 YEARS OLD AT THIS POINT AND ABRAHAM CELEBRATE HIS "WEANING". WHILE AT THE FEAST HAGAR IS "MOCKING" SARAH AND SARAH ISN'T HAPPY. ONE CAN IMAGINE HER TAUNTS: "*LOOK AT THE OLD LADY CELEBRATING EVERY LITTLE MILESTONE OF HER LITTLE PRINCE! HOW CUUUUUUTE! YET I WAS ABLE TO HAVE KIDS WITH ABRAHAM ON THE FIRST TRY.*" OUCH!

SARAH BRINGS THIS MATTER TO ABRAHAM AND DEMANDS HAGAR AND ISHMAEL ARE SENT AWAY. SHE WANTS TO MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT THIS IN HAGAR'S MIND - WHETHER OR NOT ABRAHAM'S FIRST SON CAME THROUGH HAGAR OR NOT, ISAAC IS THE HEIR, NOT ISHMAEL.

GOD COMFORTS ABRAHAM AND TELLS HIM THAT IF HE SENDS HAGAR AND ISHMAEL AWAY, HE WILL TAKE CARE OF THEM. FOR EVEN THOUGH ISAAC INDEED IS THE HEIR OF THE PROMISE, ISHMAEL, A CHILD OF ABRAHAM, WILL BE BLESSED AND CARED FOR BY THE LORD. AND WE'LL SEE THIS TRUE AS WE READ ON.

GENESIS 21:14-21 - GOD IS WITH ISHMAEL

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL LEAVE ABRAHAM AND HIS COMPANY AND HEAD TOWARDS THE WILDERNESS. EVENTUALLY THEY RUN OUT OF SUPPLIES AND HAGAR IS PREPARING HERSELF TO DIE AND PREPARING HER HEART FOR HER SON TO DIE. BUT AS BOTH OF THEM ARE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, AN ANGEL RESPONDS TO BRING COMFORT TO HAGAR AND POINT THEM TO A (PROBABLY MIRACULOUS) WELL FILLED WITH WATER!

WHY DOES GOD DO THIS? BECAUSE HE TAKES CARE OF THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM, NO MATTER THEIR ORIGIN. IN FACT THE ANGEL SAYS THAT THE DIVINE INTERVENTION WAS INITIATED BECAUSE "GOD HAS HEARD THE VOICE OF THE LAD." ISAAC IS THE HEIR, BUT GOD STILL HAS PLANS FOR ISHMAEL. **THAT'S AWESOME.**

ISHMAEL WILL GROW UP, GET MARRIED AND MOVE ON FROM ABRAHAM. HE'LL BECOME AN ARCHER, LIVING IN THE WILDERNESS. WE WON'T SEE OR HEAR FROM HIM IN THE TEXT UNTIL ABRAHAM DIES.

GENESIS 21:22-26 - ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH MAKE A TREATY

ABIMELECH, THE KING OF GERAR WHO WE MET IN GENESIS 20, RETURNS TO OUR STORY WITH FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT HE FEARED THE LORD OR AT LEAST THE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD IN HIS DREAM CHANGED HIM. ABIMELECH AND HIS GENERAL (PHICOL) APPROACH ABRAHAM AND OFFER A COVENANT OF PEACE BETWEEN THEIR NATIONS AND FAMILIES. ABIMELECH CONFESSES ABOUT ABRAHAM THAT "GOD IS WITH YOU IN ALL THAT YOU DO." THAT'S QUITE THE REPUTATION!

ABIMELECH ASKS THAT THEIR FAMILIES CAN SWEAR TO TREAT EACH OTHER WELL AND WITH KINDNESS BASED ON WHAT THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED TOGETHER. REMEMBER, ABIMELECH FREED SARAH AND SENT ABRAHAM AWAY WITH FAVOR EVEN AFTER ABRAHAM DECEIVED ABIMELECH ABOUT HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH SARAH. ABRAHAM AGREES.

AND THE FIRST TEST OF THIS RELATIONSHIP COMES PRETTY QUICKLY. MOMENTS AFTER THEIR AGREEMENT, ABRAHAM INFORMS ABIMELECH THAT SOME OF ABIMELECH'S MEN HAD TAKEN OVER A WELL BELONGING TO ABRAHAM. ABIMELECH RESPONDS FAVORABLY AND REMARKS "I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THIS UNTIL TODAY!" AND IT IS INFERRED THAT HE DEALS WITH THE PROBLEM QUICKLY.

GENESIS 21:27-34 - ABRAHAM-ABIMELECH COVENANT

CONFIRMING THE WORDS THEY HAD JUST "SWORN" TO IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION, THE TWO MEN MAKE A "COVENANT" WITH EACH OTHER TO FINALIZE THIS VERBAL AGREEMENT. ABRAHAM GIVES ABIMELECH 7 BABY LAMBS AS A PLEDGE OF HIS WORDS ABOUT THE WELL.

IT'S HELPFUL TO SEE HOW ABRAHAM HANDLES CONFLICT IN THIS SITUATION. HE ADDRESSES THE PROBLEM DIRECTLY WITH HIS WORDS TO THE PERSON HE HAS THE PROBLEM WITH PERSONALLY. HE ISN'T HOLDING A GRUDGE OR BEING JUDGEMENTAL TOWARDS ABIMELECH. NOR IS HE RESENTFUL OR PROUD. INSTEAD, WE SEE A MAN WHO IS HUMBLE AND WILLING TO SACRIFICE TO PRESERVE PEACE. NOT A BAD IDEA.

V. 31 - BEERSHEBA - ESV STUDY BIBLE: "IN LIGHT OF ABRAHAM'S GIFT TO ABIMELECH, THE NAME BEERSHEBA PROBABLY MEANS "WELL OF SEVEN"; HOWEVER, GIVEN THAT THE HEBREW WORDS FOR "SEVEN" (*SHEBA*) AND "OATH" (*SHEBU'AH*) ARE SIMILAR, IT COULD ALSO MEAN "WELL OF THE OATH." PERHAPS THE NAME WAS CHOSEN BECAUSE IT EMBRACED BOTH CONCEPTS. GIVEN ABRAHAM'S SEMI-NOMADIC LIFESTYLE AND THE NEED FOR HIM TO DIG A WELL, NO SETTLEMENT PROBABLY EXISTED AT THIS LOCATION IN HIS TIME. WHEN A PERMANENT SETTLEMENT WAS LATER ESTABLISHED IN THIS AREA, THE NAME OF THE WELL WAS GIVEN TO IT (SEE 26:33). THE TOWN OF BEERSHEBA, LOCATED IN THE NORTHERN NEGEV, BECAME FAMOUS AS MARKING THE SOUTHERN BOUNDARY OF ISRAEL"

ABRAHAM CONCLUDES THIS EVENT, AND THE CHAPTER ITSELF, WITH WORSHIPPING THE LORD AT BEERSHEBA. HE "CALLS ON THE NAME OF YAHWEH, THE EVERLASTING GOD" AND RETURNS TO HIS SOJOURNING.

GOD HAS DONE SO MUCH FOR ABRAHAM. HE HAS BLESSED HIM, RESCUED HIM, HEARD HIM, WORKED WITH HIM, AND BEEN FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD REGARDING HIM. AND THROUGHOUT THIS RELATIONSHIP, ABRAHAM KEEPS WORSHIPPING AND HONORING THE LORD AT EVERY STEP. THIS IS THE EXAMPLE OF WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO LIVE BY FAITH.

BEFORE WE CLOSE THIS CHAPTER IT IS GOOD TO BE REMINDED OF THE PLACES AND SITUATIONS WHERE GOD DOES HIS BEST WORK. THE LORD LOVES WORKING IN MOMENTS AND WITH INDIVIDUALS THAT ARE HELPLESS, EMPTY AND POWERLESS, AND WITH GOOD REASON. GOD LOVES TO WORK IN SITUATIONS WHERE NO ONE WOULD CONFUSE WHO IS IN CONTROL OR WHO MADE SOMETHING HAPPEN.

WHERE IS THIS RELEVANT TO OUR STORY AND SPECIFICALLY THIS CHAPTER? HOW ABOUT TAKING THE BARREN OLD WOMAN AND THE 100 YEAR OLD MAN AND MAKING THEM THE FATHER AND MOTHER OF MANY NATIONS! WHO IS GOING TO LOOK AT ABRAHAM OR SARAH AND WONDER WHO DID THIS GREAT AND AMAZING THING? IF THEY HAD 16 SONS AT A YOUNG AGE AND GOD CHOSE THEM TO BE A MIGHTY MULTITUDE, WE'D GET IT. IT MAKES SENSE THAT GOD WOULD CHOOSE THAT FAMILY, THEY ALREADY FIT THE MOLD.

BUT YOU SEE, YAHWEH, THE EVERLASTING GOD, LOVES TO PUT HIS GLORY AND POWER AND WISDOM ON DISPLAY TO CONFOUND THE WAY THIS WORLD WORKS. IT'S THE BARREN SENIOR CITIZENS HE CHOOSES FOR THIS JOB - AND THEN GOD'S GREATNESS IS ON DISPLAY.

HE SELECTS THE RELUCTANT AND BANISHED PRINCE OF EGYPT WITH A STUTTER TO GO TO PHARAOH AND PREACH "LET MY PEOPLE GO." HE SELECTS THE YOUNGEST BOY WHO WASN'T INVITED HOME WHEN THE PROPHET CAME TO BE THE NEXT KING OF ISRAEL. HE PICKS THAT SAME SHEPHERD BOY TO DEFEAT GOLIATH. HE PICKS AN UNMARRIED VIRGIN TEENAGER TO GIVE BIRTH TO THE MESSIAH. HE PICKS THE PHARISEE OF PHARISEES TO BE THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES. THAT'S WHERE GOD DOES HIS BEST WORK!

DO YOU KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING WITH THIS YET?

YOU AND I OFTEN LOOK AT OUR LIMITATIONS AND WEAKNESSES AS REASONS WHY GOD *CAN'T* USE US FOR HIS GLORY. YET COULD IT BE THAT THOSE ARE THE THINGS GOD *DOES* LOOK AT TO DETERMINE WHO HE WILL WORK IN AND THROUGH?! WHO IS GOD MORE INCLINED TO USE FOR HIS PURPOSES? THE SKILLED, SMART AND SEXY PERSON IN THE WORLD'S EYES WHO IS LIKELY GOING TO TAKE THE CREDIT FOR THEMSELVES IN THE END? OR THE UNSKILLED, UNEDUCATED, AND UNATTRACTIVE PERSON WHO IN THE END NO ONE WILL CONFUSE WHO DID THE WORK?

WE'RE REMINDED OF THIS IN THIS GREAT STORY OF ABRAHAM AND SARAH, SPECIFICALLY WITH THE BIRTH OF ISAAC IN THEIR OLD AGE. YES, GOD DOES WORK WITH SMART AND SKILLED PEOPLE TOO, BUT IT IS HUMILITY, SIMPLE FAITH AND EMPTINESS OF SELF THAT HE'S LOOKING FOR. AND THAT'S WHAT HE SAW WHEN HE LOOKED AT ABRAHAM AND SARAH.

SO, WHAT DOES HE SEE WHEN HE LOOKS AT *YOU*?