

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study – Genesis 20-21

Read Genesis 20:1-18

-What did Abraham do with Sarah, and why? (see also Genesis 12:10-20)

- said Sarah was his sister rather than his wife (which was only half true - v.12)
- did so because he feared for his life & wanted to be treated well for her sake
 - a pattern he'd set early on in his journeys (v.13)

-With all the promises God had made to Abraham and all the dealings God had had with him, does it surprise you that Abraham would fall again into the same sin he'd previously fallen into in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20)?

- Egypt had been close to 30 years prior to this point
 - security/safety seemed to be an area Abraham had struggled with for a long time
- a lack of trust in God resulting in sin; arose perhaps from forgetting God's promises
 - placed Sarah in a dangerous position; exposed her to potential for great sin
 - reminder of the struggle with the sinful nature in the life of the believer
 - a picture of the life of the redeemed sinner → we all are like Abraham in this respect

-How did God deal with Abimelech? Why do you think He intervened so directly? (you might also consider Gen. 18:10 & 21:1-2)

- God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and warned him to return Sarah to Abraham; otherwise he would die
- intervened to preserve Sarah & Abraham; also, to keep Abimelech from sin
 - Abraham's actions threatened to compromise fulfillment of God's promise that he would have a son through Sarah
 - could call into question the legitimacy of Isaac as heir of God's promise to Abraham (i.e. call into question his parentage)
- God intervened directly to preserve Abraham & Sarah, and so His promise to Abraham would be fulfilled without question

-How does Abimelech defend himself before God? Is this always an adequate defense? (see also Romans 2:12-15; 1 Corinthians 4:4; Jeremiah 17:9)

- states that he did this with a clear conscience and clean hands – i.e. he didn't realize he was doing anything wrong since Abraham lied to him
- conscience accuses and defends, even for those who may not know God's law – show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts
- but clear conscience does not always make one innocent – in Abimelech's case, would still have sinned (albeit unknowingly) had he had sexual relations with Sarah, but was prevented by God
 - Paul in 1 Cor. 4:4 – conscience was clear, but God would ultimately be his judge
 - our hearts are deceitful because of our fallen nature; thus, clear conscience is not always a reliable guide

-What is the irony of Abraham's prayer for Abimelech?

- though a prophet of God (v.7), he sinned and had to be rebuked by a pagan king
- he sinned against Abimelech, then has to pray for him (even though in man's ways, Abimelech comes across cleaner in this account)
- he prays for God to open the wombs of Abimelech's household and God hears; yet, to this point, Sarah's womb has remained closed

Read Genesis 21:1-7

-What does the birth of Isaac teach us about God? (you might also consider Matthew 5:18; Romans 4:17-21 with Luke 1:36-37; Psalm 30:11-12)

- He fulfills all His promises, in His time → even when it seems a long time coming
- His word will never fail; will be accomplished, to the most minute detail (Matt 5:18)
- He is the God who does what seems impossible; nothing is impossible for Him (Rom 4:17-21, Luke 1:36-37)
- He changes sorrow of His people to laughter (Ps. 30:11-12)
- He is gracious (v.21)

Read Genesis 21:8-21

-Why did Sarah want to send Hagar & Ishmael away?

- was angry because Ishmael was mocking Isaac
- did not want anything to jeopardize Isaac's inheritance
- she did not know it, but was in fulfillment of God's plan

-How did Abraham respond, and why? How did his response differ from his previous dealings with Sarah & Hagar in Genesis 16:1-6?

- was distressed and didn't want to send them away because Ishmael was his son
- appears to have sought the Lord – in contrast to Gen 16, when he just told Sarah to do whatever she wanted
 - sent them away with God's OK; God promised to bless Ishmael regardless

-What do we learn about God through His provision for Hagar and Ishmael?

- a God of grace – provided for their needs when there was no hope
- He is faithful
 - to Abraham – to fulfill His promise to him to bless Ishmael (17:20)
 - to Hagar – to His promise to her to bless Ishmael and make him into a great nation (16:10-12)
 - Ishmael means 'God hears' – God heard twice in v.17 and provided
- He is able to provide – water in the desert; enough sustenance for a single mother & her son for him to grow up

-What does this passage about Hagar & Ishmael and Sarah & Isaac teach us about salvation?

-Galatians 4:21 - 5:6 – What is the contrast between Hagar/Ishmael and Sarah/Isaac, and what does this teach us?

- contrast of 2 ways of salvation – one natural (represented by Hagar/Ishmael) and the other spiritual (represented by Sarah/Isaac)
- Hagar/Ishmael – symbolize the Old Covenant, represented by Mount Sinai & the present, earthly Jerusalem → symbolic of the Jewish system of law/Judaism as a whole
 - slave woman, gives birth to slaves → symbolizes bondage of the law; of trying to be saved by good works → leads to slavery, since bound to obey the entire law and are unable to
 - born by the natural way i.e. without divine intervention → symbolizes a religion of nature i.e. what man can do by himself, apart from any special intervention by God (i.e. salvation by works)
- Sarah/Isaac – symbolize the New Covenant, represented by the Jerusalem that is above, i.e. the New Jerusalem → symbolic of Christianity/the Church; the way of justification by faith apart from works
- free woman, gives birth to free children → symbolic of the freedom we have in Christ
 - born not naturally, but supernaturally i.e. through the promise of God → symbolizes a religion of grace i.e. not of what man can do, but of what God has done and does
 - requires divine intervention to save, to do that which is humanly impossible; by grace through faith
- v.30 – the 2 ways of salvation are incompatible; either by works or by faith, not both

-Romans 9:6-12

- doctrine of election – those saved are chosen by God; just as both Ishmael & Isaac were Abraham's sons, but God chose Isaac, not Ishmael
 - His sovereign choice not based on Man's works – was made before Isaac was even born

Read Genesis 21:22-34

-Why did Abimelech seek to make a treaty with Abraham, despite what Abraham had done to him previously? (cf. Matthew 5:16)

- saw God's blessing in Abraham's life and desired to be associated with it (and presumably also be blessed)
 - Abraham's life demonstrated the grace of God for all to see, despite his failings and sin; drew others to him
 - in the same way, we as Christians should let our light shine, that others may glorify God

Aliens and strangers in the world

We learn much about God by observing the lives of Abraham and his family. In His protection of Sarah from Abimelech, in His provision of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah, and in His care for Hagar and Ishmael in the desert, we see God's faithfulness to accomplish fully all that He has promised. In Sarah's giving birth to a son at the age of ninety, we see God's omnipotence, as well as His love and mercy, as the One who turns sorrow into joy. In the sending away of Hagar and Ishmael, we learn of His sovereignty over salvation, as the one who chooses and calls us out of bondage to freedom in Christ. So powerful was the evidence of God's work in the life Abraham that Abimelech was compelled to seek him out, in spite of what Abraham had done to him previously in deceiving him with respect to Sarah.

What is your life telling others about who God is? Are you letting your light shine before men, so that they are compelled to glorify God because of you? Or is God's Name 'blasphemed among the Gentiles' because of you (Romans 2:24)? Commit yourself to "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matt 5:16)