

# Genesis 21 - The Birth of Isaac; Ishamel Mocks Isaac; Hagar Ousted; Covenant with Abimelech

II. Epilogue: Patriarchal history (Gen 11:10—50:26)

(1) Life of Abraham (Gen 11:10—25:11)

(B) Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1—25:11)

(b) The maturation of Abraham and Sarah's faith in preparation for covenant blessings (Gen 18:1—22:19)

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(v) Hagar and Ishmael depart (21:8-21)

(vi) Treaty with Abimelech (21:22-34)

## Genesis 21

(iv) Birth of Isaac (21:1-7)

**1** Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised.

**1** Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised.

**1** The LORD came to Sarah, just as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised.

**1** And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

- God spoke this promise to Abraham and Sarah in 18:14, one year earlier

- He Who opened the wombs of the house of Abimelech (Gen 20) now opened the womb of Sarah

**2** So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.

**2** So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.

**2** Sarah conceived and gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age, at the very time that God had told him.

2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

- God's promise came to pass, just as He said it would, and just *when* He said it would

3 Abraham named his son who was born to him, the son whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.

3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.

3 Abraham named his son who was born to him Isaac—the very one whom Sarah bore for him!

3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

4 On the eighth day after his son Isaac had been born, Abraham circumcised him, just as God had commanded him.

4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

- The token of the covenant was being applied on the day that it was commanded; Isaac is the first one recorded to be circumcised on the eighth day

5 Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

5 Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

- God's promise came to pass 25 years after it was given to Abraham

— The promises of God are not always immediate, but they are always sure

6 Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."

6 Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."

6 Now Sarah had said, "God has caused me to laugh, and all who hear about it will laugh with me."

6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

- The name Isaac ("he laughs"): Sarah said that God gave her laughter (v6), that is, joy.

— Her laughter of unbelief (18:12) was now changed to rejoicing through the provision of her son. Everyone who would hear about this would laugh—that is, rejoice, with her...but

Ishmael would soon turn her laughter into a ridiculing mockery of God's work.

7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse **children**? Yet I have given birth to a **son** in his old age."

7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

7 She also said, "Who would have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse sons? Yet I have given birth to a son in my husband's old age!"

7 And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.

- "...children" - plural form of child, showing Sarah's faith in the Abrahamic Covenant that from Isaac will come many more descendants

- "...son" - the use of the singular shows she was now focused on Isaac

- She clearly recognized that what happened was supernatural. She no longer laughed in unbelief, but in joy

(v) Hagar and Ishmael depart (21:8-21)

8 And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

8 The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

8 The child grew and eventually was weaned, so Abraham threw a tremendous banquet on the very day Isaac was weaned.

8 And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.

- Instead of birthday parties, in those days they threw "weaning parties" once the child was weaned. Typically between the ages of 3-5. This would make Ishmael between 17-20 years old.

9 Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar **the Egyptian**, whom she had borne to Abraham, **mocking**/saac.

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

9 Nevertheless, when Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian—whom Hagar had borne to Abraham—making fun of Isaac,

9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

- "...the Egyptian" - instead of saying "Ishmael," Sarah focused on Hagar's Egyptian nationality to emphasize that the animosity of Hagar towards Sarah has now been instilled

in Ishmael over Isaac.

- "...mocking" - *mesòahòeq*, "laughing or jesting," from which comes "Isaac" (*yisòhòaq*)

— The word is used negatively for mocking (19:14; 39:14,17); it is also used in a positive sense of merely playing (26:8)

— Ishmael used a play on words with Isaac's name and reduced it to mockery; essentially, he was "isaacing" Isaac

— Ishmael was 17-20 years old, mocking someone who was between 3-5 years old, and is doing so on what would otherwise be a joyous occasion

10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this slave woman and her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be an heir with my son Isaac!"

10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac."

10 she told Abraham, "Throw out this slave girl, along with her son, because this slave's son will never be a co-heir with my son Isaac!"

10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

- God used this incident of Ishmael's mocking Isaac to drive out the child Ishmael and Hagar (v10), for they would be a threat to the promised seed

— Earlier Sarah had mistreated Hagar (16:6); now Hagar's son was mistreating Sarah's son

— Earlier Sarah caused pregnant Hagar to flee (16:6); now she caused Hagar and her teenage son to flee

— This again fits with the Code of Hammurabi, which says that the son of the wife has precedence over the son of a handmaid, even if the son of the wife was born later.

However, the father was forbidden to expel the son of the handmaid if the son of the wife had been born. Ishmael was to be disinherited, but he was not to be dishonored. Thus, God's intervention would have to come into play for the expulsion to occur.

When Christ, the Seed, came, the old was done away. Now that the promise has come, believers are co-heirs with the promised Seed by adoption through God's grace.

To go back under the Law would be to undo the fulfillment of God's promise. Those adopted by the Seed become seeds and are set free from the bondage of the Law (Gal 5:1). Just as Ishmael and Isaac were in conflict (Gal 4:29), so the flesh and the Spirit do not harmonize. The flesh struggles against the Spirit, often mocking it (Gal 5:16-18).

Therefore believers are to "get rid of the slave woman and her son" (Gal 4:30), that is, to remove the threat of the flesh and "live by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16). See note: **Flesh vs Spirit** in Gen 16:6.

11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son *Ishmael*.

11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son.

11 Abraham was very troubled about what was being said about his son,

11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

- This shows again how much Abraham loved Ishmael

12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and your slave woman; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named.

12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named.

12 but God told Abraham, "Don't be troubled about the youth and your slave girl. Pay attention to Sarah in everything she tells you, because your offspring are to be named through Isaac.

**12** And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

- This is the seventh divine appearance to Abraham

- This is the only time a husband is told by God to listen to or obey his wife. The reason was because Isaac was to be the son of the inheritance. He was the covenant son to whom the Abrahamic Covenant was going to be sustained.

— Whatever may have been Sarah's motivation for her demand, it was the will of God as well

— It was because of this divine revelation that Abraham went against the laws of that day and expelled Hagar and Ishmael

13 And of the son of the slave woman I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant."

13 And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant."

13 Nevertheless, I will make the slave girl's son into a nation, since he, too, is your offspring."

13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

- God shows Abraham his plan as it concerned Ishmael; He would make them a great nation: the Arab nation

- Ishmael would not receive the Abrahamic Covenant, but he will benefit from the blessing aspect of it

14 So Abraham got up early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water, and gave *them* to Hagar, putting *them* on her shoulder, and gave *her* the boy, and **sent her away**. And she departed and **wandered** about in the wilderness of Beersheba.

14 So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave *them* to Hagar, putting *them* on her shoulder, and gave *her* the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.

14 So early the next morning, Abraham got up, took bread and a leather bottle of water, gave them to Hagar, and placed them on her shoulder. He then sent her away, along with the child. She went off and roamed in the Beer-sheba wilderness.

**14** And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

- "...sent her away" - *shalach*, a neutral term, used in the sense of a friendly release; God used the same word when He sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden (3:24)

— This is a different Hebrew word (*garash*) than what Sarah used in her request (v10), which meant to expel in a hostile way

- Bread includes all sorts of victuals—bottle, a leathern vessel, formed of the entire skin of a lamb or kid sewed up, with the legs for handles, usually carried over the shoulder. These meager material possessions emphasized Ishmael's lack of inheritance. These were enough provisions to get them to the next oasis or desert well.

— Ishmael was a lad of 17 years, and it was quite customary for Arab chiefs to send out their sons at such an age to do for themselves: often with nothing but a few days' provisions in a bag

- When Abraham became distressed because of Sarah's request to oust Hagar and Ishmael, God assured Abraham that Ishmael would have a future because he too was Abraham's offspring (v11-13)

- "...wandered" - she got lost in the desert

— Beer-sheba, on the border of Egypt, was about 50 miles S of Jerusalem and 27 miles S of Hebron

— For those traveling southward, it was the last point of any significance in Palestine

- In Gal 4:21-31, Paul makes a reference to the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael to teach the spiritual lesson that law and grace as ways of salvation simply cannot coexist.

**15** When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes.

**15** When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes.

15 Eventually, the water in the leather bottle ran out, so she placed the child under one of the bushes.

15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

- In spite of his young age, Ishmael was affected first; apparently he was fainting, so Hagar put him under a bush for some shade

16 Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "May I not see the boy die!" And she sat opposite him, and raised her voice and wept.

16 Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept.

16 Then she went and sat by herself about a distance of a bowshot away, because she kept saying to herself, "I can't bear to watch the child die!" That's why she sat a short distance away, crying aloud and weeping.

16 And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

- Hagar separated herself from Ishmael, by some distance; she didn't want to be anywhere near when Ishmael died. She sat there and cried.

17 God heard the boy crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.

17 God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.

17 God heard the boy's voice, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven. He asked her, "What's wrong with you, Hagar? Don't be afraid, because God has heard the voice of the youth where he is.

**17** And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

- This was Hagar's second encounter with the Angel of the Lord

— The Angel of the Lord met Hagar in the desert, as before (16:7), and provided water from a well (v19) as before (16:14); God heard Ishmael's voice, as before (16:11)

18 Get up, lift up the boy, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him."

18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him."

18 Get up! Pick up the youth and grab his hand, because I will make a great nation of his descendants."

18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

- This was to convey to Hagar that both she and Ishmael would survive

- Again, God gives the promise that Ishmael will be a great nation; but for him to be able to have this, he had to survive

19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink.

19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. So she went, filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

**19** And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

- The water may have been miraculously provided, but the context implies that it was a well or spring that was already there and Hagar simply did not see it

**20** And **God was with the boy**, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer.

**20** God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer.

20 God was with the boy as he grew up. He settled in the wilderness and became an expert archer.

20 And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

- "God was with the boy" - fulfilling His promise made to Abraham earlier

- Ishmael grew up in the desert, setting the stage for the beginnings of his desert wanderings

- His occupation was an archer (hunter), setting the stage for his aggression

— In the context of Genesis, a hunter this is a negative occupation, as already indicated with Nimrod ("a mighty hunter before the Lord")

21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and **his mother took a wife for him** from the land of Egypt.

21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

21 Later he settled in the desert area of Paran, and his mother chose a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

21 And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.



- Paran (that is, Arabia), where his posterity has ever dwelt (compare Gen 16:12; also Is 48:19; 1 Peter 1:25). It was on the border of the Negev and Sinai.
- "...his mother took a wife for him" - on a father's death, the mother looks out for a wife for her son, however young; and as Ishmael was now virtually deprived of his father, his mother set about forming a marriage connection for him, it would seem, among her relatives in Egypt.
- It is known from records of this period of time that the Egyptians were quite anti-Semitic. Since his wife would have the same character as Hagar, the animosity was sure to continue.
- With this marriage, Ishmael became one of the fathers of the Arab nation (along with Esau, Cf. Gen 25:27-34)

(vi) Treaty with Abimelech (21:22-34)

**22** Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do;

**22** Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do;

**22** About that time, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, told Abraham, "God is with you in everything that you're doing.

**22** And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest:

- Both kings came to recognize the presence of God with Abraham. This recognition motivates them to enter into a covenantal relationship with him.

**23** so now, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my descendants, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have resided."

**23** now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned."

**23** Therefore swear an oath here by God that you won't deal falsely with me, my sons, or my descendants. Just as I've dealt graciously with you, won't you do so with me and with the land in which you live as a foreigner?"

**23** Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.

- This shows that Abraham had become a strong and influential chieftain, feared by local city-kings and city-states

— They recognized that God was with Abraham, but Abraham had been deceptive once before. This was the paradox that Abimelech faced. This contradictory element motivated Abimelech's offer of a treaty.

- Here a proof of the promise (Gen 12:2) being fulfilled, in a native prince wishing to form a solemn league with Abraham

- The proposal was reasonable, and agreed to...

24 Abraham said, "I swear it."

24 Abraham said, "I swear it."

24 And Abraham replied, "I agree!"

**24** And Abraham said, I will swear.

- Abraham agreed to the covenant; he took an oath

25 But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized.

25 But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized.

25 But then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized.

**25** And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away.

- This shows that Abimelech had not acted fairly either. His servants had violently taken away a water well that Abraham used.

26 And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor did I hear of it until today."

26 And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor did I hear of it until today."

26 "I don't know who did this thing," Abimelech replied. "You didn't report this to me, and I didn't hear about it until today."

26 And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day.

- Wells were of great importance to a pastoral chief and on the successful operation of sinking a new one, the owner was solemnly informed in person

— If, however, they were allowed to get out of repair, the restorer acquired a right to them

- In unoccupied lands, the possession of wells gave a right of property in the land, and dread of this had caused the offense for which Abraham reproved Abimelech

— Some describe four, others five, wells in Beer-sheba (7?)

**27** So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

**27** Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

27 So Abraham took sheep and oxen and presented them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

27 And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant.

- Abimelech's response seemed to satisfy Abraham, so they confirmed the treaty of peace

28 But Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

28 Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

28 Then Abraham set aside seven ewe lambs,

28 And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

- The exchange of v27 was normally as far as the parties needed to go to confirm a treaty, but Abraham went a step further, giving Abimelech seven ewe lambs

29 Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?"

29 Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?"

29 so Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set aside?"

**29** And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves?

30 He said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness for me, that I dug this well."

30 He said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well."

30 He replied, "You are to accept from me these seven ewe lambs as a witness that I have dug this well."

**30** And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well.

- The ewe lambs were a gift, a visible sign to Abimelech that this well, located in Beersheba, was the well that Abraham dug and no one else; therefore, the well belonged to Abraham by the right of labor.

- Abimelech's acceptance of the lambs shows that he recognized Abraham's claim
- There is now a covenant of peace and a covenant of justice

31 Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath.

31 Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath.

31 Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba, because the two of them swore an oath.

31 Wherefore he called that place Beersheba; because there they swore both of them.

- The similarity of the Hebrew words *sheba*, "seven" and *shaba*, "swear" seems to indicate that there is a connection between them

- Accordingly, Beer-sheba may mean "well of seven" or "well of swearing" or "well of the oath"

- The reflexive use of the word for "to swear" means "to swear oneself" or to pledge oneself by seven sacred things

- Later Israel would learn about the solemnity of oaths and treaties

32 So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, got up and returned to the land of the Philistines.

32 So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines.

32 So after they had made a covenant in Beer-sheba, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, left and returned to Philistine territory.

**32** Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phicol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines.

- The Philistines settled in Palestine en masse around 1200 BC, so there were no Philistines living in the area yet. This reference is given proleptically, meaning the area where later the Philistines settled. Gerar was part of the Philistine plain.

- However, some sea traders settled on the coast of Palestine as early as Abraham, who lived 2166–1991 BC

33 *Abraham* planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the **EverlastingGod**.

33 *Abraham* planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD God Everlasting.

33 And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.

- The tree was in honor of the covenant made with Abimelech and Phicol

- The fact that he planted a tree shows that he planned to stay there for some time; plus, he now had a water well and a peace treaty with the king
- Following the planting of the tree, Abraham instituted public worship ("called there on the name of the LORD")
- "...Everlasting God" - *El Olam*, implies an indefinite or unknown period of time; stands for an indefinite period of time or "up to the end" of a period of time, to be determined by the context.
- It does not carry the concept of eternity as it does in English
- It is only because God's nature is everlasting can the term have the meaning "everlasting" here

34 And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines for many days.

34 And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.

34 After this, Abraham resided as a foreigner in Philistine territory for a long period of time.

34 And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.