

Genesis 21

THE PROMISE, THE PROBLEM, THE PATRIARCH

Opening Observations

- * Chapter 21 is a short “trilogy”
- * Each vignette (episode) deals with closure
 - ◆ The seed promise is realized
 - ◆ The contender problem is banished
 - ◆ The patriarch’s power is recognized
- * The air-time given to the arrival of the seed is ironically brief ...
 - ◆ 9 chapters of build-up, 7 verses of fulfillment

Structure of Gen 21

- * The promise realized - vv. 1-7
- * The problem banished - vv. 8-21
- * The patriarch recognized - vv. 22-34

The Promise Realized

* What two themes are stressed in vv. 1-7?

- ◆ Everything happened JUST AS God said it would
 - This reminds me of 1 Cor 15:3-4 (“according to the Scriptures”)
- ◆ It was a physical miracle

* How are these two themes expressed?

- ◆ By repetition ... note the 3-fold repetition of God’s “agency”
 - v. 1a - “As He has said”
 - v. 1b - “As He had spoken”
 - v. 2 - “At the time ... God had spoken”

Realized .. Continued

- ◆ Note the 3-fold repetition of Abraham’s age
 - v. 2: “in his old age”
 - v. 5: “Abraham was 100 years old”
 - v. 7: “in his old age”
- * So while the birth narrative is short after all the build-up it is emphatic in its presentation

Realized .. Continued

* God “visited” Sarah - v. 1

- ◆ NASB “took note” is unfortunate
 - The Hebrew verb פקד is more “active” and better translated “attended to,” or “visited”
 - It is a common verb (occurs over 300x’s), often in contexts where God intervenes to accomplish something
 - ◆ So used in Gen 50:24-25; Exod 13:19 (reflecting Gen 50)
- ◆ Yahweh did far more than take note of her condition — He miraculously intervened and restored Sarah’s ability to bear children despite “barrenness” and “old-age”

Realized .. Continued

- * As a result, she conceived and bore a son ...
- * Who was named Isaac as commanded - Gen 17:19
 - ◆ Derived from the Hebrew root צחק
 - ◆ Which means “to laugh”
- * And was dutifully circumcised by Abraham on the 8th day as commanded Gen 17:10-12

Realized .. Continued

- * After which Sarah .. and others .. rejoiced
 - ◆ Note laughter 2x's in v. 6
 - ◆ This is the laughter of joy
 - ◆ And uses the same Hebrew root as Isaac's name in verbal forms
- * What does v. 7 reinforce?
 - ◆ Sarah's complete restoration (nursing, bearing a child); Abraham's old-age — in other words the miraculous nature of what has occurred

Closing Thought

“Principalizing” the forgoing, We are never too old for God to do a new thing in us or through us!

The Problem Banished

* What is/are the purpose(s) of Ishmael's banishment?

- ◆ To wean Abraham "of his affections"
 - No fall back position for Abraham ... particularly in light of what is coming in Gen 22
- ◆ Remove potential challenges to Isaac
- ◆ A means to fulfill Gen 17:4-5 (turn and read)

Banished .. Continued

- * Just as Isaac was weaned from nursing, Abraham is being weaned from "attachments"
 - ◆ His natural love for Ishmael must be subordinated to his love for God and His purposes
 - 📖 Reminding us that the cost of true discipleship is high - turn to Luke 9:57-62
- * The occasion of the events of vv. 8-21 arise from a party Abraham throws for Isaac

Banished .. Continued

- * Sarah observes Ishmael "mocking" Isaac
 - ◆ "Mocking" is translated from the same root for Isaac's name
 - ◆ It is in the "intensive" form .. so the idea of excessively laughing or making fun of
- * Sarah properly discerns Ishmael's nature, the threat, and moves to protect Isaac
- * But she goes further in my mind by heaping contempt on him in v. 10

Banished .. Continued

- * How is Sarah's contempt manifested?
 - ◆ She never address Hagar or Ishmael by name
- * Note the downward progression of address - vv. 9-10
 - ◆ Son of Hagar the Egyptian ... ethnic slight
 - ◆ Hagar as "this maid" ... hierarchical slight
 - ◆ And Ishmael as "the son of this maid" ... familial slight (he's still Abraham's son!)
- * Can't you almost picture Sarah "snarling" these epithets at Abraham

Banished .. Continued

- * How do we know Sarah's demand arises from proper discernment even though "nasty?"
 - ◆ Because God affirms her demand in v. 12
 - ◆ And because she properly discerned Abraham's conflicted feelings — and perhaps even divided loyalty between the two boys ...
- * Which is born out for us, the readers, in v. 11

Banished .. Continued

- * God affirms Sarah's demand and also provides the reason in v. 12
- * What does the explanation tell us?
 - ◆ First we encounter this Hebrew word זרע again
 - ◆ Anyone remember the meaning and significance?
 - Means seed or seeds
 - It is a collective, so context has to help us decide

Banished .. Continued

- * What do you like .. sg. or plural and why?
 - ◆ I like singular
 - ◆ Because God is emphasizing a particular seed
 - ◆ Ishmael will also bear offspring to Abraham as v. 13 will affirm
- * Therefore, since God is the speaker — I think he is demonstrating the skeletal form of an important doctrine ... What is it?

Banished .. Continued

- * Election!!
 - ◆ We see the skeletal form of God conscious and deliberate “choosing” of particular individuals ...
 - ◆ Sarah was God’s “unknowing agent” to bring this to light
- * All of which Paul fully develops in Gal 4:21ff specifically citing Gen 21 in 4:30
 - ◆ The “true” descendants of Abraham will be found in the line of Isaac ... and God wants there to be no confusion

Banished .. Continued

- * God mollifies Abraham in v. 13, affirming there will be another line that will proceed through Ishmael
 - ◆ The boy will survive and flourish
 - ◆ Ishmael will be the channel to fulfill the “nations” promise of the Abrahamic Covenant
- * As is his custom Abraham obeys .. immediately
- * Provisions and sends the 2 off the next morning

Banished .. Continued

- * Does Abraham's provision seem miserly?
 - ◆ Certainly does to me
- * Do you think this is all Abraham gave them?
 - ◆ Text doesn't say, but I suspect NO
- * Why don't we hear more?
 - ◆ Because how much, or little, Abraham gave them is not the author's focus

Banished .. Continued

- * Rather the author is setting up the final point of this vignette
- * What is it?
 - ◆ God's love and continued care for Hagar and Ishmael
- * Which plays out in vv. 15-21

Banished .. Continued

- * The events remind us of Hagar's first flight in Gen 16:7ff
- * Here, God hears the boy's cries and the angel of God speaks to Hagar
 - ◆ Affirms that Ishmael will head a great nation
 - ◆ Directs Hagar to a water supply

Banished .. Continued

- * W. 20-21 record God's favor toward Ishmael ...
 - ◆ God was "with him"
 - ◆ He grew and became a skilled archer
 - ◆ He dwelt in the the Wilderness of Paran
 - ◆ He took a wife from Egypt ... "the nations" line
- * This is the last we hear of Hagar .. other than in a genealogy
- * And virtually the last we hear of Ishmael
 - ◆ He will resurface briefly in Gen 25: burying Abraham, then his genealogical record and his death

Closing Thoughts

God requires us to separate
from conflicting affections in our
christian walk .. we cannot serve
two masters — Matt 6:24

Closing Thoughts

What makes this hard is that we might be
asked to separate from good things to
receive God's best

In other words ... something good may have
to go, because God has something better
He wants to give us. God is always "pruning"

The Patriarch Recognized

- * This final section shows us the status that Abraham has attained in the land
- * He still “possesses” none of it, but will make his first land acquisition in this final vignette
- * Vv. 22-34 close the saga with Abimelech, but what is its primary focus?

Recognized .. Continued

- * To show how prominent a personage Abraham has become under God's blessing
 - ◆ God's favor to Abraham has become so manifest that people all around can recognize it!
- * What principle can we draw from this?
- 👉 God works through the testimony of our day-to-day life to witness for Christ and draw people to Him!

Recognized .. Continued

- * The great irony in these final verses is the complete role reversal from Gen 20
 - ◆ Previously Abimelech gave protection, now he wants protection
 - ◆ Previously Abimelech reproved Abraham, now Abraham reproves Abimelech
 - ◆ Previously Abimelech enriches Abraham with flocks, now it is the other way around

Recognized .. Continued

- * Abraham seems to have assumed the position of power ..
- * Which is not all that remarkable when we remember the source of Abraham's power
- * In vv. 22-23, Abimelech and his "military commander" seek a treaty ... note the sequence
 - ◆ They acknowledge Abraham's source of blessing
 - ◆ They invoke God as source for the oath
- * Abraham readily agrees .. with no haggling

Recognized .. Continued

- * The order of events in vv. 24-26 probably seemed reversed to our Western mind
- * Why would he unconditionally agree, then bring up apparent "bargaining chips later?"
 - ◆ The answer is — you have to understand the eastern mind ... which is HIGH CONTEXT
 - ◆ Had Abraham led with the conflict over the wells, "high context" would think he did not want to agree to a treaty

Recognized .. Continued

- * But Abraham wanted, and saw the value of, peaceful coexistence and readily agrees ...
 - ◆ So, his quick agreement signals his desire to "reach a deal"
- * Only then did he raise an issue that might derail the treaty, wishing to remove future obstacles up front
 - ◆ In arid climates, water is at a premium
 - ◆ Wells would have been a source of constant contention among the shepherds if ownership was not resolved

Recognized .. Continued

- * We should also note that Abraham had not yet ratified the agreement .. so perhaps there was still some wiggle room
- * Now in v. 25, Abraham takes Abimelech to the woodshed
 - ◆ Text says that he “reproved” Abimelech
 - ◆ Similar pattern as Gen 20:11 .. where Abraham assumed the worst about Abimelech
 - Apparently following the “guilty until proven innocent” model of law

Recognized .. Continued

- * Just as with God, Abimelech defends himself in v. 26 by ...
 - ◆ Pleading complete innocence — which was probably true!
- * Does Abraham accept his response?
 - ◆ Yes — look at v. 27
 - ◆ Animals given to Abimelech
 - ◆ A bi-lateral (“the two of them”) covenant is cut

Recognized .. Continued

- * At this point, the peace treaty is ratified
- * But there is more .. What is going on in vv. 28-30?
 - ◆ Abraham is adding an “addendum” to the contract
 - ◆ Whereby he wants to affirm ownership of the well
- * What is significant about this “addendum?”
 - ◆ By this Abraham comes into “official” possession of his first “property” in the land
- * As customary, Abraham then memorializes the place with a name ...

Recognized .. Continued

- * Beersheba means “Well of the Seven”
 - ◆ Or ... it could mean “Well of the Oath” because the Hebrew root for “to swear” and the number “seven” is the same שבע
 - ◆ Based on the context I prefer “the seven” ... pointing to the “7” additional lambs that “ratify” the addendum
 - ◆ Either way, it is a Hebrew word play
- * Satisfied ... Abimelech heads home to Philistine

Recognized .. Continued

- * Abraham marks the site with an additional symbol ... A tamarisk tree
- * And Abraham worships
 - ◆ Giving us another name for God — Everlasting God (אל עולם)
- * The chapter ends with Abraham enjoying the fruits of his treaty ... “staying” in the Philistine’s land many days

Closing Thoughts

- * Gen 21 seems like it is devoted to “tying up” loose ends before the story turns to Isaac
 - ◆ Abraham & Sarah have the promised seed
 - ◆ Any threat of “palace revolt” has been removed
 - ◆ And Abraham has secured peace with the “king of the land”
- * In other words — [ALL IS WELL IN DODGE](#)

Closing Thoughts

- * So ... the next logical scene would seem to be events that wind-down Abraham's life in Gen 23-25
 - ◆ Namely ... Sarah's death, Isaac's bride (securing the promised line), and Abraham's death
- * But ... God has one more monster test to [affirm Abraham's loyalty](#) before the story moves on to Isaac as we might have expected!
- * We will pick up with this famous test next week ...
