

Introduction

After the incident of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham “goes on with life” and resumes moving about the land that God had deeded to him (v. 1). There are five incidents that the Bible relates for us:

I. Abraham and Abimelech (Part 1), 20:1-18

Just like in Gen. 12:10-20, Abraham once again misleads others about the identity of his wife. It had been his practice to do this in his travels (“in every place” where they traveled, 20:13), and he rationalized it because she was his half-sister (v. 12). She participated in the lie too (v. 5). He thought doing so would save his neck at least two times, but it ended up being a great embarrassment which is recorded for us down to this day. **Remember**—don’t lie! Live on principle, not pragmatics.

This time it is not Pharaoh who was deceived, but it is the Philistian king of Gerar named Abimelech. Abimelech liked Sarah and apparently took her into his harem.

Then in what was a stunning event in the life of Abimelech, God appeared to him in a dream and said that he had taken another man’s wife (v. 3). This was wrong and he would be punished for it if he persisted in this path (v. 7). **Remember**—it is wrong to take another man’s wife. It is so often done today, but it is still just as wrong as it has ever been.

Abimelech rightly responds that he had done this in innocence because of Abraham’s lie (v. 4-5). **Notice** how Abraham’s lie caused someone else to sin, and be on the verge of even greater sin (v. 9).

In verse 6-7 God agrees and tells Abimelech to restore Sarah to her rightful place and the punishment that was coming (death) would be avoided.

God says that He “withheld [Abimelech] from sinning against [God].” This **teaches** us that God prevents wicked deeds. He has control over everything, including sin (whether it is permitted, to what extent it is permitted, etc.)

Early in the morning after the dream, Abimelech did just what God told him to do (vv. 9-18). He rebuked both Abraham and Sarah and gave Sarah back to Abraham. He also allowed Abraham to live wherever he wanted to in his land. How gracious!

Verse 18 tells us that the Lord had closed the wombs of the women in Abimelech’s family. It must have been that Abraham and Sarah’s charade went on for a while. I mean, it takes several months to see a pattern of infertility like what was happening as a result of God’s judgment!

But even more amazing is that in Genesis 18:10, God promised that within a year’s time, Sarah would have a child. Abraham was 99/100 in both 17:17 and 21:5, so that we know the events of chapters 19 and 20 took place within a year’s time. Sarah must have been at least in the early stages of pregnancy when this business with Abimelech happened! What was Abraham thinking?!

II. Isaac’s Birth, 21:1-8

This small section gives the unadorned account of Isaac’s birth, circumcision, and weaning. He would have been several years old when he finally was weaned from his mother’s milk and onto all solid foods (see 1 Samuel 1:20-24). Abraham named his Isaac, which comes from the verb for “laughter” (17:17, 18:12).

III. Hagar and Ishmael Pushed Out, 21:9-21

Ishmael was about 14 years of age at the time that Isaac was born (at his circumcision in 17:25 he was 13). Sarah had another fit of jealousy and anger at Hagar for having Ishmael, and now that Ishmael was old enough, she was angry that he might take some of the inheritance of her son. Abraham was extremely displeased about his wife’s attitude.

God assured Abraham that it would be OK to put Hagar and her son out. He knew two things that Abraham might not have realized: 1) that He would take care of Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness; and 2) this would be later used by the apostle Paul as an allegory

in Gal. 4:19-31 as a way of explaining how believers are children of promise, of faith, not of the law. Note that Paul is not interpreting the passage allegorically, but he is using it as a basis for an allegory that he makes up to explain the problem of the Galatians’ turning back to the law (bondage) instead of realizing their freedom in Christ.

God promised again to make a nation of Ishmael (17:20) for the sake of Abraham.

After Hagar and Ishmael were thrown out, and their water was gone, they thought for sure they would die. But God again intervened in answer to Hagar’s prayer (see 16:7-14 for the first time). He showed her a well of water so that they would be sustained. It seems that Hagar believed in the true God, the God that Abraham had taught her about.

IV. Abraham and Abimelech (Part 2), 21:22-34

This portion tells us of a covenant between Abraham and Abimelech, where Abimelech asked Abraham to deal well with him and his offspring, since they saw that Abraham was a powerful man. There was also a dispute about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had stolen for themselves. It was about this well that Abraham gave seven ewe lambs to Abimelech to remind him about their agreement.

Abraham named the place Beersheba (well of the oath) because of this covenant.

V. The Offering of Isaac, 22:1-24

The KJV says here that God “tempted” Abraham. It is more proper to change that word to “tested” because God does not tempt anyone with evil (James 1:13). He was doing this to prove the genuineness of Abraham’s faith.

First, we see the command of God to take Isaac and sacrifice him on Mount Moriah (the eventual site of the temple – 2 Sam. 24:18, 1 Chron. 21:18, 2 Chron. 3:1). Abraham rose early the next morning to obey God’s command. It took three days journey to get there.

Then we see the great faith of Abraham in that he said “the **lad and I will go** yonder and worship **and we will come back** to you...**God will provide** for Himself the lamb” It does not say so specifically here, but we know from the NT that Abraham believed God’s promise about Isaac so much that he thought that even if he did sacrifice Isaac, that God would raise him again from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19).

At the last second, God stops Abraham and commends him because he fears God. Actually it is the “Angel of the Lord” who speaks to Abraham from heaven. At that point Abraham noticed a ram caught nearby in a thicket and offered it “instead of” his son. Here we see a foreshadowing of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Abraham called God by the name “God who provides” (Jehovah Jireh). See Gen. 16:13 for Hagar’s naming of God in her experience.

Have you ever thought about the Jewish/Christian faith and its relationship to human sacrifice? Such was practiced in many cultures, with children and adults. However, God only commanded this as a test, and it was not carried out. What other humans were killed in a sacrificial way—any with God’s approval?

Finally in this section we see that the Abrahamic covenant is again confirmed (22:15-19). Remember, it was given and confirmed four other times already in Genesis. The first was in chapter 12, then 13, then 15, 17, and now 22. At the first, Abram was 75 years old (12:4); then perhaps 80; then about 85 (16:3); then 99 (17:1, 17:17, 21:5); now maybe as old as 120 (Isaac was probably a young man by now; in chapter 23 Sarah died at 127, and since she was 10 years younger than Abraham [16:17], this means that Isaac was 37 years old at the death of his mother). So over a period of about 40 years God repeats the covenant to Abraham at least five times.

One more note in vv. 20-24 is that Abraham’s brother Nahor had children by this time. The significant thing here is that one of his granddaughters was Rebekah, who would eventually become the wife of Isaac (see chapter 24).

Concluding Question

Do you trust God like Abraham did?

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