

Genesis 21B (2011)

- The time has finally come for Abraham and Sarah to separate the child of flesh and bondage from the child of promise and grace
 - Ishmael and his mother must leave Abraham's home, while Abraham and Sarah raise Isaac
 - Hagar herself was a product of Abraham's sin in going into Egypt
 - And then Ishmael was a product of Sarah's sin of impatiently offering Hagar to her husband
 - The chain of sin has led Abraham and Sarah here
 - And the effects of their mistakes will be felt for thousands of years as Arabs and Jews battle
 - But even in the midst of their sin, the Lord remains faithful to His word
 - God's word is so certain and unchangeable that even God Himself cannot ignore it
 - So when God promised to Abraham that the Lord would bless Abraham's descendants, it must be so
 - Consequently, Abraham was able to set his wife and his first child free trusting that the Lord would care for them as He promised

Gen. 21:14 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.

Gen. 21:15 When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes.

Gen. 21:16 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.

- As we read last week, Abraham signifies a complete separation from Hagar and Ishmael
 - The simple rations hung on her shoulder mean she will receive no inheritance from Abraham
 - This was a stipulation God gave through Sarah's words

- The slave boy shall not be a fellow heir with the child of promise
 - When the greater thing comes by grace, the old shall be put away
- Abraham gives the boy into her hands, signifying that she takes responsibility for him henceforth
 - And off they went into the wilderness of Beersheba
 - Beersheba is southward, indicating she was headed back to Egypt
 - And it's an unforgiving desert wilderness
 - The water rations Abraham gave her were minimal and unlikely to keep her and her son alive for long
 - If Abraham had not trusted God to care for them, he would have been assigning them to a death sentence
- Sure enough, she and her son wandered in the wilderness for a time
 - They wandered long enough to reach a critical point
 - The teenager succumbs first to the heat and exhaustion, and he is faint or passed out from dehydration
 - So Hagar places him under desert growth for some shade
 - It's only a matter of time before he dies, and her with him
 - So she went 40-50 yards away and sat with her back turned to him, facing away from him so that she wouldn't have to watch him die
 - Clearly she feels desperate and the circumstances have reached a life threatening stage
 - And she sits weeping over her predicament
- Abraham's sin has hurt everyone, and now it seems poised to crush two people he had come to love
 - We've said it before, but it bears repeating...
 - When we make choices that place us outside God's will, we will suffer penalty one way or another

- But if that reality isn't cause enough for us to think twice and step away from our sin, then at least consider how your sin will impact others
 - There is no such thing as a victimless sin
- The full impact of our sin is not limited to merely natural and foreseeable consequences
 - God has stated in His word that He is prepared to visit the sins of one generation down through later generations

Num. 14:18 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.'

- Ishmael and Hagar offer a case study of that principle at work
 - Hagar and Ismael are now suffering because of their father and husband's sin
 - And the descendants of Isaac will suffer at the hands of the sons of Ishmael for many generations
 - God enforces this principle for two reasons
 - So that He can motivate us to set aside sin knowing it will have severe ramifications
 - And so He may use families as living examples of the corrupting power of sin and to demonstrate the seriousness of sin
- To be clear, God isn't saying He causes the penalty for your sin to rest on others in your family
 - Everyone is accountable for their own sin only
 - Rather, He is setting forth a principle that the circumstances of our earthly lives may suffer as a result of the sin of others
 - And God directs those consequences primarily upon the family of the sinner
 - Fathers and mothers bring consequences to children
 - Spouses bring consequences upon one another

- Brothers and sisters upon one another
- Children upon their parents
- But the Lord is also good to break that cycle and bring grace anew and restoration to families
 - Many believers bear a testimony like me of having been the first in their family to come to the Lord
 - And by that starting point, the Lord may bring many generations of believers into a family
- Consider the power of your decisions the next time you contemplate whether to obey the Spirit or follow your flesh
 - If not for your own sake, for how your decisions may impact others you love...or will love one day
- Here now God is ready to step in and keep His promises to Abraham

Gen. 21:17 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.

Gen. 21:18 "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him."

- Notice who's crying gains the Lord's attention?
 - In v.17 we're told the Lord hears the young boy crying
 - Apparently, the boy is as distressed as his mother
 - He is not responding to Hagar's crying
- Why didn't the Lord respond to Hagar's crying?
 - His promise was extended to Abraham and His descendants
 - Though Hagar is a woman who has also received the Lord's grace in her life, her earthly life is not God's first concern
- Ishmael is the one God is rescuing
 - God's reputation is on the line with Ishmael
 - Ishmael must live to be a mighty nation or else God will be made to be a liar

- Look at God's statement to Hagar
 - He asks her what is the matter with you?
 - Do not fear for the Lord has heard the cries of the lad
 - And He tells her to take the young boy's hand
 - He's telling her that if she wants to live, she needs to remain close to this young man
 - For he will receive the Lord's blessing in his life
- Here we see a powerful corollary to the earlier principle on sin
 - The corollary is that those on whom the blessing of God rests may be a blessing in turn to others
 - In Ismael's case, the blessing was his because of the promise God made to his father, Abraham
 - There is no evidence in Scripture that Ismael was a follower of the living God; an OT saint, in other words
 - Nevertheless, Ishmael was blessed by association with his father, who in turn was blessed on the basis of faith in God's promises
 - God's promises to Abraham concerning Ishmael expired when Ishmael died, so that his children did not directly inherit a promised blessing
 - Nevertheless, God's promise said that nations would come from Ishmael
 - So even in the promises of God, it meant that Ishmael would be blessed with children and that those children would grow and have children, etc.
 - Even today, the Arab nations are blessed with wealth, which is an indirect result of God's promises to Abraham
 - As children of God, we have been included into the promises of God made possible through His Son, Jesus Christ
 - And we will see God's blessing in our lives, just as Jesus said:

Matt. 7:9 "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?"

[Matt. 7:10](#) "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?"

[Matt. 7:11](#) "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

[Matt. 7:12](#) "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

- Our Father has a heart to give us good gifts in an infinite number of forms, and He delights to receive our thanks in recognition of those gifts
 - And just as we have a choice in whether to sin and allow that sin to cascade down through the lives of others, we also have a choice concerning God's blessing
 - We can decide whether God's blessings to us will become opportunity to bless others, or whether we'll keep it to ourselves
 - As children of God who have received His outpouring in material blessings, we can live generous, selfless lives before others
 - We can speak in kind and grace-filled ways in a world that knows only coarse and boastful language
 - We can choose to show hospitality and generosity and consideration in a world where such things are increasingly rare
 - And by making the most of those opportunities to share earthly blessings, we can also win opportunities to share our spiritual blessing
 - We can share the Gospel and perhaps bring another family into the promises of God
 - And the cycle will start again there
- So Ismael is blessed through Abraham and Hagar is blessed through Ishmael as God rescues them

[Gen. 21:19](#) 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.

[Gen. 21:20](#) God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer.

[Gen. 21:21](#) He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

- Hagar's eyes are opened to see a well of water
 - The water well was likely nearby all the while, but only now does she notice it
 - I find it interesting that God waits until they are near their end before He brings the rescue
 - He could have given them water earlier by causing Hagar to see the well sooner
 - Instead, He comes to the rescue only now
 - And the solution was not supernatural, but rather the water was nearby all the while
 - I like to remember this moment when I find myself in my own desperate moments, when things look bleak
 - Perhaps the solution is nearby, and the Lord is simply waiting for me to place my need before Him
 - Only after I appeal to Him may He show me my rescue, so that He receives the glory for that work in my life
 - So as God promised, the boy grew up under God's watch, and lived in the wilderness becoming an archer
 - Ismael settled in Paran, which is the heart of Arabia in northern Sinai
 - Eventually, Hagar finds him a wife from among the Egyptians
 - There will be a brief reunion between Isaac and Ishmael at the death of Abraham
 - And later we'll see that Esau takes his wife from Ishmael's family
 - So the chosen line of Abraham will remain separate from the rest
- Now the chapter ends with a curious scene again involving Abimelech

[Gen. 21:22](#) 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;

[Gen. 21:23](#) 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.”

[Gen. 21:24](#) Abraham said, “I swear it.”

- The king of Gerar, Abimelech, comes again to see Abraham
 - This is the same king as the one Abraham had deceived earlier
 - In that last encounter Abimelech had learned that Sarah was under God’s protection and that Abraham was a prophet of God
 - And apparently God’s blessing of Abraham is so apparent and powerful that it causes the king of Gerar to feel threatened
 - He worries that Abraham may be interested in displacing the king from his own land
 - Previously, the king had told Abraham he could have any place in his land to live
 - Now he wants to be sure that his generosity wouldn’t be used against him
 - The king visits with the commander of his army
 - This was a none-too-subtle show of force to Abraham
 - Standing armies didn’t exist in this day
 - When an army was needed, the people of the kingdom would come to join the fight
 - But Phicol by himself sent the same message: Abimelech was willing to fight to hold on to his land
 - Abimelech says that he knows God is with Abraham in all that he does
 - This is a revealing statement
 - It says a lot about God and a lot about Abraham as well
 - God has chosen to make Himself visible to the world through the lives of one man
 - And later through a nation of people who will come from this man

- And God's presence is so powerful and so evident that even a wandering shepherd in a desert land gives powerful evidence of God
 - God's blessings upon Abraham must have been tremendous
 - Animals and family multiplying beyond all expectations in the middle of arid lands
 - Causing all who see him to marvel and give glory to God
 - This is a man who carries his testimony wherever he goes
- So in v.23 the king asks Abraham to enter into a covenant with him concerning the land
 - The king wants assurances that Abraham and his growing family will not become a threat to a future generation of Abimelech's family
 - You can sympathize with this king
 - A strange tribe wanders into his land only to prove more powerful and blessed than anything you've seen
 - Naturally, you wonder where this is headed
 - If Abraham's God called Abraham a prophet, then perhaps that God would honor covenants made between the king and this prophet
 - So he is suing for peace even before the war begins
 - And in response, Abraham agrees to enter into such a covenant
 - The covenant will allow him to continue in the land indefinitely, along with his relatives
 - And in return, he will treat Abimelech fairly
 - Remember, Abimelech knows that God is with Abraham
 - But he also knows that Abraham hasn't always been upright and trustworthy
 - So a covenant or treaty was necessary to ensure peace
- Abraham sees an opportunity to secure some kindness for himself as well

Gen. 21:25 But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized.

Gen. 21:26 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."

- He raises a complaint with the king concerning a well which Abraham had dug but Abimelech's men had seized
 - A well was a big deal in Abraham's day
 - Water was life in the desert, and a well was a difficult and expensive undertaking
 - Abraham dug the well as a matter of necessity and Abimelech's men seized it probably out of envy or to protect the land
 - To dig a well was a way of claiming land rights in an area
 - Men would fight to the death over a strategic well
 - Entire cities would rise up around a well
 - It's worth noting that Abraham did try to fight Abimelech over the well once it was seized
 - And Abraham is mentioning it now to show good faith, that he didn't defend his rights with force
- But now he wants Abimelech to restore the well to him as a condition for the treaty
 - Abimelech denies knowing of the event, which was probably true
 - And his denial is an apology and an acknowledgement that Abraham had rights to the well he dug
- And so they enter into an agreement

Gen. 21:27 Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

Gen. 21:28 Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

Gen. 21:29 Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?"

[Gen. 21:30](#) 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."

[Gen. 21:31](#) Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath.

[Gen. 21:32](#) 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.

[Gen. 21:33](#) Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

[Gen. 21:34](#) And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.

- As we studied in the prior chapters, covenants involved several steps to cement the agreement
 - When covenants are presented in Scripture, the narrative won't usually relate all the details, but we can assume those steps took place
 - In this case we see only the payment Abraham makes to the king in exchange for the right to sojourn in the land
 - Notice that this is a covenant between equals, a parity covenant
 - It shows that Abimelech respects Abraham as an equal on account of God's power and blessing in Abraham's life
 - Abraham then takes a few of the sheep, seven to be specific, and sets them apart from the rest
 - The king takes note that this is unusual and recognizing it has special significance asks what it means
 - Abraham says the seven are a sign that this well is Abraham's and that he dug it
 - In effect, if Abimelech accepted these seven lambs, he was acknowledging that his men were wrong and the well was Abraham's
 - Abimelech accepts the lambs and makes the covenant
 - And the effect of this moment is to secure Abraham and his family a place in the land for as long as Abimelech and his descendants reigned in Gerar
 - The name Beersheba means the well of seven to remind everyone of this moment

- And in this place, Abraham called on the name of God in recognition of His blessings to Abraham
- Isn't it curious that the story of the promise child's arrival is sandwiched between two curious accounts with Abimelech?
 - Think back to God's promises to Abraham
 - He would have a promised seed child and he would have an inheritance in the land
 - Earlier in his encounter with Abimelech, Abraham placed Sarah in a position where Abimelech could endanger the promised child
 - But God came to the rescue by forcing Abimelech to do the right thing for Abraham
 - Now Abraham finds himself in a position to be threatened by the king's men seizing Abraham's wells
 - And so Abimelech comes to Abraham and offers a treaty to ensure Abraham has free access to the land for as long as he lives
 - First God protected His promise of a seed child, and now He has secured Abraham a place in the land
 - God is working to ensure Abraham's blessings
 - Neither the child Isaac nor this piece of land in Gerar are the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham
 - They are both just down payments, in a sense
 - The true fulfillment of the seed comes in the birth of the Messiah
 - And the final fulfillment of the inheritance is the land of Christ's Kingdom