

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

Lesson 15

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 21

INTRODUCTION

In our walk before God, there will be times when we feel that He is not listening to our prayers and petitions. We pray but do not see the answer in sight. We become discouraged, and we begin to lose our trust and faith in Him. We skip Church, stop reading the Bible and stop praying to Him. This chapter will serve as an encouragement for us. God answers prayers at His appointed time.

We make choices every day. Should we give up our favourite pastime and go to prayer meeting? What are our priorities? Some decisions have more serious implications than others. Let us ask God to help us make the right decisions.

As Christians we ought to promote peace and justice all the time. Let us show mutual respect for one another.

We need to know our Lord and be willing to trust Him every moment of our lives. God showers His blessings on those who trust and obey Him.

OUTLINE

- A. God Kept His Promise to Abraham and Sarah (21:1-8).
 1. The LORD kept His Word by giving Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age (vv.1-2).
 2. Abraham gave his son, the name Isaac (v.3).
 3. Abraham circumcised Isaac on the eighth day (v.4).
 4. Sarah rejoiced over the birth of Isaac (vv.5-7).
 5. Abraham celebrated the weaning of Isaac (v.8).

- B. God Approved of Casting Out Ishmael and His Mother, Hagar (21:9-21).
 1. Sarah observed that Ishmael posed a threat to Isaac (v.9).
 2. Sarah told Abraham to drive out Hagar and Ishmael (10-11).
 3. Sarah's plan was approved by God (12-13).
 4. Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away (vv.14).
 5. Hagar and Ishmael nearly died (vv.15-16)
 6. God rescued Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness (vv.17-19).
 7. God was with Ishmael (vv.20-21).

- C. God Prospered Abraham (21:22-32).
 1. Abimelech recognised that God was with Abraham (v.22).
 2. Abimelech requested Abraham to sign a treaty with him (v.23).
 3. Abraham agreed (v.24).
 4. Abraham complained that Abimelech's men forcibly took one of his wells (v.25).

5. Abimelech explained that he knew nothing about it (v.26)
6. Abraham ratified the covenant by setting apart seven lambs from the flock (v.27-28).
7. Abimelech inquired about the significance of the seven lambs (v.29).
8. Abraham explained that the lambs served as a witness of his rights to the well (v.30).
9. Abraham named the place Beersheba (v.31).
10. Abimelech returned to his home (v.32).

D. Abraham Worshipped the LORD God (21:33-34).

1. Abraham planted a tree in Beersheba and worshipped the LORD (v.33).
2. Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines (v.34).

The Birth of Isaac

The promised son was born to Abraham and Sarah when they were 100 and 90 years old respectively. Abraham was 75 when God gave him the promise. The age of Abraham was stated in verse 5. Its special mention reiterates that our God is a powerful God who can do all things. With God nothing is impossible! Two matters are emphasised with regard to the birth of Isaac. Firstly, God keeps His promises. The opening verse announcing the birth of Isaac emphasises that. Secondly, the Lord has His appointed time. Verse 2 states that “at the set time” the promise was fulfilled. We cannot hurry God. He is never too early or too late. His timing is always right.

Therein are some lessons for us. By nature we are impatient creatures. We need to learn that delays do not

imply inaction. God has the appointed time. So when we pray and make our petitions to God, let us make sure that we pray in the will of God. God will answer when the time is right.

On his part, Abraham circumcised the child on the eighth day. Circumcision was a commandment from God. Every uncircumcised male child would be deprived of the special blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants. As the children of the same faith, we “are the children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7). We “are blessed with faithful Abraham,” – “So then they be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Galatians 3:9). It was also recorded “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:14). Since the sign of the covenant in the New Testament is water baptism, just as God commanded Abraham to circumcise his children, we should also baptise our infant children.

Sarah was overjoyed at the birth of Isaac. God not only gave her a son, but in the process her aged body was also strengthened to carry the child for nine months, to bear the pains at childbirth, and to nurse Isaac after his birth (v.7)! How great is the LORD our God.

A Painful Parting

Abraham threw a great feast when Isaac was weaned¹. There was great rejoicing but Sarah observed Ishmael, who would then be about sixteen or seventeen years old, “mocking” (v.9). The word for “mocking” in Hebrew could be translated “playing,”

¹ Isaac would be about two or three years when he was weaned.

“poking fun” or even fondling.”² But Paul the Apostle described Ishmael as “persecuting” Isaac (Galatians 4:29)³. This constituted an attitude of Ishmael not only against Isaac but also in defiance of God’s revealed purpose for Isaac. Instead of yielding to God’s sovereign purpose, Ishmael made life impossible for Isaac and Sarah. Sarah reported Ishmael’s abusive treatment and demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away (v.10).

One can understand how Abraham must have felt. Abraham was eighty-six years old when he had Ishmael. For at least sixteen years, Ishmael was his joy. Since the promised son was so long delayed, Abraham might have considered Ishmael as his heir. The LORD knew Abraham’s predicament. So He spoke to Abraham and comforted him. The LORD took Sarah’s side. He reminded Abraham that Isaac was the promised son. However, God would also make a great nation through Ishmael, because he too was Abraham’s seed. Hence the LORD instructed Abraham to do as Sarah requested.

We may argue that it was all right for Hagar and Ishmael to remain with Abraham. Ishmael could be disciplined to accept the fact that Isaac was the rightful heir. Whatever good reasons we can marshal to support Hagar and Ishmael’s case, one strong reason against it was our Lord’s specific instructions. Isaac was the promised and chosen heir. The fact that Ishmael

was not chosen did not mean that God did not care for him and his mother. Our LORD, the omniscient God, knows what is best. By implication, their remaining with the family would develop insurmountable problems. With the benefit of hindsight today, we see that even though they had been separated, the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac continue to be at war with no clear sign of an amicable and peaceful solution. Abraham trusted and obeyed by sending Ishmael and Hagar away.

Similarly, we may be faced with our “Hagar and Ishmael”. We may resort to bargaining with God and going against His wishes. We often reason that we can control whatever bad developments that may occur as a result of our choices. We feel that there is nothing wrong with having friends with dubious beliefs and behaviour. We feel that we are strong enough to resist temptations. Our defence is often “I know what I am doing, don’t worry, I can handle it.” But history has proven otherwise. Many spiritual shipwrecks have happened on the basis of such reasoning. Let us learn from Abraham. Although it grieved him deeply to send Hagar and Ishmael away, he trusted and obeyed God.

God Cares

What Abraham could not do for Hagar and Ishmael, God did. When all the provisions given by Abraham had been consumed, God took charge. It was a touching scene. The weakened Ishmael lay under a shrub, while Hagar sat a distance away and “lift up her voice, and wept” (v.16). God heard the cries of Ishmael. God spoke to Hagar and provided for them. God promised that He would make Ishmael a great nation. This assured them of their future. Hagar brought Ishmael back to

² Hamilton, pp.78-79. Refer for a discussion of the various usages of the word.

³ Galatians 4:29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now.

Egypt where he took a wife. The narrative on Ishmael ends here with the statement that “God was with the lad” (v.20). He was mentioned only once again when Abraham died (Genesis 25:9-18).

Settling A Dispute

Abimelech, the king of Gerar, came with the commander-in-chief of his army to make peace with Abraham. Abimelech was shrewd. He had observed that God was with Abraham in all his endeavours, and had blessed him a great deal. He was worried that one day Abraham’s descendants might be stronger than his. He did not bear any grudges against Abraham for lying to him in the past regarding his relationship with Sarah. The fact that he came personally to make a peace covenant speaks for itself. He wanted to provide a certain amount of security and protection for his descendants. Their dialogue contained mutual respect. There were no further apologies or references to the past.

Abimelech wanted an understanding of peace between them. Abraham agreed but took the opportunity to settle the matter of the disputed well. Abraham complained that a well, dug by his servants, was violently taken away by Abimelech’s men. Abimelech denied any knowledge of it. Abraham, who had shown that he too was interested in making peace with him, now gave Abimelech sheep and oxen for the covenant ceremony. Although the well was his, Abraham paid for its possession using seven ewe lambs. The point is if there were to be peace, there must be justice. The manner in which these two men came together to make a long-term peace agreement is exemplary. They had mutual respect. Their good intentions

and purposes were gently conveyed. Both parties showed their genuine desire for peace and justice. Any current anomalies were handled honestly and cordially. There was a spirit of taking and giving.

God the Eternal One

Abraham called God “the LORD, the everlasting God” -- in Hebrew, Jehovah El Olam. This is the only occasion in Genesis that God was referred to using this name. After their covenant, Abimelech gave Abraham the freedom to move and settle wherever he wished in his territory, which was later known as the land of the Philistines.

As Abraham made his first covenant in regard to the land, establishing himself and his seed in Beersheba, he thankfully acknowledged the everlasting faithfulness of God in regard to His promises. By the same token, we who are His children should take comfort that God is eternal and He does not change His mind.

SUMMARY

God is faithful in all His dealings with His people. What He promises He will fulfil. But He has His own appointed time. On our part we should keep trusting and waiting upon Him.

There are difficult choices in life. Let us ask for God’s discernment. The rationale is that God knows the consequences of our actions. We ought to act accordingly to His commandments and cut out the excuses.

Finally, in seeking peace with others, we can learn from the example of Abimelech and Abraham.

END

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DAILY Readings & Discussion Questions

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Genesis 21:1-8; Deuteronomy 7:6-11; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9.

TUESDAY: Genesis 21:9-11; Ephesians 1:3-14.

WEDNESDAY: Genesis 21:12-21; Luke 9:57-62; Luke 14:26-27.

THURSDAY: Genesis 21:22-32; Matthew 18:15-17, Proverbs 16:5-7.

FRIDAY: Genesis 21:33-34; Isaiah 40:28-31; Psalm 90:1-17.

Discussion Questions

1. How long did Abraham have to wait for the son that God had promised him? What does this teach us about God?

2. What was the reason for Sarah's rejoicing? How does that help us in our daily Christian living?

3. What did Ishmael do when Abraham threw a great feast to celebrate the weaning of Isaac? If it took two to three years to wean a baby, how old was Ishmael at this time?

4. Why did Sarah demand that Hagar and Ishmael leave Abraham's household?

5. How did Abraham resolve the problem in question (4)? What can we learn from Abraham's example?

6. What do we learn about God's nature and character in His care for Hagar and Ishmael as recorded in verses 12-21?

9. What new name did Abraham call God? How does this name encourage and comfort us?

7. Why did Abimelech want to make a treaty with Abraham?

10. What are some aspects of God's character in this chapter that are especially meaningful to you?

8. How does Abraham's covenant with Abimelech tell us about Abraham's relationship with the other inhabitants of the land? How should we treat our brethren in Christ?
