

June 9- Genesis 21-23 Abraham & Isaac

Chapter 21

The promise of a son for BOTH Abraham and Sarah is finally fulfilled when Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90. They named him “laughter” -Isaac- because of the preposterous nature of the way their family came to be. A celebration for a child being weaned at this time in history would also be a celebration that a child didn’t die in infancy (as was common). Isaac survived, and so Sarah’s old jealousies and insecurities rear their head once she sees that her son has survived. She doesn’t want Isaac to have to share his inheritance with Ishmael, so Sarah demands that both Hagar and Ishmael be cast out. This is similar story to when Hagar left their household on her own when she was pregnant, but this time it is not her choice to leave. After 13 years of seeing Ishmael as his flesh and blood, and for many of those years his only son, I’m sure this matter was more than distressing for Abraham, I’m sure he did turn to God in prayer to figure out what to do. God surprisingly urges him to follow Sarah’s wishes and cast out his eldest son and his mother, but God stays true to God’s promises for Ishmael and reassures Abraham that Ishmael will come to be part of the broader promise of numerous descendants for Abraham. Abraham did his best to provide what Hagar and Ishmael needed as he sent them away, giving them a skin of water and bread. But, in the heat of the desert it wasn’t long before the water ran out, and Hagar was sure they were both going to die in the wilderness. She left Ishmael under a bush and walked a long way off because she didn’t want to see him die, and she lamented to the Lord. Again, God “HEARD” her cries and renewed the promises to make Ishmael a great nation, and then the Lord provided what she needed with a well of water. Ishmael grew up in that wilderness and became a skilled hunter with the bow, and when he came of age his mother returned to Egypt to find a wife for him from among her own people, as was the custom.

Beginning in vs. 22, we have another short story about Abimelech (the Canaanite king whom Abraham assumed had no reverence for God, but seems to have a remarkable respect for Abraham’s God and traditions. The two men formed a covenant with one another never to deal falsely with one another, but later Abimelech’s servant seized Abraham’s well (a wrong doing). Abraham complained to Abimelech who had no idea this was going on. Abraham again led Abimelech in making a covenant with him to see with his own eyes what was going on so that the king himself could bear witness to the fact that Abraham had dug the new well, therefore it was his. The planting of a Tamarisk tree marks that place as a holy place of worship.

Chapter 22

At first glance, this chapter of Genesis reveals a sadistic God who plays mind games with his beloved. The threat to the fulfillment of the covenant promise continues as now God tests Abraham’s trust and obedience by demanding that he sacrifice his only remaining son -the son who, chapter 21 tells us, is the one through whom offspring will be named for Abraham. The stakes are high, as Isaac is now the ONLY son. Yet, Abraham obeys and sets out once again for an unknown place where he is to sacrifice his son. It doesn’t say whether or not he consults Sarah in this matter -my guess is not- that’s why he sets out so early in the morning with only 2 servants! Yet, this was not Abraham’s first experience with God. Abraham and God share an intimate, covenantal relationship with one another, and it seems all along that Abraham didn’t actually expect his son to die from the sacrifice that he obediently tried to carry out. When they stopped at the base of Mt. Moriah, he told the servants to wait for both he and his son to return, and when Isaac asked where the sacrifice was Abraham’s response turned out to be what happened “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.” When they arrived at the appropriate place, Abraham bound his son, and raised his knife, and finally at the last moment was interrupted by the divine messenger who did indeed provide the ram in the thicket for Abraham’s sacrifice. As part of a covenantal relationship, Abraham fully trust God to the point of

not withholding his only son, and God provides for Abraham so that life can move forward. This is a disturbing story, but it's necessary. For in the ancient world the nations that surrounded Abraham and his descendants all practiced child sacrifice. This story is a polemic against that kind of evil, showing forth the God of Abraham to be a very different kind of God, a God who does not desire the blood of children, but who provides a way for those children to live and thrive. Vs.23 shows the connection between Abraham's family and Rebecca's family.

Chapter 23

Sarah lives 37 years after giving birth to Isaac! She dies at 127, and Abraham seeks out an appropriate place to bury her and all the rest of their dead. He enters negotiations with his Hittite neighbors over the ideal burial plot for his beloved wife. The Hittite not only offers him the cave he is seeking, but also the field in front of it for further burials, and they exchange the price agreed. Abraham buried Sarah in the cave.