

Sent home by Abimelech with a verbal spanking, Abraham and Sarah were perhaps subdued upon realizing how their fears had jeopardized the very potential of Sarah ever conceiving the promised son. But for God's personal intervention all of the promises and dreams could have been lost. Aren't we thankful our salvation and eternal life rest on His faithfulness not ours? Yes, upon Christ's finished work on the cross not our paltry, inadequate works no matter how well intentioned.

Yet despite their complicity in enabling the incident, God even moved Abimelech to make restitution to them for his transgression against Abraham and moved Abraham to undertake a priestly role in interceding for Abimelech and his household. The continuing interactions between Abimelech and Abraham and their descendants will be interesting to follow as we move through Genesis—and the rest of the Old Testament.

Back home, God soon arrived at their tent as earlier promised and without further rebuke made Sarah able to conceive. Though she had laughed at first at the promise of God, Genesis 18:12, she reconsidered after He called her on it.

Hebrews 11:11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

So by faith the aged couple, with God's blessing, came together again, this time hoping against hope for the promised son they so desired.

Romans 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. 18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. 19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: 20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. 22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

If Sarah had the normal discomforts of pregnancy or had second thoughts while in the intensity and pains of childbirth they aren't mentioned here and were soon forgotten. The Lord describes it accurately, applying it as an example of the disciples' coming sorrow then joy over His crucifixion and resurrection.

John 16:21 A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

The elderly couple laughed for joy and, as directed, named him Isaac [laughter], reflecting their joy the rest of their lives together with him. "All will laugh with me." How many rejoiced when God's Son arrived as a wee baby?

How many anguished while He was dying on the cross? How many rejoiced when He arose? We join those who did each time we gather to remember Him.

Abraham obediently circumcised his son marking him with the sign that would be his daily reminder of God's covenant with Abraham's seed. And Sarah rejoiced daily as she fed him at her breast. (Remember another older lady that was enabled to enjoy this? Naomi.)

But the next event in their lives was not so pleasant. The son of the bond woman displayed his true nature (and incidentally hers). He was about fifteen, an immature teen who was likely reflecting "normal" feelings of rejection and jealousy over his younger, more favored, half brother who had displaced him from his father's devoted sole attention. So here is another of many dysfunctional families described in Genesis and beyond. God doesn't hide their problems, nor the failures that led to them. We can learn from these stories, noting the mistakes, the consequences, and sometimes blessings, that followed. But "dysfunctional" is really a polite name for sinful, which we all are. Godly parents and godly adults considering marriage need to be fully aware of the traps our sinful natures will spring on us and our families if the inherited inborn sin of our children is ignored.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately [incurably] wicked: who can know it?

Heartless, cruel, selfish, unjust, intolerant,—all words that may come to mind when we consider Sarah's expulsion of her hapless handmaid. Yet God takes a different view of it. Abraham is very hesitant to disinherit and expel his son and his mother, the handmaid. But God intervenes and directs him to heed Sarah's demand's. Why? **"Because in Isaac shall thy seed be called."** This very specific promise became the basis for what was the greatest act of faith attributable to any man in history when Abraham set out to sacrifice his son expecting his resurrection. But He does comfort Abraham with His promise that Ishmael will not only survive but father a nation, because he is Abraham's seed. He, by the grace and mercy of God, is included in the original promise of great nations descending from Abraham. God's purposes are being carried out even if to our eyes things are out of control. He is unshaken in His foreknowledge as He skillfully weaves the present as time emerges from the future and proceeds into the past. Yes, He knows what He is about and is tending Time as a shepherd tends his flock. Though grievous enemies of Israel would emerge from these early events God later would use them for needed repeated discipline of His people over their history spanning hundreds of years.

Yet in so doing He also gave these nations "a ringside seat"—an opportunity to observe His power, His faithfulness, His mercy and His blessings upon His chosen people despite their failures; a mute invitation to humble themselves at His feet, and receive His mercy too. While no nations have done so yet they will in the Millennial reign

of Christ. Meanwhile, even in Old Testament times, individual Gentiles did humble themselves before Jehovah. People like Ruth, Uriah the Hittite, Nebuchadnezzar. Watch for more of them as you go through the scriptures.

Casting out the bondmaid not only had consequences at the time, it also portrayed a much larger scenario that played out later in the history of Israel. Law was replaced by Grace. The Law was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. His righteous life under it rightly condemned everyone who was under it, "for all have sinned and [do] come short of the glory of God," Romans 3:23. Paul is led by the Spirit to use the "free woman" and the "bond woman" to illustrate the displacement of the Law of Moses by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, in his powerful appeal to Christians tempted to put them selves under the Law.

Galatians 4:21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? 22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. 24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. 25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. 26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. 28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. 29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Though cast out and abandoned by her master's obedience to His command, God did not abandon her. Again she is alone without hope in the wilderness and about to perish. This time He has an angel call to her from heaven. He directs her to a bubbling well later named Beersheba. The fifteen year old becomes a good archer and wilderness survivor. He later married an Egyptian Hagar selected for him and fathered the great nation promised her by the angel.

Abraham is then approached by Abimelech with the chief captain of his army. They acknowledged Abraham's God and sought to make a treaty of peace with him. Why? Why now? Were they uneasy because of their previous experience with Abraham's deception regarding Sarah's

marital status? His testimony to them had been gravely compromised and it contradicted their perception that God was with Him in all he did. They desired some guarantee of safety from this powerful alien who had moved in and become their neighbor. They had courteously and generously granted him permission to temporarily use their land while in the vicinity. As we learn later Abraham was there because of a famine in the area where he had been living. Abimelech's land was watered by wells offering a refuge for those displaced by famines elsewhere. But there had been some controversy over the use of the wells so Abraham sought to resolve that. Abimelech professed good will and ignorance of the strife over the wells. Abraham resolved it by presenting seven ewe lambs as payment for the water rights for the particular well at hand. They made a contract allowing Abraham water rights for that well, calling it Beersheba, "well of the oath." Abraham settled down there planting a grove to shade his tents. It may have been the same well God's angel pointed Hagar to after she had been expelled by Abraham. It figures in history down through the Old Testament and still exists with a city of that name in the south of the nation of Israel. One can follow its interesting history in the Bible.

Abraham was careful to keep his relationships with the occupants of the land "at arms length." No cozy relationships with the peoples his descendants were to invade and displace some four generations in the future. He is an example for the believer today. Though we will reign over the earth with Christ its king we do not seek to dominate it now without Him. And we are to keep our relationships with the world "at arms length," respectful, formal and upright as aliens and pilgrims. We decline to meddle in the affairs of this world and its governments, and we obey the powers that be while paying our taxes and giving honor and respect due those in power as God's appointees. Abraham was in the "world" but not of it.

John 17:13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. 20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

By Ronald Canner, August 3, 2010

Here is a project for those interested. Use a concordance to trace the history of Ishmael's descendants through scripture.

Do you think Ishmael's descendants are still around? If so, who are they? If so, will Ishmael's descendants play a role in the coming Great Tribulation forecast by Daniel and the Lord Jesus?

We can ask the same questions about the Philistines. Do you think the Philistines, whose king made a covenant with Abraham, are still around? If so, who are they? If so, will the Philistines' descendants play a role in the coming Great Tribulation forecast by Daniel and the Lord?