

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 20

Chapter 20

The end of chapter 19 spoke of the conception and birth of Moab and Ammi, the daughters of Lot. We must remember that the angel of the LORD made the final announcement for the conception of Isaac the day before the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah and two other villages in the valley of Siddon and the conception of the two boys occurred in the following two nights. Therefore, the conceptions of Isaac, Moab and Ammi occurred within a month or so of each other.

The end of chapter 19 simply completes the story by telling of the successful births of Moab and Ammi nine months later.

Chapter 20 returns the narrative to the destruction of the valley of Siddon. It was time for Abraham to move; however, the conception of Isaac had not occurred yet.

Abraham Move from Hebron to Gerar

Genesis 20:1 Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar.

It was a 95 mile journey southwest from Hebron to Kadesh, a village under Egyptian control (located in Saudi Arabia today) and then a 45 mile journey north to Gerar. Why Abraham journeyed 40 miles south out of the way; we do not know! But he did. Gerar was located in the area controlled by the Canaanites near the area under the control of the Philistines.

Abraham and Abimelech

Genesis 20:2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, " She is my sister." So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

A flawed man, even in a One-on-one relationship with the LORD, still has a propensity to act as a flawed man. Here, Abraham makes the same mistake that he made with Sarah when they entered Egypt. Again he lied to Abimelech about Sarah's being his wife. It needs to be clearly understood that a half-truth is still a lie.

As the king of Gerar, Abimelech was basically the mayor of the village. But we must ask the question, "Why would this man want a 90 year old woman as a wife"? Verse 17 of this chapter answers the question.

God and Abimelech

Genesis 20:3 **But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married."** 4 Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation, even *though* blameless? 5 "Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." 6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 "Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours." 8 So Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were greatly frightened.

Notice that the LORD had a special place in His heart for Abimelech; He would not allow Abimelech to approach Sarah and commit a sin with her. Therefore, we can safely say that this dream occurred the night Abimelech took Sarah into his house.

In application, this passage shows three things concerning the LORD's attitude toward people. First, even the best intentions by a person of integrity can result in a sin against the LORD. He will seek to intervene in the person's life who must quickly redirect his intentions and ways. Second, if the course of action is not abandoned, the LORD will bring judgment on the sinful person. Third, the sin of one person will affect the lives of all persons connected to him.

Abimelech and Abraham

Genesis 20:9 **Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done."** 10 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?" 11 And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place; and they will kill me because of my wife. 12 "Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife; 13 and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'"

Here is the passage that has been referenced several times which shows Abraham's biological relationship to Sarah. This passage indicates that the decision concerning how they would

introduce each other was made about the time they entered Canaan land; it was not a new idea; it was probably put in place shortly before they entered Egypt.

Abimelech's Gift to Abraham

Genesis 20:14 **Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him.** ¹⁵ **And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; settle wherever you please."** ¹⁶ **And to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared."**

Abimelech realized that simply taking Sarah into his home was a sin that needed to be rectified. For that sin, Abimelech paid Abraham 1,000 pieces of silver as well as "sheep and oxen and male and female servants." Abimelech added to the wealth of Abraham with this compensation. In addition, Abimelech offered Abraham the choice of pitching his tents wherever he wanted in his land.

Abraham's Prayer

Genesis 20:17 **And Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore *children*.** ¹⁸ **For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.**

As promised to Abimelech in his dream, Abraham prayed for him. His prayer was effective; his prayer was healing; the LORD healed Abimelech. Here we discover why Abimelech took Sarah into his household; he was childless. He had a wife and maids who had not given him a child. It was his hope that Sarah would change his luck and give him a child.

This passage poses a problem in timing. If the LORD kept Abimelech from having children because of Sarah, how long was she in his care? Had he and his wife and maids stopped having children or did he have no children? Opinions may vary at this point and no one knows the correct answer. However, it seems that Abimelech's wife and maids had never had children in anticipation of this incident. It was Abimelech who needed the healing and because of Abraham's prayer, "God healed Abimelech." What a witness to the Canaanite people of the power of the One Almighty God!

Chapter 21

Birth of Isaac

Genesis 21:1 Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised.² So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.³ And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.⁴ Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.⁵ Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.⁶ And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."⁷ And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Abraham and Sarah, with all their clan, had settled in Gerar after Abimelech released Sarah from his house. Evidently, Sarah was not pregnant while she was in Abimelech's care. The timeline seems to be as follow:

1. The LORD promised Abraham that Sarah would bear a child in the same "season" next year. (Gen. 17:21)
2. The LORD required the house of Abraham to participate in the circumcision ceremony. (Gen. 17:23)
3. The LORD and two angels joined Abraham and promised that Sarah would bear a child in the same "time" next year. (Gen. 18:10)
4. The two angels left Abraham and entered Sodom and the destruction of the villages occurred on the following day. (Gen. 19)
5. The daughters of Lot conceived children with him during the two nights following the destruction. (Gen. 19)
6. Abraham moved his family to Kadish and then back to Gerar where Abimelech took Sarah to make her his wife. (Gen. 20)
7. To protect him the LORD did not allow Abimelech to take Sarah as a wife and Sarah was returned to Abraham. (Gen. 20)
8. The LORD allowed Sarah to become pregnant with Isaac. (Gen. 21:2)

The timeline of events listed above seems to have taken place within the span of one season or 13 weeks. Therefore, the first announcement promising the birth of Isaac in the "same season next year" occurred at the beginning of the season and Sarah's conception noted at the end of the list occurred in the last days of the season. This timing allowed for Isaac to be conceived and born in the same season. For example, a child conceived at the end of spring on June 15, 2016 would be born at the beginning of spring on March 29, 2017.

The passage ends with the indication that Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Sarah was beside herself with joy; at the age of ninety, she had never thought that she would be able to nurse a child.

Isaac's Weaning Celebration

Genesis 21:8 And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

Children have been weaned at the age of four throughout the majority of history in the world and there is no reason to believe it was different with Isaac. In the last 75 years, the weaning of a child has lost its importance, especially in America, but in the rest of the world throughout time, it has been a time of joyous celebration for the entire family and closest friends. When Isaac was four years old, Ishmael was between 17 – 18 years old.

Sarah's Contempt for Hagar

Genesis 21:9 Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. ¹⁰ Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." ¹¹ And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. ¹² But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. ¹³ "And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant." ^{14a} 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.

At the celebration of the weaning of Isaac, Ishmael, now 17-18 years old, was laughing and jesting about the festivities of the celebration and it made Sarah angry. Sarah wanted Abraham to send him and his mother away from the family but Abraham did not want to do so. However, the LORD told Abraham that it was time for the two to move to another place. The time had come for Ishmael to take a wife, begin a family and be responsible for his mother. The LORD had a plan and this part of the story is especially important. Soon the LORD would ask Abraham to offer his only son on an altar on Mount Moriah and Isaac will be the only son living in Abraham's house. The following morning, after the LORD spoke to him. Abraham gave Hagar and Ishmael provisions and sent them to the east. Abraham was 104 years old and Sarah was 94 years old at the time of this separation.

Hagar in the Wilderness of Beersheba

Genesis 21:14b And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.

¹⁵ And the water in the skin was used up, and she left the boy under one of the

bushes.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.¹⁷ And 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.¹⁸ "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand; for I will make a great nation of him."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.²⁰ And God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness, and became an archer.²¹ And he lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Notice that Ishmael was just as concerned as Hagar about their immediate situation. Ishmael must have cried out to the LORD also because the LORD said, "**What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.**" The two were alone together in the wilderness of Beersheba, and they did not notice that the LORD was with them. They ran out of water and they did not notice the provision of the LORD. The two cried out to the LORD, and He answered. This story is an important reminder for people of faith; even in the darkest hours of life, the LORD is there, watching, providing, guiding, sustaining and training. The LORD heard the cries of both of them and He answered.

The wilderness of Beersheba was in the vicinity of the well of Beersheba. Even though this story identifies the place by that name, it had not been named yet. The naming of the well and the wilderness will occur when Abraham makes a covenant with Abimelech and Phicol in the next story in Genesis. The name Beersheba was recorded here to identify the location of Hagar and Ishmael when they cried out to the LORD.

The passage ends with the explanation that Ishmael became an archer and took an Egyptian wife of Hagar's choosing. We will not hear of Ishmael again until he rejoins Isaac to bury Abraham in the cave 71 years later.

Truce with Abraham

Genesis 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;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."
²⁴ And Abraham said, "I swear it."

This event with Abimelech occurred about the same time that Hagar and Ishmael were sent away from Abraham's house. Isaac would have been a little older than four years old at the time.

Abimelech had been watching Abraham for four years by the time of this passage. He saw that God was blessing Abraham in that desert area and it caused him to be fearful of Abraham and his God. In this passage, to ensure his own well-being and that of his descendants, Abimelech made a truce with Abraham.

Complaint of Abraham

Genesis 21:25 But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. 26 And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; neither did you tell me, nor did I hear of it until today."

Whether or not Abraham complained to Abimelech about the seizure of the well immediately after the truce or later, we do not know. The point of this story is that Abimelech's men seized the well that Abraham dug without Abimelech's knowledge.

Covenant of Abraham and Abimelech

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

Evidently, the truce was not good enough for Abraham. He wanted a covenant with Abimelech; therefore, they made a covenant. The word "covenant" means a "cut." Abraham gave Abimelech sheep and oxen and then they made a sacrifice to confirm their binding covenant. The offering was split in two and the two men walked between the two parts to seal their word to each other and the offering was burnt.

Seven Ewe Lambs

Genesis 21:28 Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. 29 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by yourselves?" 30 And he said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand in order that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well."

Abimelech did not expect the action of Abraham at this point. **"What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by yourselves?" "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand in order that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well."** Abraham had paid for the well that he had dug on Abimelech's land. The price was seven ewe lambs. The well was the first piece of property that Abraham actually owned in the land of the Canaanite people. Until this time, he was a guest on the land or he was renting property.

Location of Beersheba

Genesis 21:31 Therefore he called that place Beersheba; because there the two of them took an oath. **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.

“Beersheba” means “well of oath” or “well of seven.” This covenant between Abraham and Abimelech was mentioned in verse 27.

In this passage, Phicol, Abimelech’s commander is mentioned for the first time. He will be mentioned again with Abimelech in chapter 26, at least 70 years later and after the death of Abraham in connection with Isaac. In chapter 26, he is still the commander of Abimelech’s army.

A Tamarisk Tree

Genesis 21:33 And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. **34** And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.

The tamarisk tree has long featherlike branches with small clusters of tiny leaves and it produces beautiful pink blossoms in the spring months. When in bloom, the pink blossoms virtually hide the green leaves. It was a tree that would stand out in the wilderness of Beersheba; no one would dispute the ownership of this well because of this tree which Abraham planted.



A well at the Beersheba location with an old tamarisk tree near.