

The Faithfulness of God

Text: Gen. 21:14-34

Introduction:

1. In our last lesson we considered the spiritual lessons to be learned from the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael, drawing on the Apostle's allegory in Galatians 4. Now we return to the study of the text itself and the lessons we can learn from what takes place next in this chapter.
2. This section of Genesis 21 deals with two important events:
 - The separation of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham's camp (Vs. 14-21).
 - The peace treaty between Abraham and Abimelech (Vs. 22-34).
3. Both events bear testament to the faithfulness and mercy of God. We will note this in both the trial of Hagar and Ishmael (Vs. 14-21) and the treaty between Abraham and Abimelech (Vs. 22-34).

I. THE TRIAL OF HAGAR & ISHMAEL (Vs. 14-21)

A. The Catalyst of their Trial (Vs. 8-13)

1. The failure of Abraham. In many ways Hagar and Ishmael suffered due to Abraham's lapse of faith. We could say that in some ways they were the victims in the situation. It is a timely reminder that in a sin cursed world, suffering is sometimes inflicted upon others and the solution is not to turn against God in bitterness but to turn to God for solace, comfort and help.
2. The mocking of Ishmael. Ishmael's response to Isaac revealed his true character and that it would be unworkable to have the two together. It is of interest to note that Ishmael's antagonism towards Isaac was particularly manifested when Isaac was weaned and growing in maturity. While Isaac was still in infancy, Ishmael appears to have taken a low profile but when he "grew and was weaned", he began to assert himself. This teaches us some important principals:
 - a. The believer needs to move from infancy to maturity. There is nothing wrong with infancy. A newborn babe needs milk for that phase of his development. 1 Peter 2:2 says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." There is however something wrong with a state of prolonged infancy. This is the problem with the carnal Christian described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. The problem with the carnal Christian is not that he was once an infant. The problem with the carnal Christian is that he should have and could have grown beyond infancy to greater maturity but has chosen not to. Moving to meat does not mean you never drink milk again. An adult still benefits from a glass of milk as a part of his diet but an adult reliant only on milk will be a very sick and weak adult.
 - b. There comes a time when every believer needs to "grow and be weaned". That doesn't mean that we ever get to the place where

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we are self-sufficient and independent, with no need for any ministry from others. But it does mean that you mature and develop the capacity to eat the meat of the Word as well as drink the milk of the Word.

- c. The flesh life particularly begins to assert itself as the believer begins to mature beyond the fresh flush of infancy. Don't be surprised at the internal struggle when you seek to take steps forward in Christian maturity.

B. The Conditions of their Trial (Vs. 14-16)

They were:

1. Drifting (Vs. 14) – ‘wandered’. It appears that they lost their way in the wilderness of Beersheba. They had likely set out with the aim of getting to another settlement but got lost on their way. Henry Morris notes, “Archaeology has revealed that there were numerous settlements at this time in the vicinity of what later was known as Beersheba, and it seems that Hagar and Ishmael set out in this direction.”
2. Destitute (Vs. 15) – “the water was spent”. Their meagre resources soon ran out and they were in a desperate condition. Imagine the terrible thirst that must have gripped them both. Hagar was Ishmael's guide but she could not lead him to water. What a picture of the world's guides who may appear to sustain you for a time but in reality, it is short lived and soon you find yourself lost and on the brink of destruction.
3. Dying (Vs. 16a) – “let me not see the death of the child”. It appears that Ishmael was worse off than his mother and was now on the brink of death.
4. Despairing (Vs. 16b) – “she...lift up her voice, and wept”. Hagar and Ishmael were broken hearted and filled with sorrow.

C. The Compassion in their Trial (Vs. 17-21)

In His mercy, God intervened in this tragic and hopeless seen, speaking to Hagar out of heaven, calming her fears and showing her water for Ishmael. There are at least two lessons we can draw from this account. There is a lesson in the area of:

1. Suffering – the answer to our trials is seen in God's gracious dealings in the account before us. We can be comforted and helped in our trials by:
 - a. The Presence of God – God heard Ishmael's cries (appears he appealed to God in prayer whereas his mother just cried in despair) and answered in the form of a Christophany – “the angel (messenger) of God speaks out of heaven.” God speaks those words of comfort and assurance – “fear not”.
 - b. The Promises of God – evidently Hagar had forgotten God's promises of Genesis 16 or had come to the point where she seriously doubted them. How often we are inclined to doubt God's promises in times of testing but in reality, it is those very promises to which we must cling in faith, trusting that God will come through in faithfulness.
 - c. The Provision of God – interestingly Hagar was blind to the well of water that was right there and available. How true this can be

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- of us also in our trials. Our tears cloud our vision so that we fail to see that God has made provision for our refreshment and sustaining. So often in the trials of life we fail to see the Divine Provisions God has made for us, and we forget the promises He has made to us. "We open our hands to receive what we think we need instead of asking Him to open our eyes to see what we already have. The answer to most problems is close at hand, if only we have eyes to see (John 6:1-13; 21:1-6)." (Wiersbe)
- d. The well of water reminds us that in our trials we have available to us:
 - i. The wellsprings of the Spirit (John 7:37-39)
 - ii. The water of the Scriptures (Eph. 5:26)
 2. Salvation – by way of application, we can see a touching salvation picture in this account. It is a good picture of:
 - a. The lost condition – Hagar and Ishmael were strangers, lost, destitute, dying, hopeless and broken. How well that describes our lost condition without Christ.
 - i. Strangers – they were outside of Abraham's camp and strangers to the covenant of promise. In like manner, without Christ we are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12).
 - ii. Lost – the sinner is one who wanders in the wilderness of this world without any true hope, purpose or meaning. Ephesians 2:12 describes it well, "without Christ...having no hope, and without God in the world."
 - iii. Destitute – one's own resources quickly run out. The world has no real and lasting solution to the sin problem.
 - iv. Dying – the lost sinner is one who is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). "...sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15).
 - v. Broken – sin, while offering temporary satisfaction, leaves the sinner in a hopeless and broken condition. Sin produces great sorrow. Unless the sinner repents, weeping in this life will translate into "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in the afterlife (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).
 - b. The Divine solution
 - i. God seeks – "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Lk. 19:10)
 - ii. God hears – the cry of a lost sinner is heard and responded to by a God who loves sinners and desires to reconcile them to Himself. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13)
 - iii. God saves – God provides living water to thirsty souls if they will come to Him. Sadly, like Hagar and Ishmael, so many fail to realise that the well of water to quench their thirst is right there and available in Christ for all who will repent, believe and receive. Jesus said to the people of His day, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have

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- life.” (John 5:40) It is a reminder that God must open the sinner’s eyes to see that Christ is the answer (Acts 26:18).
- iv. Illustration: We are reminded of another encounter at another well many years later in Samaria as recorded in John 4. There Christ met a Samaritan woman who came to the well to draw water. Christ saw a woman whose heart was thirsty to know true joy and fulfillment. She had sought comfort for the thirst in her heart in relationships with men but that failed. Christ now reveals Himself as “the living water” for thirsty souls.
 - v. John 4:13-14 “Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but **the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.**”
 - vi. Rev. 22:17 “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. **And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.**”
 - vii. Isaiah 12:3 “Therefore with joy shall ye draw **water out of the wells of salvation.**”

II. THE TREATY OF ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH (VS. 22-34)

God’s grace and faithfulness to Abraham is also seen in what now takes place between him and Abimelech, the Philistine king. It is quite remarkable considering the events recorded in Genesis 20 happened only a few years before (approx. 4-6 years).

A. The Request for the Treaty (Vs. 22-23)

- 1. The Testimony that inspired the Treaty (Vs. 22)
 - a. The recognition of Abraham’s testimony.
 - i. Abimelech and Phichol, the chief captain of his army, come seeking a peace treaty with Abraham. The reason stated by Abimelech is truly remarkable – “**God is with the in all that thou doest:** Now therefore swear unto me”.
 - ii. It is a truly wonderful thing when we so walk with God that the unsaved around us recognize a difference in our lives. Can your unsaved family, friends and work contacts see that God is with you in all you do? Do you have the kind of testimony that would even prompt them to approach you to ask “you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). We need to be a witness both by our **life** and with our **lips**.
 - iii. Considering the typology of the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael (previous sermon), it is significant that this event is said to have occurred “at that time” (Vs. 22). When believers die to the flesh and begin to allow the life of

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Christ to live through them, they will have a testimony that begins to impact others.

- iv. W.H. Griffith Thomas notes, “The ordinary uneventful days of a believer’s life are usually a better test of his true character than an emergency or crisis. It is sometimes possible to face a great occasion with wisdom and courage, and yet to fail in some simple, average experiences of daily living.”
 - b. The restoration of Abraham’s testimony.
 - i. This represents God’s gracious restoration of Abraham’s testimony considering the events that transpired between Abimelech and Abraham in Genesis 20. While Abraham was living deceitfully and leaning upon his own understanding, the result was a bad testimony before Abimelech. In fact, you would think that Abimelech would never come to trust Abraham again after that, that his testimony would be permanently marred in his eyes.
 - ii. Abimelech’s approach to Abraham is a blessed reminder that God is able to restore a broken testimony. You may have marred your testimony for Christ through backsliding and fleshly living, but if you will get right with God and let Him work with you, your testimony can be restored back to a place of usefulness.
 - c. The regard for Abraham’s testimony. That Abimelech would seek a covenant with a godly man like Abraham says something for the wisdom and character of this heathen king. Most rulers today are far more interested in seeking alliances with the wicked rather than the righteous.
2. The Terms of the Treaty (Vs. 23)
- Abimelech then outlines the proposed terms of the treaty. It was to be characterized by:
- a. Truthfulness – “that thou wilt not deal falsely”. No doubt this aspect of the treaty was partly motivated by Abimelech’s previous experience with Abraham.
 - b. Durableness – “with me, nor with my son, nor with my son’s son”. This was to be a lasting covenant. The request speaks again of the calibre of Abimelech. He wasn’t just concerned for his own welfare and reign but for the next generation who would follow him. What a contrast to the self-centred politicians of our day! How we need believers who will be faithful to the commitments they make.
 - c. Kindness – “according to the kindness”. Abimelech points to his own history of showing kindness to Abraham as the standard to follow. Kindness should also govern our relationships with others.

B. The Rebuke before the Treaty (Vs. 24-26)

1. The Principle in Abraham’s Rebuke (Vs. 24-25)
 - a. Abraham agrees to make a treaty with Abimelech but wisely raises an issue that needed to be resolved before peace could be made.

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- b. This is an important principle for establishing and maintaining peace in relationships. Issues cannot be ignored and glossed over. They have to be discussed honestly and plainly. The elephant in the room cannot be ignored. Sin must be dealt with plainly before there can be true peace. Abraham was not interested in “peace at any price”. Many believers settle for superficial, fake peace, pretending a significant issue does not exist between them but that is not the Bible way.
 - c. The restoration of Abraham’s testimony is again highlighted in this rebuke. Previously Abimelech was the one reproving Abraham, now Abraham is reproving Abimelech.
2. The Point of Abraham’s Rebuke (Vs. 25)
- a. Abimelech’s servants had forcibly taken over a well of water that belonged to Abraham. This injustice would have to be resolved if they were to move forward from here.
 - b. Prov. 27:5-6 “Open rebuke *is* better than secret love. Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.”
3. The Problem with Abraham’s Rebuke (Vs. 26)
- a. The problem was not in the content of Abraham’s rebuke but in its timing. Evidently, he had delayed doing anything about it and Abimelech rightly points out that it should have been brought to his attention earlier. “It is as much the duty of him who has a grievance to reveal it, as it is the duty of him who has caused the grievance to remove it.” (Whitelaw)
 - b. To his credit, Abimelech did not use his ignorance of the issue to justify inaction. Once he was made aware of the issue, he was prepared to rectify it. That is good leadership. Just because a leader is ignorant of something under his oversight does not mean he is released from all responsibility. Having been made aware of the issue, he must take ownership of the problem and deal with it.

C. The Ratifying of the Treaty (Vs. 27-32)

1. The Gifts of the Covenant (Vs. 27-30)
- a. The general gifts (Vs. 27). In the previous encounter with Abimelech and Abraham (Gen. 20), Abimelech gave gifts to Abraham. Now Abraham gives gifts to Abimelech. In the previous situation, Abimelech gave gifts to Abraham even though Abraham was in the wrong. Now Abraham gives gifts to Abimelech even though he is in the wrong. Reconciliation involves a selfless, sacrificial, giving approach.
 - b. The special gift (Vs. 28-30).
 - i. Seven ewe lambs are set aside. “The number seven represented completeness, sealing the covenant, and symbolizing Abraham’s permanent right to the well.” (Morris) This provokes a question from Abimelech as to the purpose of this to which Abraham replies, making it clear that it was to “be a witness” that the well belonged to Abraham.

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- ii. While it might appear that there is measure of mistrust in this agreement between the two men, in reality we see the principle of seeking to put things in place to avoid the same mistakes being repeated again in the future. While “seemingly betraying a secret suspicion of the prince’s veracity, the act aimed at preventing any recurrence of the grievance... Good men should not only rectify the wrongs they do to one another, but adopt all wise precautions against their repetition.” (Whitelaw)
 2. The Geographical Marker of the Covenant (Vs. 31-32)
 - a. Abraham names the location Beersheba because of this historical event that takes place there. “The word ‘Beersheba’ means “the well of the oath” or “the well of the seven”. It is interesting to know that seven wells have actually been found at the place which has been identified with Beersheba, twelve hours south-west of Hebron.” (Thomas)
 - b. Beersheba would go on to become a significant place in the lives of the patriarchs and the nation of Israel.
- D. The Reverence after the Treaty (Vs. 33-34)**
1. Abraham plants a grove. Groves would later become associated with idolatry and would be forbidden by God but we need to note that Abraham was not engaged in any kind of idolatry here. It seems he turned the well at Beersheba and surrounds into some kind of oasis, a place for rest and worship.
 2. Abraham calls on the name of the LORD. Abraham’s relationship with God is again highlighted. Abraham was a man who walked with God. No doubt this involved thanksgiving for what God had done. It is significant to note that Abraham also receives a fresh revelation of the Person of God as this is the first time God is referred to as “the everlasting God” in the Scriptures. Abraham already knew God as “the most high God” (14:18) and the “Almighty God” (17:1). Now here he uses a new name (as far as Abraham is concerned) for God, a name which expresses the eternal nature of God. Abraham has grown in the knowledge of God over the years since he has moved to Canaan. This new revelation of God’s character would prepare him for the next great crisis of his life – arguably the biggest trial of his life.
 3. Abraham sojourns in the land of the Philistines many days.

Conclusion:

1. Have you come to Christ for living water? Have you been saved or are you lost and trying to survive on the world’s meager resources?
2. To whom or what are you turning in your trial as a believer? Is it Christ the fountain of living waters or the empty, broken cisterns of this world (Jer. 2:13)?
3. Are you a peacemaker as a believer, prepared to sacrifice and deal with issues in order that the Lord might be magnified?