

Chapter 21 – Trouble Again - Just like a Soap Opera,
say, maybe, “The Young and the Old /S the Restless”

There’s four main stories going on in this chapter

1) the birth of Isaac, vs. 1-8

2) God’s plan to separate Isaac (the child of the promise) from Ishmael (the child of the flesh), vs. 9-13

3) God’s provision and care for Hagar and Ishmael, vs. 14-21
and

4) Abraham’s further dealings with Abimelech, vs. 22-34

The birth of Isaac: key words or phrases

1) *“the Lord visited Sarah as he had said”*

He’d said that he’d be back in chapter 18 and Sarah would have a son, and now that’s what’s happened

2) *“the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken”*

When God says something, you can count on that.

3) *“at the set-time” מוֹאֵד mo-ade’*

God had determined the proper time for Isaac to be born, just as he determined the proper time for Jesus to be born. No matter how strongly we like to believe in free will and making things happen on our own, we keep bumping up against scripture that tells us that God is in control and determines when things will happen as well as what things will happen.

How both can be true is a seeming contradiction or paradox that is simply beyond our present ability to comprehend. A good explanation will just have to wait until we’re dead and no longer seeing through a glass, darkly. And then it probably won’t really matter to us, hopefully we’ll have better stuff to do than sit around and think about such things

A little literary insight into the text

Isaac – laugh – mocking

These three words all sound alike; in fact, laughing and mocking are the same word, the meaning depends on the context.

This starts out as a happy chapter with the word “laugh” being mentioned in verse 3,4,5, twice in 6 and again in 7.

But then we get to the dark side of the word in verse 9.

This is sort of like the way that Yosemite Sam would laugh when he thought he was getting away with something, like the time he jumped out of the plane and told Bugs

Bunny, “So long, sucker!” and then started laughing as he parachuted to what he thought was safety but then he landed in a police car instead and his laugh changed.

I don’t mean to say that the use of the pun (words sounding alike with different meanings) was supposed to be funny, it wasn’t.

That’s just an example of how our author made careful use of his words to keep the story moving and to provide a transition from one theme to another.

So now after the laughter and happiness of the opening verses, we're at a feast that Abraham has thrown to celebrate Isaac's weaning.

Isaac would have been about 3 years old, so no doubt Sarah was celebrating too. But in the middle of the celebration, Sarah sees Ishmael, notice that she won't even use his name, making fun of or mocking or treating contemptuously, little Isaac, and she tells Abraham to get rid of him and Hagar.

Notice the subtle ways that these folks have changed in the past 13 years:

- 1) Sarah doesn't blame Abraham this time, she just tells him to get rid of the kid and his mother.
- 2) Abraham doesn't give in as quickly, but it says that the situation grieved him.
- 3) It's not Hagar causing the trouble this time, but Ishmael, evidently when an angel tells her to behave, she listens.

Perhaps the most important difference is that this time, unlike most of the other times when he's been faced with a crisis, Abraham doesn't act until he hears from God. Maybe he's finally learned to live more consistently with the faith that he's famous for. God tells Abraham to do what Sarah has said and not to worry because He will also make a nation out of Ishmael for Abraham's sake, but that Abraham's seed will come through Isaac.

Remember, whenever we see the word seed mentioned we're to think of two things:

- 1) the seed of the nation
and
- 2) the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head.

So in verse 14, Abraham rises early in the morning, just as he did when he saw the smoke of the destruction of the cities and as he will do when he goes to sacrifice Isaac, and gives Hagar and Ishmael a skin bottle of water and sends them on their way.

Not to make too much out of it, but speaking for those of us who are not early risers, there's only two reasons to make a special mention of rising early:

- 1) either you're looking forward to doing something
or 2) you're troubled and can't sleep.

Leastways, that are the only reasons that Bible people are mentioned as rising early.

We've already seen that Abraham rose early when he was troubled, just as Abimelech rose early when he was afraid.

Moses rose early when he went to meet with God and when he came down to build an altar.

The people rose early when they wanted to worship and later have an orgy before the golden calf.

Joshua rose early on the days of battle

Jacob rose early after his vision of the ladder (stairway) to heaven

Gideon rose early when he was checking his fleece

Samuel rose early to go check on his brothers in the army
David rose early when he was running from Saul
Hezekiah rose early when he was facing the Assyrians
Job rose early to offer sacrifices for his children
Jesus rose early to pray
and Paul got up in the middle of the night to go to Macedonia.
Anyway, Hagar and Ishmael are sent away.

Now, to answer it before it comes up, there are three possible reasons why this is not an example of how poorly women were treated in the Bible.

- 1) Abraham did not treat Hagar this way because she was a second-class woman, he had the authority to send her away because she was a servant or a slave and whether she was male or female didn't make any difference.
- 2) Abraham sent Hagar away not because she was just a woman and he could whatever he wanted to with her and not because his wife told him to, but because he was under instructions from God, so this is an example of the plan of God, not the injustice of society.
- 3) Paul said that this happened as it did, not because Hagar was a woman, but to help us understand our salvation.

To finish with Hagar and Ishmael for now:

They drink up the water and she decides that they're going to die, so she leaves him under a bush and wanders away "about a bowshot," which is perhaps a veiled reference to his future as a master archer, and waits to die.

They're both crying, and as is His way God hears the cry of Ishmael and sends an angel to reassure her and to remind her of his promise about Ishmael.

She sees a well that she'd somehow overlooked,

(Side trip thought: how many times have we overlooked all that we have around us when we get discouraged and tired? The verse never says that that angel made the well appear, just that she looked up and, by Gum, there is was)
they fill up the skin, get a drink, get their second wind, make their home in the wilderness. The next thing you know she's gone to Egypt to get him a wife (just as Abraham will send the servant to his homeland to get Isaac a wife), and later we'll see his lineage.

This separation of Isaac and Ishmael was very important to the thinking and theology of Paul. He mentions it in Galatians and Romans.

Paul tells us, and if he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then God tells us that we are to learn from the stories of the Old Testament because they were written for our benefit:

1Co 10:9 Nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted Him and were destroyed by serpents.

10 Nor murmur as some of them also murmured and were destroyed by the destroyer.

11 And all these things happened to them as examples; and it is written for our warning on whom the ends of the world have come.

1Co 10:5 But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were scattered in the wilderness.

6 And these things were our examples, that we should not be lusters after evil, as they also lusted.

Ro 15:4 For whatever things were written before **were written for our learning**, so that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

2Ti 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

17 that the man of God may be perfected, thoroughly furnished to every good work.

Ro 4:20 He did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God,

21 and being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was also able to perform.

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

23 Now **it was not written for him alone** that it was imputed to him,

24 **but for us also** to whom it is to be imputed, to the ones believing on Him who has raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

Allegory – something that has two meanings, the original or historic meaning and the deeper or spiritual truth that is being pointed to.

Examples are Pilgrims Progress, the Chronicles of Narnia (although C.S. Lewis always denied that), fables, and most prophecy.

In other words, an allegory means that the story or the event has a more important meaning behind it. “The moral of the story is.....”

According to Paul, the story of the conflict between the child of the flesh Ishmael, and the child of the Spirit or the Promise, Isaac, is an allegory. For him, Hagar represents Mt. Sinai and Ishmael represents the law. We can't be saved by looking to Mt. Sinai and trying to keep the law. Instead, we are saved by grace, by trusting in the mercy and love of God as shown by the death of Christ on the cross. We are children of the Promise and just as Ishmael mocked Isaac, so were the legalists (both Jewish and Christian) who thought that the Galatians had to keep the law still persecuting Paul and the other children of the promise.

Galatians 4:21-31

Romans 9:1-9

The final section deals with a treaty between Abraham and Abimelech. This is of interest if you're interested in treaties and trade relations between city dwellers and herdsmen three thousand years ago.

(If you are, I've got an article I bought out of Biblical Archaeologist Magazine that I'll share)

For us, the main point of interest is that we'll see a complication in lives when the son of Abraham and the son of Abimelech both break this covenant in chapter 26.