

Genesis 18:1 - 22:24 **Circumcision; God visits; Isaac is born; Isaac Sacrificed**

Introduction:

Last week you discussed the significance of the covenant between God and Abraham. Genesis 15 is perhaps the most pivotal of events recorded between the creation, the flood and the birth of Jesus. Here we see the heart of The Father in such vivid display. Abraham is unable to walk through the pool of blood in the blood covenant, so God Himself (Jesus) walks through on behalf of the man. Essentially, if either party cannot or will not honor the covenant principles, the other is free to do to him as was done to the animals. Two thousand years later, man has failed to keep the covenant, and God Himself, in the form of a man, Jesus, is slaughtered on the cross. The blood covenant is completed. What kind of God is this? He is the God who loves the world so much He is willing to give His only son, the one He loves, to die for the sins of all sinful man everywhere and throughout all time. This is what we can learn about the nature of God.

This man, Abraham, is a unique man who will father the entire people God will choose as the vehicle for the birth of the Messiah. By studying this man we can learn much about how God wants His people to live. His obedience and his righteousness is founded on the very instructions of God. Yet, he is not perfect. We learned of his lies in Egypt about his wife, Sarai, and he will repeat those sins again with Abimilech. There has been only one perfectly righteous man, Jesus the Messiah. But this man, Abraham is a good and righteous man who ushers in the era of the Torah.

Chapter 18 - God Comes to Visit

V. 1-8 Hashem (God) appears to Abraham, along with two angels, while Abraham is in a weakened condition from his circumcision. The sages say this visit is on the 3rd day following the circumcision, the most painful day of the operation. God is demonstrating the significance of this relationship between God and man, the very covenant itself; also demonstrating and modeling the need to reach out to those who are infirmed, and Abraham was truly infirmed, as were all the males of his household. We read last week he had an army of 318 servants born in his household. Every male in the household, eight days old and older, were circumcised. And God came to visit!



It is the heat of the day, in the Plains of Mamre, near Hebron, and Abraham is sitting at the door to his tent. When he discerns his visitors, Abraham rises, and runs to the men, and bows before them to implore them to come inside and be refreshed.

Think about this:

- Abraham is 99 years old
- He is recovering from major surgery 3 days earlier
- He runs to them - old men don't run in this culture
- He bows low to show respect - again, think about his pain
- He invites them to come in and stay awhile

“If I find favor in your eyes....”

- “Let some water be brought to wash your feet”
- “Recline under the tree”
- “Let me bring a morsel of bread to sustain you, and then you may go”

So in response Abraham:

- Instructs Sarah to bake bread (3 seahs or measures of fine (wheat) flour - conservative estimates places the volume of fine wheat flour at about 33 cups and less conservative estimates place the volume at about 60-80 cups of flour; enough to bake anywhere from 10 - 20 loaves. At the most, a man might eat one loaf of bread (3-4 cups of flour) per day if that is all he eats)
- Had a tender and good calf slaughtered and cooked
- Brought cream and milk, curds, butter, etc for the guests to eat

Abraham recognized the significance of his guests and spared nothing to show great hospitality to his visitors. In the custom of Bedouin hospitality, there might be many of Abraham's household who joined the guests at that meal.

What would you offer to serve to God if He came to visit your home?

V. 9-15 Sarah and the birth of Isaac.

- Promise of Isaac being born within the coming year.
- Sarah laughs and denies it. Laughs to herself, but God certainly heard her laugh.
- V. 13 “Is anything beyond Hashem?” (Is God's arm too short?” Numbers 11:23)

V. 17, 19 Why does God share His plans with Abraham?

- Abraham is surely to become a great and mighty nation (covenant).
- All the nations of the earth will bless themselves by Abraham.
- For I have loved him.
- He commands his children and his entire household in keeping the ways of Hashem, doing charity and justice (principles very important to God).
- In order that Abraham might be able to fulfill his side of the covenant agreement.

V. 20-32 Sad plans for Sodom and Gomorrah

- The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great. Remember that Abel's blood cried out. The created world cries out to God when sin becomes so great.

- Destruction is certain.
- While God and Abraham are talking, the angels (men) leave and go to Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Abraham negotiates with God to save the righteous of Sodom and Gomorrah - settling for God's commitment to save the cities if just 10 righteous people can be found.

Chapter 19 - The horrors of Sodom and Gomorrah

V. 1 Lot is found sitting at the gates to the city. Judges and city fathers are the ones who sit at the city gates. Here, they hear cases and judge for the citizens of the community. Lot is an important man in the city. While Sodom and Gomorrah had their impact on Lot, Lot remained a righteous man; a sinner to be sure, but righteous to the point of being saved from the destruction.

- In the midst of all the corruption of the cities, Lot, his wife, and their two daughters were spared because of Lot's righteousness.
- **What does this tell us about the nature of God?**
- The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah was so great Hashem was ready to destroy the cities. Tradition tells us the outcry involved sexual sin, sodomy, but also involved oppression, cruelty, and abuse, especially to sojourners and strangers.
- Lot and his daughters escape to the small town of Zoar, possibly located at the south end of the Dead Sea. Not the original destination imparted by the angels, but negotiated on by Lot.

V23 Abraham looked down to the Dead Sea from the trees of Mamre and saw the smoke rising from the earth.

V. 29 Lot was saved in part because of his relationship with Abraham.

V. 30-38 Lot and his daughters survive the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah but have the depressing sense that the whole world has been destroyed. (No doubt they have remembered the stories of the great flood when only one family was saved from total destruction)

- They dwelt in a cave, in isolation.
- The daughters felt it was their duty to begin repopulating the earth, their father being the only man available.
- Two sons are born, one by each daughter, Moab and Ben-ammi.
- These are the fathers of the nations of Moab and Ammonites who will play big roles in the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites.

Chapter 20 Abraham lies about Sarah once again

Abraham and Sarah leave Hebron and travel south into the Negev (desert, Yeshimon). Conditions are unsuitable so they travel west toward the Mediterranean Sea and settle in Gerar, in Philistia. Abimelech is king of the region and is known as being a good and righteous king, especially in contrast to Pharaoh in Egypt.

Out of fear Abraham once again claims Sarah is his sister and she is kidnapped by the reigning monarchy.

God appears to Abimelech in a dream and tells Abimelech he is about to die because he kidnapped Sarah, a married woman.

V. 4 Scripture is clear Abimelech had not approached Sarah. This is important information as God has promised that within the year she would conceive and bear a son, Isaac.

V. 6,7 God gives Abimelech a choice: Release Sarah to her husband who is a prophet, and Abraham will pray for Abimelech and Abimelech will be blessed; or, if he chooses to not return the woman, Abimelech will die as well all who are his.

- God calls Abraham a prophet who has the power to pray for a man and the man will be blessed. Perhaps, a part of this strategy or pronouncement is to let Abimelech know that Abraham is a man chosen by the Living God and is a blessed man. This word will spread far and wide and people will know Abraham is a special person.

V. 14-16 Abraham is enriched by Abimelech giving him flocks, cattle, servants and maidservants. Can we fully understand how wealthy and powerful Abraham is?

Abimelech gives Abraham a thousand pieces of silver and the opportunity to settle anywhere in the land he chooses.

V. 17, 18 Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech, Abimelech's wife and his maids. God had closed every orifice of the people of Abimelech's household. That means that not only were the wombs closed, but urination and defecation was impossible as well. This was truly a miserable affliction.

Chapter 21 the son of promise is born

v. 1-8 God remembered Sarah as He has promised and she conceived.

- Scripture says Isaac was born at the appointed time. What is the appointed time? (Gen. 18:10 - one year after God visits Abraham, possibly in the Spring around Passover)

- Isaac means “laughter”; “he laughs”; or “he will laugh”. Sarah proclaims “God has made laughter for me, everyone who hears will laugh with me”.
- Isaac was circumcised by Abraham on the **eighth day** (day of new beginnings - covenant).
- Abraham is 100 years old at the birth of Isaac. How old was Abraham when Ishmael was born? (86 years old: Genesis 16:16)
- The child grew and was weaned, probably at age 3-5 years, and a great feast was held to honor this son of Abraham. Some traditions record that Shem was in attendance of this great feast.

V. 9-20 Sarah is distressed by Ishmael, whom Abraham loved, and wanted him to be cast out.

- Ishmael was seen mocking Isaac and it upset Sarah. Some records state Ishmael loaded a bow with an arrow and pointed it at Isaac as if he was going to kill his brother.
- Remember, Ishmael is 14 years older than Isaac and now add the years to Isaac’s weaning and Ishmael is a young man, perhaps age 17-19 years.
- Sarah demands Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away and Abraham is grieved.
- God blesses the demand to send the two away and assures Abraham that Ishmael and Hagar will be blessed. Ishmael will become the father of nations as well since he is the son of Abraham.
- Abraham complies and sends the two out, with provisions but no additional men to protect them.

Vs. 17 God hears the lad cry and responds. At this point in time, Ishmael is a fatherless child, cast off by his earthly father and left to make it on his own. God promised He would protect and provide for Ishmael and He is faithful to His promise.

When Ishmael grew into a man Hagar sought a wife for him from Egypt - the world.

Pictures of what is to come (prophecies) in the narrative.

We might be inclined to ask why this story of the sending away of Hagar and Ishmael has to do with the story of Abraham and the birth of Isaac. Surely it has more to say than the fact having two mothers in one house gets real complicated; or even more than the fact that Ishmael needed to be far away from Isaac for God to accomplish His will and plan through this son of promise. If we look carefully we can see an interesting prophetic picture and gain a valuable lesson for our own lives today.

The story of Hagar is introduced immediately following the great blood covenant in Chapter 15. Not only did this blood covenant take place, but at that time Abraham learned a very dark and foreboding truth for the future: not only would he become the father of a great nation, his offspring would be strangers in a foreign land and

even held captive as slaves in that land - they would be oppressed. We know that land would be Egypt.

Hagar is oppressed in the household of Sarah and Abraham - she is a stranger. She is Egyptian and in Hebrew Hagar's name means "stranger". She too is in a strange land.

With a heavy heart Abraham places bread on Hagar's shoulder and gives her a skin of water to take with her, and sends out into the midbar, desert, trusting God would provide further for her. Very soon Hagar runs into a water crisis - nothing to drink and is prepared to die. God intervenes and miraculously shows her water to sustain her and Ishmael. God promises that her son will become the head of a great nation.

Four hundred years later the offspring of Abraham are strangers oppressed in a foreign land, Egypt. God leads them away from the oppression into the midbar, desert. They leave with bowls of bread on their shoulders but very soon experience a water crisis; actually two water crises. Their backs are against the Red Sea and Pharaoh is bearing down on them with a mighty army of charioteers. God parts the water miraculously and they survive. However, in just three days they run out of water to drink and are about to die. God again rescues them by miraculously providing water to drink. And where are the Israelites going? They are going to take the land and become a great nation.

God has a heart for the stranger. We are, after all, strangers in this world and making our way to the Promised Land through a virtual desert of life. Jesus Himself was a stranger in this world and was certainly oppressed. We will read many times in Torah the commands to treat the stranger, sojourner, foreigner, and the convert with kindness, dignity and respect. God is teaching us through this story of Hagar and Ishmael being rejected and sent out, and then receiving the lovingkindness (chesedness) of the Father of all Mankind, to be gracious to strangers. Who are the strangers in our lives today that we should treat with dignity, kindness and respect?

V. 22-34 Abraham is still dwelling in the land of the Philistines under the monarchy of Abimelech. Abimelech recognizes the extraordinary power and protection Abraham has and is concerned Abraham might overpower him and take his kingdom. Abimelech and Phicol, commander of the army, approach Abraham to make a peace pact.

Abraham however brings up a problem over a well dug by Abraham's servants. The well had been taken over by Philistines. Abraham paid the price of seven ewes to Abimelech to establish for all time that he, Abraham, honestly purchased this well for his own use.

Abraham named the place Beer-sheba because the two of them took an oath at this place.

Here Abraham planted a tamarisk tree and proclaimed the “Name of Hashem, God of the Universe”.

Chapter 22 - Abraham offers Isaac on the altar; Known as the, “Akeidah, the binding of Isaac”.

This is another of the greatly pivotal episodes in the life of Abraham that has great bearing on God’s plan of redemption. In fact, this is considered in Jewish tradition the final of ten trials Abraham is to endure. Each of these ten trials has a unique role in the development of the plan God has to redeem sinful man to Himself.

The Ten Trials and the implication for God’s plan of redemption: Some of these are recorded in the Midrash, a compilation of commentaries by the sages through the years. Additionally, some are recorded in the Book of Jasher and Josephus’ “Antiquities of the Jews”.

1. Abraham hides for 13 years from Nimrod who wants to kill him
 - Abraham is hiding at the house of Shem and studies the Torah.
2. Nimrod throws Abraham into a burning furnace and yet he is saved
 - God has called Abraham and just as He saved other of His great saints, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, or the Apostle Paul, God saved Abraham.
3. God commands Abraham to leave his homeland and family
 - God establishes the concept of the Promised Land. This is a land that through Abraham’s descendents will bring the redeeming messiah into the world.
4. A famine forces Abraham to leave Canaan
 - Heaven is not to be found on this earth in this lifetime (dispensation). Trials on this earth will make us long for the redemptive nature of the messiah and the world to come.
5. Pharaoh’s officials kidnap Sarah
 - Satan will do whatever he can to thwart the plan of God and the safety of God’s people. Satan has allowed the object of Abraham’s heart to be stolen. If Satan can tarnish Sarah, where will the promised son come from who will provide the promised messiah?
6. Abraham goes to war to rescue Lot
 - To what lengths will God go to preserve and protect His children? Not only did Abraham preserve his family member, he preserved the rest of the Sodomite people, representing the fact that through the seeds of Abraham, the entire world will be blessed.
7. God tells Abraham his offspring will suffer under oppression by four kingdoms
 - From Genesis 15 we see Abraham faints at the thought of committing all his progeny to uphold the covenant with the Living God. God is telling Abraham that even though his descendents will sin to such a degree that foreign powers will dominate them, God’s love for his people will continue true and strong.

8. God commands Abraham to circumcise himself and Ishmael, and all males in his household 8 days and older
 - God establishes a covenantal sign for all His children. Paul says we should be circumcised in our hearts. (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:29)
9. God commands Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael
 - Synchronism will destroy the fidelity of God's people. The son of promise will be compromised by the illegitimate son, even though the illegitimate son is loved by the father. God's children must maintain a separation in the world and hold themselves to God's calling. Think about the parable of the wheat and the tares. (Matt. 13:24-30)
10. God commands Abraham to offer Isaac on the altar
 - The picture of the redeeming Messiah, willingly going to the altar (cross) for the sins of unrighteous man.

How old was Isaac when God told Abraham to offer him on the altar?

Most of the sages connect the Akeidah with the death of Sarah in chapter 23. If that is true, Sarah died at age 127 years which would make Isaac 37 years old. Certainly not the tender young lad we grew up seeing on the flannel graph story boards. We will discuss this further in next week's lesson.

V. 1-10 As discussed in our introduction lesson, there are several parallels to the Akeidah story and the crucifixion of Christ.

- Take your son, your only son, whom you love.
- Go to the land of Moriah, present day Jerusalem, Mount Moriah is the Temple Mount, where Yeshua was crucified.
- Bring him as an offering: Yeshua was a sacrifice covering the sins of mankind.
- On the third day (Abraham is traveling from Beer-Sheba, perhaps 60 miles away).
- Isaac carried the wood for the offering on his own back. Yeshua carried the wood of the cross on His own back.
- Abraham walked with Isaac to the destination of the altar. God walked with His son to the destination of the crucifixion.
- God provided a ram for the offering. God will seek out for Himself the lamb for the offering. The ram was a substitute because Isaac was not the Messiah. There could be no substitute for Yeshua as the offering for the sins of mankind.
- Isaac was willingly bound and placed on the wood of the altar. Yeshua went willingly to the cross.
- The ram was trapped in the thistle bush. Yeshua wore a crown of thistles.
- Abraham stretched out his hand with the knife to sacrifice his son but God stopped him. God did not stop the soldier who pierced the side of Yeshua, bringing forth blood mixed with water.

V. 12 Abraham is honored because he did not withhold his beloved son from the instructions of God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.

V. 13, 14 God provided a ram caught in the thicket by his horns (crown of thorns) for the sacrifice. This is an alternate sacrifice just as Jesus is the alternate sacrifice for our sins.

- Abraham calls the place Hashem Yireh, God Provides, as it is said this day, “Hashem will be seen”.
 - God was seen on that same hill when Christ was crucified
 - Abraham called this place Hashem Yireh though previously Shem (Melchizedek) called the place, Salem
 - In later years it became known as Yireh-Salem, or Jerusalem (there is no J sound in Hebrew)

V. 15 -19 The angel calls a second time, second witness, and offers God’s blessing on Abraham. God says,

- *“By Myself I swear - the very word of Hashem -that because you have done this thing, and have not withheld you son, your only one, that I shall surely bless you and greatly increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens and like the sands of the seashore; and your offspring will inherit the gate of the enemy. And all nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring, because you have listened to my voice.”*
- **Read Romans 11:16-21 and drink in the rich blessing of our being grafted into this root, Abraham, and the blessings that flow from him and through him. Drink in the prayer of the ending verses of this same passage, verses 33-36.**
- Abraham, Isaac and the servants return to Beer-Sheba.

V. 20-23 The chapter ends with a short genealogical report of Abraham’s brother, Nahor. The significance of this report is the lineage of Isaac’s wife, Rebecca, and later Jacob’s wives, Leah and Rachel.

