

Genesis Chapter 20-21 – John Karmelich

1. A purpose of this introduction is to give some big picture ideas of the text. When you analyze the text verse-by-verse, you can often miss some of the larger issues being shown in the chapter.
 - a) As I read and reread Chapters 20 and 21, I kept thinking of the same verse:
I (God) will bless those who bless you (Abraham), and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:3 NIV)
 - i) In many ways, Genesis 12:3 has examples and illustrations in Chapters 20-21.
 - ii) In Chapter 19, we had the story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom.
 - a) Abraham prayed for Lot and he was spared of that destruction.
 - b) Lot was "blessed" only because of his relationship with Abraham, the fact that Abraham prayed for him, and Lot's trust in the God of Abraham.
 - iii) In Chapter 20, the primary focus is on a "non-Jewish" king named Abimelech. The interesting part is we don't read of Abimelech's sins. What we do read instead, is of Abraham's sins in this chapter. Despite the fact that Abraham messed up, God blesses Abimelech through Abraham. Again, the principal of Genesis 12:3 comes into play despite the mistakes made by Abraham.
 - iv) In Chapter 21, we have the actual birth of Abraham's son Isaac. There is relatively very little text about his birth as compared to the other stories in these chapters. Genesis spends more time announcing the coming of Isaac than it does the events of Isaac's birth and childhood! Again the big-picture idea is on how the world will be blessed through the miraculous birth of Isaac, as he is part of the messianic line.
 - v) Finally in the last part of Chapter 21, we come back to King Abimelech. This is another puzzling section as to why it is included. It is essentially a treaty between Abraham and Abimelech to establish the boundary between their territories. The chapter ends with Abraham planting a tree at this spot to mark the boundary and remember the event.
 - vi) Chapter 22 changes topics on to one of the greatest stories of the entire bible, which is Abraham offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice. More on that next week!
 - b) Given that, I see all the stories of Chapters 19-21 teaching us about God's relationship with Abraham and his descendants, and God's relationship with "non-Jewish believers".
 - i) The Old Testament distinguishes Jews and Gentiles. There are a few stories in the Old Testament of non-Jewish people getting "saved", but the primary characters are the descendants of Abraham and their relationship with God.
2. Another big-picture idea that you see through these chapters is the concept of "contracts".
 - a) God likes to work with long-term promises, often called "covenants". I like to use the term "one-way contracts". This is a legal term that refers to a promise given by one party regardless of what the other party does. There are also some "two-way contracts" which means that "Party #1" will only fulfill the contract if and only if Party #2 agrees to do something else. Every time you make a purchase at a store, that is a two way contract. You agree to give money, and the store agrees to give you stuff. If the store agrees to give you stuff for free no matter what you do, that is a "one-way" contract. You're only part in that "free-stuff-one-way-contract" is to believe the contract is true and take the free stuff.
 - b) This is important to grasp "contracts" through these chapters and throughout the bible.
 - i) For example, the promise of Isaac being born is a "one-way contract" by God. It will happen because God says so, and God wants us to trust it will happen.
 - ii) The "problem" with God's one-way contracts is He decides on the timing, not us.
 - iii) To live by faith is to wait for God to fulfill what he desires for our life.

- iv) The bible is also filled with “two-way” contracts. God promises us all sorts of blessings and rewards if and only if we do what He commands of us.
 - a) These are mostly “non-salvation” issues, but issues that help us to mature and grow in our relationship with him.
 - v) Chapters 20 and 21 are full of events and stories that are all based on God keeping his word and keeping up “his end of the contract”.
 - a) On a related topic, a repeated word in Chapter 21 is “Beersheba”.
 - (1) That location is also a “pun”, because Beersheba means “oath”.
The location of Beersheba is associated with “oath’s” or contracts.
 - b) What is interesting is that most of the text Chapters 20 and 21 focus on God’s contractual relationships with “Gentiles” as well as Abraham himself. There is a lot of text describing God working through a pagan king and Abraham’s Egyptian maidservant Hagar. A big-picture idea to see is that God is not only working out His plan for us through the Jewish messianic line, but also those who encounter Abraham. God likes to work through people. It is often through some relationship with believers that God will also draw in and work with non-believers.
3. Chapters 20 and 21 answer some interesting religious questions through these stories.
- a) In Chapter 19, we read of Sodom being destroyed. One can ponder if all non-Jews at that point are “doomed”. Chapters 20-21 tell a positive story of the “non-Jew” Abimelech. Abimelech’s story is “sandwiched” around the birth of Isaac.
 - b) This is deliberately told right after the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to show that God does care for others besides the Jews, but that at this point in history, God is “primarily” working through the Jewish nation to get God’s plans accomplished.
 - c) With that in mind, let’s go to Chapter 20:
4. Chapter 20, Verse 1 Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, ² and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.
- a) The “why” question of Verse 1 puzzled me for a long time. Let me set up the question:
 - i) Abraham was told a short time ago that he was going to have a miraculous child through Sarah despite the fact they were too old to have children.
 - ii) In Chapter 19, Abraham prayed and “haggled” with God to spare 10 “righteous” people in Sodom, including Lot and his family.
 - iii) Abraham watched Sodom get destroyed from a distance and assumed by faith, that Lot was spared.
 - iv) Now we read in the next verse (Verse 1 of this chapter) that the first thing Abraham does is move out to the Southern desert, encounter this king named Abimelech and lie to her about his wife Sarah.
 - v) With all that said, why did Abraham do all of this? Abraham was told by God that he would inherit the “land”. He was told of a promised child that would come, and essentially, the next thing we read about Abraham leaving the “land” and lying to a pagan king!”
 - a) Commentaries are full of speculations, many of which sound plausible but none of which are explained in the text.
 - b) Sometimes, as a bible student, you have to get to a point where there is no explanation given, and you have to accept the story as is. The point of this story is to teach about the events that did happen despite of a lack of reason or excuse given as to why it happened.

- c) One of the great lessons I have learned as a bible student and teacher is “The plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things”. The plain/main things is that Abraham “wandered” where he should not and that he lied in order to protect his life. Further he was willing to give Sarah away to a pagan, despite the fact of God’s promise that he would have a son through Sarah.
 - b) This leads us back to the text. In the text, Abraham, probably out of fear for his life, lied about Sarah being his wife. He let King Abimelech take away Sarah into his harem.
 - a) How could Abraham lie if God promised he would produce a child with Sarah? There is no necessity of lying to this king if he was trusting God. We are reading here of a lapse of faith on Abraham’s fault.
 - c) Reading these verses in context of the whole chapter, it is important to understand the principal that God uses are mistakes for His glory. Abraham made a mistake, but God used that mistake to show us that God’s will gets accomplished even when we mess up.
 - i) This by no means excuses our mistakes. If anything, our lives would be far better if it never happened in the first place. It just means that God knows all things, and knows in advance of the mistakes we are going to commit and often uses those circumstances for His glory as well as to teach us lessons.
 - ii) Despite the fact of Abraham’s fear of this king, God “worked it out” so Abraham and Sarah still went on to have a child together.
 - iii) Notice an angel didn’t “step in” at this point and stop Abraham from giving away Sarah. Even though God intervened later in this chapter, I think God waited as to let it “sink in” to Abraham what he did wrong. It also gave a chance for God to work more miracles into people’s lives by the way God “fixed the problems” that we can create.
5. Verse 3: But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman." ⁴ Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? ⁵ Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands."
- a) Let’s talk about this Abimelech character.
 - i) We only get a few clues about him and his territory in Genesis.
 - ii) He is king of “Gerar”. In Genesis 10, Gerar is described as part of the territory of the Canaanites (Genesis 10:19). This is one of the tribes “wiped out” when the Israelites conquered the land centuries later. We learn in Chapter 26 that Abimelech is “King of the Philistines”, which means a different people migrated (or conquered) this location.
 - iii) In Chapter 26, Abraham’s son Isaac also encounters Abimelech.
 - a) Most commentators believe that the Abimelech encountered by Abraham’s son Isaac is the son or grandson of the one Abraham encounters. The world Abimelech is a kingly title, as well as a name.
 - b) The story of Isaac’s encounter with Abimelech is meant to be a parallel to this story in Chapter 20. We’ll discuss this more in Chapter 26.
 - iv) Abraham is a pagan king. Yet the God of the Universe, take the time in a dream one night to tell the guy, “You’re messing with another man’s wife. If you “get it on” with her and I’ll “get it on” with you, if you know what I mean! ☺ “
 - a) Whoever this king is, he has some sort of fear of the true God.
 - b) I also find it amazing that King Abimelech called God “God”. He didn’t use the name “Jehovah”, but “Adoniah”, which is to imply “my God”.

- i) Notice this king had enough “hoospa” to plead his innocence before God. He stated, rather boldly, and correctly, that it was “not my fault” because Abraham lied to this king about Sarah being his sister as opposed to his wife.
 - ii) In this dream, out of fear of his life, Abimelech pleads for his innocence.
 - c) I should also stop and this point and comment on why king Abimelech would want Sarah as part of his harem. The text doesn’t say, so again, it is just speculation:
 - i) Sarah could still have her beauty despite her age. God could have simply put this desire into King Abimelech to have Sarah as to test Abraham’s faith.
 - ii) Some commentators also speculate that having a large harem is a sign of kingly power. Remember that Abraham was a wealthy man. For Abimelech to take something valuable of Abraham’s possession was culturally, to “connect with the power” of Abraham.
6. Verse 6: Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die."
- a) I maybe reading too much into the text, but I believe we will meet Abimelech in heaven one day. Abimelech trusts in the God of Abraham and “does the right thing” when told by God. This King Abimelech didn’t have Abraham’s knowledge of God, but I believe God does judge us based on the knowledge we do have about Him, and how we acted on that knowledge. In King Abimelech’ only encounter with the true God, he acts with obedience. We’ll have to get his full story when we meet him one day in heaven.
 - b) I am fascinated by God’s words in Verse 6: “I (God) have kept you (Abimelech) from sinning against me.”
 - i) This is a reminder that God keeps us from sinning!
 - ii) We don’t “not sin” by willpower or God-given abilities to “not sin”. If that were the case, the credit would go to us and not God. We pray to God to keep us from temptations and God answers those prayers. God himself who keeps us from sin.
 - iii) This still means we are accountable to God. When we sin we get our focus off of God. At that point is when God is saying to us, “Ok, that’s the way you want to live for the moment, be my guest”. ☺ After we mess up and seek God again, is when God “takes over” and keeps from sin.
 - c) Notice how God remedies the situation.
 - i) God didn’t say to Abimelech “You didn’t mess up, so just give Sarah back to Abraham and everything will be fine”.
 - ii) God specifically tells Abimelech in Verse 7, “Abraham is a prophet.” God says this despite Abraham’s sin.
 - iii) This is the first we mention of Abraham being a prophet. In fact, this is the first time we hear of anyone being a prophet of God. Being a prophet of God means that God has given you a special ability to “shine forth” God’s truth and you are called to be a living witness to others. We tend to think of prophets as one who have a special gift to see the future. The broader definition includes anyone who has the gift to expound God’s word and share its truths with others.
 - d) God told Abimelech that, “Abraham will pray for you and you will live”.
 - i) This part gets me. God wants Abimelech to look to Abraham, the guy who just lied to him to have peace with God.
 - ii) The “word-picture” being told here is that “salvation comes through the Jewish nation.” God uses Abraham to start a Jewish nation to be His witnesses to the world. We worship a “Jewish God”. The promised Messiah is Jewish and God doesn’t want us to forget that!
 - a) Jesus said, “For salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22b, NIV).

- iii) This does not mean Jews are superior to Gentiles. It just means that God picked Abraham and his descendants to be his witnesses unto the world and to bring in the Messiah. Back here in Genesis, God essentially tells Abimelech that his “whole household will live” if he looks to Abraham. The “word-picture” for Christians, is that we look to a descendant of Abraham, namely Jesus for the salvation of us, and of our household.
 - iv) This is why Abimelech, who only “naively” sinned, must seek repentance through Abraham who “intentionally” misled by lying about Sarah not being his wife.
- 7. Verse 8: Early the next morning Abimelech summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. ⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham in and said, “What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done.” ¹⁰ And Abimelech asked Abraham, “What was your reason for doing this?”
 - a) Abimelech is a “public witness” of his own innocence. King Abimelech is “giving his testimony” to those around him of how God is the God of Abraham. Notice in Verse 8 how Abimelech told “all his officials” about the dream, and how God wanted Abimelech to remedy the situation.
 - b) Next, notice Abimelech’s obedience to God.
 - i) Abimelech didn’t say, “Oh boy, what a weird dream I had last night. Better lay off the spicy foods”. ☺ He understood the vision was from God and more importantly Abimelech acted on what God commanded him to do.
 - ii) As a general-rule, believers don’t get dreams with marching orders for us for the next day. God gave us something better, which is his Word. God wants us to look to that book for our life instructions.
 - c) Before King Abimelech returns Sarah to Abraham, Abimelech asks Abraham for the reason that he lied to him in Verses 9-10.
 - i) Maybe Abimelech just wanted more information as to why this happened.
 - ii) Back in Verse 6, when God commanded Abimelech to return her, God never said to ask questions. The “only good” done by these questions is that it showed the sins of Abraham and how he tried to cover them up with his excuses in the next set of verses. The basic lesson to learn from this “Q&A” session with Abraham and Abimelech is that “there is no excuse for sin”.
- 8. Verse 11: Abraham replied, “I said to myself, ‘There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’” ¹² Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³ And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.”’
 - a) I heard a wonderful little sermon on Verse 11 called, “Because I Thought” by Jon Curson. Let me paraphrase the key thoughts of that sermon:
 - i) In Verse 11 Abraham replied, “I said to myself”. This is translated in the King James Version “Because I thought”.
 - ii) A sure-fire way to sin in life is the danger of “because I thought”. This is the idea of ignoring the biblical principals of life and trying to rationalize sin.
 - iii) It is amazing the excuses we can use to justify our sinful actions. This is the danger of “because I thought”.
 - iv) Notice how Abraham tells half-truths and blames everyone but himself in these verses in order to avoid taking personal responsibility for his sin.
 - b) This is the verse where we actually learn the fact that Abraham’s wife Sarah is also his half-sister. Abraham was “technically” telling the truth when he was saying Sarah was his sister and not his wife.
 - i) One of the 10 commandments is to “not bear false witness” (Exodus 20:16a NKJV).

- ii) To not give false-testimony (i.e., lie) also includes telling half-truth's with the intention to deceive. In other words, if you make a statement that is technically true, but the way you say it is designed to deceive someone, that is a violation of the commandment to "not bear false witness".
 - c) Let me paraphrase what Abraham is saying and give a response: "I worship the true God. Yet, I know I live among a bunch of pagans and I fear for my life. Therefore, in order to save my own skin, I told a half-truth so I wouldn't get killed."
 - i) This whole section is a lapse of faith by Abraham. Remember that God promised to give a son through Sarah. If Abraham sold Sarah to King Abimelech's harem, then Abraham is not trusting in God's promise to him. Abraham got "his eye off the ball" of God's promises in order to save his own life.
 - ii) There is a good proverb that fits here:

"When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him." (Proverbs 16:7 NIV)

 - a) This means that if things are right with you and God, God will cause those who are your "enemy" to be at peace with you.
 - b) Let me give an illustration on this: Is there a person in your life who is a real pain in the behind? Instead of trying to fix them, ask God is there anything blocking your relationship with Him? If there is, remind God of Proverbs 16:7! I have been amazed in my own life at the times I have been bothered and worried about a problem-person in my life.
 - c) When I then work on restoring my relationship with God, God in turn causes peace to happen with that other person.
9. Verse 14: Then Abimelech brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like."
- a) A few chapters back, when King Sodom offered material rewards to Abraham for saving his life, Abraham turned them down. Essentially Abraham in that case wanted to show what a "good witness" he was before God and how Abraham wasn't doing it for the money. (See Genesis 14:22-24).
 - b) Now we have here Abimelech offering material gifts to Abraham. He accepted these gifts despite the fact that Abraham was the one who sinned. You would think the gift giving should be the other way around. You would think Abimelech would say, "Here is your wife back, now pray for me as God has instructed and let's both get on with our lives".
 - i) What we have here is Abimelech "worshipping" or at the least, giving honor to Abraham. (Remember, "I will bless those that bless you..." from Genesis 12:3).
 - ii) King Abimelech is giving gifts to Abraham only because Abimelech understood that Abraham is sent from God. Technically, Abimelech is honoring the God-of-Abraham, not the sinful actions of Abraham himself.
10. Verse 16: To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."
- a) Notice King Abimelech said, "I am giving your brother..." as opposed to 'your husband". This is a subtle insult and a reminder of the half-truth that Abraham stated.
 - b) Sarah went along with this whole scheme. Therefore she shares some guilt.
 - c) This is the first time in the bible that silver is used as a payment of redemption.
 - i) If you study the word "silver" throughout the bible, it is often associated with redemption (See Numbers 18:16) and also associated with "blood". There are word-pictures of how blood is necessary for the forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22) and silver is associated with "blood-money" and redemption.
 - ii) Remember Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 silver coins. This was later called "blood money" when he threw it in the treasury. (See Matthew 27:6).

11. Verse 17: Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, ¹⁸ for the LORD had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah.
- a) This is the part that gets me. Prior to any of these events of this chapter, King Abimelech's wife and slave girls could not have any children. It is as if God "did something" to this king's sperm so he couldn't have children.
 - i) You can think of a cute word-picture here. King Abimelech could have no children. As far as his descendants are concerned he is "dead". By his association with the God of Abraham, he was "made alive" and could have children.
 - b) But we read in Verse 18 that God-himself "closed up every womb" in the king's house. After Abraham prays to God, we assume children start popping out everywhere! ☺
 - i) This verse is personal to my wife and me as we had a difficult time producing children. (We now have two daughters). It makes me wonder of "God closed our wombs" for some divine purpose at that time.
 - ii) It also teaches that we can pray to God in cases where we want children but for some reason, cannot have them at that time. In Abraham's case, he had to wait until he was 100. For those dealing with infertility issues, we have to remember to not only accept God's will, but also to live on God's timing.
 - iii) It also teaches that God has divine purposes in allowing tragedies and suffering in our lives. God does not allow harm to believers in order to punish them. He allows it to happen for some divine purpose. Sometimes it may take years to know the reason, like in this case of King Abimelech. Sometimes we may never know, as those events trigger the events of some other people around us.
12. Genesis Chapter 21, Verse 1: Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.
- a) The story now changes focus to the actual birth of Isaac.
 - b) Notice the emphasis is on God's timing and dates:
 - i) "at the very time God had promised him" (Verse 2)
 - a) This verse emphasizes that when God makes a promise, he sticks to it. God work's on his timing not ours
 - ii) "Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him"
 - a) This verse emphasizes Abraham's obedience to God's commands. God told Abraham that children are to be circumcised on the 8th day (Genesis 17:12). The number "8" in scripture is associated with "new beginning". If the 7th day is one of "rest", the "8th day" represents a new beginning.
 - iii) "Abraham was a hundred years old".
 - a) Notice the patience of God to bring in Isaac, which is the next step of the messianic line to Jesus. God waited until Abraham was 100 years old for this step. This is another reminder that in God's "one-way contract's", we wait on His timing, and not ours.
 - b) If you have ever met someone who is 100, the last thing you think about is that person having a kid. I have found God likes to work after we have exhausted all our efforts to do things without God's help. God "doing the impossible" is a chance for God alone to get the credit for that work.
 - c) Remember the focus of this section of the text is not so much on Isaac, but on his parents.
 - i) Further, the story of Isaac's birth is "sandwiched" between two stories involving Abraham and King Abimelech.

- ii) My point is Genesis spends a lot of text announcing Isaac's birth, and when the actual event comes, there is not a lot of text about the birth itself. It is almost as if the anticipation and the announcements are greater than the event itself.
 - iii) I also believe that all of these predictions also focus on a future messianic king, namely Jesus. Remember that prophecy in the Old Testament often has a double-fulfillment. There is a short-term fulfillment in order to validate the prediction (or announcement in this case) with the birth of Isaac, and at the same time, all the emphasis on the "coming birth" is a prophetic prediction tying to Jesus himself.
13. Verse 6: Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." ⁷ And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."
- a) Remember in Genesis 18:12 Sarah "laughed" at this birth announcement in a sense of doubt or sarcasm. Here Sarah calls her son Isaac, which means laughter, in a joyous way.
 - b) We can take comfort in the fact that God's promises come true despite our doubts and even our sarcastic attitude toward God at any one point.
 - c) Again, it doesn't excuse our sins, it just shows that God is faithful even when we are not.
 - d) I think all of "this" was sinking in to Sarah. She was past the age of childbearing, and yet here she was having a child and further, having the ability to nurse children. Here is something she has wanted all of her life. When she gets past the age of childbearing is when God performs this miracle.
 - e) I have found that God often does his best work "after we give up". Sarah wanted children all of her life. When she got past the age where (she thought) it was physically possible is when she "gave up" on that notion. Again, she laughed sarcastically at the idea of having children. The reason God works this way is only He can get the credit.
 - i) Christians refer to this as a "surrender prayer". Let me give you some examples:
 - a) "Lord, I don't understand why you put me in this situation, but you do. Help me to learn the lessons you want me to learn from this situation and accept your will."
 - b) "Lord, I really really want (fill-in-the-blank). I've taken all the steps to accomplish this and no success. Lord, if it is your will for me not to have this, help me to accept that it not your will, or help me to have the peace to accept your timing." I have often seen God give people what they want in these situations after and only after they have fully accepted letting God be in charge of that situation and acting upon that concept.
 - f) Finally, notice Sarah's gratitude. God finally gave her a son.
 - i) Notice Sarah didn't say, "Well, God, its about time you gave me a kid. I'm an old hag now and you made me suffer all of those years." ☺
 - ii) Instead, Sarah prayed a prayer of gratitude. Two times she agreed to let Abraham sell her into a harem and both times God rescued her. Give Sarah credit for going along with God's will and God blessing her life. Sarah had an attitude of gratitude and gratefully accepted God's gift to her.
14. Verse 8: The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast.
- a) The day that Isaac stopped eating only breast milk and started eating solid food (I'm guessing around age 2-3), Abraham threw a big party in Isaac's honor.
 - b) The word-picture here is that Abraham is trying to get everyone's focus on the "promised son". Much in the same way God wants us to draw attention to Jesus and not ourselves.

- c) You can also take the word-picture of Verse 8 a step further and connect it to a verse taught in the New Testament:
- i) "You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." (Hebrews 12a-14 NIV).
 - ii) In this passage in Hebrews as well as 1st Corinthians Chapter 3, "milk" is a word-picture of the Christian fundamentals, while "solid food" is a word-picture of moving on to maturity as a Christian, and learning to trust God on a daily basis.
 - iii) Getting back to Genesis, Abraham held a feast as his son Isaac moved from "milk" to solid food. One can read this as our responsibility to children to help them mature and grow with "solid food" in their relationship with God.
15. Verse 9: But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰ and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."
- a) OK, the plot thickens. ☺
 - b) Hagar's son Ishmael was about 13-14 at this time. Anybody who has teenage children understands how the one not being honored can mock the other.
 - c) There is a subtle "demonic hint" as Satan understood that Isaac is the promised son. You can comprehend the "son of the flesh" mocking the "promised son".
 - d) The New Testament book of Galatians picks up on these verses.
 - i) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son (Ishmael) by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman (Isaac) was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. (Galatians 4:22-24, NIV).
 - ii) Paul's point in Galatians is that the word-pictures being shown is that the birth of Hagar was "of the flesh". Remember that Abraham tried on his own to produce the messianic son and had a son through the slave-girl Hagar.
 - iii) Paul's point is essentially saying "You can't mix your own efforts with God's plans for our lives. You can't take matters into your own hands, but wait on God's timing for Him to work through you."
 - a) In practice, this is a difficult. Sometimes it is God's will for us to move forward. Other times it requires the patience to wait on God. I have found it is best to "keep moving forward" and trusting that God is working it out in our life. If we do something that we think is God's will (e.g., Abraham having the son through Hagar) and it turns out this is not God' intention for our life, then God finds a way to "cast out" what is our own effort.
16. Verse 11: The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹² But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. ¹³ I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."
- a) Abraham was naturally concerned. Here was Hagar, probably 13 or 14. Abraham just spent 13 or 14 year of his life raising his own son and loving Hagar as a father. One can imagine how difficult this must have been for Abraham to cast him out. I believe this is why God "stepped in" and spoke to Abraham at this point.
 - b) Notice God did not say to Abraham, "Too bad for Hagar. He wasn't part of my plan for your life and now I'm going to wipe him out." ☺

- i) Even though the “promise” of the messianic line goes through Isaac, God is still going to bless Ishmael, the son of Hagar. The question is “why”?
 - a) The first answer goes back to “I will bless those that bless you”. God wanted to show the surrounding world that “Abraham is special” and any offspring of Abraham is special.
 - b) Further, God still has compassion on Hagar and her son Ishmael. They too, trusted in the God of Abraham and God reward them for that reason.

- 17. Verse 14: Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.
 - a) One has to remember that Abraham was a rich man. Of all the stuff in his possession, the only thing Abraham gave Hagar and her son Ishmael was a little bread and water for the road. You have to wonder if Hagar thought, “All of these years of service and this is all you are giving me?”
 - b) You have to read this as “sign of faith” by Abraham. God said that He would take care of Hagar & Ishmael and Abraham trusted in that promise. It wasn’t necessary for Abraham to give a ‘bunch of stuff” to Hagar, because God said He would take care of them.
 - c) Give Hagar a little credit too for not putting up a fight and accepting God’s will for her. By the next verse, Hagar was convinced that Abraham sent her off to a death sentence, yet we don’t read of Hagar pleading to stay.

- 18. Verse 15: When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob. ¹⁷ God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."
 - a) Hagar’s only resource was the water-skin given by Abraham. When that was used up, she gave up. She placed her tired son under a bush so she didn’t have to watch him die.
 - b) Notice the text says, “God heard the boy crying” in Verse 17.
 - i) God is aware of the pleading and sorrows of all of his children, including “the son of the flesh” which is Ishmael.
 - c) Notice the focus on the text is on the mother Hagar and not the son. God is teaching her to walk by faith. God waited until her only resources ran out as to teach her to walk by faith and God still has a plan for her life despite the fact she was an outcast.
 - d) In Verse 18, God promised Hagar that Ishmael would be the father of a “great nation”. When we get to Chapter 25, we will read of Ishmael’s descendants. He became the father of all of the Arabic people.

- 19. Verse 19: Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.
 - a) God’s promises for our future begin with our practical needs. Yes the boy will grow up to lead a great nation. Right now, he just needs some water to live! This is a reminder for us to pray for our practical needs as well as the big promises for our future.

- 20. Verse 20: God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. ²¹ While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.
 - a) This is the last we read of Hagar. In Chapter 25, we will read the genealogy of Ishmael’s descendants, but this is the last verse about Hagar.
 - i) In fact the last specific task we read about Hagar is the fact that she gets a husband for her son. (Moms, make sure your sons read this verse when they complain about you don’t like their girlfriends! ☺) Remember marriages were arranged by their parents in this culture. Hagar remembered God’s promise to her and she acted on that promise by helping to pick out the right husband for her son.

- b) I also pondered, why the bible mentioned that Ishmael became an archer?
- i) Maybe it is a simple fact that God gave him the skills to survive the desert. It may be a simple application of “where God leads, God provides”.
21. Verse 22: At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. ²³ Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you."
- a) We now change stories in the middle of the chapter. We no longer read about Hagar and Ishmael, but the story shifts back to King Abimelech and dealing with Abraham.
- b) It is almost as if the story of Isaac’s birth and the casting out of Ishmael is “sandwiched” between two stories of Abraham and King Abimelech.
- c) It appears the main point of the story for the remainder of the chapter has to do with establishing a boundary between King Abimelech and Abraham.
- d) Notice Abimelech said in Verse 22, “God is with you in everything you do.”
- i) I don’t think Abraham had TV commercials, or a press agent proclaiming his wonderful relationship with God. ☺
- ii) I think Abraham just lived his life and became a “living witness” to those around him that his life is pleasing to God.
- iii) King Abimelech saw or heard of Abraham’s victory of the “four kings over the five kings”. Abimelech probably heard how Lot was spared from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abimelech remembered that in his dream, God told him that Abraham was a prophet. It was now “sinking in” that Abraham was something special.
- iv) King Abimelech turns to Abraham in order to establish a boundary between his kingdom and Abraham’s “land”. It is another example of God showing how He is working his redemptive plan through Abraham and outsiders who want to obey God need to look to the “God of Abraham”.
- e) Getting back to the text, you can see that Abimelech still didn’t trust Abraham.
- i) King Abimelech requests that Abraham didn’t “deal falsely” with him or his children. Remember that Abraham told the half-truth about Sarah being his sister.
- ii) It is a reminder that “our sins can come back to haunt us”. One of the most difficult things to change is our reputation to others. King Abimelech knew that Abraham was a prophet of God, but he also knew that Abraham was capable of sin, and in this case, telling a half-truth. Notice Abimelech remedies the situation by making Abraham swear by “his God” to deal honestly with him.
22. Verse 24: Abraham said, "I swear it." ²⁵ Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized. ²⁶ But Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today."
- a) This little trio of verses has some interesting applications about having balance in our lives. Notice Abraham didn’t just “stand there and take the compliments”. He didn’t say, “Yes, I am a prophet of God. Sorry about the half-truth thing. Since I am a prophet, it won’t happen again. ☺ “
- i) Abraham used the moment to bring up a specific water well that one of Abimelech’ servants took that is (apparently) part of Abraham’s territory.
- a) King Abimelech said essentially, “This is news to me, I’ll deal with it.”
- ii) Abraham knew that the “Promised Land” belonged to his descendants, and this specific point about a well is Abraham taking the authority given to him by God and establishing a specific boundary point involving this well.
- iii) The big picture idea is despite Abraham’s sins, God sticks to his promises.
- iv) God blesses this Gentile king who honored Abraham as being sent by God. God blessed Abimelech with children as He was obedient to God through Abraham.

23. Verse 27: So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty. ²⁸ Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, ²⁹ and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?" ³⁰ He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well." ³¹ So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.
- a) To close this land deal, animals were exchanged. The word "sacrifice" is not mentioned in this text, and the exchange of animals was probably just to "verify the contract".
 - i) I thought of an old parable about the business of being a consultant: That is, it is important to charge money for your opinion. It is human nature to take paid-advice more seriously than free-advice because it cost you something. I say this because I think it ties to the seven sheep Abraham paid. It is a sign to Abimelech that "Abraham was serious" about this contractual relationship.
24. Verse 32: After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God. ³⁴ And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.
- a) I spent a lot of time thinking about this story: Why would the bible spend so much "space" talking about this land-border-contract between Abraham and King Abimelech?
 - i) A possible reason is to connect the concept of "contracts" or "oaths" between the previous story of God protecting Hagar and Ishmael with this story.
 - a) In the Hagar-Ishmael rescue, it happened at Beersheba (Verse 14).
 - b) This treaty story also takes place in Beersheba (Verse 32).
 - c) Remember the word "Beersheba" means "place of an oath".
 - d) In the first case, it was God keeping his "oath". In the second place, Abraham is the one keeping his "oath".
 - ii) God is not against us making contracts or oath's. Jesus teaches on this topic and the emphasis is on us keeping our word.
 - a) Remember God cares about His reputation. Therefore, we need to care about our reputation because we are God's witnesses. If people can't trust us in our "business life", how can they believe us when we talk to them about God?
 - b) In this story, Abimelech still had some "mistrust" in Abraham because of the half-truth story in Genesis 20. This section here in Chapter 21 is about Abraham restoring that trust with this land-contract with King Abimelech.
 - b) Next question, why did Abraham plant a tree?
 - i) It could be something as simple as planting a marker between territories.
 - ii) Planting trees, in "Jewish thought" is associated with establishing their homeland. It may tie back to this verse. When the Jews regained Israel in the 1940's a major tree planting project began. Planting a tree is reminder of the establishment of the "Promised Land", the land promised to God by Abraham.
 - c) Notice Abraham never said to Abimelech, "Sorry your highness, but God said this land is mine. Remember God told you I am a prophet. Well, he also told me this land is mine, so get moving". ☺
 - i) God did not call Abraham to conquer this king, but simply to be obedient to the specific tasks that God called for him and let God worry about the rest.
 - a) There will come a day that the land was taken by the Jews for their Promised Land. That didn't happen for another 400 years. God simply called Abraham to be his witness, to continue the Messianic line through Isaac and "cast out" the "works of the flesh" which was his son Ishmael.

ii) (Can't you just feel the closing sermon coming here? ☺). That is the same thing God does for us. God does not call us to go out and fulfill all of his promises. God does His end of the contracts on His timing, not ours. Our job is to be faithful to what God calls us to do, and let God worry about the details that are beyond our control. I'll tackle this some more in the closing prayer. It's time to wrap this up.

25. Let's pray: Father, we thank you for the promises you have made to us through your Word. All of those promises are for our benefit and to help mature us as believers. Forgive us for our worrying, as we are focusing on things you never meant for us to worry about it. Our physical and emotional pain is real, but with your guidance, you will see us through it, as that is part of your promise to us. Help us to focus on the specific tasks you have called us to do today, to plan for our future, but at the same time be willing to change if your plans for us are different than our own. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.