
Day 8 - January 8

Period of the Patriarchs (2100 -1525 BCE)

Abram Deceives Abimelech

Birth of Isaac

Abraham and Abimelech Settle Dispute

Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael

Readings: *Genesis 20:1-21:21*

Reflections:

- The story of Abimelech is so close to the previous story about the Pharaoh that some scholars believe it is basically the same story that got told two different ways in the oral tradition and then copied down twice. First, there is a major logical inconsistency in that Abraham would still be worried about him being killed so Abimelech could take her as his wife if Sarah is 90 years old. She is so old that it is a crazy miracle she has a baby. So why would Abimelech be so attracted to her? She supposedly is way too old to give him children, and would he still be focused on her beauty when she is 90? This story may be misplaced in the sequence of the story and come from an earlier time or it just may be a mystery. Anyway, Abraham and Sarah both lie using a technicality to try to save themselves. This is a common human ploy to take one small piece of information and use it to misrepresent a much larger set of facts.
- Once again we see that self-saving rather than complete trust in God causes problems. The main point of the story concerning Pharaoh is repeated.
- Abraham, after supposedly sinning, still needs to pray for Abimelech to be healed. It seems in the end that God wants to make it clear that he is working through Abraham. Signs of God's grace are everywhere in this story. Abraham and Sarah fail miserably and then they get gifts of animals as well as the freedom to possess any land they like. They are also given the status of God working through Abraham's prayers to bring healing. God is a God of abundant grace.
- The birth of Isaac is a wonderful story. Not only is it a miracle but the whole theme of laughter is repeated. Sarah goes from laughing in disbelief to laughing with true joy. What a gift of miraculous grace again, God doing the impossible to complete his purposes and fill his children with joy.

- There is another story of Abraham and Abimelech. This time about a well. The key statement is, “God is with you in everything you do.” This is the main point of so much of Abraham and Sarah’s experience. Interesting that Abraham stays in the land of the Philistines. Abraham has an experience of living in enemy territory (Egypt and the land of Philistines) to be a forerunner of Israel living in similar situations.
- The story of Hagar and Ishmael shows the human side of Sarah and Ishmael, a protective mother and a jealous teenager. God’s directions throughout this story again show his grace and mercy. God continues to work through this entire situation with mercy and love. Ishmael is an archer and his descendents will be archers. Although this may seem like a meaningless side note to us, it likely was more meaningful to the reader. It likely answered the question, “Why does this rival group excel at archery?” As we progress in the story we discover that Ishmael’s descendents will become rivals of Israel. There are two lessons we can note from this simple note about archery. First, if you go back far enough, your enemies are actually your family. This is why God’s heart is for reconciliation. He as the heavenly parent simply wants to see reconciliation between family members. Second, if God gives you a skill (like archery) remember that it can be used for good or for evil. In this case, we will discover that this skill ultimately is used to hurt others. For example, someone who is a good communicator will be very good at putting other people down and hurting them through what they say. Someone who is particularly strong can use that strength to intimidate or bully others. Our strengths and skills need to be submitted to God to ensure they are used to help, not hurt others.
- God’s purposes continue to unfold and we find that even in the greatest expressions of humanity, God is in control and working in power and grace to complete his purposes.