

Abraham (Part Eleven)

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Let us go back to Genesis 20 and getting a running start on this subject of Abraham in the Philistine's land. We are going to have quite a bit of preface before we get into chapter 20. Remember as we progress through each chapter in regards to Abraham, we see changes in a life lived by faith as it progresses towards the fulfillment of God's promise. Now God's promise was in the promised seed, Isaac. We know that he was the forerunner of the real promised Seed of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of the spiritual aspect of the promise God made to Abraham.

Isaac is born in chapter 21. So, in chapter 20, one final major trial remains before the son is given. Remember when Terah first presented a problem for Abraham and Terah finally died. Now Abraham is finally head of the family and he feels free to move on. He leaves his homeland and goes on into Canaan and travels down into Egypt. Now Egypt is behind him, and Lot disappears from the scene, and Sodom is judged.

At this point now we get into chapter 20, and another trial that has a very familiar ring to it comes into the picture. Abraham stays from Egypt and what took place there, and now going to the Philistine's land, and we find him once again denying his true relationship with Sarah.

Another central [unclear]. Now there must be an important lesson in this episode. I think we recognize when God shows things in the Bible sometimes in great detail, when He tells us just about what everybody said, other times He reveals things in great bold strokes somewhat like a painting. Now remember, people, nations, sometimes things represent something else. There is a lot of typology in the Bible, a great deal of symbolism.

We can see Lot as typical of the world's tradition that he wants to be a part of.

Genesis 10:6 The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

Genesis 10:13-14 Mizraim begot Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, and Casluhim (from whom came the Philistines and Caphtorim).

In a genealogical way we see that the Philistines were descendants of the Egyptians. Now Egypt represents in the Bible the world apart from God. Gathering, analyzing, using knowledge on a carnal basis (remember Elbert Hubbard, devoid of spiritual knowledge), and not using God's Word by faith to direct their lives.

The Philistines are of the same spirit, but when one looks at their geographical location, you will find the Egyptians on the outside, peripherally, of the Promised Land, Canaan, and we find the Philistines right up against the borders of the Promised Land. So Egypt possesses worldly wisdom, that is, knowledge through the senses, but cannot really know God. Remember,

I Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Now the Philistines represent a further attainment of the same knowledge, and they are much closer to the truth. You see, they are much closer to the Promised Land, in fact, they are reaching out to try to enter into it. In typologically, the Egyptian does not give a hoot. But the Philistine, he is trying to get into the promised land on the basis of his carnal knowledge.

Let us go to I Samuel just to show you something that is shown in many, many scriptures in regard to the way the Israelites thought of the Philistines. In chapter 17, David fights Goliath. Goliath was a Philistine.

I Samuel 17:26 Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this

uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

Now for a very long time in biblical history, uncircumcised was almost invariably synonymous with Philistine. The Philistine wants the promise of God, the Philistine wants the Promised Land, but he wants them without circumcision. He is unwilling to kill the flesh, unwilling to cut away the foreskin of the heart. He does not want to be converted. He wants to attain the Kingdom of God on the basis of his accumulation of carnal knowledge, which indeed may be tremendous. We might even say, on the basis of technology.

It's interesting that Philistines are known for being a race of giants and there is a bit of symbolism there as well. They were a mighty and strong people, symbolic of their intellect, symbolic of their technological achievements that God used their stature of a race of people to indicate their relative size in the eyes of the true people of God. They look as though they are insurmountable. They have everything on their side. They have all the technology, they seem to have all of the wisdom, they seem to have all of the power. The worldly-wise appear to be on their side.

Knowledge derived from the senses has its place, but with it, man cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, though the Philistine seeks to intrude into it.

So what we are dealing with here is the final test before the seed is given. Is Abraham going to be able to pass this test against the mighty Philistines? If you have done any reading at all in the Bible, you will recognize that it was the Philistines that almost always had the technologically advanced warfare equipment. They had the iron chariots. They were the ones that knew the secrets of making iron. Maybe they were even making steel and bronze and those kinds of things. They were always an intimidating force to the Israelites who always seemed to be the underdog whenever they went out to war against these people, even in that circumstance there with David.

Now, we have seen in the past that Abraham was also a man with great intellectual capacity. We see in this chapter, him being severely tested by the carnal knowledge of this world that is represented by the Philistines, to give away, as it were, his principles, in order to make accommodations with them.

You know the story. That God once again virtually intervened and gave Abraham some help in order to show the spiritual truth that belongs in the realm of faith. Now once Abraham owned up to his relationship with Sarah and he did not give up on his principles, Sarah, then we find that the knowledge of the world can become a great gift, and can even strengthen and enrich faith, because we find that Abimelech gave him great gifts.

So God in this chapter shows the overall lesson: that if one holds on to proved spiritual faith, and demonstrates that by hanging onto his principles, that is, the principles of God's Word, that is, God's truth, then one can possess knowledge and the powers that it gives. See, the carnal knowledge represented by the Philistines cannot enter into, does not grasp, the spiritual truth.

What is the Philistines? The Philistine is the one who is worldly-wise. Now you understand why Elbert Hubbard called his magazine "The Philistine." Because he considered himself worldly-wise.

So what is the practical application of this for you and me? What is it that causes us to give up on our principles when the world puts the pressure on you and me? I will tell you what it is. Most of the time it is fear. The fear that they are going to hurt us in some way, personally, economically, or physically. Sometimes we fear that we are going to offend them. But brethren, God is showing in His Book, they do not get it. There is a reason why they are opposed. They cannot get what we have been given, they cannot fully understand why we want to hold on to our principles even though they might want to possess them and they might even admire us for hanging on to our principles. They might even be envious of us. I have had people tell me when someone stuck something out, "Boy, I wish I could do that."

We have to learn to do what Abraham did, and that is, learn to deal with circumstances while trusting God. Do not align yourself too quickly because it is extremely likely that if you hold fast to your principles, they are going to back down and nothing will happen. Even if it does happen, like it happened with Abraham, you have God on your side, and He is going to mercifully intervene in some way.

Genesis 21:22-28 And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, “God is with you in all that you do. Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt.” And Abraham said, “I will swear.” Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech’s servants had seized. And Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor had I heard of it until today.” So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

I just wanted you to see that Abimelech and Abraham had a run-in after chapter 20, but this time Abraham held fast to the principles that God had shown him to His face. Then he shows that peace with the Philistines is possible so that even they might share in the blessings with the sons of God.

Genesis 20:1-7 And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.”

But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she, even she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.” And God said to him in a dream, “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”

Recall that this took place, apparently, right on the heels of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and it is after the destruction that Abraham moves, probably to find better pasture of his herds. He goes to Gerar which is about 8 miles southeast of Gaza. Even to this day, Gaza is in the same general location.

Now, did Abimelech take Sarah in because at age 90 she was a ravishing beauty? I think not. I do not in any way mean to diminish her looks, or her attractiveness, but it is very likely that because of the customs of the times, (and I do not mean that he did not have serious intent), all that Abimelech was doing was a political move. He was taking this relative of Abraham's and entering, first of all, into a political union with him through her.

After all, Abraham had no mean reputation. He was a *very* wealthy man. He was, with all due respect to others around him, a king in his own right. By present circumstances, his realm and the number of people under him was small. But in the milieu of the times that he lived in, Abraham was a very important person. Abimelech wanted to make sure through the political means that they had available to them then, that there would be no reason for Abraham to attack him, because he would have been attacking his relative. Now that is my thought regarding why he took Sarah.

Now Abimelech said what he did, he did in the innocence of his heart. How in the world can a man do that? Well, he was not innocent, and we understand that. I will tell you why we can understand that in just a minute. Yet on the other hand, I do not believe that Abimelech was really telling a lie. He meant what he said. He was only acting according to the level his moral and spiritual understanding. He was acting within the customary methods and ways of his time. So, he was just not as well developed morally or spiritually as maybe he might want to, or maybe he should be.

Now I said that how do we know that he should have known that? It is because of what God said. I am paraphrasing what God said, "Yes. But you touch her and you are a dead man." It indicates to me that God was saying to Abimelech, "You should know better anyway."

Genesis 20:8-11 So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men

were very much afraid. And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.” Then Abimelech said to Abraham, “What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?” And Abraham said, “Because I thought, surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife.”

So, there is the father of the faithful, there is the man of faith, there is the elect giving the reason why we are willing to give up our principles in the face of the Philistines. You see the worldly lies here. This is very real. I do not mean to demean in any way. All of us have fears. I have fears, because when I have to face somebody out in the world regarding something, my stomach gets into a knot, my head goes around in circles with all kinds of thinking about what I am going to say and going to do. If they say this, I am going to respond this way. I have not grown to the place where Jesus said take no concern of what you should say. I do not have that kind of faith yet.

The fear is very real and it is something we have to learn to deal with. It is when we learn from the examples that are given in God’s Word and we use it, that God comes to bat for us and we learn the result of those things.

Genesis 20:12-15 “But indeed she is truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her, ‘This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, “He is my brother.” ’ ” Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, “See, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.”

Now back to the context beginning in verse 8. Abimelech acted the next morning after God spoke with him. His servants were alarmed, and he complained bitterly and publicly to Abraham. He probably did it publicly in the presence of his servants, partially to be impressive before them to get justification for what he had done, and also partially to shame Abraham. And

Abraham sinned again, he made a mistake. Again, it shows the faithfulness of God, and because He loves us, He will chasten us and He will embarrass us publicly, as He did here twice with Abraham in regard to this, when he gave up on his principles and did not live by faith for a while.

Genesis 20:16-18 Then to Sarah he said, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before everybody.” Thus she was rebuked. So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore children; for the Lord had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

Abimelech sent Abraham off with a pretty liberal gift of cattle and gave him leave to dwell in all of the land wherever he wished, that is, after chewing him out.

I am going to paraphrase for you what he said to Sarah. He says, “The gift is a covering to the eyes with regard to all who are with you.” In other words, it was a payment, it was an expiatory gift, an atoning gift. Now all of you are familiar with a term Yom Kippur. Yom is the Hebrew word for “day.” Kippur is “atonement,” but that is not what the word kippur means, it does not mean atonement. Kippur means, “to cover.” The Day of Atonement is a day of covering.

You might, if someday you are studying in Genesis 6, where it says Noah pitched the ark. Well, what it says in Hebrew is, Noah "kippured" the ark. It means he covered it with pitch so that it would not leak. He covered the wood with asphalt-like material so that it would be waterproof.

That is what atonement is. Atonement is a covering that hides something so that it no longer looks the way it previously did. It is like a paint job, where we say, that a coat of paint will hide a multitude of sins. You take an old beat-up wall, and you put some nice paint on it, and suddenly the old beat up wall looks pretty acceptable and agreeable. That is what an expiatory gift does. It covers the dirty, foul deed and makes it look good so that nobody can see the dirty, foul deed.

So what Abimelech was doing here was buying his way out. He was appeasing. This brings to mind something else, that whenever Jacob returned from Laban's land and he was met by Esau, and you know what he had done to Esau about twenty or so years before. He left Esau in a froth and Esau was angered and upset because of the things that Jacob had done to him in deceiving their father, and of course supplanting him as recipient of the promise. Jacob got out of town in a hurry.

Well, here it is, twenty-something years later and he is coming back a very wealthy man, and what he did when he heard that Esau was on his way to meet him, he lined up all his troops—his children—all of his cattle, all of his oxen, and all of his sheep. He divided them up into two groups, so that if Esau attacked one group then the other group would have an opportunity to get away, so that at least some of them would be spared.

But out in front of these two groups, he sent a tremendous, sizeable gift to Esau. And he said that it might appease his face. Now what do you think he thought Esau's face would look like? It would be one angry Esau. And so Jacob wanted to cover that anger up with a gift so that Esau would turn into a very smiling twin brother. Well, it worked. When they saw one another, Esau threw his arms around Jacob and they hugged one another and cried, and so the sin of Jacob was covered.

That is what Abimelech did here. He said in effect, "Sarah, you rotten scum, you lied to me just like your brother, your husband Abraham did. You have shamed everybody as a result of what you did, but I am going to cover it up. I'm going to give a gift to cover up the foul deed that you and Abraham did." What an embarrassing situation for Abraham and Sarah to be in.

He said this gift is a covering to the eyes with regards to all who are with me. It is a payment, an atoning gift, because in you the whole family is disgraced. So, you see, it is a covering, a gift, and nobody sees the disgrace. That is the symbolism that it gives.

Well, God had brought a plague on Abimelech's house because of this, some sort of a disease that rendered it impossible for them to bear children. There is one other interesting sideline here that is so interesting in regards to prayer.

A little bit earlier, God says to Abimelech,

Genesis 20:7 “Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet.”

And then down in Genesis 20:17, after Abimelech followed through with what God told him to do, he then goes to Abraham and asks him to pray. It is that word “pray” that gives you an insight to prayer and what it is. The word there in Hebrew is pal-wal. It means literally, to judge.

There is no doubt that Abraham talked to God, but Abraham also judged. Now what did he do? What he did was evaluate the circumstance, and he interceded for Abimelech before God. God heard Abraham’s prayer on Abimelech’s behalf. What he did probably is say, “Now, look God. Abimelech was just acting as any normal human being would have acted in this case, anybody in his circumstance. He was just following the customs of the time, and I think under the circumstances that the plague that You have put upon them is sufficient, and I think that it ought to be lifted because Sarah and I brought him into this by our lie.” See he judged the situation and he recommended to God a sentence or decision that he felt should be handed down.

Now what you and I have to do is apply that to our lives and the circumstances that we find ourselves going through, and also the circumstances that we find other people going through too. When you talk to God, He wants you to evaluate circumstances. He wants you to come to Him and tell Him why He should do something. Not to just ask Him to do it, but to say, “God, I think you ought to do this because. . . .” Because You are merciful, because You are faithful, because this person needs to be encouraged, because there needs to be a witness made, not only in this person’s life, but for the entire congregation and maybe for the entire church. Because the people of the world need this, because, because, because.

So, you ask God your judgment under the circumstances that are going on, and then, you watch what God does. Then what do you do? What do you learn? You learn how to be a judge. Prayer is a very valuable tool for learning how to judge, to judge righteous judgment, because God is going to answer in His time. He is going to answer.

Then if you remember the way that you pray, you will know whether or not you judged correctly or whether changes need to be made in your judgment to better understand the next time you pray in judgment or what your judgment ought to be.

That is what Abraham did. So, the father of the faithful sets us a pattern again. He judged and God responded. God lifted the plague from off of these people and life went on.

Now that is there for you and me to learn not to give up on our principles, Sarah. Just because the world puts some pressure on us. The Philistines do not understand.

You might think that this thing is exactly the same as what occurred in Egypt, but it was not. If you go back and compare the two, you will find that they were the same in only one aspect. And that is that Abraham and Sarah lied, and that Sarah came in danger of becoming the wife of a pagan king. But Abimelech is a totally different character than Pharaoh in Egypt. At least Abimelech was a man who was imbued with a moral conscience that was much, much higher than the Pharaoh's in Egypt. We see that he was open to divine revelations. And if you go back and read that one that happened in Egypt and you will not find the slightest indication of a relationship possibility with God.

Again there are a number of things that I want to note here in Genesis 21 before we get into more detail. First of all, I want to give you a thumbnail sketch of Isaac. Isaac, I feel in some ways, is a difficult person to evaluate, and at least in my own thinking here, it might be because of my expectations regarding him, because after all, he was the promised seed. Should I not expect that the fulfillment of the promise, the type of Christ in all of the Bible, to be kind of an overpowering personality, a presence to be reckoned with through the pages of the Bible?

Well, Isaac is one of the patriarchs. But the Bible does not present him as an active and dominating personality. He does not even come close to the

influence of his father. On the other hand, the Bible does not present him as being weak and cowardly either. But rather the Bible presents him as being converted, present, humane, but more or less passive personality.

Back in Hebrews 11, just a brief mention of him here, at least he does make the hall of fame you might say, of those of faith.

Hebrews 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

That mention there combined with the things given about him in the book of Genesis shows that the Bible presents him as a man of faith, of righteousness, and I believe that there is no doubt about that. Now perhaps the contrast to dynamic Abraham is purposely drawn by God in order to give us a more accurate picture of the relationship that Christ fulfilled in regards to the Father when Christ came as a man. He said the Father is greater than I. Isaac [unclear], and I am sure that we are seeing a very few. But the ones that are shown here are, with one exception, every single one of them is met with an admirable and evenhanded control. The man seems to have had good control of himself.

Now, we have no record of his early life except for his circumcision at age 8 days, and also probably around age 2 he was weaned and he was mocked by Ismael. Now the supreme moment in his life undoubtedly occurred early in his young manhood.

Genesis 22:9-12 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

The word translated, "lad" both here and in verse 5, means an unmarried child still in his father's house. Josephus says that Isaac was 21. Other

commentaries that I have read speculated anything from age 12 or 13 up to about 25. Some in the church speculated that he might have been thirty-three and a half. That if he was *the* type of Christ as a fulfillment of the promise, is it unwise, is it unreasonable to speculate that he carried it right on through in that Isaac was thirty-three and a half years when Abraham went to sacrifice him. Nobody knows, and in the long run it is unimportant.

What is important is Isaac's willing submission to his father *even to the point of death*. If indeed Isaac was a young man in the full bloom of his life, full bloom of his strength, and his hopeful anticipation of his future of getting married and having children, then what he did here is extremely impressive. If Isaac was indeed 21, or 25, or 33, surely he would have been able to overpower or get out of the grasp of his 120+ year old father and run away. But he did not do that.

So, you see Isaac as a young child and on up through his teen years as a young man, had been taught by his father about the great God and His purpose and promise and the part Isaac was to play in that. I believe that Isaac too had a pretty great measure of faith. It was not just in his father, but that faith ascended through his father and on up to God.

In addition to that, Isaac shows a number of very fine qualities.

Genesis 24:63 And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming.

This is the occurrence when his servants brought Rebekah. It says he was mediating, and some translations say that he was praying and there are other places where his prayers are mentioned. So, he was a mediating man, a praying man.

Genesis 24:67 Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

The Bible tends to show that Isaac was a very devoted husband and father. Unlike the other patriarchs he was the only one with one wife and he was faithful to her until the very end.

Genesis 26:20-22 But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah. And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

Isaac was a man of peace. He was a man that gave space to anger. He was a man that did not go to war with people even though they were treating him deviously and unfairly. He simply moved somewhere else.

Genesis 26:25 So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

It is so interesting how many times digging a well is mentioned. So again, this indicates that prayer was a regular part of his life.

Now here the speaker is Jacob, and he says a number of things about Isaac as he is talking to Laban.

Genesis 31:42 "Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed."

That is what Isaac feared. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and on and on it goes. Isaac feared God. It is brought up again in Genesis 31.

Genesis 31:53 The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.” And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.

Meaning the God of Isaac.

So God was deeply respected by Isaac. Isaac dies at age 180. This is again somewhat of an indication of what kind of man he was. God says he gives long life to those who honor their father and mother. He outlived his mother by 53 years, and he outlived his father by 5 years.

Now there is one sad note here, and that is, according to Josephus, Isaac was blind through the last 50 years of his life. Now you think that was not a burden to carry around. Is that not interesting?

Another character that appears in this chapter is Ishmael. Now he is important to the story in this chapter. His name means, God hears. It probably stems from the prayers of Abraham and Sarah regarding having an heir. That is, that whenever he was born, for a while Abraham had looked upon him as an heir, and that God had heard their prayers and gave them a son through Hagar. Or, it might have stemmed from the time his mother Hagar fled from Sarah’s wrath. Remember, that time when the Angel of the Lord sent her back.

Ishmael was somewhere between thirteen or fourteen years older than Isaac, and we find in chapter 17 that he was very tenderly loved by Abraham.

Genesis 17:17-18 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!”

For a good while Abraham clung to the hope that Ishmael might be the promised seed. However God had other plans and the sending away of Hagar and Ishmael apparently was the only way God felt that the inheritance could be kept pure.

Now here a little bit more about Ishmael. This is, when they fled from Sarah's wrath.

Genesis 16:11-12 And the Angel of the Lord said to her: "Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

Now we can look at when Abraham sent them away.

Genesis 21:17-18 And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation."

Genesis 25:12:17 Now this *is* the genealogy of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Abraham. And these were the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: The firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These were the sons of Ishmael and these were their names, by their towns and their settlements, twelve princes according to their nations. These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.

Now let us go look at the episode when Joseph was sold by his brothers.

Genesis 37:25-28 And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. So Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.” And his brothers listened. Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

I wanted to read that so that you would understand that the Midianites and the Ishmaelites are the same people. They were all sons of Ishmael. They are sometimes called in the Bible Ishmaelites and sometimes called Midianites.

One more thing regarding Ishmael. You will recall the metaphor God used back there in Genesis 16:11 to describe Ishmael drawn from the wild donkeys that roam the Arabian desert. Recall he was called a wild ass of a man. Now what it indicates tells a great deal about the personality of the Ishmaelites or the Midianites. It indicates somebody of fierce independence with an almost boundless love for freedom. Someone who is hardy, frugal, despising town life in every form. And I tell you that is a good thing, because the donkey metaphor indicates someone who is in a constant state of feuds. It is a good thing that they have the tendency of wanting to live apart from others.

Many of the Arab people are descended from him. I am not going to tell you everyone because I do not know. Not all Arabic people are from Ishmael, but undoubtedly many are to this day. It appears that one of the roots of the bitter rivalry that has existed between the people of Israel and the Arabic people stems from that incident where Ishmael was sent away from the family of Abraham and Sarah in order to protect the purity of the inheritance that was to go to Isaac. So he was, and remains to this day through his descendants, a very important personality.

Let us go back to the new Testament to the book of Galatians, because Ishmael pops up here even though he is not mentioned by name, his mother is and so we understand then who the son is in this context.

Galatians 4:28-29 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.

Ishmael is used by the apostle Paul as the type of one begotten after the flesh who by nature persecutes those who are begotten of the Spirit. That is, they are the ones with enmity against God who persecutes the sons of God having the Spirit of God.

Now there is more to this than meets the eye at first glance. At the very beginning of Jesus' teaching in,

Matthew 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So very early in Jesus' teaching, He makes it clear that there should be an expectation on the part of Jesus' followers that they are going to have to expect and endure persecution from our fellow man. Now this is confirmed by the apostle in I Thessalonians 3.

I Thessalonians 3:1-4 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for

you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

The remarkable thing about this is that the persecution does not always come from outside the church. We will see this as Paul is talking to the Ephesian elders when he is seeing them for the last time.

Acts 20:28-31 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

So Paul is showing us that persecution is not always going to come from outside the church. Sometimes from carnal and perhaps unbelieving people right within the church. Now brethren this is the lesson through history and you can see it throughout the pages of the Bible. Remember, the Israelites were both the church and state. And it was the Israelites who killed the prophets, it was not the Gentiles. The persecution of God's prophets and His ministers came right from within the line.

Who was it that persecuted Jesus? It was the Pharisees, the scribes, and the Sadducees. They were the ones who instigated His execution which was carried out by the Romans. If it had not been for the persecutions coming from the people of Israel, it is very likely that Pilate would have let Him go. Who were Paul's main persecutors? Brethren, it was Judaizers within the church that were his main persecutors.

Do you begin to see the application the apostle Paul is making here in Galatians? When he talks about those that are born after the flesh, that even though Ismael is the archetype in that regard. He is the type that is given

back there in the book of Genesis, yet the apostle Paul in his application applies to *anybody* who is born after the flesh. That is all of us who are acting carnally.

Galatians 5:16-17 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Now there, what he does is he draws the man of the flesh right inside of him, as it were. When we get baptized the old nature just continues to influence us as the apostle Paul shows us very clearly in Romans 7. He shows there is an irreconcilable conflict between the two, even as there was an irreconcilable conflict between Ishmael and Isaac that never could have been resolved. They always would have been at war. Even when God tried to separate them apart, still the bitter rivalry has continued right on down to this day. The apostle Paul is saying it is right near you and me.

It is principles, two different natures. Once we have repented and once we have received God's Holy Spirit, there are two natures that are within us and there are irreconcilable conflicts between the two. Human nature is going to do all that it can to persecute the Spirit of God that is within us.

Now as we become more converted, there should be a diminishing effect of the flesh's influence, but it will never be entirely eliminated as long as we are in the flesh.

It is a good thing we are saved by grace through faith or we would never make it.

Genesis 21:1-2 And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

I want you to notice that He says, "at the set time." I think it is a very interesting concept to study, "at the set time." Is it possible that God is working within a timeframe for each one of the lessons or exercises or drills

or tests or trials, whatever one might want to call them, that He puts us through? Does that sound reasonable that God would do something like that? Do they not do that in school? Sure, they do. You have timed tests. In addition to that, each grade that you go through lasts approximately nine months. It is a nine-month trial young people go through, and then they find out whether they passed or failed. They get a break for six weeks, and then another timed trial. It is set for an appointed time.

Now that does not sound that unreasonable that God might do the same thing for us. I do not mean that every trial has exactly the same length of time for every individual or for each individual. But is it possible that He sets a time that, “well, this is going to be accomplished by such and such a time or My name isn’t God.” I think that there is some indication that our Creator does things like that.

Genesis 15:1-4 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.”

A promise is made.

Genesis 17:15-17 Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.” Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

So Abraham sees that quite a number of years have gone by, by this time, maybe somewhere in the twenties.

Genesis 18:13-14 And the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”

We find then that it came at the set time. Now, did God set the time? Certainly He did. God does everything on time. But that trial lasted twenty-five years for Abraham and Sarah. Did God set it at the very beginning?

Psalms 69:13 But as for me, my prayer is to You, O Lord, in the acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of Your mercy, Hear me in the truth of Your salvation.

What he is saying there is when you God see that the time is right.

Psalms 102:13 You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, has come.

Psalms 105:17-19 He sent a man before them—Joseph—who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters, he was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.

Can you not see Joseph in prison, praying prayers, year after year, day after day, week after week, month after month, thinking about the injustice that he should be in prison while all of this is going on. His prayer seemed to be of no avail. But you see other things of which Joseph may have been unaware had to be worked out. If you remember that sermon I gave a couple of years ago on the day of Trumpets, when the time came, Joseph was brought out of prison, and in one day he went from being a slave and a prisoner to the second in command in Egypt. One day, at the set time.

Now remember that when you are going through your trials. There is a Master Creator at work, and He knows what He is doing. He is very aware of you, He is aware of what is going on all around you. He is not just working with you. There are other things, other occasions, other people, and things

that have to be worked out. But when the time is right, in an acceptable time, in the time that God has set, He will come through.

Genesis 21:3-7 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me.” She also said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Isaac means laughing and it is a reference to Abraham laughing in joy at the prospect of the possibility of Sarah giving birth to the promised son, and of course it is also a witness against them because of Sarah’s laugh of unbelief. And now here she is saying that everyone will laugh with me in joy and in amazement that I should give birth to a child at age 90.