**Lesson 6**

**25-26 October 2021**

**Genesis 21**

***Another Perspective*:**

**Names of God –** For the past two or three weeks we have been discussing the concept of “progressive revelation” in relation to *God’s promises* to Abraham and *prophecies* about the future, i.e. that God did not reveal the specific details about His plans all at once, but added details as they were needed. Today we will look at another form of progressive revelation in which God reveals more and more of *His character* through the names by which He is known. We have seen several names or titles for God in our study of Genesis so far. In Genesis 1-3, He was introduced as Elohim (powerful one) and Yahweh (Lord of the universe). In the episode with Melchizedek, He was given the extended title “Yahweh, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.” Hagar called the One who spoke to her in the wilderness “The God Who Sees” and “The Living One Who Sees Me”. In chapter seventeen God described Himself to Abraham as “God Almighty”. At the end of chapter twenty-two we read that Abraham called on the name of “Yahweh, the Everlasting God”. And Abraham named the place where God provided a ram to sacrifice in place of Isaac “Yahweh-Yireh” (KJV: Jehovah-Jireh), which means “The Lord Will Provide”. Each of these names or titles gives us insight into a different aspect of God’s character. And each new name related intimately to the person’s personal need at the time. (See the second BSF bullet point on page 2.)

**A Father’s Sacrifice –** It struck me this time through the story of Abraham’s life that he willingly gave up *both* of his sons in obedience to God’s command. We are very familiar with the account of the sacrifice of Isaac, but it was just as hard for Abraham to be willing to relinquish Ishmael as it was for him to be willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Yet in *both* instances we read that Abraham “got up early in the morning” to obey what God had told him to do in regard to a son that he loved very much. In *both* cases the boys were probably young teenagers, and *both* times there was immediate complete obedience on Abraham’s part, with no murmuring or complaining and apparently no resistance from the sons.

**Patterns in Abraham’s Life –** Rising early in the morning to obey God’s commands is a *pattern* that we have observed in Abraham’s life in several situations, a good pattern that demonstrates his faith. But we have seen another pattern of behavior that demonstrated a lack of faith when he repeatedly referred to Sarah as his sister, not his wife. We saw two specific instances of this happening (with Pharoah in Egypt and with Abimelech in the land of the Philistines), but he admitted to Abimelech that he had been calling Sarah his sister every place he went since he left his home in Ur (see Genesis 20:13). So Abraham is a mixture of faith and fear, of good habits and bad habits. It is encouraging to see how God worked patiently in his life, to confront his fears and to build his faith. As we consider Abraham’s example, we need to examine our own lives to see what habits of faith and fear are ingrained in us. May the Lord give us the *discernment* to see what needs to change, the *desire* to grow, and the *discipline* to follow through.

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***Bible Study Fellowship’s Perspective:*** *The following comments were taken from Lesson 13 of the BSF course on Genesis.*

* Abraham valued peace as he lived in community with Abimelech’s people. Abraham went straight to Abimelech to resolve an issue regarding the seizure of one of his wells by Abimelech’s servants…**Abraham demonstrated grace and kindness as *he paid for possession of a well he already owned*.** pg 5
* Abraham’s walk of faith had ups and downs as he grew in his understanding of God. After the treaty and peaceful solution at Beersheba, King Abimelech and his commander returned home. **In gratitude and worship, Abraham planted a tamarisk tree and called on the name of the Lord, “the Eternal God.”** Every new name of God recorded in Genesis represents a growing understanding of the multifaceted character of God. *We can grow in faith and understanding right along with Abraham and Sarah as we study.* pg 5
* **Family life tests our character and dependence on God.** God intentionally orchestrated human life in family units that offer both needed support and opportunities for character development…Abraham’s family was complicated, and so are ours. Abraham had to seek God and make a hard decision about Ishmael. *We also constantly need God’s wisdom to lead our families well.* pg 6
* **God’s promises are certain because God’s character is certain…**The blessings that came through Abraham continue today. While God’s promises remain true and many are fulfilled, we must trust God for what has not yet been delivered. Sometimes what is true does not *feel* true. Faith in God is more than a general sense that everything will turn out well. **God leads us to trust *specific* truth in *specific* ways.** pg 6

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**Jen Wilkin, *God of Covenant* video #4: *The Long-Awaited Son,* part 1**

**The Lesson of Abraham and Sarah** – The story of Abraham and Sarah is a story about the people of God. Before we can draw a *personal* application from it, we must make an application about the people of God *in general*. This is *not* a story about God granting fertility “if we only believe hard enough.” **It is the story of the faithfulness of God to create for Himself a people upon whom He set His favor in a particular time and a particular place.**

**He Laughs** – “The Lord visited Sarah **as He had said**, and the Lord did to Sarah **as He had promised**.” In this statement we see the familiar pattern of “…and God said…and it was so” that we have seen since Genesis 1. We see the joyous statement that Sarah bore Abraham a son when he was 100 years old, and Abraham named his son Isaac, as the Lord had commanded. Remember that Isaac’s name means, “he laughs”. Who laughs? Certainly Sarah laughed with joy, and Abraham in all likelihood joined her. But the One who had the last laugh in this account is God Himself. Imagine His laughter over the fulfillment of this promise.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? No! It is certainly miraculous that the long awaited child has arrived. But it is perhaps equally miraculous that Sarah, who has lived a life of bitterness and sorrow, now finds great joy in the Lord. The lesson here is that no *circumstance* is too hard for the Lord . . . and no *heart* is too hard for the Lord. We sometimes crave the miraculous in a story like the birth of Isaac, but do we celebrate the miracle when a heart of stone is turned to a heart of flesh?

**Laughter, Continued** – We see laughter being displayed again when Isaac is weaned. This time it is Ishmael (now 16 or 17 years old) who laughs, and his is the laughter of disrespect. Sarah hears it and is highly displeased, so she tells Abraham to send Ishmael and Hagar away. The first time scripture records Sarah telling Abraham to do something was when she told him to take Hagar as a wife so they could establish a family through her. At that time, we saw that there was a “hint of Eden” in her words, and it was not a good thing that Abraham listened to her advice. But the problem then was *not* that he listened to his wife per se, but that he listened to her *instead of listening to the Lord*. This time, when Sarah tells Abraham to send Ishmael and his mother away, God tells Abraham to heed her words, because this is the right thing to do at this time. Sarah’s motives may have been wrong, but God was using this situation to accomplish His own greater purpose, and He tells Abraham that He will bless Ishmael and make him a great nation.

**God Hears** – Once again we see the names bestowed on Abraham’s two sons continue to be prophetic. When Hagar and Ishmael leave to travel in the desert (probably heading back to her homeland Egypt), their water runs out, and Ishmael is about to die. This breaks Hagar’s heart, and scripture tells us that she “lifted up her voice and wept.” And God heard. Not only that, but once again the Angel of the Lord calls out to her to let her know that God has heard. He reiterates the promise He had made to her before Ishmael was born that her son will become a great nation.

**God’s Faithfulness to All Parties** – In this passage in Genesis we have an account of God meeting a Gentile woman by a well, reminiscent of Jesus encountering the Samaritan woman by a well. In both instances God showed great mercy to the woman, meeting her in her hour of need. In fact, this account in Genesis shows God’s great faithfulness to *everyone* concerned: to Abraham and Sarah, to Isaac, and to Hagar and her son Ishmael. He is looking out for all of their needs and concerns.

**Two Women, Two Covenants** – Our homework for this week included examining a passage from Galatians 4. In that passage Paul reveals that Hagar and Sarah were archetypes representing the old and new covenants respectively. That is, Hagar represents those who are still in slavery to the Law, and Sarah those who have been freed through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Ishmael, the son “born according to the flesh” is the one born through the will of man. He is the result of a self-reliant act. In contrast, Isaac was born through the will of God. These two boys picture different means of salvation. There are those who believe that they can save themselves by keeping the Law. But those who are the true children of Abraham are those born through a miraculous means by the will of God Himself. Salvation is given to us; it is not earned or achieved.

**Abraham and Abimelech** – In the second half of Genesis 21 we read the account of the treaty or covenant between Abraham and Abimelech. Keep in mind that “Abimelech” is not a *name* but a *title* given to the leader of the Philistines, just as “Pharoah” was the title given to the leader of the Egyptians. So this Abimelech may or may not have been the same man as the Abimelech to whom Abraham had given Sarah previously. He deals with Abraham respectfully, probably because of Abraham’s great wealth. The two men agree to remain at peace with each other, and they resolved an issue of access to well water for their respective herds. The chapter ends with the statement that “Abraham lived as a foreigner in the land of the Philistines for many days.”