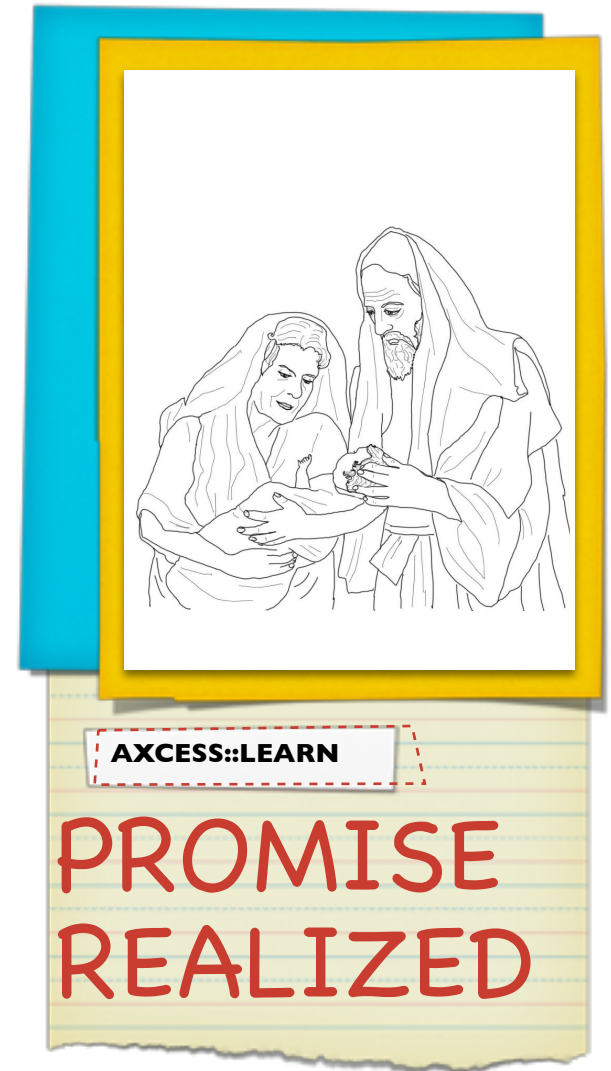




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****Italicized words in brackets interlaced in the text are the Hebrew words that were used in the oldest known manuscripts. Approaching Scripture through the Hebrew mindset and context can help us to appreciate more fully and to properly interpret what the passage is actually intending to communicate.*



Read Genesis 20 - 21

GENESIS 20

>< v.1-2 Avimelekh king of G'rar King Avimelekh was certainly an early Philistine settler. His name was a sort of a combination of title and name meaning "My father is king" (*Abba*, father; *melekh*, king). Why would he take 90-year-old Sarah to be part of his harem? She must have retained much of her exceptional, youthful beauty that had attracted the Pharaoh 25 years earlier when she was 65...otherwise it may have been simply for the purpose of a peaceful alliance with Avraham.

>< v.3-7 God speaks to Avimelekh in a dream

God communicated with people through dreams in Scripture. God gets straight to the point: "I'm going to kill you Avimelekh because you've taken this married woman." Avimelekh argues his case that he hasn't had sexual relations with her...and he didn't know she was married. God acknowledged he's telling the truth but He continues to explain that it was divine power that kept him from touching Sarah...otherwise, death would have been the penalty. God instructs him to return Sarah to Avraham who would intercede for him...If he did not return Sarah then Avimelekh's line would end.

Did Avimelekh know who he was talking to in this dream? We find the actual word "Adonai" in the original Hebrew text when Avimelekh addresses God. This term simply means "lord"...he was aware he was talking to a god, but he didn't know which one except that he was the protector of Avraham.

>< v.7-18 God heals Avimelekh's wife & maids

God had designated Avraham as intercessor between God and Avimelekh. Just as Avraham had pleaded on behalf of the hypothetical righteous in S'dom, he would need to do the same for Avimelekh, and God would listen because Avraham was righteous. Why would God allow Avraham to be intercede for Avimelekh, even though Avraham had tricked him?

Unlike the situation in Egypt 25 years earlier Avimelekh does not kick him out. He actually adds to his wealth and invites Avraham to stay in his country.

Avimelekh does as God instructed him and returned Sarah to Avraham, who did make intercession on his behalf and then God restores his household by opening their wombs, enabling them to produce descendants.

GENESIS 21

>< v.1-7 The promised Yitz'chak is born All of YHWH's promises to Avraham were literal, and they were literally fulfilled. God kept His promise, as He always does, and Sarah had a child, Yitz'chak (Isaac). The promise, 25 years in the making, was for this child of promise. God set the time that Yitz'chak was to be born to Sarah. Avraham followed God's instruction to circumcise his son at eight days old. Avraham at 100 and Sarah at 90 were overcome with rejoicing laughter because of what God had done in their old age.

>< v.8-13 Yishma'el mocks Yitz'chak. Yishma'el would have been about 15-16 years old when Yitz'chak was weaned. Sarah did not like how Yishma'el taunted her son and told Avraham to banish the slave-girl from the clan, and she wanted Yishma'el gone too. Avraham was troubled because he loved Yishma'el, his firstborn. How difficult this must have been for Avraham to release his only begotten son of 13 years. God comforted Avraham by promising that He would graciously supply the earthly portion of the blessing that had just been taken from Yishma'el.

>< v.14-21 Distress in the desert of Be'er-Sheva

Hagar was about to die of thirst, she was in distress, leaving her son under a bush, she cried "I can't bear to watch my child die." In verse 17, reads that God heard the boy's voice and *mal'ach Elohim* calls out to Hagar from heaven. Whose voice was this? Was it an angel or the voice of YHWH God Himself? The message was delivered and brought reassurance to her in her time of dire need...and God opened her eyes and she sees a well of water. Yishma'el grew, lived in the desert, became an archer and married an Egyptian woman chosen by Hagar.

>< v.22-34 Covenant with Avimelekh With the birth of Yitz'chak, Avraham was more confident in the ability of God to protect him and to keep His promises. If anything were ever to happen to him, he had his important heir in Yitz'chak. The family would prosper by the promises and blessings of God. There is a dispute between Avraham's clan and Avimelekh's people over water wells. Avimelekh was well aware of Avraham's friend in the highest place which had threatened his life once before. The settled with a traditional *b'rit* ceremony at *Be'er-Sheva*. Avraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

NOTES

HEBREW WORD DEFINITIONS

Avimelekh- my father is king

(*abba*, father; *melekh*, king)

Yitz'chak- he will laugh; he will rejoice

mal'ach Elohim- angel of God; messenger of God

Be'er-Sheva- well of seven, well of an oath

Avimelekh:: early Philistine settler. G'rar (*located on the eastern border of modern-day Gaza Strip*) eventually became a part of Philistia. The Philistines are Israel's most consistent and noteworthy enemy thought biblical history.

Lipit-Ishtar:: law that would have allowed Avraham to accept or deny Yishma'el as an heir to his estate, because Yishma'el was born to a slave-girl, Hagar, who would have benefited had Yishma'el been given the firstborn share.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

—Why do you think God allowed Avraham to intercede for Avimelekh, even though Avraham had tricked him?

—Why do you think it's so difficult to wait long periods of time for God's promises?

—Do you think it's easier or harder for us today than it was for them four thousand years ago?