



Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

Genesis 21:15-34 – Divine Promise to Hagar and Covenant with Abimelech

December 16, 2018

1) **The Divine Promise to Hagar 21:15-21**

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 about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there, 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.” 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. 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.

As a follow-on from our lesson last week, we will be looking further at the promise to Hagar and specifically the Covenant between Abraham and Abimelech. We pick up again from verse 15 where Hagar had previously been sent away by Abraham and Sarah into the wilderness of Beersheba.

Let's read verse 15 through 21. The original Hebrew in verse 17 says “she lifted up her voice”. Apparently at this point, both Hagar and the child were sobbing to the point that God heard them crying. While it appears neither of them were actually praying to God, God still heard their distress call as if it had been a prayer.

An angel of God intervenes and speaks directly to Hagar. First and most importantly God comforts, soothes and addresses her immediate problems first, then her troubled soul second. The promise is quite remarkable as you think through the whole story. While Hagar apparently did all that God's plan required with the birth of Ishmael and then being a wife to Abraham, she had to feel good at that point. But within a short period of time, she had been banned to the wilderness with no apparent hope and near death for herself or her child. How could this have happened when I did as God requested? How many times have we asked ourselves that very question?

In verse 18, God's promise to make her child a great nation is truly remarkable and a “saving event” in her life. However things would not necessarily come easy in their young lives'. Having no father, Hagar would need to provide her unwavering and constant guidance and protection for Ishmael. Interestingly verse 20 also specifically says “God was with the boy as he grew up”; what do you think this involved throughout his life?

Typically any marriage arrangements would have been made through the father of the family. So this is again another example of the total commitment and parenting done by Hagar. In this case, she naturally turned to Egypt to find her son a bride.

Several things to ponder from these verses:

- How many times have we felt hopeless, alone or totally distressed in life? What was your reaction and how did you act?
- How many times have you done what you thought was what God specifically directed and desired to only have it turn out badly or worse than what you thought should have happened “in the moment of the event”?
- How are we to interpret a bad situation or outcome that was derived from what was “God's directive or direction” for my life?
- Even in your darkest moments of despair and hopelessness, will your God really abandon you?

2) Covenant with Abimelech 21:22-34

²² At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do. ²³ Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned." ²⁴ And Abraham said, "I will swear." ²⁵ When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, ²⁶ Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today." ²⁷ So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. ²⁸ Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. ²⁹ And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?" ³⁰ He said, "These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well." ³¹ Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. ³² So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. ³⁴ And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

These verses start with some very interesting points in verses 22 and 23. Why would the Philistine King Abimelech, King of Gerar, be asking Abraham for kindness and to not deal falsely with him?

- Verse 22 – Abimelech’s recognition of God blessing Abraham is a tremendous sign that our lives and God’s work in them is evident to all, not just our Christian friends and family; Your witness and life is on constant display and powerful to the world!
- Verse 22 – Abimelech brought his Army Commander with him for the discussion and negotiation, do you find this interesting and for what purpose was he present in the meetings?
- Verse 23 – A Philistine King is asking someone to swear by Abraham’s God as a more definitive sign
- Verse 23 – What does “as I have dealt kindly to you” mean to you?

The covenant they were seeking is where Abimelech asked for Abraham’s good will while Abraham requested Abimelech’s recognition of his rights to the well at Beersheba. Strangely in this situation, as opposed to both sides offering gifts in exchange for the agreement, only Abraham offered gifts and it was also at two different times. Any thoughts as to why this may have happened in this manner? Most possibly it was a case where the “sojourner” Abraham recognized the sovereignty of Abimelech in his land. The word Beersheba means “Well of the Oath”.

What significance if any does the planting the Tamarisk tree in Beersheba carry? Beersheba is the only place that the Bible recorded planting trees. It was likely meant to be a **symbol of commitment**. This could be to the memorial to the oath between himself and Abimelech, but most believe it is a memorial of his **re-commitment to the everlasting God**. He now had God’s promise, peace with his neighbors and water for physical life in the desert. God kept his promises to Abraham; Abraham’s life was filled with his blessings. This was also the same king that Abraham had misrepresented Sarah as his sister! Wow, how things turned out!

There is ample evidence in the scriptures that God wants His people to be fully committed to Him; and God blesses both nations and individuals who commit to him. Chapter 21 is all about being fully committed to God and then taking action. If we want our plans to succeed, we must commit them to God. Committing ourselves and our plans to God is more than a quick prayer. Real commitment means taking time to discern with God what His will is for our lives. Committing our ways to God often requires that we do not go with the moment; rather we pause, seek, and reflect on Biblical precepts before making decisions; and we commit those decisions to God.

3)

Group Discussion:

1. Think back to some of your darkest, most hopeless times; as a group discuss the following:
 - a) Did you feel as if you had done what you thought God wanted and were left without understanding?
 - b) What specifically brought you back from utter despair and being alone?
 - c) What was your reaction and how did you act?
 - d) Will God really abandon you in those times? Does it seem as if he did at that time?
2. How are we to interpret a bad situation or outcome that was derived from what was “God’s directive or direction” for my life?
3. In verses 22-34, what was Abraham’s first reaction and decision after agreeing with Abimelech?
 - a) How can we learn from Abraham’s decisions in this story?
4. Do we have our “symbols of commitment” to God? Discuss in your life things you have done to worship and physically show your commitment to your God.
5. How do we discern whether our commitment to a plan is God’s plan as opposed to our own will?
6. At what level of decisions is our “commitment to God’s plan”? Is it for work only, family only, pain and stress only, life changing or everything we do?
7. How do you deal with “indecision about a commitment” with respect taking action? How do we prevent ourselves from being “paralyzed from acting” for God?