



Lesson 13

Abraham's Two Sons

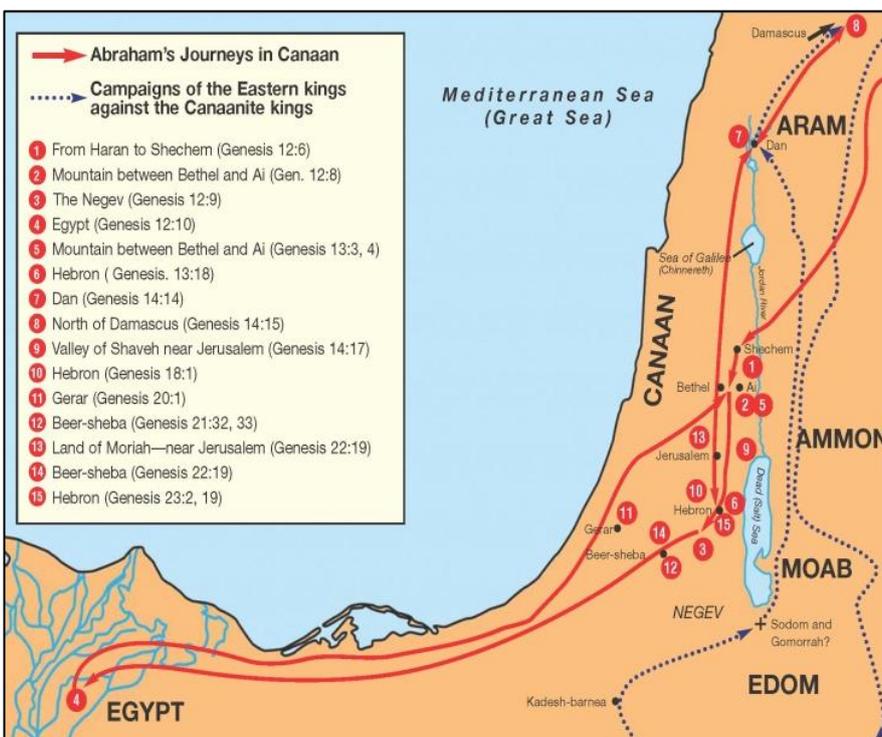
Introduction

In the last lesson we looked at Lot and saw the problems that he faced in life because he did not put God first. In spite of his concern for his nephew, Abraham could not save Lot from this disaster and the Genesis record now returns to the story of Abraham and Sarah.

Abraham and Abimelech

Chapter 20 begins by telling us more about Abraham's journeys in the land of Canaan; he explored the land in obedience to the commandment of God to him when the Lord had promised it to him.

“Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”
Genesis 13:17



The map shows all the journeys Abraham made in the land of Canaan. See if you can find Hebron (number 10) and Gerar (number 11); this is the journey we read of at the beginning of chapter 20.

Gerar was ruled over by a king called Abimelech. He looked at Sarah and found her very attractive and wanted her for his wife. Foolishly, Abraham had pretended that she was his sister rather than his wife and God warned Abimelech to leave her alone. He told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet, someone who speaks God's words. Abraham is the first person in the Bible to be called this.

What is remarkable about this event is that Sarah was 90 years old! Remember that God had promised that she would have a son and it seems that her youth and beauty were renewed miraculously so that this could happen.

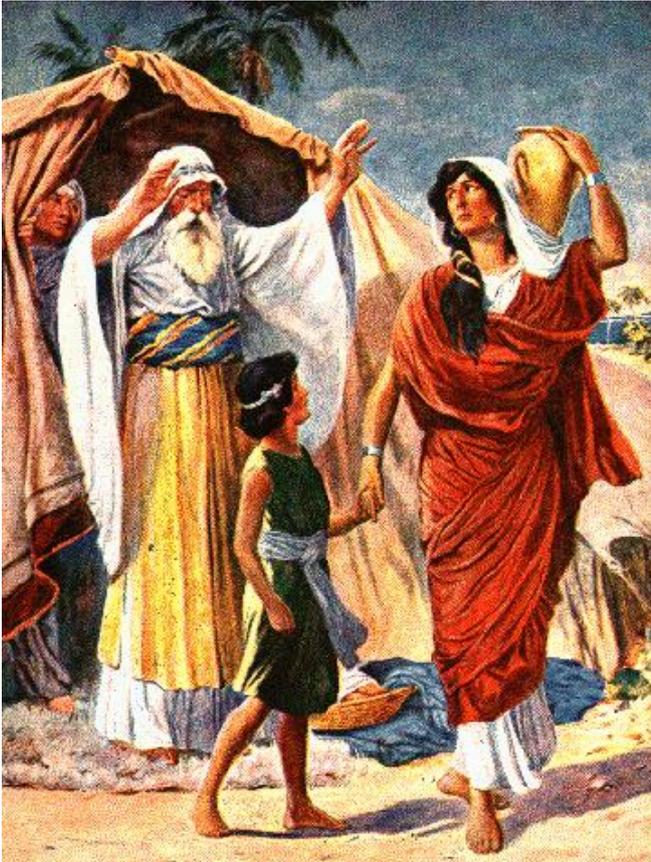
The Birth of Isaac

We read (21:1) that Sarah conceived and bore a son who was called Isaac. Remember that in chapter 18 Sarah had laughed in disbelief when the angel had told her that this would happen. Then she was afraid because of her lack of faith. Now she laughs again; this time with happiness and rejoicing that she and Abraham finally had a son together.

However, the happiness did not last. When Isaac was old enough to be weaned, perhaps 3-4 years old, Sarah found Ishmael mocking him. This does not sound very bad but once again we find help elsewhere in the Bible. We read in Galatians:

“He who was born according to the flesh (Ishmael) persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit (Isaac), so also it is now.”
Galatians 4:29





There had been nothing miraculous about Ishmael's birth. However, it was God's spirit power that gave strength to both Sarah and Abraham to enable the birth of Isaac and Ishmael was jeering at this. This is the very first thing we read about Ishmael in the Bible and it tells us what sort of person he was, someone who mocked God's ways and purpose.

Sarah understood this and told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. When he did not want to do this, God spoke to him telling him to do what his wife said.

Ishmael was about 17 years old at this time and we can understand his feelings. For the first 14 years of his life he had been brought up as the only son of Abraham, his father. Abraham had taught him about God's promises but it seems that Ishmael did not have the same faith as his father. Perhaps his mother, Hagar, had told him that he would be the one who would inherit when Abraham died. Then Isaac was born and it was clear to everyone that he was the son favoured by Abraham.

Hagar and Ishmael were sent away by Abraham, with God's approval, and wandered off into the desert. Their water ran out and they were in danger of dying. However a merciful God showed Hagar the way to a well and spared their lives. God did this because Ishmael prayed to Him and the Lord listened: *"What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is"*. As Ishmael had grown up, his father had taught him about God's ways (see 18:19) but Ishmael had not accepted them. Now, when he was at risk of death, he turned to God in prayer. Many people are like this. They know what is true from the Bible but do not want to accept it in life; perhaps they mock it like Ishmael. It is only when some great problem happens to them and they do not know the answer that they turn to God in prayer.

SUMMARY

In this lesson we have learned:

- Abraham walked throughout all of Canaan to see the land God had promised to give him.
- God fulfilled His word and Isaac was born to Sarah and Abraham. God did not forget His promises but both Abraham and Sarah had to learn to be patient and to trust in God.
- Ishmael and Isaac were both brought up to understand God's promises but Ishmael did not accept them and so was sent away with his mother, Hagar. All of us have an opportunity to listen to God's word and accept it. However, if we reject it, we will be rejected by Jesus and will not have a place in the kingdom to come.