

A Rood Awakening!

Presents

Awakening in the Word

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS
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THE OVERVIEW

Our portion this week begins with the joyous news of the much anticipated fulfillment of YHWH'S promises to Abraham that he would have an heir from his own body through his wife Sarah. Consistent with this joyous proclamation, our portion begins not only with an announcement, but also with a summary of the celebration of the naming and circumcising of Isaac as well as mention of the celebration of Isaac's growth and weaning. This joyous report of Isaac's birth, circumcision, naming, and weaning is quickly interrupted by the somber story of Hagar and Ishmael being expelled by Abraham. The focus of the portion shifts at this point from Isaac to Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness and their encounter with the Sovereign One. Finally, our portion concludes with the story of Abimelech the Philistine king and his chief military advisor visiting Abraham for the purpose of making a treaty with him to assure peace between themselves and their descendants.

THE OUTLINE

1. The Birth of Isaac

- Genesis 21:1-2 Sarah's visitation and the birth of Isaac
- Genesis 21:3 The naming of Isaac
- Genesis 21:4 The circumcision of Isaac
- Genesis 21:5-7 Sarah's response to Isaac's birth
- Genesis 21:8 The celebration of Isaac's weaning

2. The Expulsion of Ishmael and Hagar

- Genesis 21:9 Ishmael "mocks" Isaac
- Genesis 21:10 Sarah petitions for the liberation of Hagar and Ishmael
- Genesis 21:11-13 Elohim affirms Sarah's request to Abraham
- Genesis 21:14 Abraham frees Hagar and Ishmael
- Genesis 21:15-16 Hagar and Ishmael in danger
- Genesis 21:17-19 The visitation of Hagar
- Genesis 21:20-21 Hagar takes a wife for Ishmael from Egypt

3. The Covenant with Abimelech

- Genesis 21:22-24 Abimelech and Abraham make covenant of peace
- Genesis 21:25-32 Abimelech and Abraham settle a dispute over a well
- Genesis 21:33-34 Abraham plants a grove and sojourns in the Philistines' land

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the connection between Genesis 20:17-18 and Genesis 21:1-3?
2. Why do verses 2, 3, and 5 focus on Abraham's age and not Sarah's?
3. Who names Isaac, and what is the significance of his name?
4. Why is Isaac and not Ishmael the son of promise?
5. What did Sarah see that upset her?
6. Whose name surprisingly never appears in this passage?
7. How old was Ishmael when Isaac was born?
8. How old is Ishmael in our portion?
9. Did Abraham violate the Torah concerning the firstborn?
10. Why did the Holy One bless Ishmael?
11. What does Abimelech desire from Abraham?
12. What does Abraham desire from Abimelech?
13. What is the significance of the seven ewe lambs?
14. What is the connection between the story of the well at Beersheba and the stories of the birth of Isaac and the expulsion of Ishmael?

THE TEXT

Genesis 21:1-34 *And YHWH visited Sarah as He had said, and YHWH did unto Sarah as He had spoken. ²For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which Elohim had spoken to him. ³And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as Elohim had commanded him. ⁵And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. ⁶And Sarah said, Elohim hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. ⁷And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? For I have born him a son in his old age. ⁸And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. ¹⁰Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. ¹¹And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. ¹²And Elohim said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. ¹³And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. ¹⁴And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her*

away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. ¹⁵And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. ¹⁶And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. ¹⁷And Elohim heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of Elohim called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for Elohim hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. ¹⁸Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. ¹⁹And Elohim opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. ²⁰And Elohim was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. ²¹And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

²²And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, Elohim is with thee in all that thou doest. ²³now therefore swear unto me here by Elohim that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. ²⁴And Abraham said, I will swear. ²⁵And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. ²⁶And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day. ²⁷And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant. ²⁸And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. ²⁹And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? ³⁰And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well. ³¹Wherefore he called that place Beersheba; because there they sware both of them. ³²Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines. ³³And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of YHWH, the everlasting Elohim. ³⁴And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.

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Our portion this week begins with the much anticipated fulfillment of the numerous promises of YHWH to Abraham that he would have an heir from his own seed through his wife Sarah. Let us look again at the twofold promises given to Abraham concerning both land and seed. While the character of Abraham is introduced at the end of Genesis chapter 11, the narrative of Abraham begins in Genesis chapter 12 with a promise.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now YHWH had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:²and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:³and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 12:6-7 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. ⁷And YHWH appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto YHWH, who appeared unto him.

Genesis 13:14-17 And YHWH said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:¹⁵for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. ¹⁶And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. ¹⁷Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

Genesis 15:4-7 And, behold, the word of YHWH came unto him, saying, This [Abram's servant] shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. ⁵And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. ⁶And he believed in YHWH; and He counted it to him for righteousness. ⁷And He said unto him, I am YHWH that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

Genesis 15:18-21 In the same day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:¹⁹the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites,²⁰and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims,²¹and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Genesis 17:4-8 As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. ⁵Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. ⁶And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. ⁷And

I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be an Elohim unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. ⁸And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their Elohim.

Genesis 17:15-16 *And Elohim said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. ¹⁶And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.*

Genesis 18:9-15 *And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. ¹⁰And He said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? ¹³And YHWH said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? ¹⁴Is any thing too hard for YHWH? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. ¹⁵Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And He said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.*

Clearly this promise of seed and land is the very core and purpose of the narrative of Abraham. We should note that Abraham was 75 years old when he left Haran and began his journey of faith.

Genesis 12:4 *So Abram departed, as YHWH had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.*

Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was born.

Genesis 16:16 *And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.*

He was 99 years old and Ishmael 13 years old when they were circumcised.

Genesis 17:24-25 *And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁵And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.*

A year after he circumcised himself and his household, the promise of an heir produced by him and his wife Sarah was finally fulfilled.

Genesis 21:1-2 *And YHWH visited Sarah as He had said, and YHWH did unto Sarah as He had spoken. ²For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which Elohim had spoken to him.*

Genesis 21:5 *And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.*

For twenty-five years Abraham and Sarah had lived by faith, wondering and waiting for the day that this promise would be fulfilled. There is much that we can learn from this narrative of promise. First and foremost we should recognize the faithfulness of the Sovereign One. We witness in the story of Abraham the fact that our Elohim is not only the maker of promises but also the fulfiller of promises. We may also note that regardless of how grand the promise may be or how impossible it may seem, YHWH is always faithful to His Word. In the story of Abraham and Sarah we witness how YHWH reveals Himself by allowing the circumstances surrounding the promises to insure that everyone would see His hand in their fulfillment.

For a young couple, the promise that they would have a child may seem somewhat unspectacular. After all, the husband and wife need only to have intimate relations, and sooner or later a child will be conceived. It does not require a great deal of faith to believe that a young, healthy married couple would or could have a child. But when the wife is consistently infertile and the couple is aging, eventually what would be considered natural becomes a matter of hope and faith.

At seventy-five Abraham was already approaching a time when the hope of fathering a child may have been diminishing. Clearly Sarah was already unable to conceive and bear children. As Abraham and Sarah continued to age, their hope of having a natural born son was beginning to wane. Their expectation was slowly being replaced with anxiety and skepticism. This skepticism is evident in Abraham's dialogue with the Creator as well as in his and Sarah's laughter at the notion that they would yet have a child of their own.

Genesis 15:2 *And Abram said, Adonai YHWH, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?*

Genesis 17:17-18 *Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? ¹⁸And Abraham said unto Elohim, O that Ishmael might live before Thee!*

Genesis 18:11-12 *Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?*

But YHWH restores their hope through a loving and gentle retort.

Genesis 18:14 *Is any thing too hard for YHWH? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.*

The obstacles of barrenness and advancing age were quickly making it very clear that if Abraham and Sarah were to have a son, it would be by the hand of YHWH and not by mere natural means. The child born of Abraham and Sarah would not be an accident of nature but a divinely-willed life.

We should realize that from the very beginning, what was promised to Abraham and Sarah was to be clearly understood as the work of YHWH, not as an act of nature or the work of any other *elohim*. Abraham and Sarah are chosen servants of the Sovereign One. As such, their purpose is to manifest the image, power, glory, and character of the Invisible Elohim. By prescribing a time beyond the natural course of nature for Sarah to conceive and bring forth an heir unto Abraham, YHWH makes manifest His unlimited power and ability, His great patience, and His faithfulness to His promises. By taking Abraham beyond the probable and even the possible, YHWH demonstrates that He is beyond the limits of our strength and imagination.

YHWH repeatedly assures Abraham and Sarah that there is a plan and an appointed time for the fulfillment of these promises to take place. Revealing His power, character, and faithfulness is, however, only one of the reasons for the delay in opening Sarah's womb.

Genesis 17:21 *But My covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at **this set time in the next year.***

Genesis 18:10 *And He said, I will certainly return unto thee **according to the time of life;** and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.*

Genesis 18:14 *Is any thing too hard for YHWH? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.*

A part of this timing involves the fact that Sarah would twice be abducted. By closing Sarah's womb during the days of her youth and physical beauty, YHWH protects His chosen vessel from scandal. There is to be no confusion concerning the paternity of the child or the miraculous nature of his birth. The Torah repeatedly speaks of Sarah's inability to bear children.

Genesis 11:30 *But Sarai was barren; she had no child.*

Genesis 15:2 *And Abram said, Adonai YHWH, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?*

Genesis 16:2 *And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, YHWH hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.*

Genesis 18:11 *Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.*

Thus, it should be clear that Sarah would not conceive even if she were abducted, seduced, or raped. That her conception could only be through the will of the Creator helps to remove any doubts concerning Isaac's legitimate claim to Abraham's inheritance. Here we should take note that although the Torah previously focused upon Sarah's advanced age and her inability to conceive and bear a child, our portion focuses not upon Sarah's age but upon Abraham's advanced age.

Genesis 21:2 *For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which Elohim had spoken to him.*

Genesis 21:5 *And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.*

Genesis 21:7 *And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? For I have born him a son in his old age.*

In the fulfillment of the promise, the focus shifts from Sarah to Abraham. I will suggest that the reason for this shift is for the purpose of making emphatic the reality that Abraham (and not Abimelech or Pharaoh) is the father of Isaac. The juxtaposition of the story of Sarah's abduction by Abimelech and the birth of Isaac may cause some to wonder if it was the king of Gerar who fathered Isaac. Our portion emphatically answers this question with a resounding NO! It is Abraham, even in his old age, who miraculously fathers Isaac.

A second reason for the delayed fulfillment of the promise of a child to Abraham and Sarah has to do with the Covenant of Circumcision. As we have stated in previous portions, the Covenant of the Cutting of the Pieces and the Covenant of the Cutting of Circumcision are two parts of the same covenant. We have seen that Ishmael was circumcised on the same day that Abraham was. By delaying the conception and birth of Isaac until after the circumcision of Abraham, Isaac becomes the first seed of Abraham to pass through the cutting and enter the Covenant of the Cutting of the Pieces. This makes Isaac the firstborn of the covenant. While Ishmael was indeed cut and bore the token of the covenant, he did not pass through the cutting; therefore, he never actually entered the covenant. Consequently, it is Isaac and his seed, not Ishmael and his seed, who are the heirs of Abraham and inheritors of the covenant promises of land and seed.

What wisdom is evident in the workings of YHWH in this matter of the perfect timing of Isaac's birth! As we wait for the return of Messiah and the final fulfillment of all the kingdom promises, we should keep these lessons in mind so as not to become discouraged or disillusioned while we are waiting on YHWH.

We must be confident that YHWH will indeed keep His promises in His perfect fashion and in His perfect timing.

2 Peter 3:2-9 *That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: ³knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, ⁴and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. ⁵For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of Elohim the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: ⁶whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: ⁷but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ⁸But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with YHWH as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹YHWH is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

Before we delve into the conflict that is at the heart of this portion, there is yet another lesson that I believe is worthy of our attention. We have already mentioned the tension and skepticism raised by the juxtaposition of the story of Sarah's abduction with the story of Isaac's birth. While this juxtaposition of the stories may raise doubts, it also reveals a powerful principle. We may remember that when Abimelech abducted Sarah, the Sovereign One warned him of the dangers he would bring upon himself and his household if he violated Sarah. We are also informed that the Creator had closed up all the wombs of Abimelech's household.

Genesis 20:3 *But Elohim came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.*

Genesis 20:18 *For YHWH had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.*

The provision that the Sovereign One made for Abimelech's release from this curse was Abraham's intercession.

Genesis 20:7 *Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.*

Genesis 20:17 *So Abraham prayed unto Elohim: and Elohim healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.*

At the end of last week's portion Abraham was asked to pray for his enemy so that Abimelech's wife and maidservants would be able to bear children. We may only imagine how many times Abraham had unsuccessfully offered such prayers for his own wife. In last week's portion Abraham was asked to petition for his adversary the very request that YHWH had not yet granted to him and Sarah. It should not go unnoticed that after Abraham prayed for Abimelech's wife and maidservants and their wombs were opened, Sarah's womb was likewise opened. Abraham's willingness to obey the will of the Creator that he pray for his enemy's household, restoring fruitfulness to Abimelech's wife and maidservants, brought a similar blessing upon Abraham. Thus, we should be careful what we pray for, even and especially for our enemies.

Yeshua likewise taught a similar principle concerning mercy and forgiveness.

Matthew 5:7 *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

Matthew 6:12-15 *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. ¹⁴For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: ¹⁵but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Matthew 18:21-35 *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? ²²Yeshua saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. ²³Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. ²⁴And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ²⁷Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. ²⁹And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ³⁰And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. ³¹So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. ³²Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: ³³shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? ³⁴And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. ³⁵So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

To the one who shows mercy, mercy is shown. To the one who forgives, forgiveness is given. We often witness in the Torah that YHWH deals with people measure for measure. We have also seen that what we sow, we reap. By planting a prayer for the healing and fruitfulness of his enemy's wife and maidservants, Abraham reaped healing and fruitfulness for his own wife. So we see a powerful principle revealed by the connection of these two stories.

Now let us move to the conflict at the very heart of our portion, which begins with the joyous news of Isaac's birth. In very rapid succession we pass through a number of important rites of passage: birth, naming, circumcision, and weaning. We may note here that Isaac's name was divinely appointed,¹ which may explain why he is the only patriarch not to have his name changed. I would also point out how little attention is given to the fact that Isaac is circumcised. It is mentioned only as one of the three rites of passage, and the focus is more upon Abraham's obedience to fulfill the commandment than on Isaac actually being circumcised. While Abraham fulfills the commandment to circumcise his son on the eighth day, the fact that Isaac passed through the cutting of Abraham's circumcision is what is of ultimate importance. By passing through the cutting, Isaac does what Ishmael cannot do. By passing through the cutting, Isaac enters the covenant and becomes the heir of its promises.

The same day Isaac is weaned, Abraham makes a great feast. The Torah then immediately tells us that Sarah sees Ishmael mocking Isaac.

Genesis 21:8-9 *And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.*

The juxtaposition of these two verses strongly suggests that what Sarah witnesses is taking place during the events of the party. We should be clear as to what Sarah is observing. First, we should recall that

¹ Genesis 17:19

Ishmael was thirteen years of age when he was circumcised. Isaac was born the next year when Ishmael was fourteen years of age. Weaning in the Ancient Near East took place when a child was between six months to five years of age.

The age at which infants are weaned varies in different societies. In Egypt and Assyria breast-feeding often lasted three years; similarly in Israel, at least in second temple times (2 Macc. 7:27). One Rabbinic statement limits the practice to twenty-four months, while another mentions a period of four or five years (ket 60a).²

1 Samuel 1:22-24 *But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before YHWH, and there abide for ever. ²³And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only YHWH establish His word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him. ²⁴And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of YHWH in Shiloh: and the child was young.*

2 Maccabees 7:27 *But she bowing herself toward him, laughing the cruel tyrant to scorn, spake in her country language on this manner; O my son, have pity upon me that bare thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee such three years, and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age, and endured the troubles of education.*

If we assume that Isaac is at least three years of age at the time of this event, then we must understand that Ishmael is at least 17 years of age. The significant age difference between Isaac and Ishmael evokes a great deal of speculation when it comes to describing what Sarah witnesses. At the very center of this speculation is a debate over the meaning of the Hebrew word *metzachek* (*mem, tzade, chet, kof*), which is variously translated as “mocking,” “playing,” and “sporting.” The root of this word is *tzachak* (*tzade, chet, kof*), which means “to laugh.” This is the same word that is at the root of Isaac’s name, Yitzchak. Clearly the name Yitzchak or Isaac is based upon Abraham and Sarah’s laughter at the news of an heir. But in our portion there seems to be something more sinister at play. Some have even suggested that Ishmael was sexually abusing Isaac. This line of thinking is based upon the use of the word in the later story where Abimelech witnesses Isaac “sporting” with Rebekah.

Genesis 26:8 *And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.*

In this passage the word *tzachak* clearly carries with it a sexual form of playfulness. While the context of the above passage does indicate a sexual nature to the playing, the word itself emphasizes only the idea of playfulness; there is no connotation of any kind of sexual behavior. I reject, therefore, any notion of Ishmael sexually abusing Isaac.

Some have taught that because of Sarah’s pride, she does not like the fact that the son of a slave is playing with her freeborn son. In this regard Sarah is concerned about the influence the son of a low class bondwoman might have upon her son. It is also taught that Ishmael is simply playing with his little brother in a rough, harmful, or otherwise risky fashion. In other words, Sarah sees Ishmael using his superior size and strength to dominate the little boy Isaac, perhaps even teasing him. While this is indeed a possible understanding of the intention of the text, it is complicated by the lack of Isaac’s name. In other words, there is nothing in the text overtly stating that Ishmael is mocking Isaac.

Genesis 21:9 *And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.*

² The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 146

We can just as easily read this passage in the following ways:

Genesis 21:9 *And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, laughing.*

Note that there is nothing in the text that states whom or what Ishmael is mocking, or at whom or at what he is laughing. The text may also read as follows, which may make the most sense:

Genesis 21:9 *And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, sporting.*

Shortly after this event we are informed that Ishmael becomes an archer.

Genesis 21:20 *And Elohim was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.*

I would suggest that possibly what Sarah witnesses is Ishmael demonstrating his athletic prowess, thus drawing the guests' attention to himself and away from her son Isaac, the honoree of the feast. Would this display of selfishness be enough to provoke Sarah to request his expulsion? I believe the answer to this question is found in the text itself. Let us first take note of the fact that while the portion begins with the joyous announcement of Isaac's birth and rites of passage, the attention of the reader is diverted from Isaac to Ishmael. The story of Isaac is allotted eight verses, while the story of Ishmael receives the attention of 13 verses. In addition to this inequality of verses is the evidence we find in Sarah's response to what she sees.

Genesis 21:10 *Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall **not be heir** with my son, with Isaac.*

The Hebrew word translated by the King James translators as "heir" is formed from the root word *yarash* (*yud, resh, shin*), meaning "to take possession of" or "to inherit." There is another Hebrew word, *nachal* (*nun, chet, lammed*), which likewise means "to inherit." By the usage of these two words we can discern a subtle difference between them that may solve this puzzle for us. *Nachal* is the verb used when there is more than one heir involved.

Deuteronomy 21:16 *Then it shall be, when he maketh his **sons to inherit (nachal)** that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn.*

Numbers 26:56 *According to the lot shall the **possession (nachal)** thereof be divided between many and few.*

Words formed from the root word *yarash* are used, however, to indicate an inheritance received by a single heir.

Genesis 15:3 *And Abram said, Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, **one born in my house is mine heir (yoresh)**.*

I would suggest that after witnessing the manner in which Ishmael draws all the attention to himself, Sarah fears that he might likewise seek to draw all of the inheritance to himself, leaving nothing for Isaac.³

With this fear in mind, Sarah demands that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. Here we may remember that it was Sarai who suggested that Abram father a child through Hagar and gave Hagar to Abram to be his wife.

³ The Schottenstein Edition Interlinear Chumash, Genesis, ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications, Pp. 105-106

Genesis 16:3 *And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.*

We have also witnessed that once Hagar conceived, there was tension between Sarai and Hagar.

Genesis 16:4 *And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.*

At this point Sarai complained to Abram about the way she was being treated. But Abram reminded Sarai that Hagar was still her handmaid and that she was free to deal with her as she saw fit.

Genesis 16:6 *But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.*

While we often want to make Sarah out to be the wicked witch of the East for treating poor, pregnant Hagar harshly, this may not be the case. While it was clearly Sarai's intention to give Hagar to Abram as a second wife, Abram did not bestow this title upon her. We should recognize here that marriage was a major ordeal. A man and woman did not simply become married. Arrangements were made, contracts negotiated, rights determined, and prices paid. A "wife" had legal rights as determined by the contracts that were negotiated. On occasion, however, poor girls could be taken in as servants and then become concubines. A concubine was a partner without legal rights. A marriage contract may have included a clause stating that if the wife could not have children, she was obligated to provide another woman, usually a servant girl, to bear children for her. We should remember as well that servants (especially non-Hebrew servants) were the property of their master,⁴ as were their children.⁵

A husband could adopt the child of a slave as his own child and bestow upon him the right of inheritance. According to the Nuzu tablets of Sumer, the standard practice of the Ancient Near East was that a childless family could adopt a servant born in its house as an heir. This servant would assume the responsibilities of a son to care for the parents in their old age and would inherit the estate upon the parents' death. If, however, a natural son should be born to the adoptive family, then the servant would be reduced to the role of a second born, and the natural son would become the heir.⁶ This is clearly what has happened in the case of Hagar and Ishmael. It is clear that Hagar is not a "wife" but a concubine or surrogate mother. It is also clear that Abraham has bestowed sonship upon Ishmael. We witness Abraham interceding for Ishmael and treating him as a son.

Genesis 17:18 *And Abraham said unto Elohim, O that Ishmael might live before Thee!*

Genesis 17:23 *And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as Elohim had said unto him.*

Genesis 17:25 *And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.*

The Torah contains clear laws governing a man who has two wives. While Hagar may not have the legal rights of a wife, she nonetheless occupies this role. Her son Ishmael is clearly considered by Abraham to be a son, and, in fact, the firstborn.

⁴ Leviticus 25:40-46

⁵ Exodus 21:4, 7-11

⁶ The Bible and the Ancient Near East, Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, W.W. Norton & Company, Pg. 109

Deuteronomy 21:15-17 *If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: ¹⁶then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: ¹⁷but he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.*

Based upon this passage of the Torah, it would appear that Sarah is suggesting that Abraham violate the Torah by rejecting the firstborn of the “hated” wife in order to make the favored wife’s son the heir of the double portion. What should amaze us even more is the fact that the Sovereign One Himself seems to affirm Sarah’s position. Is it possible that Sarah would suggest that Abraham violate the Torah and that the Creator would indeed sanction such behavior? Many commentators, including Victor Hamilton, have stumbled over this passage and have drawn a wrong conclusion.

Sarah’s real concern now becomes clear. She is disturbed not by Ishmael’s behavior (v.9) but by the possibility that this “ben ama” (son of the common people) is in a position, legally, to share the inheritance with Isaac. This is an altogether different explanation for the source of conflict than in ch.16. There the controversy emerged because of Sarai’s infertility and Hagar’s fertility. Here the issue is inheritance.

Cuneiform law indicates that the son of a slave woman had a legal claim on his father’s property. If that custom forms the backdrop to this story, then Sarah is asking Abraham to commit an illegal act. This may also explain why Sarah uses the verb “garas,” which, as we noted, can be a term in the O.T. for divorce. Ishmael is not just a slave girl’s boy but the son of Abraham’s second wife. Sarah is pushing for Ishmael’s disinheritance, however contrary it may be to legal principle.⁷

I believe that there is more to the story than is evident from the text itself. Consequently, we are required to look into other archeological evidence for understanding. There are several ancient Law Codes that have been discovered which predate the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai; the most notable being the code of Hammurabi. I want to be clear that the Torah is eternal. In other words, Abraham knew the Torah, as did Adam, Seth, Noah, and Shem. The fact that much of the Torah’s legal codes are incorporated into the legal codes of other ancient cultures does not imply that the Moses drew upon these codes to write the Torah (as many liberal scholars contend). These ancient codes verify that the Torah was known from the beginning and was later restored and corrected at Sinai. There are other older codes, such as the code of Lipit-Ishtar, which predate the famed Hammurabi code. Lipit-Ishtar was the fifth ruler of the dynasty of Isin, and ruled from 1934-1924 B.C.E. Nahum M. Sarna writes:

The laws of Hammurabi (par 170f.) and of the still earlier Lipit-Ishtar (par. 25) implicitly make inheritance rights legal consequences of the father’s acceptance of the infant as his legitimate son. There is no doubt that Ishmael was entitled to a share of Abraham’s estate. The key to Sarah’s demand lies in a clause in the laws of Lipit-Ishtar where it is stipulated that the father may grant freedom to the slave woman and the children she has born him, in which case they forfeit their share of the paternal property (cf. Judges 11:1-3). Sarah is asking Abraham to exercise that legal right (cf. 25:6).⁸

The actual law of Lipit-Ishtar reads:

If a man married his wife and she bore him children and those children are living, and a slave also bore children for her master but the father granted freedom to the slave and

⁷ New International Commentary of the Old Testament, Victor P. Hamilton, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Pg. 80

⁸ The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 147

*her children, the children of the slave shall not divide the estate with the children of their former master.*⁹

I agree with Sarna that Sarah is merely asking Abraham to exercise his legal prerogative by freeing Hagar and her son from the state of slavery. Clearly Sarah's motivation is not love for Hagar and Ishmael; it is concern for her son Isaac's inheritance. Thus, Sarah is not asking Abraham to violate the Torah or any other law. The Sovereign One is not affirming such a violation, nor is Abraham guilty of any infraction. Instead, Sarah is suggesting that Abraham exercise his legal right. The situation grieves Abraham, but YHWH affirms that this separation is indeed a necessary part of the plan. The Holy One comforts Abraham with the assurance that Ishmael will indeed be blessed.

Genesis 21:13 *And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.*

Again, we should note that the reason for Ishmael's blessing is the fact that he is Abraham's seed. Ishmael will indeed become a nation, because this is what the Sovereign One promised Abraham concerning his seed even before Ishmael was born. Here we would do well to understand that YHWH is faithful to His word. We may also see in this, however, how our actions can turn the Creator's faithfulness to His promises into a curse instead of a blessing.

If Sarah's extreme request is motivated by Ishmael's drawing attention away from Isaac to himself and the fear that he will ultimately share the inheritance, it is interesting to note that Ishmael's name never appears in this portion. While Ishmael may have been showing off a bit trying to make a name for himself, it is as though the Torah humbles him by reducing his stature and status. Ishmael is referred to as "the son of Hagar the Egyptian," "the son of the bondwoman," "her son," "the child," and "the lad," but never as Ishmael. He is also never referred to as "the son of Abraham." While Abraham and Hagar affectionately refer to him as *yeled* or "child," it is interesting to note that the Creator refers to Ishmael only as *na'ar*, meaning "lad" or "young man," making no reference to his relationship to Abraham. It is as though YHWH humbles the one who is seeking to exalt himself.

Unlike the events in chapter 16 when Abraham listens to Sarah's voice concerning Hagar without confirming it with his head, the Sovereign One, here Abraham acts only after Sarah's request is confirmed by YHWH. Here the proper order of headship is being demonstrated. Once again, this time at the Creator's behest, Abraham listens to Sarah's voice and liberates Hagar and Ishmael. It is clear from the text that this is not an easy thing for Abraham to do, but his love for YHWH is greater than his love for his son, as we shall see demonstrated again in the future.

Once again, we see that Abraham is quick to fulfill all that YHWH calls him to do.

Genesis 21:14 *And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.*

There are several important details that we should take note of in this verse. First is the speed with which Abraham fulfills his mandate. Second, we should understand that the provisions that Abraham gives Hagar are sufficient for both Hagar and Ishmael to return to Egypt or some other town. Third, we must note that Hagar puts the water bottle on her shoulder, not Ishmael's. He is nearly 17 years of age at the time of their liberation. Finally, we should be aware that the reason the water runs out is not because of a shamefully inadequate gift of supplies on Abraham's part, but because Hagar "wanders" in the wilderness.

⁹ Wikipedia, Lipit-Ishtar, ref. Martha T. Roth, Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lipit-Ishtar>

Again in this story we witness the incredible faithfulness of YHWH to His Word. YHWH promises Abraham that if he acts obediently, He will take care of Ishmael and make him a great nation. Abraham faithfully subdues his own emotions and frees Ishmael. Now, in the wilderness, the Sovereign One intervenes and saves Hagar and Ishmael by showing Hagar a well of water.

The image of water in this story intrigues me. Is it possible that the water YHWH reveals to Hagar is a metaphor for the Torah? While Hagar the Egyptian and her son dwelt with Abraham, he provided them Torah teaching (water). When they leave, however, the little teaching and faith imparted to them is used up as they wander in the wilderness. In the barrenness of the wilderness away from Abraham's tent, Hagar and Ishmael lose hope and the desire to live. But again, for Abraham's sake, the Sovereign One intervenes by opening Hagar's eyes and showing her a well of water (the living Torah). If they drink of this living water they will live, and the promised blessing will be received. We are told in this story that "the lad" does drink and that Elohim is with "the lad." It is interesting to note that nowhere does it say that Hagar drinks of this water. Hagar then provides Ishmael with a wife from her own country, Egypt, seeming to indicate her return to her father's house.

Our portion ends with a bit of a puzzle. After the verses about the expulsion of Ishmael, our portion relays another story about a well. Abimelech the king of Gerar and his military advisor suddenly show up on Abraham's doorstep seeking to make a treaty with Abraham. The reason for this treaty is clearly stated in Abimelech's own words.

Genesis 21:22 *And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, Elohim is with thee in all that thou does.*

Abimelech saw firsthand the power of Abraham's prayers in their last encounter. The inspiration that prompted Abimelech to travel to Abraham's tent to request a treaty may well have been the news of Isaac's birth. Recognizing that both Abraham and Sarah were advanced in years, this news would have been understood to be miraculous. We should note that Abimelech does not desire a treaty because Abraham has grown rich and powerful but because he recognizes the anointing of YHWH upon him. What we witness in Abimelech is the beginning of the "fear of YHWH." We should also note that in the previous encounter, Abimelech was clearly the superior and Abraham the inferior. In this encounter, however, it is clear that Abraham and Abimelech are equals. The covenant made between them is one of parity.

The first part of the covenant is based upon Abimelech's request of Abraham. By the content we may hear innuendo concerning Abimelech's first encounter with Abraham, which nearly cost him his life.

Genesis 21:23-24 *Now therefore swear unto me here by Elohim that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. ²⁴And Abraham said, I will swear.*

At the heart of this clause is a request for honest and benevolent dealings between Abraham and Abimelech and their future generations. Abraham is gracious and grants Abimelech's request. But then Abraham boldly puts forth a request of Abimelech, which may have caught the king off guard.

Genesis 21:25-30 *And Abraham reproveth Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. ²⁶And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day. ²⁷And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant. ²⁸And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. ²⁹And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? ³⁰And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well.*

Once again, Abimelech claims ignorance and quickly corrects the situation by affirming that Abraham is indeed the owner of the well. Abraham sets apart seven ewe lambs and gives them to Abimelech as a sign of ownership of the well. The Torah tells us that they made a covenant with each other that day and that Abraham called the place "Beersheba."

Genesis 21:25-31 *And Abraham reproveth Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. ²⁶And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day. ²⁷And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant. ²⁸And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. ²⁹And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? ³⁰And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well. ³¹Wherefore he called that place Beersheba; because there they swear both of them.*

The setting apart of the seven ewe lambs may have served as a reminder to Abimelech and others that this well had been purchased by Abraham from Abimelech. The Hebrew word for seven is *sheva* (*shin, vet, ayin*). The Hebrew word for oath is *shava* (*shin, vet, ayin*). The name Abraham gives to the well is Be'er-Sheva (*be'er* meaning "well"), which may be translated as either the "Well of Seven" or the "Well of Oaths." Clearly the name was to be a reminder and a testimony of this covenant between Abimelech and Abraham.

The puzzle that remains is why this story is connected to the stories of the birth of Isaac and the expulsion of Ishmael. As we have seen above, the first two stories clearly have an organic connection. But this final story in our portion, at least on the surface, has no apparent connection with the rest of the story. Is it possible that this was just an accident of historical timing and chronology? Is the sole connection, as is mentioned above, the fact that Abimelech heard of Isaac's birth and saw this as confirmation of the anointing upon Abraham? I am going to suggest another possibility, which I will admit stretches it a bit, but does have a real connection to the story of Isaac's birth.

We should take note of the parallels between Sarah and the well at Beersheba.

SARAH

- Abraham is the rightful husband of Sarah
- Abimelech's men abduct Sarah
- Abimelech pleads ignorance
- Abimelech restores Sarah
- A gift is given to demonstrate integrity

THE WELL

- Abraham is the rightful owner of the well
- Abimelech's men take the well
- Abimelech pleads ignorance
- Abimelech restores the well
- A gift is given to demonstrate integrity

We may note elsewhere in the Scriptures that wells/cisterns and wives are connected.

Proverbs 5:15-20 *Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. ¹⁶Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. ¹⁷Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee. ¹⁸Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. ¹⁹Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. ²⁰And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?*

With this in mind, I am suggesting that this story of the well is really another affirmation that Isaac is the child of Abraham and not the son of Abimelech. In this regard we may consider Sarah as the well that Abraham "digged." That sexual relations are referred to in such agricultural terms is witnessed in the book of Deuteronomy as well.

Deuteronomy 22:9-10 *Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. ¹⁰Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.*

By context, the above verses are a reference to marriage and family. So it is in our text as well. Abraham digged the well; that is, Abraham was intimate with Sarah. Thus, that which came from Sarah belongs to Abraham, not to Abimelech or his men. Therefore, by Abimelech accepting the gift of the ewe lambs, he is acknowledging that what came from the well – what came from Sarah – surely belongs to Abraham and not to himself. We could understand that this story is Abimelech's way of affirming in the eyes of all his kingdom that Isaac is indeed the son of the old man Abraham and not, as some might suppose, of his own encounter with Sarah.

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