

God keeps his promises...

Genesis 20: 1 – 21: 34

Abraham and Sarah travelled to Gerar, the sea coast country in the south-west of Palestine, on the way to Egypt. The people who lived in this area were later called the Philistines. These were the enemies of Israel. The king's name was Abimelech, which means 'my father is king.' This suggests an authority no higher than man: it is the concept of 'my father as king of all the people', the supreme ruler. Abraham was evidently upset by what had happened in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and perhaps longed to get away from the infamy and terror. So he moved down into the south country and came across these people. The first thing he did there was to tell a lie (or 'half-truth') about his wife. He said she was his sister, exactly as he did 30 years before...

Abraham and Abimelech (Genesis 20: 1 – 18)

- What motivated Abraham to (once again) tell this lie? How would you describe Abimelech's character? Do you think Abraham misjudged Abimelech?
- How does this story contrast the faithlessness of man with the faithfulness of God? See 2 Timothy 2 v 13.

The birth of Isaac (Genesis 21: 1 - 7)

- Notice how Isaac's birth happened exactly as God had promised to Abraham and Sarah. In what ways was the birth of Isaac miraculous? Why did Abraham circumcise Isaac?
- 'Isaac' means 'laughter'. What is the difference between Sarah's laughter in verse 6 and her laughter back in Genesis 18? What brought about this change?

Hagar and Ishmael sent away (Genesis 21: 8 – 21)

- Why did God condone Sarah's demand to "get rid of that slave woman and her son", even though this act of rejection seemed cruelly unfair and harmful to Hagar and Ishmael, and greatly distressing to Abraham?
- Why did God nevertheless hear Ishmael's cries? How did God provide for Hagar and Ishmael, and what did he promise to do for Ishmael?
- See Romans 9 v 6 – 9 and Galatians 4 v 28 – 31. Who are the "children of promise"? Why are they like Isaac?

The treaty at Beersheba (Genesis 21: 22 – 34)

- What was it about Abraham that made Abimelech believe that a covenant between them would be kept? Do you think Abraham deserved to be seen as trustworthy?

So God keeps his promises – even against all odds... Remember when Sarah was in doubt, God reassured Abraham with the words: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18 v 14). As we approach Christmas, remember too how the angel Gabriel reassured Mary about her cousin Elizabeth, who was barren yet conceived a son in her old age (John the Baptist): "With God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1 v 37).