

# Ministry of Grace

## Lesson 11 – Difficult Decision

### Genesis 21:1-34

<sup>1</sup>The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. <sup>2</sup>And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup>Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. <sup>4</sup>And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup>Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup>And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." <sup>7</sup>And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

<sup>8</sup>And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. <sup>9</sup>But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. <sup>10</sup>So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." <sup>11</sup>And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. <sup>12</sup>But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. <sup>13</sup>And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring."

<sup>14</sup>So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. <sup>15</sup>When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup>Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. <sup>17</sup>And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. <sup>18</sup>Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." <sup>19</sup>Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. <sup>20</sup>And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. <sup>21</sup>He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

<sup>22</sup>At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do. <sup>23</sup>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." <sup>24</sup>And Abraham said, "I will swear." <sup>25</sup>When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, <sup>26</sup>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."

<sup>27</sup>So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. <sup>28</sup>Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. <sup>29</sup>And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?" <sup>30</sup>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." <sup>31</sup>Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. <sup>34</sup>And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

## Synopsis

After all these years of waiting, when hope seemed gone, Yahweh finally fulfilled his promise to Abraham. Sarah got pregnant and gave birth to a son whom they named Isaac. On the day he was weaned they had a great celebration as was customary at that time. This was the day that an infant officially became a member of the family. Even more significant to Abraham and Sarah was the fact that it meant that Isaac was also officially declared to be Abraham's heir. Though good news for Abraham, it was not good news to Hagar and her son Ishmael. It was perhaps a result of Ishmael's lost hope of becoming Abraham's heir that he now laughed and made fun of little Isaac.

Unfortunately for Ishmael and his mother, Sarah saw Ishmael making fun of her son and as an apparent act of jealousy, she insisted that Abraham divorce Hagar and send her away. This would officially remove Ishmael from any claim on an inheritance from Abraham. The thought of sending Ishmael away with his mother was displeasing to Abraham, but God spoke to Abraham and told him to do as Sarah had suggested.

Early the next morning Abraham gave Hagar food and water and sent her away. After the water ran out, Hagar assumed that they would both die in the wilderness so she had Ishmael lie down in the shade of a bush and she went away a little distance to cry. Apparently, Ishmael took that opportunity to talk to Yahweh, because we are told that he heard Ishmael. Yahweh then told Hagar to go get the boy and he opened her eyes so that she saw the well that was nearby. We are not told any other details except that Ishmael and Hagar survived, he married an Egyptian woman, and Ishmael became very accomplished with a bow and arrow.

Sometime after this, King Abimelech came to Abraham and proposed an agreement between them that they would deal kindly with each other. Abraham agreed and proceeded to tell Abimelech that he had dug the well and Abimelech's people had taken it from him. Abraham then set aside 7 lambs from his flock. When Abimelech asked him the meaning of the lambs Abraham said that they were a witness that he had dug the well. They both agreed and Abraham named the well Beersheba (well of an oath, or well of seven).



**Figure 1 - The Well at Beersheba**

**Genesis 21:1-3**

**The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.**

“The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised.” – The Targum of Jonathan and the Targum of Jerusalem paraphrase this verse as, “God did a wonder for Sarah in causing her to conceive when she was so old, and in such circumstances as she was.”

“at the time of which God had spoken to him” – Remember, back in **Genesis 18:10** God had said “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” This is a literal fulfillment of that promise.

“Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him ... Isaac” – Isaac was named in accordance with what Abraham was told to name him (**Genesis 17:19**). Isaac (*yitskhaq*) means “to laugh - in delight, merriment, or mockery.” Abraham laughed in delight, initially Sarah laughed in mockery, but after he was born she laughed in delight (see verse six). Later on he will be laughed at in merriment by Ishmael (**Genesis 21:9**).

**Genesis 21:4, 5**

**And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.**

“Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old” – This was in accordance with what God had commanded him a year earlier:

This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ... He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, (**Genesis 17:10, 12**)

“Abraham was one hundred years old” – It has been twenty-five years since Abraham left Haran:

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. (**Genesis 12:4**)

Since we have determined that he left Haran about five years after his original call from Ur, it has now been thirty years since he was promised that in him all peoples of the earth will be blessed:

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (**Genesis 12:3**)

Also, it has been about sixteen years since he was told that his seed would be the Messiah (**Genesis chapter fifteen**).

It has been fourteen years since Ishmael was born:

Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (**Genesis 16:16**)

## Timeline of Abraham

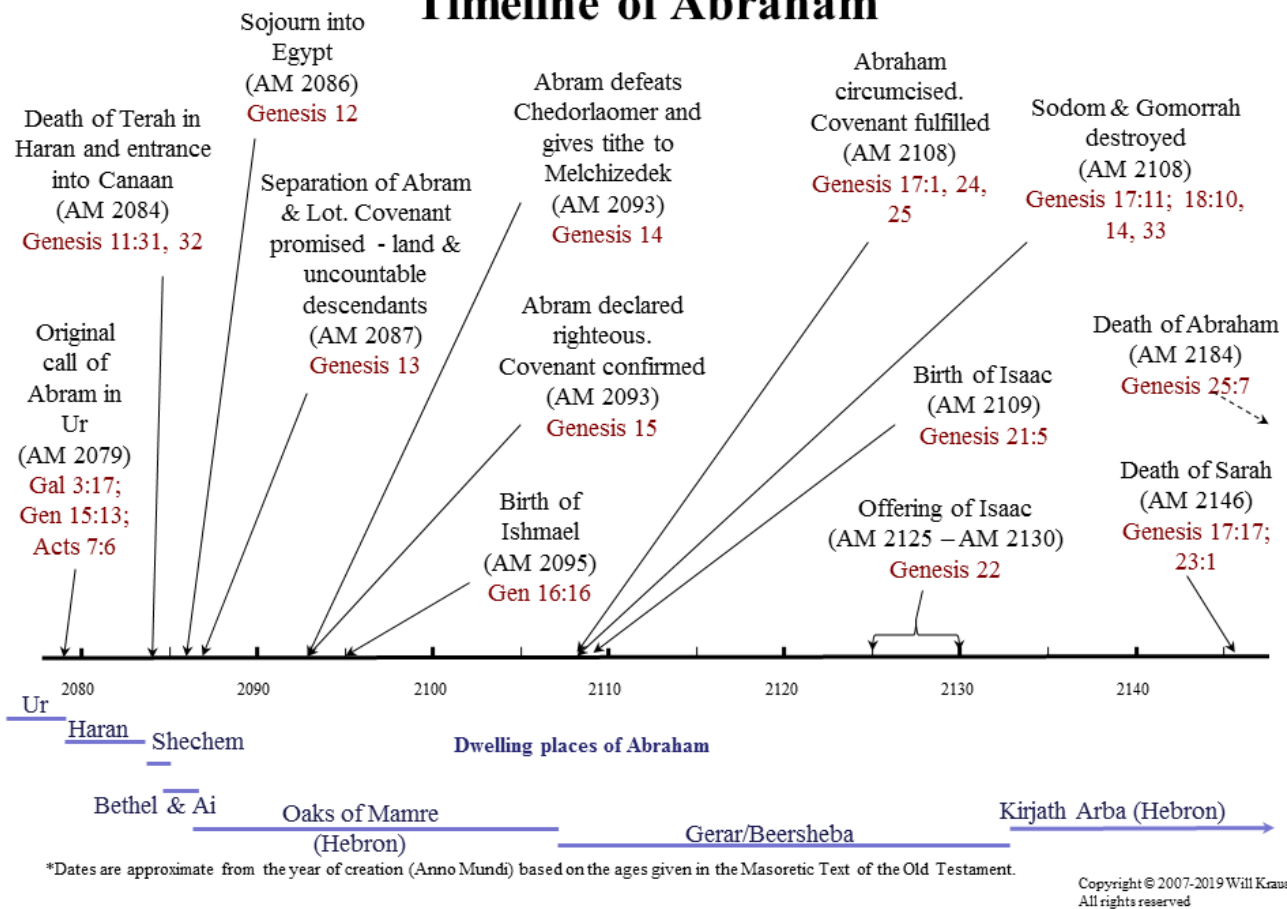


Figure 2 - Timeline of Abraham's Life

### Genesis 21:6, 7

And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

"God has made laughter for me" – The birth of Isaac caused Sarah to respond in joy. In a similar manner, Mary rejoiced when she was told that she would be the mother of the Messiah:

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, (Luke 1:46-47)

### Genesis 21:8-10

And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac."

"And the child grew and was weaned" – At what age Isaac was weaned is uncertain. According to Jarchi (12<sup>th</sup> century Rabbi and commentator), he was 24 months old. According to the book of 2

Maccabees, a child was weaned at the age of three years. According to Jerome (4<sup>th</sup> century theologian and historian), Isaac was five years old when he was weaned. According to Philo (Jewish philosopher of the 1<sup>st</sup> century), Isaac was seven years old when he was weaned. Others claim that he may have been ten or twelve years old before he was weaned.

For our study we can assume that Isaac was two or three years old when he was weaned (we'll see why later in this study). This would make Ishmael sixteen or seventeen years old at the time.

What we do know is that when a male child was weaned, he officially became a member of the family, with a right to inherit the estate of his father. This is probably the reason for the celebration and the feast (and may also be the cause of contention between Isaac and Ishmael).

“Sarah saw the son of Hagar ... laughing” – The word translated “laughing” is *tsakhaq*. This is the same word used of both Abraham and Sarah when they laughed at the thought of having a child. However, this is a different type of laughter, for in the book of Galatians we are told that Ishmael persecuted Isaac:

But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. (Galatians 4:29)

Thus, we can assume that Ishmael's laughter at Isaac was out of derision, not out of joy. We can also assume from Sarah's following comments, that the teasing had something to do with both boys being heirs and Ishmael's being the eldest.

“Cast out this slave woman” – The Hebrew word translated “Cast out” is *garish*, meaning “to drive out” or “to cast out.” It is the word used of Adam being cast out of the Garden of Eden in **Genesis 3:24**. It is also the word used of a woman who has been divorced from her husband in **Leviticus 21:7**. Because Ishmael was a legitimate son of Abraham, there could have been some claim to inheritance as the eldest son. If Abraham divorced Hagar, however, her son would no longer have a right to the inheritance. This seems to be Sarah's intent.

### **Genesis 21:11-13**

**And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring."**

“the thing was very displeasing ... on account of his son” – There are two possible reasons for Abraham being displeased. The first is that he may have been displeased at Ishmael's actions. The second is that he may have been displeased at Sarah's suggestion, because Ishmael was his son. The latter is more likely because of what God said to him.

“But God said” – Not Yahweh (the LORD) but Elohim (God). Because God's personal name is not used in the text, some scholars believe that this was not an audible voice, but an inward “voice of the spirit” or the voice of God in a dream, which spoke to Abraham.

“through Isaac shall your offspring be named” – This does not mean that his descendants will refer to themselves as Isaac's descendants. It means “in Isaac shall descendants be called into existence to you.”

“I will also make a nation of the son of the slave woman” – According to **Genesis 25:13-16** there were twelve princes born to Ishmael.

**Genesis 21:14-16**

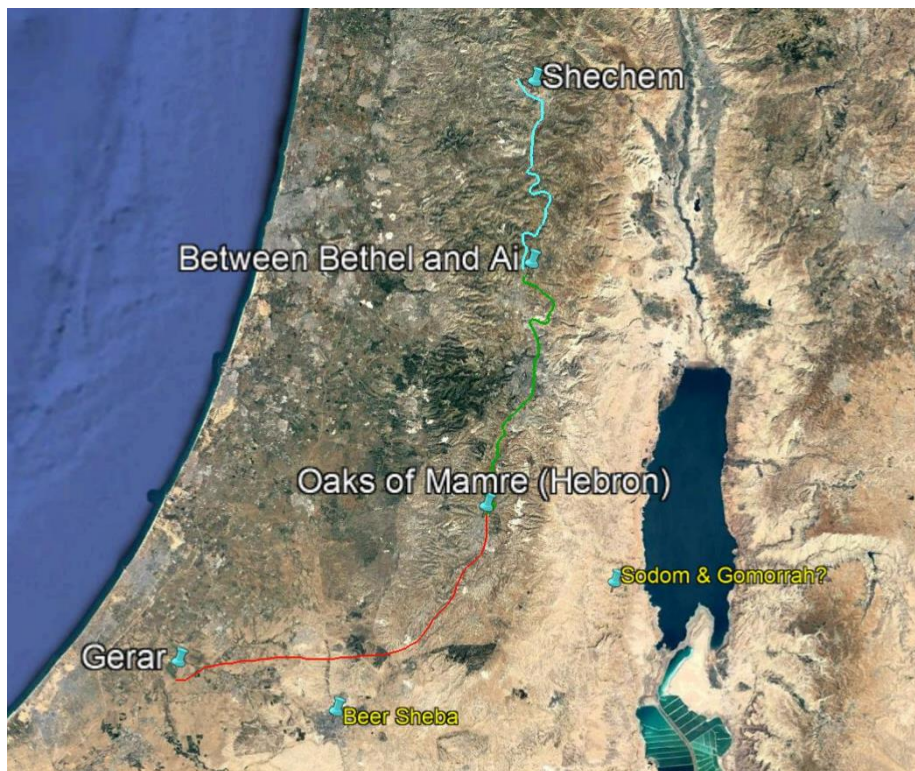
So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

“Abraham rose early in the morning” – Apparently, Abraham and Sarah had their conversation about Ishmael in the evening. Perhaps God then communicated to him in a dream.

“bread” – Hebrew *lekhem*, meaning “bread or grain, but used as a general expression for any kind of food.”

“putting it on her shoulder” – From this we can infer that Ishmael was not more than sixteen years old (seventeen at the most), because had he been older he would have been the one carrying the provisions. It may appear that Abraham, who previously has treated guests so generously, was being cruel to Hagar and Ishmael by providing so little food and water. It was customary, however, to provide only enough water to get the travelers to the next well. Apparently Abraham instructed them in the way to the well, but they got lost.

“and sent her away” – Here we see the first example of Abraham following the direction of God when it was not what he naturally wanted to do. In his call out of Ur and out of Haran as well as his various travels throughout the land of Canaan, his following of God’s lead was not something that was displeasing to him. Here we see Abraham sending Hagar and Ishmael away even though it was painful to do so.



**Figure 3 - Gerar and Beer Sheba**

“Wilderness of Beersheba” – This wilderness is to the south and east of Gerar. The well that was later named Beersheba (see verse thirty-one) is about twelve miles east of Gerar.

“she put the child under one of the bushes” – Since Ishmael was around sixteen or seventeen years old, this probably means that he became exhausted and was unable to go any further. Therefore, Hager directed him to lie in the shade.

“lifted up her voice and wept” – Either Hagar had forgotten or had chosen not to believe God’s promise from seventeen years earlier when He told her:

And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." (Genesis 16:11-12)

### **Genesis 21:17-19**

**And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.**

“God heard the voice of the boy” – It’s interesting to note that God heard Ishmael. It does not say that God heard Hagar. The name Ishmael means “God hears.”

“the angel of God” – Not a created angel, but God, himself. Only God could make the statement “I will make him a great nation.”

“I will make him into a great nation.” – God reminds Hagar of the promise He made years earlier:

The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." (Genesis 16:10)

“Then God opened her eyes” – This apparently refers to mental perception, not visual acuity. Obviously, the well had been there all along, but Hagar simply had not noticed it. We are not specifically told that this well is the same as Beersheba (well of an oath) identified in verse thirty-one, but it very well could be.

### **Genesis 21:20, 21**

**And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.**

“became an expert with the bow” – Isaiah mentions the people of Kedar (one of the twelve sons of Ishmael) as archers:

For thus the Lord said to me, "Within a year, according to the years of a hired worker, all the glory of Kedar will come to an end. And the remainder of the archers of the mighty men of the sons of Kedar will be few, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken." (Isaiah 21:16-17)

The secular writer, Virgil, speaks of the Ituraeans (descendants of Jetur, another of the sons of Ishmael) as being remarkable with their bows.



“Wilderness of Paran” – This wilderness is to the southeast of the land of Canaan, extending all the way into the Arabian Peninsula.

“his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt” – This is not surprising since Hagar was from Egypt originally (see [Genesis 16:1](#)).

### **Genesis 21:22-24**

**At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do. 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." And Abraham said, "I will swear."**

“at that time” – These events took place at about the same time as the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael.

“God is with you in all that you do” – This is a direct fulfillment of the promise made to Abram when he was instructed to leave his homeland and travel to the Promised Land:

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ([Genesis 12:2](#))

Even though Abimelech’s first encounter with Abraham and Sarah was less than honorable, the king has had sufficient time to recognize that Abraham has the blessing of God on him.

“swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me” – Again, Abimelech has good reason to ask for this type of treaty because of the deception perpetrated by Abraham and Sarah when they first came into the country around Gerar.

“as I have dealt kindly with you” – Abimelech has treated Abraham honestly and respectfully ever since he learned that Abraham and Sarah were husband and wife and that Abraham was a prophet.

### **Genesis 21:25, 26**

**When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, 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."**

“Abraham reproved Abimelech” – Having agreed to treat Abimelech and his people fairly, Abraham now brings to his attention a wrong that Abimelech’s people have done to Abraham.

“and I have not heard of it until today” – Abimelech informs Abraham that he had been ignorant of these events until told them by Abraham. The implication is that if he had known of it sooner, he would have resolved the issue already.

### **Genesis 21:27-32**

**So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?" 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." Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. 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.**

“Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech” – As a token of his intention to deal honorably with Abimelech in the future, Abraham gave him a gift. He also set seven lambs off to the side by themselves.

“the two men made a covenant.” – Literally, “the two of them cut a covenant.” The process of a covenant was to cut a number of animals in two and arrange the pieces so that the two parties could walk between them. This is the same process that God and Abraham went through when God made His covenant with Abraham (except that only God walked between the pieces). See **Genesis 15:10-17**.

“What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs” – The purpose of the seven lambs was to secure a title to the well. That is, by giving these lambs to Abimelech, Abraham made a public claim to the well. By accepting the seven lambs, Abimelech publicly acknowledged that the well was Abraham’s.

“that place was called Beersheba” – Beersheba means “well of seven.” Since an oath was often performed by repeating a promise seven times, the word for an oath is the same as the word for seven. Thus, Beersheba also means “well of an oath.”

“So they made a covenant at Beersheba” – It is likely that both Abraham and Abimelech recited their promises to each other seven times at Beersheba.

### **Genesis 21:33, 34**

**Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.**

“the Everlasting God” – *El Olam*. The word *olam* refers to “the vanishing point in the distance at which things disappear.” Thus, it has taken on the meaning of perpetual or eternal.

“Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines” – Probably at or near Beersheba.

## **So What?**

### **Obedying God, Even When it Hurts**

It’s time to use our sanctified imagination again.

Imagine Abraham’s joy when his promised son was finally born. It had been sixteen years since he was told that Messiah would be his seed. Could this be the Savior himself? Abraham probably checked to make sure that Isaac had all his fingers and toes as he marveled at the tiny perfection of his little hands and feet, and how his heart must have glowed as he watched the child suckle at his mother’s breast. Sarah, old in years yet still beautiful in appearance, finally knew the joy of holding her own child in her arms. On the eighth day, Abraham gathered the entire family together as they celebrated Isaac’s circumcision. Well, not everyone celebrated, certainly not Isaac! Over the next couple of years Abraham and Sarah both watched the young child grow with wonder and thankfulness in their hearts over what Yahweh had done. “Yahweh, you have kept all of your promises,” Abraham may have prayed. “How could we ever have doubted you?”

As the day of Isaac's weaning approached, both Sarah and Abraham busied themselves with preparations, their excitement mounting as the milestone day approached. Laughter and merriment surrounded the bountiful feasting that filled the day as the whole family celebrated the joyous occasion. Even so, not everyone celebrated. Ishmael, once the apple of his father's eye, was feeling more dejected than ever as everyone made such a big fuss over his baby brother. He compensated for his own frustration by making jokes about Isaac with his friends. Finally, they were laughing as well, not out of joyful celebration, but spiteful teasing.

When Sarah looked over and saw Ishmael and his friends pointing and laughing at Isaac, she knew that no good would come from it. She had suffered enough from this boy and his mother. She was going to put a stop to it once and for all. Imagine how Abraham must have felt that evening as Sarah demanded that he get rid of Hagar and her son. After only a brief discussion, he told Sarah that he would sleep on it and make a decision in the morning. That night God spoke to him in a dream, telling him what he must do. Abraham woke with a start early in the morning, rose from his bed, stoked the fire, and prayed. After wrestling with God in prayer, he knew what he must do and he did it, in spite of the awful feeling in his gut.

Is that what you would have done? Are you willing to follow God's leading even when it produces personal pain and suffering? Do you seek obedience to God's word at the expense of your own comfort and pleasure? Imagine, forcing your own son to leave, knowing that you may never see him again!

How about you? What is it that God is gently prompting you to do? Has He been asking you to do something really difficult? Although you want to be obedient, do you find it nearly impossible to do? Think of what Abraham went through in casting Ishmael out of his house! Now, commit to God that in His power and with His help, you too will follow Him in spite of the difficulty and personal sacrifice!

### **Faith by Osmosis?**

Living in the household of someone with a strong faith does not guarantee that your faith will be strong. You may have grown up in a family that is committed to God. You have heard about the gospel message from the time you were old enough to understand. You may have heard your father and mother, as well as older brothers and sisters, talk about what God had done in their lives. You may have even experienced God's miraculous provision for your family in times of dire need. Perhaps you have observed how your parents lived a life of prayerful obedience to God. But all of that somehow fades into the background when you are personally suffering or going through times of testing from God. Or, perhaps you grew up in a non-Christian home like I did, where there were no examples of godly suffering. The idea that a loving God would allow you to go through times of difficulty even when you've been faithful and obedient just doesn't seem right. You may have even shaken your fist at God or even yelled at him in your prayer times. Every Christian will go through times of trials and testing. That's how our Heavenly Father causes our faith to grow. Some day you'll look back on it and say, "Thank-you Lord. Now I know you love me."

Imagine the feeling of rejection that Hagar and Ishmael must have felt as they walked away from the family. I can almost hear Ishmael saying to his mother, "So much for a loving God! If Yahweh really loves us, He wouldn't allow us to be cast out like this?" After travelling for most of the day, the water was gone and they both felt exhausted and thirsty. With no well in sight, Hagar had her son lie down in what little shade the scrub bushes offered – then she walked away. After going far enough that she

knew Ishmael couldn't hear her, Hagar sat down and started to cry. She knew the end was near for both of them. Without water in this arid wasteland, nothing could survive for long. As the tears flowed, she suddenly heard a voice from heaven. She knew that voice! She had heard it some seventeen years earlier when she ran away from Sarah. She had not heard the voice since that day, but she had not forgotten what it sounded like.

Well, she may have remembered what God's voice sounded like, but she obviously had forgotten what He had said to her concerning her son. If she had remembered, she would not have despaired at a time such as this. Or – perhaps she did remember, but in the face of ominous adversity she simply didn't believe it. In spite of living all those years in the house of a committed man of God like Abraham, her faith wasn't very strong.

How about you? Have you lived in a family of faith for so many years and not developed a strong faith yourself? When adversity comes and mom and dad aren't there to help you through, do you throw up your hands in despair, or do you drop to your knees in prayer? It's hard at first, but with each new challenge, we find it a little bit easier to seek God's face. We learn through experience that a strong faith comes from times of trial. The Apostle Peter put it this way:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6-7)

And James said:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Difficult times and life's trials and challenges are what allow us to grow in faith. Without these times our faith languishes and atrophies away. So, instead of looking ahead with fear regarding the trials that are to come, look with anticipation, because God will never leave you nor forsake you. Instead, He will allow times of difficulty to enter your life so that your faith may be strengthened and you will be drawn closer and closer to the God who loves you.

So, let me ask you, "Have you reached the point in your life yet where difficulties drive you to your knees with thankfulness? Or are you still shaking your fist at God?"