

Our Covenant God – Part Eleven

Last week we touched on the conception and birth of Isaac.

Genesis 21:1-7 (NKJV) And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, *and* all who hear will laugh with me.” She also said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne *him* a son in his old age.”

At last! This is what it was all about! This is what Abraham had been promised by God. This son would be the one that all the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant would come through. Through Isaac every family on this earth would be blessed. This miracle baby was proof that God had power over death as well as life because God brought this precious life out of what was dead: Abraham’s dead loins and Sarah’s dead womb!

Isaac is weaned

And so the baby grew and was weaned. Some scholars believe that Isaac would have been 5 years old when he was weaned. Some even believe that he would have been 12 years old but the most reliable sources indicate that a baby would be weaned at two or three years of age.

In Eastern countries this is always a season of domestic festivity, and the newly weaned child is formally brought, in presence of the assembled relatives and friends, to partake of some simple viands. Isaac, attired in the symbolic robe, the badge of birthright, was then admitted heir of the tribe [Rosenmuller].

Source: A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments by Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown

This was a grand celebration and Abraham held a feast in honor of his son, Isaac. But there was one cloud that cast its dark shadow on that joyous event: Ishmael treated Isaac cruelly. Sarah saw it and demanded that Abraham banish Hagar and Ishmael from their home.

In the NKJV Genesis 21:9 is translated: “And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.” The Amplified Bible translates it as mocking instead of scoffing. Paul, however, uses far stronger language in Galatians 4 when he tells us that Ishmael persecuted Isaac.

Homework Question #1: Compare Genesis 16:4-6 and Genesis 21:11. In what way/s has Abraham changed? What do you think has brought about this change?

That brings us to Abraham’s seventh encounter with God.

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Abraham's seventh encounter with God

Previously, we stated that, in total, Abraham had seven encounters with God. My source for that information was *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* by Paul Borgman and *On The Bible* by Martin Buber. Buber calls these seven visits the seven revelations of God. However, there is one encounter between Abraham and God which is not included by these authors, which is the one that we are about to discuss. I have actually recently corresponded with Paul Borgman concerning this and asked him why this is so and he told me that it was because he was looking at it from the perspective of personal visits by God between him and Abraham as their relationship developed. Because this visit did not concern their relationship – it only addressed issues outside of it – he did not count this as one of the visits by God. I understand and respect where he is coming from on this point and it is a valid point from the angle that he is looking at it but I will be amending the study to include it because we are looking at it from broader perspective. Thus, in future, the study will show that Abraham actually had eight encounters with God in total, instead of seven. That does not change the points we made previously about how encounter number 4 when God cut covenant with Abraham was the central focus of all the encounters. Instead, it would mean that both numbers 4 and 5 are the central focus, which is totally valid and carries the same significance because encounter number 4 was when God cut covenant with Abraham and encounter number 5 was when God and Abraham exchanged names and Abraham received instructions on receiving the seal of the covenant: the circumcision scar.

Thus, Abraham's seventh encounter with God is found in **Genesis 21:12-13** (NKJV) But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he *is* your seed."

This is the seventh encounter. Seven is the number for completion. That means that this is the conversation that makes it all complete. It is finished and done now. There is nothing more to add concerning the covenant terms or conditions. Isaac is the promised son and Ishmael cannot take his place. Yet, because of Abraham's love for Ishmael, God promised to take care of him too. However, as far as the Abrahamic covenant was concerned, that belonged to Isaac. One day there would be a Messiah, a Savior, who would come into this world and He would come through Isaac's bloodline. And through that Messiah, whom we know as Jesus, you and I would become children of Abraham as well – not illegitimate children of a slave woman, but legitimate children who carry God's Name and are heirs of the Covenant.

Galatians 4:22-24a (NKJV) For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic.

Galatians 4:28-31 (NKJV) Now we, brethren, as Isaac *was*, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, even so *it is* now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "*Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.*" So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

Homework Question #2: What do the above-mentioned verses in Galatians say about you personally?

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Abraham did as God told him to and banished Hagar and Ishmael. God took care of him and he lived in the Wilderness of Paran and married an Egyptian woman. Ishmael was probably seventeen at the time that he was banished.

Abraham and Abimelech cut covenant

Abimelech approached Abraham and asked him to cut covenant with him. Abraham agreed and they cut covenant together at the time of Ishmael's marriage. We don't know how old Ishmael was when he got married. We do know that Isaac and Esau were both married at 40. Therefore, if Ishmael was also married at 40, Abraham would have been 126 years old. At this stage he had lived in Gerar, the land of the Philistines, for 27 years – ever since the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abimelech had plenty of time to watch Abraham and the conclusion he had reached was "God *is* with you in all that you do". That is why he wanted to cut covenant with Abraham: because he had seen that God was with Abraham in all that he did!

It should be that way with us today! People should be drawn to us for the same reason: because God is with us in all that we do.

An interesting play on numbers

We already mentioned the number seven earlier in this lesson. In Abraham and Abimelech's covenant-making, we find the number seven again. As we said before, the number seven is the number of completion. It speaks of perfection and maturity. There are seven days in Creation. There are seven days in a week. There are seven colors of light which, when combined, result in white light. These are the seven colors of the rainbow. There are seven unique notes in a musical octave. There are seven continents and the ancient term for describing all of the oceans of the world is "the seven seas". There are seven planets visible to the naked eye... and the list goes on.

In Hebrew, the word seven is also used for 'oath'. The first time that we find this word used for oath is in this covenant between Abimelech and Abraham.

Homework Question #3: Why do you think the word seven could be used for an oath? What would the relevance of it be?

Genesis 21: 22-34 (NKJV) And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God *is* with you in all that you do. Now therefore, **swear** to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt." And Abraham said, "I will **swear**."

Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized. And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor had I heard *of it* until today." So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

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And Abraham set **seven** ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. Then Abimelech asked Abraham, “What *is the meaning of* these **seven** ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?” And he said, “You will take *these* **seven** ewe lambs from my hand, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well.” Therefore he called that place **Beersheba**, [which means Well of the Oath or Well of the Seven] because the two of them **swore an oath** there.

Thus they made [cut] a covenant at **Beersheba**. So Abimelech rose with Phicol, the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. Then *Abraham* planted a tamarisk tree in **Beersheba**, and there called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.

Another interesting pattern of words and numbers in this passage is three:

- The word meaning oath / seven is mentioned three times.
- The number seven is mentioned three times.
- Beersheba, which means “Well of the Seven” is mentioned three times.

There are, thus, three patterns of three in this passage.

The number three is the number requirement for a fact to be established as truth. There were three people present here: Abraham, Abimelech, and Phicol. In a trial you needed three to find a person guilty – the accuser plus two witnesses. This is a principle that we will examine further when we look at how God established His covenant with three people: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Homework Question #4: Why did Abraham plant a tamarisk tree in Beersheba after cutting covenant with Abimelech?
