



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Ignite Your Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 4

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Message Title: Faith and Rewards pt. 1

Release Date: Tuesday, 8/20/19

God said that when Ishmael was born, there would be constant conflict between Ishmael and Isaac and their nations, the Palestinians and the Jews, and what we see today is simply a reflection of what God said would be true.

But it is worth noting, I think. That, I do believe the Covenant Promise of Genesis chapter 12 verse three is still in effect when God promised to Abraham, I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you. There's no reason to believe that's ever been voided out. Even though right now we don't claim a literal earthly kingdom. We don't claim a piece of geography. If a Jew was to respond to the Messiah, trust Jesus as Savior, a Jewish person is brought into the church just like anybody else. But the Bible does teach that when the church is raptured off the Earth, that God still has unfinished business with the nation of Israel. Once again, His focus will be on that part of the world. His focus will be on a geography. His focus will be on a nationality, and God has significant work still to fulfill His promise that He made to Abraham with that nation of people. And because of that, I believe the promise is still in effect- I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you.

I think historically, one of the reasons that the United States has been blessed of God is not because we're such a moral people, because we're not. It's because we have allied with the nation of Israel and God made a promise to Abraham and He's keeping that promise. But if it reaches a point where we no longer choose to do that, I think we'll see radical changes in our nation. So if you want to know how to pray, one of the most significant prayer requests you could offer is that we will continue to maintain a commitment. It's not really a question of who's right and who's wrong. It's just a commitment to God and His people and God is going to have to deal with His own people. But that's a very important part of what's going on right now in the Middle East.

Well, if we were to take that conflict and we were to narrow it all the way down to just a one-on-one conflict it goes back four to 5,000 years- and it shows up in Genesis chapter 21, which is where we find ourselves in our study. So, if you have a Bible, turn to Genesis chapter 21.

We've been tracking the life of Abraham for about 25 years in terms of the chronology of his life, Abraham and Sarah, and a big part of that journey has been awaiting the birth of this promised seed, this promised child, and it's been a big part of the highs and the lows that we've experienced with Abraham over these last several months of our study. Finally, chapter 21 verse one, *"Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed 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 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with 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.'"*

Now given the fact that we've been waiting for this event, chapter after chapter in Abraham's life for 25 years, and really been kind of working up to this crescendo point, I would imagine that there would be a whole chapter written on the birth of Isaac. I mean this has really been a significant point that we've been waiting for. What I would expect is really a detailed discussion of this grand event. What we find are two verses, basically. To put this in some perspective, there's more information about what Abraham fed his guests for supper in Chapter 18 than there is on the birth of Isaac, which raises some interesting questions. Why is that? As a matter of fact, when I read verses one and two, I see that the emphasis is not even on the birth of Isaac. The emphasis is on the fact that God promised and in God's time He kept His promise. Notice the repetition. For example, verse one, *"The Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, He did for Sarah as He had promised. She bore a son, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him."* The repetition is really what we need to notice, and the repetition draws our attention to the fact that God had promised and when it was God's appointed time, God kept His promise. The writer is recording this as almost a matter-of-fact event, as his way of saying God promised it. Therefore, it was as good as done. It shouldn't be a surprise. It shouldn't be a shock. It was just completely expected.

Can you imagine how Abraham and Sarah's life would have been so radically different? Their anxiety, their frustration, their fear, if they would have just learned that lesson, learn the lesson that if God said it, it's as good as done. Let's not worry about it. Let's just believe that God, in His time, will do it. No, I'm sure once Isaac was born, Abraham and Sarah kind of look back on the past years in some of those moments of crisis, some of those moments of doubt, and they said, you know, how could we have doubted? We should have just believed God would be faithful. He promised it. He'll do it.

Think how much anxiety and how much frustration and how much fear would be eliminated from our daily lives, if we would just believe: God said it; God will do it. He promised; he'll fulfill his promise. It's as good as done. But we don't. We have anxiety, we have frustration, we have fear, because we're not completely convinced that God tells the truth. We have our ups and downs just like Abraham and Sarah did, and we have our moments of crises. I think the writer recorded this way, as a way of just saying God said it. It was as good as done. Here it is. It's pretty matter-of-fact.

Abraham names his son just what God said to name him. He names him Isaac -Laughter. Every day when they would call Laughter to the supper table, they'd be reminded. This son was named after the celebration of God doing the impossible. So, we laughed, laughed in celebration, laughed and tried to come to grips with God keeping His promise. So, Laughter, do this, Laughter do that. Every day was a reminder. God keeps His promise, even when it seems impossible.

Then Abraham circumcised Isaac on the eighth day, which again was a reminder that this son came totally by the power of the Spirit of God, had nothing to do with the physical ability of Abraham and Sarah, the flesh, to produce this. You remember the New Testament writers said that Abraham and Sarah were as good as dead in their ability to have a child. And so the flesh is removed and tossed aside, as a way of saying, there's nothing we can do in the flesh to do this. This Promise Seed came 100 percent through the power of the Spirit of God.

I love verses six and seven, because they are so joyful. The Hebrew words are very expressive. Sarah is absolutely celebrating. She is rejoicing. She's as happy as she can be, because she's finally experienced what she's been waiting for at 90 years of age: the birth of the Promise Seed. I think it's worth noting too that the text says that she was able to nurse this child. I mean, I don't know what all God was doing in Sarah's body at age 90, but He did rejuvenate her to the point where she nursed this child until he was weaned, probably age three. I also think it's rather humorous at the end of Verse Seven, when she

says, "I have borne him a son in his old age". You know, she wasn't exactly a spring chicken here. She was 90 years old.

I think verses one through seven are really a celebration of the rewards of faith. It is true that Abraham and Sarah have had their moments of doubt, but really over the 25 years, a remarkable journey of faith, and they have experienced the rewards of faith. And they're just absolutely joy-filled and celebrating in these verses. But in those moments of doubt, Abraham and Sarah did make some choices, and there are consequences to those choices, and they continued to be a part of their lives.

So we pick it up in verse eight, "And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant." So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder and gave her the boy and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was used up, and she left the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink. And God was with the lad, and he grew and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer. And he lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt."

In ancient times among the Hebrew people, they had certain significant events in the life of a child that were celebrated. One of those was the time when the child was weaned, which typically was about three years of age. They believed that was a transition from infancy to childhood and then they would celebrate that until the child reached 13, which was a transition from childhood to adulthood. The Bar Mitzvah meant they were now responsible themselves for the law. So, at the time when a child was weaned, it was a big party, it was a big celebration for them as a very significant event.

So they're having this significant party. Ishmael would have been about 16 years of age. For 13 of those years he was the only son, and would have certainly been the focus of Abraham's attention, his beloved son. But over the last three years, that's changed. Over the last three years, Isaac has really become the focus of that family. And neither Hagar nor Ishmael quite knows what to do with that. So, at this celebration, this 16-year-old teenager, Ishmael, begins to mock his little three-year-old brother on his special day. And his mom doesn't take to that too well. So, Sarah comes to Abraham and says, honey, Ishmael – actually, it's interesting, the text doesn't even use his name - the son of the slave woman. Sarah basically says Ishmael and his mother, they need to go. They need to go. They can't live here. They can't exist together. As a matter of fact, she goes so far as to say he will not be a part of this inheritance, this promise, this being heir to the Promise Seed.

Well, the text says that that greatly distressed Abraham. One reason it distressed him is because I think Abraham loved Ishmael very much. It was his son. He loved him. But I think there's more to it than that.

In a sense, what Abraham was saying was, God, I know I had a crisis of doubt, and I know because of that I made a bad decision that produced this son. But I'm just kind of wondering, would you mind

changing your sovereign plan so that we could include Ishmael into this promise? Yeah, that's really what he was asking. And God responds. God responds and he agrees with Sarah. No, I think God's motivation is different than hers. But He basically comes along and He says, Abraham, listen to your wife, she's right. She's right, this son cannot be included in the promise. This son cannot be included in the inheritance. He is not the Promise Seed.

I think the great concern was that God had purposely waited until Abraham and Sarah were past any potential of childbearing, so everyone would know this is totally a miracle child. This is totally an act of God, totally of the Spirit of God. But when Ishmael was there, there was a tendency to confuse that, because Ishmael was a product of his flesh. Ishmael was simply a product of Abraham's choice and his relations with Hagar. And he was a work of the flesh. And God didn't want any confusion between that, which He had done miraculously, and that, which was Abraham's work of the flesh. And so He was saying, you know, the two of these, they cannot be together. I want everyone to understand that the Promise Seed, that this line is going to come through this one miracle child, and because of that, then Hagar and Ishmael, they've got to go.

Now the text, in my opinion, bends over backwards to say it isn't that God was just sending them out on their own, but rather God was going to take care of them, is going to meet their needs. He would make Ishmael into a great nation. God cared for them very well. The point was simply, he's not the Promise Seed, and so God was removing any confusion.

It's very interesting to go to the New Testament, the book of Galatians chapter 4, where Paul offers commentary on Genesis 21. Basically, what's happening in the book of Galatians is Paul is writing to combat an error happening in the church, as it relates to grace and legalism. There was a problem of people believing that the way that you are declared righteous before God is yes, you do believe that Jesus died on the cross and was buried and rose again. But you also have to add elements of the law, works of the flesh, to that, in order to be declared righteous before God. And Paul is saying, no, that's not true, not by works of righteousness. It's totally an act of faith before God. But there was more to it than that. It was also a case where, once these people came into a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. Then, in their walk with God, they were bringing in issues of the law, saying, okay, but now that I'm walking with God, you need to do this and this and this and this in order to be righteous before God. And Paul is trying to tell them, you know, you didn't come to Christ that way. You don't live out your faith that way. So that's what they're arguing about.

In the process of that. Paul goes back to Genesis 21. He goes back to Ishmael and Isaac and he says, these two sons of Abraham create an allegory, what he calls it. It's a picture. And one represents the power of the Spirit of God, which is Isaac. And what one represents is the works of the flesh and that's Ishmael. Ishmael represents the works of the flesh and that leads to bondage and slavery. Isaac represents the work of the Spirit, which leads to freedom. And so, he uses those two as a picture of what he's trying to communicate. And basically, what he says is, it is not possible for Ishmael and Isaac to live together. You cannot mix the law and grace. And that is why it was necessary for Ishmael and Hagar to be sent away, so there would be no confusion.

Cara: Bryan, it's so interesting how history and theology merge together in this message. So the division we see today in the Middle East stems from the two sons of Abraham.

Bryan: Yeah. So I think everybody understands the issues in the Middle East are really complicated and we would never want to over-simplify them. But yes, they do root back to the decision Abraham made with Hagar and the two sons and the result of all that.

Arnie: So, on the one hand we see Abraham and Sarah celebrating the birth of Isaac. But on the other hand, we see them having to deal with those times that they failed to trust in God.

Bryan: Yeah. So, such an interesting chapter, and after there's a long wait for the Promise Son to finally be born, and it's so matter-of-factly stated. It's like God promised; God kept His promise; what's the big surprise here? But I do love the celebration of Sarah and her laughter and her joy. This is just a glorious moment. But there's the reality that there's Hagar and there's another child that came out of their doubt and this has to be faced and dealt with. It's just a reminder, choices have consequences and sometimes those consequences last for a lifetime.

Cara: Well I really liked this teaching because I always felt like Hagar got the raw end of the deal. So it really put it into perspective for me. It's hard to see the righteousness of Sarah because of her actions, and yet God sided with her. So just help us really understand that again.

Bryan: Yeah. So first of all, what Sarah's motives were, we're not really told in the text. I wouldn't say they were necessarily righteous. Probably a lot of frustration and pain in that. But God affirms that what she's saying is correct, because there cannot be any confusion that Ishmael was not the Son of Promise. He came about through the flesh. And so in order to make it clear that Isaac was the Son of Promise and he came through the Spirit, that there would have to be a division. The New Testament would say law and grace can't mix. And that's what is happening in Chapter 21.

Arnie: So basically, you're saying Ishmael and Isaac represent law and grace, and those just can't coexist.

Bryan: Yeah. And I would go a little farther and say, actually, that's what Paul says in Galatians Chapter Four. Paul gives us really interesting commentary on the story in Chapter 21, but absolutely right. There is no blending of law and grace, not even a little bit. They're two completely separate operating systems. And Paul goes so far as to say that if you add one work of the law to salvation, then you've nullified Christ, you've nullified the cross. So, there are two systems that can't mix. It's not Jesus plus anything. It's just Jesus.

Cara: Amen.