

On the Beginning

24. Isaac Born

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 21

Genesis 21 begins with the fulfillment of a promise from God to Abraham that we first saw back in Genesis 12. In Genesis 12:2, the LORD says, *"I will make of thee a great nation,"* at least implying that Abraham and Sarah would have children. In Genesis 12:7, the LORD says, *"Unto thy seed will I give this land,"* promising outright to give them *"seed."* Because Sarah was barren, and stayed childless into old age, Abraham's faith was tried, and he says in Genesis 15,

"Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir." (Genesis 15:2-3)

But the LORD encouraged him to keep on believing in the promise. You will remember all this because much of the Book of Genesis up to this point has been about this promise and the trial of Abraham's faith. Then we read,

"And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him." (Genesis 21:1-2)

God indeed did keep His promise!

1. Their Faith Is Rewarded!

Scripture emphasizes that God did exactly what He said He would do. *"The LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken"* (Notice this emphasis in verses 1-2). God will always do what He promises, and we need to believe God and keep believing Him no matter what! Abraham and Sarah had trouble believing, you will remember. They laughed when the LORD reaffirmed His promise (Chapters 17 and 18). But the New Testament says, that they did exercise faith! It says that Abraham. . .

". . . against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Romans 4:18-20)

It says,

"Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." (Hebrews 11:11)

Although their faith was weak at times, and was sorely tried, they did keep on exercising what faith they had, and that faith was rewarded with the birth of Isaac!

Of course his birth was an amazing miracle. See how this is stressed in verses 3-5. His birth caused great joy, as we can see in verses 6-7. The laughter of unbelief (Isaac's name means "laughter"—Genesis 17:15-19 and 18:10-14) became the laughter of joy! We need to have it settled in our mind that if it will take a *miracle* for God to fulfill His promise, we should expect a miracle! We also need to remember that divine promises, continuing faith in those promises, the trial of that faith, and the miraculous fulfillment of the promises, always bring *great joy!*

2. Hagar Is Cast Out!

When little Isaac was weaned (at about two years of age, according to the custom), a big celebration was held. Apparently at that celebration, Sarah saw Ishmael “*mocking*” her and her son and demanded that Abraham cast him and his mother out of their household, (Read verses 8-11). This was the sad part of an otherwise very happy event. However, God said that throwing out Hagar and her son was the right thing to do (verses 12 and 13). And the Book of Galatians in the New Testament says that the casting out of “*the bondwoman and her son*” was “*an allegory*” of a great spiritual truth (Read Galatians 4:21-31). Hagar and Ishmael represent our sinful flesh and its fruit (See Galatians 4:23). Sarah and Isaac represent the Spirit of God and His fruit (Look at Galatians 5:16-23). In Galatians the two major systems preached in the world for *salvation* and *sanctification* are contrasted: the Law-Works-Flesh system and the Grace-Faith-Spirit system. The first says that men are saved or made holy by keeping God’s Law, which is achieving the goal by one’s own works, which is accomplished by the energy of our own flesh. Galatians says that this system leads to bondage (3:3, 3:11-14, 4:24-28, 5:1). The other system brings liberty, and says that men are saved and made holy by God’s Grace, through faith in Christ, which happens only by the power of God’s Spirit. The lesson of the story of Hagar’s expulsion is that the two systems cannot co-exist.

3. God Is Always **Right!**

Abraham was really unhappy about casting Hagar and Ishmael out, but God assured him that it was the right thing to do. Read Genesis 21:12-14. But was it *fair* for the LORD to have this happen? The answer is that it may not seem “fair,” and that it may not have been fair according to the way people today insist on fairness. But it was *right*, because it was what God wanted. The story Jesus told in Matthew 20:1-16, illustrates the difference between rightness and fairness. God always does right, but what He has chosen to do may not always seem fair. Our idea of fairness relates to the equality of opportunity we demand in a game. If someone is given an advantage, we say that it isn’t fair. But life isn’t a game, and life isn’t fair. Don’t demand that God be fair, but always believe that He is *right*!

4. God Is **With Ishmael!**

Verses 15 through 21 tell us the “happy ending” to the story of Hagar and Ishmael. The LORD hears their prayers, spares them in the desert, and gives them a life in Paran (between Sinai and Canaan, territory familiar to the Israelites, who received the Book of Genesis from Moses in the wilderness). Ishmael was a teenager at this time, and although he was not covered by God’s covenant with Abraham, he was still the object of God’s love.

5. Abimelech Is **Reconciled!**

This chapter ends with the story of how Abimelech, the Philistine king of Gerar, finally came to good terms with Abraham. We remember from Chapter 20 that previous experience had not left him with a good impression of the patriarch, but now he says, (in verse 22), “*God is with thee in all that thou doest...*” (Genesis 21:22)

A covenant is made between the two men that assured good relations between their families for generations to come (vs. 22-34). This covenant is transacted in the name of

“...*the LORD, the everlasting God.*” (Genesis 21:33)

He is the God who will always be. This is a new name (the everlasting God, *El Olam*) Abraham used for the LORD.

