

THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM
"God Always Keeps His Promises"
Genesis 21:1-7
Pastor Rick Bartosik
Mililani Community Church
February 2, 2003

"the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised"
Genesis 21:1

In Genesis 21, the day finally arrived when God's promise to Abraham and Sarah became a living reality. After many years of delay the son of promise was born. For 30 years God had kept Abraham and Sarah waiting, testing their faith, preparing them and working in their life--at times they doubted, at times they were confused, at times they attempted to take matters into their own hands. But when God was ready, when the time was right, we read in verse 1: "*the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.*"

BIG IDEA: THREE IMPORTANT LESSONS ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF GOD THAT WE LEARN FROM ISAAC'S BIRTH: God is faithful to His Word; God is all-powerful; God is never in a hurry and always on time.

The first lesson is that

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD.

This point is made clear by repetition. The passages says, "Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him" (vv. 1-2).

Notice four little words in this verse that should be embedded deeply in your heart as a believer. You should underline them in your Bible: "as He had said." God is faithful to His Word.

In Joshua 23, at the end of Joshua's life, he gathered the people together and delivered two farewell sermons. In the first one he reminds them of all the things God had promised to them. Then he says in verse 14: "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed." He ends his life and ministry on that note--the faithfulness of God to His Word.

In II Timothy 2:11-13 we find the last words of the Apostle Paul; he too speaks of the faithfulness of God--"I am comforted by this truth, that when we suffer and die for Christ it only means that we will begin living with him in heaven. And if we think that our present service for him is hard, just remember that some day we are going to sit with him and rule with him. But if

we give up when we suffer, and turn against Christ, then he must turn against us. Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, he remains faithful to us and will help us, for he cannot disown us who are part of himself, and he will always carry out his promises to us" (Living Bible).

God is faithful to His Word. That is the bed rock for the Christian. As we have studied Abraham's life we have seen that God never broke His covenant with Abraham, even though Abraham had been unfaithful over and over again. He had become impatient. He had doubted God, he had even gone so far as to take matters into his own hands and produce a substitute for the son God had promised. But God finally did just what He said He was going to do.

The Holy Spirit has a message here for you and me. We can trust the LORD, no matter what the circumstances may be; we can trust Him, no matter what the appearances may be, no matter how long the delay. If God has made a promise to you, then you may be sure He will keep it. You may waver, but He will not waver. You may doubt and disbelieve; He remains faithful. The day will come when you will laugh with joy at the fulfillment.

There is a second lesson here that Abraham and Sarah learned. . . .

GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL

Nothing is too hard for the LORD. Nothing can hinder or thwart the outworking of His purpose. Abraham was old and Sarah was barren, but these obstacles presented no difficulty for God. God's power is unlimited. The One who created the universe and man was fully capable of fulfilling His promise to Abraham and Sarah.

Notice that three times Abraham's age is repeated in verses 2-7: "Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age. . . (v.5) Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. . . Sarah said (v. 7), Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

How does this apply to us? You may be saying "God certainly did a miracle for them. But God can't do that for me. My situation is different. "I am too old," or "Those opposing me are too strong," "My problems are too serious." Is God sovereign? Is He all-powerful? Then He can and will do what He has promised. We learn from Abraham's life that we are never too old and it is never too late for God to do a new thing in and through us. Even if you are at the age of retirement--God may have very important work ahead for you. To say that God can't work in your situation is simply UNBELIEF in ability of your sovereign, all-powerful God. No matter how serious you consider your problems to be, they are no barrier to God when He wills to do something. Put your full confidence in Him and trust Him for everything no matter how difficult the circumstances may appear to be.

And don't say you don't have the strength. God will give you whatever strength you need. God not only gave Sarah the strength to conceive and bear a child. He gave her the ability to nurse that child as well. Abraham not only received strength to produce one child. He was made

young enough to father six more sons by his wife Keturah, whom he married after Sarah died (Genesis 25:1-2).

If God gives you a task he will also give you the strength and the time you need to do it!

A third lesson Abraham and Sarah learned, which is also emphasized in this account is that. . . .

GOD IS NEVER IN A HURRY BUT ALWAYS ON TIME

God is in no hurry in carrying out his promises but rather has a set time for their fulfillment. Verse 2 says: *"Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him."* This time had been first mentioned in Genesis 17:21. It was repeated twice in Genesis 18: 10 and 14. Now the promise is fulfilled and it is not early or late. It is *"at the very time God had promised him."*

CONCLUSION

One of the hardest things we face in life is what seems to us to be delays in God's actions. We are so much in a rush and in a hurry, but God is never in a hurry. He is not pressed for time. We fret and worry and sometimes we are tempted to try to work out the answer for ourselves and get ahead of God. But when we do this we are doubting God's ability to do what He has promised. Isaiah 28:16 says, "He that believes shall not make haste." We need to trust God and wait upon Him. He is never too late. He is always right on time.

Besides these three great lessons which God taught Abraham and Sarah, we see something else in the birth of Isaac. In this account we see . .

SEVEN PARALLELS BETWEEN ISAAC'S BIRTH AND THE SUPERNATURAL BIRTH OF CHRIST

Most of us are aware, as we will see next week, that the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice to God on Mount Moriah is a picture of God offering His own Son on Mount Calvary. But as we look over the whole life of Isaac, we see many ways in which he is a figure of Jesus

TR> Let's look at some of the parallels between his birth and the birth of Jesus. . . .

First, Isaac and Jesus were both the promised seed and son.

Just as God's promise to Abraham looked forward to the birth of his beloved son, Isaac--there are hundreds of OT prophecies which look forward to the birth of Jesus.

In Genesis 17:16 "I will bless Sarah and will surely give you a son by her."

In the case of Jesus we see this in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Isaiah 7:14 goes even further: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Second, there was a period of delay between the promises and their fulfillment.

In Abraham's case there was a delay of somewhere between 25 and 30 years from the time Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees until the birth of Isaac. In the case of Jesus there was an interval of hundreds, even thousands of years.

Third, God's omnipotence was affirmed following the announcement of the birth.

When Sarah heard the promise she thought "Will I really have a child, now that I am old?" (Gen. 18:13) to which God answered, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" When the birth of Jesus was announced to Mary, Mary had greater faith than Sarah, but her question was about the same: "How will this be. . .since I am a virgin?" The angel's response was: "Nothing is impossible with God." (Luke 1:34,37). In both cases God answered with a statement of His own omnipotence.

Fourth, the names of the sons were given before they were born

Genesis 17:19, "And you will call him Isaac." Matt. 1:21, "And you will call his name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Fifth, the births occurred at God's appointed time

Genesis 17:21, "by this time next year." In the same way, Paul says in Galatians 4:4, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." So, like the birth of Isaac, the birth of Jesus was neither too early or too late. It was at the time appointed by God. All the events of Christ's life followed a plan that had been predetermined by God.

Sixth, the birth of Jesus, like the birth of Isaac, required a miracle

The miracle of Jesus' birth was greater than Isaac's but they both required a miracle. In Isaac's case the miracle was only that of restoring reproductive power to an old couple. In the case of Jesus, it was the miracle of being born without a human father. By the virgin birth the dual nature of Jesus as God and man was achieved and demonstrated.

Seventh, there was laughter and joy at the birth of Isaac and Jesus

Isaac's name means laughter, and his name declared him to be his father's delight. When Jesus was born the angels rejoiced and invited others to rejoice too: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

There is one more comparison we can see in the birth of Isaac. We have compared the birth of Isaac to the birth of Christ, which is the first of many parallels between the life of Isaac and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. But there is also a comparison between Isaac's birth and the spiritual birth necessary if you and I are to be saved and have a place in God's kingdom. . . .

A COMPARISON BETWEEN ISAAC'S BIRTH AND SPIRITUAL BIRTH

Romans 4: 18-25: *"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave GLORY to God, being fully persuaded that God had POWER to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."*

THERE ARE FOUR MAIN POINTS IN THESE VERSES:

FIRST, ISAAC'S BIRTH WAS HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE. The birth of Isaac was humanly impossible because Abraham and Sarah were both dead as far as their ability to produce new life was concerned.

This is precisely what the Bible says about our ability to save ourselves. Ephesians 2:1 says that we are "dead in . . .transgressions and sins." We cannot make ourselves spiritually alive any more than a corpse is able to bring itself back to life. This is a truth that we don't hear preached on very much today--that people without Christ are spiritually dead and unable to save themselves. They are utterly lost and dead in sin. Dr. Arthur Pink says: "This is a fatal defect in any preaching: sinners will never be brought to see their need of a Savior until they realize their lost condition and they will never discover their lost condition until they learn that they are dead in sin." Jesus did not make this mistake. He told Nicodemus that he could not even see the kingdom of God unless he was born again.

SECOND, ISAAC'S BIRTH REQUIRED A MIRACLE . Abraham believed God's promise of a son because he was "fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:21).

This means that Abraham knew that the power in this birth would have to come from above, from God. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5).

Titus 3:3-7: *"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."*

THIRD, THE GLORY WAS GIVEN TO GOD ALONE NOT TO MAN. The passage in Romans shows why salvation is like this, indicating that it is in order that glory might be given to God and not to sinful men and women (Romans 4:20).

As long as Abraham possessed the physical ability to procreate a child, the child would have been his child and the glory for producing it would have been his as well. But since he was past the age of engendering children when Isaac was conceived, the glory was all God's. That's the way it is with us. The Bible says that God "chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him" (I Cor. 1:28-29).

FINALLY, THE NEW BIRTH, LIKE ISAAC'S BIRTH, REQUIRES A MIRACLE OF GOD. Romans tells us that these events in the life of Abraham were not written for him alone. They were written for us so that we might believe and have the righteousness of God credited to us, as it was also credited to Abraham (Rom. 4:23-24). This is a prime reason for studying the life of Abraham (The other main reason is to encourage believers to live by faith). It is that you might believe in the God who does miracles and come to faith in Christ. You can only be saved by a miraculous birth. And this is what God offers. This is what God does.

The sinner is alive naturally--physically, mentally--but he is dead spiritually. That is why the new birth is termed a crossing over from death to life John 5:24. Have you passed from death to life by the miracle of the new birth?

OUTLINE OF THE MESSAGE

IMPORTANT TRUTHS ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF GOD

God is faithful to His Word

God is all-powerful

God is never in a hurry and always on time

ISAAC'S BIRTH FORESHADOWS THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

He was promised before he was born

It was a long time between promise and fulfillment

God's omnipotence was affirmed at his birth

He was assigned a name before he was born

He appeared at the appointed time

His birth required a miracle

He was the delight of his father

ISAAC'S BIRTH ILLUSTRATES THE MIRACLE OF THE NEW BIRTH

His birth was humanly impossible

His birth required a miracle

The glory was given to God alone not to man

The new birth, like Isaac's birth, requires a miracle of God.