

A Promise Fulfilled

Genesis 21:1-7

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 21...

King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 13 that...

Proverbs 13:12

**Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.**

In the same passage, Solomon says...

Proverbs 13:19

A desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul, (it refreshes and delights)
but to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools.

"**A desire fulfilled,**" or *a desire that comes* becomes a source of life and delight to the soul. God made us to desire good, and that good is sometimes something we must work for. Other times, however, hard work isn't what's required to attain the good. Sometimes the good can only be attained by WAITING, which in my opinion is HARDER. Abram and Sarai (before God changed their names) got tired of waiting and Ishmael was born. They thought they could "just do something" and accelerate God's plan, but they only succeeded in multiplying problems. However, in spite of their impatience and sin, God's will was UNDAUNTED, and after a total of 25 YEARS OF WAITING, longing for the child God had promised, he came! Picking up in Genesis 21:1, we read...

Genesis 21:1-7

1 The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. 2 And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me. 7 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.

So, God visits Sarah, and as I mentioned a few weeks back, the Hebrew word translated "visit" often has to do with DIVINE INTERVENTION. When used of God, it means that He is beginning to act in a given situation, and that could be for blessing OR CURSING. God gives special attention to an individual or a matter, always with respect to His people's destiny. He may visit TO DESTROY (as in the case of the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15), or He may visit TO DELIVER (as He did with His people in Egypt, as we're told in Exodus 4:31). A person's destiny is CHANGED when the Lord "visits." When the LORD visits Sarah, He enables her to have the promised child, but the writer of Hebrews gives further insight into the miracle of Isaac's birth...

Hebrews 11:11 (NET)

By faith, even though Sarah herself was barren and he was too old, he received the ability to procreate because he regarded the one who had given the promise to be trustworthy.

That's from the NET Bible, and I appreciate this translation because others make the entire verse about Sarah. The Greek phrase means to receive the "power to DEPOSIT seed," not the power to RECEIVE seed. The fact is that, despite Sarah's barrenness and Abraham's advanced age—the Greek says Abraham was "past the time of maturity," like he was past his expiration date—BY FAITH, the couple ATTEMPTED TO CONCEIVE A CHILD, and by God's power, they did!

They BOTH were given the POWER to produce a child ACCORDING TO GOD'S PROMISE, and it's through those same promises that WE receive power unto godly living. Peter tells us that...

2 Peter 1:3-4

3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us HIS PRECIOUS AND VERY GREAT PROMISES, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

It's through God's fulfilled promise of a Savior that we've become partakers of the divine nature, escaping the darkness and corruption of this world (we've talked a lot about that over the last few weeks)! It's the POWER we receive from His PROMISES that enable us to LIVE GODLY LIVES! If we believe this, we'll live leaning more and more into those promises by doing as Peter says...

2 Peter 1:5-7

5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

There is a GROWTH PROCESS that's meant to occur as we set our hope on God's promises, those fulfilled and those awaiting fulfillment BECAUSE THEY'RE BOTH ACTIVE IN OUR LIVES. For a thing to be in the mind of God is for that thing to be AS GOOD AS DONE. We'll come back to future promises later. For now, we see that GOD EMPOWERED THIS COUPLE TO CONCEIVE A CHILD ACCORDING TO PROMISE. Isaac is certainly a TYPE or PREFIGURING of Christ, preparing hearts for that future miraculous birth, but he wasn't conceived the same way, that is IMMACULATELY; Isaac was the result of Abraham and Sarah's union, and according to the writer of Hebrews, THAT was an act of FAITH.

The LORD had VISITED, or INTERVENED, on their behalf, giving them the power to procreate, but read the Genesis passage again and NOTICE HOW GOD VISITED SARAH (read [HERE](#))...

Genesis 21:1-2

1 The Lord visited Sarah AS HE HAD SAID, and the Lord did to Sarah AS HE HAD PROMISED. 2 And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age AT THE TIME OF WHICH GOD HAD SPOKEN TO HIM.

The Holy Spirit inspired Moses to EMPHASIZE THE PERFECT FAITHFULNESS OF THE LORD. God did WHAT He said He would, the WAY He said He would, WHEN He said He would. In Genesis 17 and 18, God promised to give the couple a son and that SARAH WOULD GIVE BIRTH TO THIS SON. There would be no unpredictable series of bizarrely coincidental events that would somehow result in a child being renamed and given to them. No, a ninety-year-old woman was going to give birth, and the next verse doubles and TRIPLES down on this point...

Genesis 21:3

Abraham called the name of his son who was born [NOT GIVEN] to him, whom Sarah [NOT SOME SURROGATE LIKE HAGAR] bore him, Isaac.

This repeated emphasis was meant to make sure the reader understood that this was an ACTUAL BIRTH from Sarah, not a child taken in by adoption or surrogacy. Oh, sure, God could've brought about the nation of Israel through Abraham by those means, but our God is the God of IMPOSSIBLE MEANS. The last time I taught, we learned of the UTTERLY SHAMEFUL origin of the Moabites and Ammonites; that stigma would plague them forever. Israel's origin, however, would be remembered as nothing short of MIRACULOUS.

Verse two also spoke to God's timing, which is perfect. This son was conceived and born to Abraham by Sarah AT THE TIME OF WHICH GOD HAD SPOKEN TO HIM. Initially, the LORD gave Abraham NO TIMETABLE, just as He gave NO TIMETABLE FOR THE PROMISE GIVEN IN THE GARDEN. He just invited Abraham to BELIEVE, and through faith and patience, he finally received the promise...

Hebrews 6:12-15

11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you may not be sluggish, but IMITATORS of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, Surely I will bless you and multiply you. 15 And thus Abraham, having patiently WAITED, obtained the promise.

Warren Wiersbe put it this way...SHOW WIERSBE QUOTE

Just as Olympic athletes develop their skills as they practice hard and long before the big event, so God's children grow in godliness and faith as they wait for the fulfillment of God's promises. Faith is a journey, and each happy destination is the beginning of a new journey. When God wants to build our patience, He gives us promises, sends us trials, and tells us to trust Him.

Abraham's journey of faith, in a lot of ways, is a SNAPSHOT of how humanity awaited the fulfillment of God's first promise to humanity. It was in the Garden. Adam and Eve had just rejected life for a counterfeit and doomed the rest of us to physical and spiritual death. The serpent, our only true enemy, had successfully tricked our first parents. God had to send them out of the Garden, out of His presence, and their sin would be passed down to us, separating us from God as well. However, that wasn't the end, and I love how the Jesus Storybook Bible puts it. It says...

"Before they left the garden, God whispered a PROMISE to Adam and Eve: 'It will not always be so! I WILL COME TO RESCUE YOU! And when I do, I'm going to do battle against the snake. I'll get rid of the sin and the dark and the sadness you let in here. I'M COMING BACK FOR YOU!'"

And ever since the promise was given, humanity looked for this serpent-crusher. In fact, if you read the Bible through this lens, the close-ups on the lives of the various people we encounter looks like a search for the promised serpent-crusher. Abel? Seth? Nope. Enoch? Noah? Shem? No. Abraham? Nope. Isaac? No. Jacob? Judah? Joseph! Nope. Moses! Joshua? David? Solomon! NO. We see lots of

great men who lived throughout history, but none of them were the Promised One who would pass the test. None of them could live sinlessly. Where was this Rescuer? When would He come? Like Abraham and Sarah, lovers of God throughout history waited and watched...

Ages after this promise in the Garden, after multiplied failure from humanity, God transitions from addressing humanity as a whole to REVEALING HIMSELF THROUGH A FAMILY. Again, God could've chosen a young, vibrant, fertile couple to transform into a nation, but that isn't His way. Remember, He was setting up an illustration of a future miracle birth. God chose this elderly couple, the wife being barren and the husband as good as dead—an IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION—to transform into a nation. You see, tucked within His promise to Abram back in Genesis 12 was the CONTINUATION OF THE PROMISE God made back in the Garden to send a Savior to crush the serpent and save the world (Genesis 3:15). Remember, God said...

Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Then, thousands of years later, He said...

Genesis 12:1-3

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 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. 3 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.

God's promise to Abraham was A PIECE OF THE BIG PROMISE, and in spite of man's continued failure to obey God, God never thought twice about keeping it! He affirmed His Word to Abraham at the outset of their relationship. After Abraham failed again and again, like the rest of humanity before and after him, giving his wife away to Pharaoh and sleeping with Sarah's servant at her behest, GOD REAFFIRMED HIS PROMISE in Genesis 17. He said...

Genesis 17:1-2

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.

THIS is the encounter in which God changed Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah, and for the first time, God names the son to be born and lays out the timeframe for this promise: ISAAC would be born in ONE YEAR. What was ABRAHAM'S RESPONSE? AH! Right! As we saw last week, Abraham again faltered in faith and gave away his wife AGAIN to King Abimelech. Are you seeing the pattern? MAN'S REPEATED FAILURE and GOD'S PERFECT FAITHFULNESS. In spite of it all, GOD FULFILLS HIS PROMISE.

Now Isaac is born! THE NEXT STEP OF GOD'S PLAN UNFOLDS. As we well know, Isaac wasn't the promised serpent-crusher, but he was a step along the path TO that promise's fulfillment. That said, I don't want to minimize all the dealings of humanity and specifically of ABRAHAM that transpired in the

meantime. TONIGHT, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT HOW THE PROMISES OF GOD CHANGE US. As Wiersbe said earlier, fulfilled promises aren't just happy destinations, they're the beginning of the next journey. As such, almost all of our lives are spent on the journey, and it's on this journey that our faith and godliness grows as we look forward to fulfillment.

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4a). Since the Garden, humanity looked forward to that moment, and now we live on the other side of it! I love that we're talking about the miraculous birth of Isaac leading up to Christmas. The virgin gave birth to a son, a Son that was GIVEN from heaven, a Son who succeeded where Adam failed and yet died on the cross for Adam and everyone else's sin. Though the Son CARRIED OUT the Father's will and THE SCRIPTURES ARE COMPLETE, as God's followers, WE HAVE STEPPED INTO HIS GRAND NARRATIVE. Like the saints of old who longed and looked for the Rescuer that God would send, we look forward to another promise. Jesus said...

John 14:2-3

2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

And just as God described how Abraham's son would be born, and how His own Son would come into the world, the Holy Spirit revealed to Paul what the fulfillment of this promise would look like too...

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

And this will be a pre-tribulational rapture because: (1) We're not Israel, and the Tribulation is "Jacob's Trouble," not the Church's; and (2) we are not appointed to wrath but to salvation, according to Paul's words in the same context (1 Thessalonians 5:9). That means, THIS IS NEXT! One soon day, Jesus is going to split the sky and call us up to Himself. We'll be CHANGED FOR GOOD! We'll be rid of this sin-broken world and our rotten flesh that so desperately wants to give in to sin. We look forward to the FULFILLMENT of the PROMISE of the Rescuer's RETURN, and that same longing that we carry in our hearts has the same transformative effect on our lives as it had on those Old Testament saints who looked for Him the first time. Paul describes this effect...

Titus 2:11-14

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus

Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

The Apostle John wrote of this PURIFYING ASPECT of life lived LOOKING UP...

1 John 3:2-3

2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Jesus promised that He would RETURN, not WHEN, but HOW. The lives of the faithful are LIVED DIFFERENTLY because, as the writer of Hebrews reveals, they're SURE OF WHAT THEY HOPE FOR, CONVINCED OF WHAT THEY DO NOT SEE (Hebrews 11:1). As His faithful, our lives won't be lived in complacency, worldliness, or self-obsession; they'll be lived with the aim of PLEASING HIM.

Genesis 21:3

Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.

Though Abraham failed so much, like we do, here upon the fulfillment of the promise, ABRAHAM RESPONDED IN OBEDIENCE. "Isaac" was the name that God chose. It means...(wait) LAUGHTER...and why do you think God chose that name? YEAH! It was a MEMORIAL, a REMINDER of how they initially reacted to God's promise. Remember, Abraham seemingly laughed out of joy as the promise that Sarah would be the one to bear him a son. Such times of elation when God has come through in our lives need to be remembered, especially later when times are difficult.

However, Sarah laughed in unbelief, and now, each time she called her son, she would be reminded of how she didn't believe God as watched her son come running in. Some of you hearing that might be like, "*Whoa, whoa, whoa. That doesn't sound like the God I know. He forgives my sin, throws it in the bottom of the sea, puts it behind His back and remembers it no more.*" That's correct. This wouldn't be a remembrance her unbelief for the sake of judgment, but for ENCOURAGEMENT to NEVER DOUBT GOD again, a valuable reminder too, wouldn't you say?

I've said it before that much of what we do here in service to the LORD and you as a church staff, as well as what we ALL do for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is a MINISTRY OF REMEMBRANCE. This sin-broken world has a way of CORRODING and ERODING our memory of WHO GOD IS, WHAT HE'S DONE (as we sing on Sunday mornings), and WHO WE ARE IN HIM. We need to be REMINDED. We should set up such reminders for ourselves and never forget how the LORD has worked at some point in our lives. This little boy born to Abraham and Sarah would be a walking talking ebenezer of how they first reacted to the promise, an uncontrollably happy (laughing) moment, and an encouragement to FAITHFULNESS.

Genesis 21:4-5

4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Abraham's response to the fulfillment of God's promise was OBEDIENCE. He gave his son the name God gave him, and then he followed God's command to circumcise him on the eighth day (Genesis 17:12). This was the sign of the covenant that would be passed down through the family, a family that was only

made possible by God fulfilling His promise IN THE TIME IN WHICH HE SAID HE WOULD. Now Abraham would keep time and obey God's command to circumcise Isaac after the prescribed timeframe of EIGHT DAYS. Our response is to be the same as Abraham's! God keeps His Word, and in turn, WE keep HIS Word. As I thought of it, I thought, "We're to be PHILADELPHIAN!" The Philadelphian Church was the only one of the seven churches mentioned in the Revelation for which Jesus had NO CORRECTION. He encouraged them, saying...

Revelation 3:8

I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

And He PROMISED...

Revelation 3:10

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

We show our love for Jesus and our faith in His promises, His Word, by LIVING ACCORDING TO THEM.

Genesis 21:6-7

6 And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." 7 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.

Her laughter of unbelief turned to the laughter of surprise, wonderment, and joy, and her declaration that OTHERS WOULD LAUGH WITH HER was actually prophetic to the future reality. Others would rejoice because of Isaac's birth. It would be more than a "Huh! That's neat!" kind of story. It's the kind of story that give rise to the saying that ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!!! LIVES WOULD BE FOREVER CHANGED BECAUSE OF THIS BIRTH. Why??? This was a step closer to the fulfillment of the BIG PROMISE God made to humanity back in the Garden to send the serpent-crushing Rescuer, and the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that "in [him] all the families of the earth [would] be blessed" (Genesis 12:3b).

Sarah even laughed WITH JOY that she was nursing a child at the age of NINETY! Think about it, with their great wealth, because of God's blessing, they were like royalty. Abraham was seen as a mighty prince in the eyes of those in the land in which he sojourned, and Sarah was his "princess," as her name even supports. As such, she could've had anyone nurse the newborn, but SHE DID IT. SO COMPLETE WAS THE MIRACLE that she and Abraham not only received the power to conceive and bear a child, but she also received the VITALITY to nurse him. God doesn't *barely* fulfill His promises, He fulfills them PERFECTLY, NOTHING LACKING!

THIS is the FAITHFULNESS of the God in which we HOPE! It is HIS FAITHFULNESS shown through PERFECTLY FULFILLED PROMISES that IGNITES and FANS THE FLAME OF OUR FAITH! The fulfilled promise of Isaac's birth was a PIECE OF THE BIG PROMISE made in the Garden, and a picture of its fulfillment, one IMPOSSIBLE, MIRACULOUS BIRTH to prepare the hearts of the world for ANOTHER.

God perfectly fulfills His promises, which is one reason why the Bible is SO ENCOURAGING; it's a BOOK OF FULFILLED PROMISES, amazing promises, promises that matter. We serve a Promise-Keeping God.

Besides His promise to return, Jesus also revealed how this current universe will give way to a NEW and SINLESS day, and with that revelation, Peter continues to encourage...

2 Peter 3:10-13

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

We're INVITED to live like those who have received the promises of God because, in His mind, they're DONE. We're invited to live holy lives of obedience, unafraid of circumstances in this world, knowing that we're only responsible for glorifying THE ONE WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISES. God has PROMISED that He's coming back for us. He is working toward that end even NOW! Every second that passes in this world is a second closer to the fulfillment of that promise! Do you believe that? If you do, you'll live in light of eternity. God has made us so many other promises—"I will send you the Helper...I am with you always...You will receive power...I am coming soon"—and they all GIVE US STRENGTH and ENCOURAGEMENT to PERSEVERE until that day.