

The God of All Promises **Genesis 1:1-21**

In spite of the culture of death that invades the world with Cain's murder, God promises a Savior in Gen 3:15.

The first 'son of promise' we learn is Isaac is vaguely promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3.

And then, God specifically promises Abraham and Sarah a particular child in Gen

In Gen 21, God delivers on his promise to Abraham and Sarah in the birth of Isaac. The chapter divides very easily into two sections:

- 1-7 – The birth of Isaac
- 8-21 – The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael

First: God Keeps His Word. 1-7

“The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.”

This truth is not a small bump in the road from Genesis to Revelation. It is the basis of the OT, fulfilled in the NT.

- a) God's ability in our inability
 - Sarah had no children of her own
 - She was past child-bearing years
 - After the birth of Ishmael, Hagar ridiculed Sarah

It is very important and noteworthy that verse 1 says “The Lord did for Sarah as He had promised.”

V 2 – *“And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.”*

God not only gave Sarah a son but gave her a son when he said he would

Three times in 2 verses, Scripture stresses that God made and kept promises.

It's actually impossible for God to make a promise and not keep his word

Titus 1:2 - ...in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began

Repeatedly, Genesis 1 reminds us that *“God said...and it was so...”*

- b) God overturns our reproach.

V 6 - And Sarah said, *“God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.”*

There was a time when the only laughter Abraham and Sarah heard was when people laughed at them. But God has turned their mourning into laughter.

What is the application of this truth?

- Historically

It was important that Israel know that God keeps his word because he had promised to care for them during their wilderness wanderings and victory over their enemies in the Promised Land.

V 1 – *“The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.”*

Abraham and Sarah were in an impossible situation. They were both beyond the years of having children. It was an impossible situation.

Remember that Moses wrote Genesis –

Joshua 1:1-2 - *After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, ²“Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.*

Joshua 1:3 - *Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.*

Israel needs to watch God fulfil his promises in impossible circumstances.

- Personally

There are equally times in our lives when it appears life is against us and we can only hear hurt or mockery. We too face impossible situations.

- Messianically

Mary faced a similar situation to Sarah. How was she going to have a baby?

Luke 1:37 – *“For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

- Universally

We need to know that God keeps his word to Abraham to remember that God will keep his word in everything he has said. He has promised us eternal life. He has promised us heaven.

This is important because there are times in the world – and we live in those times now – when it appears that God’s word will not be fulfilled, that God’s work in the world will be defeated.

For instance: I’m not speaking for or against universal health care, but I am saying that universal health care, as it is being proposed, requires all Americans to fund abortion through their taxes.

It was important for Israel, hearing this during the Exodus and it is important for us, in our own exodus, to remember that God sees his words. Moses confidently insures we know that God keeps his words even in seemingly impossible circumstances.

And this brings us to the second part of the chapter.

Second: God Knows the Godly and Ungodly. 8-14

At verse 8, a conflict re-emerges in Abraham’s life. Hagar leaves for the 2nd time but this time, it is not of her own choosing. This time, Abraham expels Hagar and Ishmael from their family.

For 14 years, since Ishmael’s birth, there has been a struggle in Abraham’s family. Now, with the birth of Isaac, tensions arise again and reach a new level.

Ishmael is 14. He is the slated heir of Abraham and Sarah. But when Isaac is born, Hagar and Ishmael know that Ishmael will be displaced. At that point, resentment builds, not from Sarah against Hagar but Hagar against Sarah.

When he is weaned, a feast is given for Isaac and Sarah sees Ishmael mocking her son.

"The prospects and expectations of Ishmael are suddenly shattered. He had grown to youthful vigor, confident that he was to inherit great wealth, and the power of his father. Now the true heir appears. Ishmael is moved to mad hatred. Proud and impetuous, he does not conceal his chagrin. On the occasion of a great feast given in honor of Isaac, he is guilty of insolence, and mockery and insult."

William Eerdmans

In response, Sarah, who originally encouraged Abraham to have a child with Hagar, now demands that Abraham drive the pair from their family.

What is important at this point is that Moses is using Sarah’s words to remind Israel of what God has promised concerning the 7 nations and the Promised land.

These are not just Sarah’s words, this is God’s promise

Psalm 83:1-8 – *O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God!*
² *For behold, your enemies make an uproar; those who hate you have raised their heads.* ³ *They lay crafty plans against your people; they consult together against your treasured ones.* ⁴ *They say, "Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; let the name of Israel be remembered no more!"*
⁵ *For they conspire with one accord; against you they make a covenant—* ⁶ *the tents of Edom*

and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites, 7 Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; 8 Asshur also has joined them; they are the strong arm of the children of Lot.

These verses expose the attitude of the descendants of Ishmael in opposition to Israel.

The distinction between Isaac and Ishmael is not simply familial, it isn't just about two women or two boys, but it has deep spiritual significance, both for

- the past – Israel entering Canaan – but for
- the future – God separating believers from unbelievers

Galatians 4:28-31 - *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." 31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*

V 29 - Paul says "Don't be surprised if the Temple and the synagogue persecute you. They are the unbelieving seed of Abraham and following in Ishmael's footsteps.

What is God's response? V 30 - "But what does the Scripture say? Cast out the slave woman and her son..."

Back to Gen 21

Abraham loves Ishmael.

Genesis 17:15-19 - *And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" 19 God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.*

In the same way, God loves the world; both Jews and Gentiles, both believers and unbelievers.

He makes it rain on

Note: God is kinder to Ishmael than Sarah.

Genesis 21:12-14 - *But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. 13 And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also,*

because he is your offspring.”¹⁴ So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

As the story closes, God is providing for Hagar and Ishmael even though God has not chosen Ishmael to be the child of promise and his seed are unbelieving pagans.

Genesis 21:15-19 - *When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes.¹⁶ Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Let me not look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. ¹⁸ Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.*

Third: God is the True Sovereign

In Job we saw how God chose one path for Abraham and another path for Job.

Earlier in Genesis 13, Moses recounts how God separated Abraham from Lot. Now he reveals how God separated Ishmael and Isaac.

When, in the next chapter, Abraham climbs the steps to Mount Moriah, there is no other son to live and fulfil God’s promise from Gen 12 if Abraham sacrifices Isaac. Abraham cannot say, “If Isaac dies, I can always call on Ishmael. Ishmael is gone. God has placed the hope of all he has promised in the future – for the ultimate Son to come – on Isaac.

Hebrews 11:17-19 - *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

In the same way, God will separate Israel from the 7 nations whom they are supposed to but fail to displace. But God does not fail.

And all of this prepares us for the ultimate separation -

Matthew 25:31-34 & 41 - *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.... Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

Fourth: Our Application

- a) Love the ungodly
- b) Pray for the ungodly
- c) Trust God with the ungodly

Fifth: The Ultimate Promised Son

Of course, Jesus is the ultimate promised Son and the son for whom all other sons are born.

This is why John frames his recollection of Jesus's incarnation as

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.

Jesus is the ultimate proof that God keeps his word.

Community Groups:

- 1 – Who wrote Genesis?
- 2 – What were his reasons for writing the book?
- 3 – How is Genesis 3:15 the promise of a son?
- 4 – How is Genesis 12:1-3 a promise of a son?
- 5 – How is Isaac's birth a promise kept?
- 6 – What was Israel's circumstance when Moses wrote Genesis?
- 7 – Why was it important for them to know that God keeps his word?
- 8 – How is God's promise keeping applicable to you at this time in your life?
- 9 – What is the Messianic application of God's promise kept and Isaac's birth?
- 10 – What is the universal application of God's promise and Isaac's birth?
- 11 – How does God demonstrate more care of Ishmael than Sarah?
- 12 – What might this say about God's care of the unbeliever?
- 13 – How does God's exclusion of Ishmael speak to his power and promise-keeping when it is seen in the light of Isaac's potential sacrifice?

14 – How does God’s separation of Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael (and next, Jacob and Esau) speak to God’s sovereignty?

15 – How does God’s care of Ishmael influence our concern for the ungodly?

16 – Who is the ultimate promised Son?

17 – How does Isaac prefigure Jesus?

18 – What is your primary take-away from this chapter