

19. The son of promise

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A farmer was going to sell his litter of pups. While he was putting up a sale sign on his farm gate post, a little boy came to him and asked the farmer, "How much is a puppy?" with squinting eyes because of the bright spring sunlight.

"Well son, these puppies are pure breed and they are expensive." The boy fished out a handful of coins from his coverall pocket. "I have 39 cents. Will this do?" said the boy. The farmer couldn't help himself but smiling at the boy and said, "Oh, I reckon so. That will do just fine." Then he turned around and whistled toward his barn.

There were four cutest puppies you have ever seen running and stumbling toward the farmer. As they arrived to the fence, they stuck their noses out to the little boy and started to lick and jumping at him. From the corner of his eye, the boy noticed the fifth puppy was coming toward him rather slowly and limping. The boy looked up from his squatted position and said, "I will take that one," as he pointed to the fifth puppy.

"Son, you don't want that one. He cannot run with you and play with you well. He is a runt and crippled." The boy started to pull up his pants legs and showed his leg braces and specially made shoes to the farmer. And he said, "I don't run well either. So I can understand him. I will be his friend."

You see, spiritually we are crippled because of our wicked sinful nature. Jesus came to us and became our friend and identify with us by taking our sins upon Himself.

That is Grace of God.

It is easy to overlook the meaning behind the story of this chapter. An old couple having a child – interesting, but nothing to write home about. But it is more than that. We will notice that there is a very striking similarity between the birth of Isaac and the birth of Christ.

A. THE SON OF PROMISE IS BORN

Genesis 21:1-7 And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. 2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him--whom Sarah bore to him--Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." 7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

It took 25 long years for this promise to come to pass, but God was faithful to His promise. God's promises never fail. God is not only a promise maker, but also He is a true promise keeper.

When I was born, my mother was 43 years old. I thought that is a rather old to have the first baby. Sarah topped my mama by 47 years. She was ninety years old

and Abraham was 100 years old. I am sure that when Abraham was passing cigar gums around, his friends jabbed him and teased him by saying, "You old dog!"

Isaac's birth also meant the rewarding of patience. Abraham and Sarah had to wait 25 years for their son to be born, because it is through faith and patience they inherit the promises. Trusting God's promises not only gives us a blessing at the end, but it gives us a blessing while we are waiting.

Abraham represents faith, and Sarah represents grace according to Gal 4:24-26, so Isaac was born by grace through faith.

The birth of Isaac was a miraculous birth. It was contrary to nature.

Romans 4:19 And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb.

However, I find the bigger miracle than this. God Himself took a human form and made Himself lower than angel and was born of a woman as a helpless human baby. Because He had to identify with us and had to understand our crippled spirituality by our sins. Through the atoning sacrifice of His sinless life we could find the only way to heaven. That is the miracle of miracles.

B. THE FLESH MUST GO

Genesis 21:8-13 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. 9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. 10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac." 11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. 13 Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed."

The most reliable research indicates that Isaac was three years old when he was weaned. Notice the conflict came from Ishmael to Isaac. Galatians 4:22-29 describes for us a spiritual application of this conflict between Isaac – the son born of the promise and Ishmael – the son born of the flesh.

Galatians 4:22-29 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar-- 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children-- 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband." 28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.

This conflict between the two sons was almost inevitable, even though they are some 13 years apart.

Please allow me to put this in spiritual aspects:

When we are born again, we receive a new nature. And when we receive a new nature, that is where the trouble always begins.

Romans 7:19 (NIV) For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.

There are constant fights between old and new nature. Unfortunately, the old nature is often in control in our actions. The time comes when we have to make a decision as to which nature we are going to live by. We must make a determination to yield to the Lord in every matter. We either have to permit the Holy Spirit to move in our lives, or else we have to go through life controlled by the flesh. There is no third alternative for the children of God.

Contrary to Ishmael, Isaac's birth is ordained by God. We can find remarkable similarities between the births of Isaac and of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1) The birth of Isaac and the birth of Christ had both been promised.

25 years earlier, God had said to Abraham, "I am going to give a son to you and Sarah," and God has made good His promise.

God also said to the nation Israel, "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son." When the day came that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, it was a fulfillment of prophecy. Both births had been promised.

2) With both births there was a long interval between the promise and the fulfillment.

Actually, there were about 25 years from the time God promised it until the birth of Isaac.

With the birth of Christ, you could go back many generations. God had promised that there would come One in David's line – and that was a thousand years before Christ was born.

3) Both Isaac and Jesus were named before their births.

Abraham and Sarah were told that they were going to have a son and that they were going to name him Isaac.

With the birth of the Lord Jesus, we find that He was also named beforehand.

Matthew 1:21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

4) Both births were miraculous.

The birth of Isaac was a miraculous birth, and, certainly, the birth of the Lord Jesus was. Because no man had any part in that.

5) Both sons were obedient to their fathers, even unto death.

In chapter 22 we are going to see that this son Isaac was offered up as a sacrifice by his father. He was not a small boy of eight or nine years. Isaac just happened to be about thirty-three years old when this took place, and he was obedient to his father even unto death.

That was true of Isaac, and that was certainly true of the Lord Jesus Christ.

6) The miraculous birth of Isaac is a picture of the resurrection of Christ.

Out of death came life – that’s resurrection. Out of the dead womb of Sarah, Isaac was born. That was the foreshadow of the resurrection of Jesus.

Romans 4:25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

Perhaps Abraham did not want to give up Ishmael, because the boy was his first son. But he had to realize that the son of promise and the son of flesh could not coexist as our old carnal nature and godly character cannot coexist.

Galatians 5:24 And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

We all need to make choices each and every moment. It is not easy to separate ourselves from the carnal pleasures of this world. But that is what the Lord wants us to do. The obedience and disobedience to the Lord is the difference between true believers of God and carnal ones. We need to continuously choose what God wants in our lives to please Him.

C. ADIOS, HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

Genesis 21:14-21 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. 15 And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. 16 Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, “Let me not see the death of the boy.” So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, “What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18 Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation.” 19 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. 20 So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. 21 He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Abraham was a wealthy man and could certainly spare more provisions, even giving them a donkey or a bag of silver. But Abraham realized that without God’s help, no matter what he gave them, it would not be enough. But with God, things would turn out all right. The descendants of Ishmael became the Arabic people as God had promised. And they are doing just fine with the oil they have.

Hagar is certainly a picture of the needy people in the world today – wandering, weary, thirsty, blind, and giving up hope in despair. How we need to tell them the Good News of Jesus that the Living Water is available and the Bread of Life can be theirs, too! God is kind and gracious to all who call upon Him.

D. A COVENANT WITH ABIMELECH

Genesis 21:22-34 And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, “God is with you in all that you do.” 23 Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to

the land in which you have dwelt." 24 And Abraham said, "I will swear." 25 Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized. 26 And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor had I heard of it until today." 27 So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. 28 And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. 29 Then Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?" 30 And he said, "You will take these seven ewe lambs from my hand, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well." 31 Therefore he called that place Beersheba (it means 'Well of the oath'), because the two of them swore an oath there. 32 Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba. So Abimelech rose with Phichol, the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. 33 Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. 34 And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.

As many as four years may have passed since the events of Genesis 20. During that time, it was evident that God was blessing Abraham and Sarah. Whenever a believer is restored to fellowship with the Lord, God can bless that person once again. The purpose of discipline is restoration, and the purpose of restoration is ministry and blessing.

"God is with you in all that you do" – what a testimony! Abraham did not permit one lapse of faith to cripple him. He got right with God and made a new beginning.

A new name for God is introduced here: 'El Olam' – "the Everlasting God." Abraham already knew 'El Elyon' – "God Most High" from Gen 14:19 & 22 and 'El Shaddai' – "God Almighty" from Gen 17:1.

What an encouragement to know "the Everlasting God"! Wells would disappear, trees would be cut down, ewe lambs would grow up and die, altars would crumble, and treaties would perish. But the Everlasting God would remain forever.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Trusting God's promises not only gives us a blessing at the end, but it gives us a blessing while we are waiting.

None of us like to wait for the answer of our prayer request from God. But while we wait for it, we learn to be patient. The patience produces character. Character produces hope. Hope in God never disappoints us.

2) We must make a determination to yield to the Lord in every matter.

We either have to permit the Holy Spirit to move in our lives, or else we have to go through life controlled by the flesh. There is no third alternative for the children of God.

3) The obedience and disobedience to God is the difference between true believers of God and carnal ones.

We need to continuously choose what God wants in our lives to please Him.