

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“A Promise Fulfilled”

Genesis 21:1-34

2002

Introduction

We live in an era of unkept promises. Nations sign important treaties and then break them at will – case in point: Iraq, China, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and North Korea. Even our own president wagged his finger in the camera while making his stubborn denials of wrongdoing only to be later exposed as a lecherous liar. Even many married couples show little regard for their wedding vows. At times it seems that no one can be trusted – no one is honest – no one is good for their word. We even have a sarcastic phrase for our jaded skepticism: Promises, promises!!

Even Jesus Himself would not “would not entrust himself to any man, for he knew all men.” (John 2:24). But according to 1 Peter 2:23 there was One to whom Jesus entrusted Himself and that you can safely entrust yourself to and lean on heavily: His name is Yahweh, Jehovah, Almighty God, the Eternal God.

2 Cor 1:20 “no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.”
It has been said, *“You can’t break God’s promises by leaning on them!”*

I The Fulfillment Of God’s Promise

For 25 years God had promised Abraham and Sarah a son (Genesis 17:16, 19-22), and for 25 years they had waited. But after 25 long years ...

A. The Lord was **gracious** to Sarah [Verse 1a]

Gracious = Paqad = “To visit or to show active concern”

Ex 4:31 “... and when [the Israelites] heard that the LORD was concerned about [paqad] them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.”

B. The Lord did for Sarah what he had promised [Verse 1b]

1. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age

It took 25 years for this promise to come to pass, but the Lord did for Sarah what He had promised -- just as He always does.

But the promise of a son was not fulfilled because Abraham was perfect in his obedience, because he wasn’t. The promise was fulfilled because God was faithful to His Word.

Rom 4:19-21 “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.”

Heb 6:15 “And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.”

Application:

Patience is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. But for patience to grow, it must be tested. I have found that God repeatedly puts me in situations that require a great deal of patience. And His most effective avenue for developing this quality in my life is by means of unanswered prayer.

C. The Lord fulfilled His promise **precisely** [Verse 2]

At the very time = Mowed` (mo-ade') = “At the appointed or fixed time”
God’s promise of Isaac was fulfilled exactly, precisely, and right on schedule.

Gen 18:14 “Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”

Illustration:

That’s one thing you must know about God. He is right on time – every time!! God’s purposes are never delayed or thwarted! They cannot be defeated by man’s sin. His purposes are certain and what He has promised, He will accomplish.

Gal 4:4 “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son ...”

Rom 5:6 “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”

II The Obedience Of Abraham

A. Abraham named his son **Isaac** [Verse 3]

Isaac = Yitschaq = “Laughter (i.e. to mock)”

Abraham and Sarah had both laughed in disbelief at the promise of a son (Gen 17:17; 18:12)

As a result, God directed Abraham in Gen 17:19 to name the boy, Isaac.

Initially, they laughed because, from a human perspective, it was absurd for them to think that they could have a child so late in life.

But now they would laugh because God had miraculously intervened and had given them a son who would bring remarkable joy to their lives.

Isaac is a wonderful picture or foreshadowing of the life of Jesus Christ:

1. Both were the result of a promise.
2. Both were born after a long period of waiting.
3. Both mothers were assured of God’s power (Gen 18:13-14; Lk 1:34, 37).
4. Both were given names rich with meaning before they were born.
5. Both were born at God’s appointed time (Gen 21:2; Gal 4:4).
6. Both births were miraculous and divinely accomplished.
7. Both births were accompanied by joy (Gen 21:6; Lk 1:46-47; 2:10-11).

B. Abraham circumcised Isaac on the 8th day [Verse 4]

1. As God had commanded him in Gen 17:10-12.

Circumcision = “The cutting away of the male foreskin”

Circumcision was an outward sign of an inward commitment and was required of Abraham and his descendents after him.

Application:

In the New Testament, the physical act of circumcision is no longer required for believers. Instead, we are to be circumcised in our hearts.

1. It is an expression of our identification with Christ
2. It is an expression of spiritual fidelity to the Lord
3. It is an expression of putting to death the sinful nature - Col 2:10-12

C. Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born [Verse 5]

At an age when Abraham should have been looking at retiring, buying a time-share in Princeville and drawing Social Security payments for the next 35 years, he became a father!

III The Harvest Of Prayerless Decisions

A. Abraham held a great feast for Isaac [Verse 8]

Illustration: Like the prodigal son - Luke 15:11-32

The son appears after years of patient waiting

The father throws a feast for the long-awaited son

The older son was jealous and reacted with bitterness and anger

B. Sarah saw Ishmael mocking and said to Abraham: [Verse 9-10]

Mocking = Tsachaq = “To laugh in scorn or ridicule”

This conflict is an extension of the strained relationship between Hagar and Sarah revealed in Genesis 16:4, where Hagar despised and persecuted Sarah.

And now in Gen 21, Ishmael despises and ridicules Isaac. Interesting!!

Application: The power of modeling

How do you respond when your feelings are hurt? When you’re under stress?

When you’re disappointed? When you’re not appreciated? Angry?

Your response has an enormous impact on your children. They are watching and learning how to respond to life’s challenges from you!

1 Cor 1:1 “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ!”

1. “Get rid of that slave woman and her son”

Get rid of = Garash = “To drive out or divorce”

Prov 22:10 “Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.”

2. “Ishmael will never share in Isaac’s inheritance”

Galatians 4:1-29 describes for us a spiritual application of this conflict between Ishmael (the son born of the flesh who represented the Old

Covenant that was based on the law) and Isaac (the son born of the promise who represented the New Covenant based on faith alone). Paul's point is that inclusion into the family of God is by faith in God's promise, rather than by the works of the flesh.

C. Abraham was greatly **distressed** over Ishmael [Verse 11]

Greatly distressed = Ra` a` = "To be grieved or displeased"

It is worth noting that Abraham's distress was the result of his own unbelief, disobedience and prayerlessness:

1. He failed to believe God's promise of a son
2. He failed to seek the Lord's wisdom regarding his wife counsel
3. He slept with his wife's handmaiden who conceived a son
4. He continued to cling to Ishmael as his son of promise

Abraham was deeply grieved by the decision that was being forced upon him.

1. Abraham loved Ishmael and he didn't want to give him up.
2. Ishmael had been Abraham's "backup" plan in case God's promise failed.
3. To give up Ishmael was give up his "first born" son as well as his future financial security.

1. But the Lord said to Abraham: [Verse 12a]

a. "Do not be so distressed"

Application:

Phil 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

b. "**Listen** to whatever Sarah tells you" [Verse 12b]

Listen = Shama` = "To pay attention and obey"

God reassured Abraham that He was divinely guiding Sarah's counsel.

It is interesting to note that while Sarah's motives may have been self-centered, God was using her to force Abraham's hand in setting aside his son born of the flesh.

Illustration: When the people of Israel asked for a king - 1 Sam 8:6-9

The request displeased Samuel, but the Lord allowed it and used the king to discipline them for their rejection of Him.

c. "Through Isaac your offspring will be **reckoned**" [Verse 12c]

Rom 9:6-8 "Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."

d. “I will make Ishmael into a nation also” [Verse 13]

In the Code of Hammurabi, Law 146, the children of slaves who were not made heirs must be set free as their rightful compensation.

Yet the promises God had made to Hagar (16:10-12) and to Abraham (17:20) concerning Ishmael would be honored: “I will make the son of the maid servant into a nation also, because he is your offspring.” (Genesis 21:13).

D. Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away [Verse 14a]

Like Abimelech in Genesis 20:8, Abraham rises early in the morning to carry out God’s commands.

Ps 119:60 “I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.”

Rapid obedience is one of the marks of a maturing faith!

It may seem harsh for Abraham to do this, but it was exactly what God wanted, and exactly what needed to happen in order for God’s promise to be fulfilled.

Application:

When the Lord tells us to let go of things that bring us a sense of security and pleasure, it is never easy to let go. But if we want to inherit the promises of God – we must let go!!

Luke 9:23-24 “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

Jim Elliot: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

IV The Intervention Of God

A. Hagar and Ishmael wandered in the desert of Beersheba [Verse 14b-16]

Wandered = Ta` ah = “To vacillate, stagger or stray”

1. Hagar and Ishmael ran out of water

The sudden freedom from slavery was tempered by the realization that their newfound freedom had turned into a death sentence.

Ps 63:1 “God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

2. Hagar put Ishmael under a bush to die

Remember, Ishmael was not a child, but a teenager of 14 years – Gen 17:25.

Like Elijah in 1 Kings 19:3-5 following the great victory over the prophets of Baal, Hagar fully expected that they would both die of hunger and thirst.

3. Hagar began to sob

Eph 2:12 “[She was] excluded from citizenship in Israel and [a foreigner] to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”

B. The Lord **heard** Ishmael crying and the angel of God said: [Verse 17-18]
Interestingly, it was not Hagar's cries that caught God's attention, but Ishmael's.

As a descendant of Abraham, he was the object of God's special care.

Ps 34:17 "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles."

1. "What is the matter?"

Ex 3:7-8 "The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

2. "Do not be **afraid**, God has heard"

Ishmael = "God shall hear" – and God, indeed, had heard!

Isa 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

3. "I will make him into a great nation"

Gen 17:20-21 "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation."

C. The Lord miraculously provides [Verse 19-21]

1. God **opened** Hagar's eyes and she saw a well of water

Illustration:

2 Kings 6:17 "And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

Application:

God's answers to our problems are often right in front of us, but:

- a. Our anxieties keep us from seeing the obvious solution.
- b. God hems us in and even blinds us to the answer until we have cried out to Him.

2. Hagar filled the skin with water and gave her son a drink

3. **God** was with Ishmael as he grew up

2 Chron 1:1 "Solomon son of David established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the LORD his God was with him and made him exceedingly great."

- a. He lived in the desert and became an archer
- b. His mother got him a wife from Egypt

V The Treaty With the Philistines

A. Abimelech and Phicol said to Abraham: [Verse 22]

1. "God is with you in **everything** you do"

Abimelech and Phicol recognized Abraham as a man who was the object of God's divine love, favor and protection. As a result, Abimelech wanted to have a treaty with Abraham in order to protect himself and his people from being on the wrong side of Abraham's powerful God.

Gen 39:2-6 "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw **that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did**, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned ... So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate."

Application:

Do people recognize that God is with you in everything you do?

Acts 4:13 "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."

Phil 2:14-16 "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life."

2. "Swear that you will not deal falsely with me" [Verse 23a]

Swear = Shaba` = "To seven oneself (by repeating a declaration seven times)"

Ps 12:6 "And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times."

Deal falsely = Shaqar = "To cheat or lie"

Abimelech respected Abraham's God -- but he didn't trust Abraham. After all, Abraham had already been exposed as a liar and Abimelech had nearly lost his life because of Abraham's deception (Gen 20:3).

3. "Show us the same **kindness** I have shown to you" [Verse 23b]

Kindness = Checed = "Favor, mercy, loving kindness"

Luke 6:31 "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

B. Abraham agreed but complained about a well [Verse 24-26]

Matt 18:15-17 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

- C. Abraham and Abimelech made a **treaty** [Verse 27-31]
1. Abraham gave sheep, cattle to seal the treaty - Gen 17:1-27
Treaty = Beriyth = “To cut a covenant (by passing between pieces of flesh)”
 2. Abraham brought 7 ewe lambs to Abimelech
 - a. For a witness that Abraham had dug the well
 - b. The place was called Beersheba
- D. Abraham settled down in the land
1. He planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba [Verse 32-33a]
Tamarisk tree = Eshel = “A tree or grove of any kind”
 The tree was planted as a memorial to God’s favor and deliverance.
 Gen 12:7 “The LORD said to Abram, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.”
 2. He **called** on the name of the Lord, the eternal God [Verse 33b]
 Abraham calls on the name of *Jehovah*, the Everlasting God. If we want to enjoy the fullness of God’s promises, we must be a people who call on the name of the Lord – and call on His name frequently!
 Is 55:6-7 “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”
 3. He stayed in the land of the Philistines a long time [Verse 34]

Conclusion

- A promise is only as good as the promise giver. As a result there are few promises in life that you can unreservedly rely on. But a promise from God is something you can depend on with absolute confidence.
- 2 Peter 1:4 “Through [His glory and goodness] he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”
- Josh 23:14 “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.”

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