

Promised Heir & Inheritance

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[0 : 00] He visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him.

Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, God has made laughter for me.

Everyone who hears will laugh over me. 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.

And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.

[1 : 13] So she said to Abraham, cast out this slave woman with her son. For the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.

And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. 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. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also.

Because he is your offspring. 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. When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes.

[2 : 21] And then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bow shot. For she said, let not me look on the death of the child.

And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. 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. Up. Lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand.

For I will make him into a great nation. And then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

And God was with the boy and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran.

[3 : 24] And his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. At that time, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, said to Abraham, God is with you in all that you do.

Now, therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity.

But as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear.

When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, Abimelech said, I do not know who has done this thing.

He did not tell me and I have not heard of it until today. So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech. And the two men made a covenant.

[4 : 31] Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. And Abimelech said to Abraham, What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart? And he said, These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.

Therefore, that place was called Beersheba because there both of them swore an oath. So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Thichol, the commander of his army, rose up

and returned to the land of the Philistines.

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

Abraham! Well, good morning, everyone.

Good to see you, Chelsea. Yeah, there you are. Good to see you, Chelsea. Well, will you pray with me as we come to God's Word? Come to God's Word. Heavenly Father, as we sang in our first song, that this is God's only plan.

[6 : 19] I pray that as we read Genesis and sit under Genesis 21, fill us with the conviction that this is your only plan to bring life and blessing and salvation to us and the whole world.

So give us understanding and faith, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Genesis is the first book in the Bible. Profound, isn't it?

You're starting to think, what are we paying this guy for? We ask him to go study so that he could share what he's found with us. Genesis is the first book.

Now, it is profound, okay? It sets the foundation, the framework for understanding the rest of the Bible.

This is God's only plan. As we come to the birth of Isaac, the heir of all God's promises, of God's plan, we've got to remember the larger story going on here.

[7 : 31] Sin entered the world and brought God's curse, God's judgment, instead of blessing.

We've seen in Noah's flood, we've seen the fire at Sodom, that the judge of all the earth must do what is right.

He is just. How will God redeem and save his world? Enter Abraham. Not because Abraham is any better than the rest of the world, but God graciously calls him.

He makes a covenant with him. God is creating his own family, calling them out of the world, a people for himself of all nations.

He says all the nations will be blessed through him, through this family. Now how will God's saving purposes for the world be achieved?

The tension in Abraham's story has been, there's no son, there's no heir. How can God's purposes be achieved if there's no heir to carry out God's purposes?

[8 : 44] And here in Genesis 21, we're going to see three crucial things to understand about God keeping his promise in providing an heir to save the whole world.

Here's what we're going to see. In verses 1 to 7, the Lord keeps his promise by doing himself what's humanly impossible.

In verses 8 to 21, the one who is going to inherit everything is the son of promise, not the son of human ability.

And then in verses 22 to 34, the inheritance is just a matter of time. It's coming because God's everlasting. So that's where we're headed.

So with the birth of Isaac, we're coming to the climax, one of the climaxes in the story. And there's something obvious. If we know the story well, you've heard it lots of times, we can take it for granted.

[9 : 55] We're told in verse 5, Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him. It is repeated a few more times, so we get the point.

Verse 2, in his old age. Verse 7, in his old age. When we're first introduced to Abraham and Sarah, back in chapter 11, we're told she has no children, and she is now 90 years old.

She's past menopause. The way of women has ceased, we heard earlier. And yet it's repeated here as if it's kind of offending our intelligence.

It's just repeated so much. Verse 3, Sarah, Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son. Verse 3, who was born to him, to Abraham, whom Sarah bore him.

We get the point, right? At the end, verse 7, it finishes with Sarah's astonishment. Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.

[11 : 09] We get it. It's Sarah and Abraham's child. Abraham was 75 when God first called him, back in chapter 12. What if God had given Abraham and Sarah the heir straight away when they were 75?

They would have rejoiced, wouldn't they? They were no newlyweds. They'd had a lot of heartache already. They would have been rejoicing. Wow. Instead, God keeps showing up and just reaffirms his promise.

You will have a son. Look toward heaven. Number the stars. If you're able to, so shall your offspring be.

And Abraham believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness. Still no child. At 86, they get sick of waiting.

They want to help God keep his promise by their own ability, using Hagar as a surrogate. And they make an absolute mess of things.

[12:22] Then at 99 years old, the Lord makes the covenant in chapter 17, and Abraham, the man of faith, hears Yahweh's promise again, I will give you a son by Sarah, and he laughed.

He laughs in disbelief. Chapter 18, the Lord promises Sarah, she laughs.

They can't believe it. They're very much like us, aren't they? They can only imagine that God can do what they think is possible.

How much are we anxious today? Because we just can't see how it could possibly, how he could possibly look after us.

They're just like us. They're too afraid to hope. It just hurts. It actually hurts too much when you just cling to God's promises and they don't come true for 25 years.

[13:29] They can't believe it anymore. So what are we meant to be seeing here? What would they have known now that they're holding Isaac in their hands?

What would they have known that day? I think they would have known this. They had nothing, we had nothing to do with the birth of this child whatsoever.

We had nothing to do with it. And nothing is too wonderful for the Lord. He can do anything. This is impossible. When things seem hopeless, Yahweh visited.

He did it. He did it himself. Mercifully. Impossibly. The Lord has done this and it is wonderful in our eyes.

every time they or someone else use Isaac's name. Remember, it means laughter. Hey, laughter, come wash your hands before dinner.

[14:38] Laughter, tidy up your tent. It would have reminded them every day about two things. When they heard God's promise, they both laughed. They didn't believe God.

It would have reminded them of Hagar incident. It would have reminded of putting Sarah in danger with Abimelech, what we saw last week.

If God had left it up to them and their faith, Abraham would have stuffed it up. Every day they would have had that reminder. They laughed.

But the second thing and the more important thing, every time they heard laughter, his name is a daily reminder of the Lord's gracious faithfulness to keep his word, his promise.

Let's emphasize here, verse 1, as he had said, as he had promised at the time of which God had spoken to him.

[15:48] And here we see Sarah laughing again. She's laughing. This is the laugh that God's grace gives you. God has made laughter for me.

What's the right response to God keeping his promise? I think we see here in Sarah and Abraham. If you see how wonderful God keeping his word is, you praise.

You just, wow, that you are a God who keeps your word so graciously despite my lack of faith and lack of obedience. You praise.

You make me laugh and the right response is obedience. Abraham obeys. He names and circumcises Isaac in covenant obedience.

Praise and obedience. So what are we seeing here in Genesis, the first book of the Bible? How will God save all the nations of the earth?

[16:52] He will graciously keep his covenant promises by doing what's humanly impossible, visiting himself. There's a trend at the moment of evangelical, I don't know if you know or not, we're an evangelical church.

We're all about the message, the promise fulfilled in Jesus. That's at the heart of evangelical Christianity. There's a trend of evangelicals going to Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox, just that tradition way of doing church.

Are we just one different branch of all the different types of Christianity out there in the marketplace?

Is this just one way of doing Christianity? I'm going to say no because Genesis is the first book of the Bible.

John Woodhouse, he's the former principal of Moore College. He came and spoke at our church camp a number of years ago. He wrote a tiny book but it was profound in my understanding.

[18:10] It's called God of Word and he says this, it is not that we evangelicals emphasize the Word of God while Catholics emphasize sacraments and charismatics emphasize the Holy Spirit and liberals emphasize good works.

God of God Woodhouse says this, this is really simple but it's profound. Where you have the Word of God creating faith in God, there is all of biblical Christianity.

That's what we're seeing here. It's God keeping His Word. That is Christianity. That is how He's going to fulfill His promise.

Well, verse 8, the second thing, the second foundation we learn here.

How many, how common is it at weddings or special family events, Christmas Day or something, at some point there's some family bust up, isn't there?

[19:25] Like, there's something about those special days that, I don't know, emotion, maybe it is because it's the special day. Emotions are high and just those old jealousies and grudges, they can't, they just wait for that day.

Here we've got that day, verse 8, this is Abraham and Sarah's greatest celebration in their life.

They're throwing a party with the birth of Isaac when he's weaned.

In our culture, it might be the first birthday party but Isaac here is probably two, maybe three, little infant. Ishmael would be 13 or 14 and just as Hagar taunted Sarah back in chapter 16, here we've got Ishmael laughing, maybe mocking.

It's not quite, it's hard to know what to imagine here. The word laughing is different to previous verses. It's the same word that when Lot was warning his sons-in-law get out of Sodom, they thought he was jesting.

And then Potiphar's wife, which we see later in Genesis, she uses this word as Joseph was making sport of her. So jesting, making sport, something's going on here.

[20:49] It's Isaac's big celebration, he's the heir and Sarah sees Ishmael doing something that's, it's just not befitting the moment and she flips out.

Drive out. This is forceful language, drive that slave woman out. Like she can't even use her name, like even though she used Hagar as a surrogate, she can't even use her name.

This is deep anger. With her son. It's also Abraham's son. Now verse 11, Abraham is deeply distressed.

He has deep affection for Ishmael. But the shock, isn't the shock, verse 12, what God's response is?

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.

[21:59] God's love. The Lord agrees with the wisdom of these boys parting ways but he's not agreeing with Sarah's jealousy or pettiness.

We shouldn't equate those two things. Now this feels so wrong, doesn't it, to send off a child in the care of his mother like this.

It must have hurt Abraham incredibly, likely never to see them again. But he did have this reassurance that the Lord would look after him.

He would become a great nation. If we look at the end of this section, I suspect a lot of people would be happy with the blessings Ishmael receives.

If you got this from God in life, I think a lot of people would be content. He gets a family, his name, he's got a legacy, he's going to have a nation after his name, he's protected from disaster, that's pretty good, he gets provided for, we're told God is with him in all he does, so somehow God gives him a measure of success in his life, he becomes even an expert with the bow, like he's powerful, don't mess with Ishmael, he becomes powerful.

[23:41] I think a lot of people would be happy with those blessings. things. So what are we meant to see here?

How are we meant to make sense of Ishmael being sent off? It's hard for us to understand today, but the firstborn back then in a patriarchal, agrarian time, the firstborn became the heir of the land and as the heir, as the head of the family, it was the heir's job to look after the family.

The problem we've got here, we've got two heirs. firstborns. It's a problem of their sinful making, by trying to take matters into their own hands.

We've got two firstborns. One is chosen ahead of time by God, the one provided by God himself, impossibly provided, simply because God promised.

The other is the son of Abraham and Sarah, what they could humanly do. Ishmael is the son of human effort, Isaac is the son of God's promise.

[25 : 07] We've got two heirs. Now, Ishmael is blessed a lot with earthly things, but he doesn't have the covenant promises.

Now, if we've got a problem with this not being equally distributed, I think we don't get how free. God choosing Abraham in the first place is, it's totally free, he didn't have to do that.

His covenant with Abraham, it's free, he didn't have to do that. Choosing Isaac, it's God's free choice to choose Isaac.

The promise is God's free choice, it's his choice. But here in Genesis, Ishmael and Isaac represent two polar opposites and the Apostle Paul picks this up in Galatians 4.

He says, the sending off of Ishmael is a picture illustration, salvation by human ability and salvation by faith in God's promise.

[26 : 16] They are incompatible, they can't dwell together. this isn't some later theology of the Bible. This isn't evangelicals imposing the whole, it's just faith.

It's right here in Genesis. Only by promise, only by faith in the promise, is there blessing and inheritance.

It is not the son of human ability that will inherit. Well, at the start of the Great Awakening, mass, mass revivals in America and the UK, there was a group who met together one night, John and Charles Wesley, we sing some of Charles Wesley hymns still today and they're reading the preface of Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians and they're reading aloud this sentence.

When it comes to salvation, what have we then nothing to do? know nothing. Only to accept of him who of God is made unto us our wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

And William Holland, who was there that night, he said, at those words there came over me such a power that I cannot well describe. My great burden fell off in an instant. My heart was so filled with peace and love I burst into tears.

[28 : 09] I almost thought I saw my saviour. My companions perceiving me so affected fell on their knees and prayed and when I afterwards went into the street I could scarcely feel the ground I trot upon.

No one will ever inherit salvation by human abilities. salvation we're seeing here salvation is by the son of promise. It's always been faith in the promise of those who inherit everything.

Have we got nothing to do? Nothing. Nothing. Just accept of him. Here it is right in the first book of the Bible.

The third thing verses 22 to 34 we've got this abrupt scene change where Bimelech turns up again who we saw last week.

What's he doing here? Twice we're told verse 24 and then at the end in verse 34 Abraham he has no rights he's not a citizen he's a sojourner he's got a temporary work visa to put it in today's language.

[29 : 35] We've just seen one exile so Abimelech turning up with his commander by his side you might start to think this could be intimidation he's another exile but he's got his muscle next to him but no this king wants to make a treaty with this foreigner Abraham owns no land and yet Abimelech seems concerned for his people's future his posterity he even mentions the land so Abimelech as we saw last week he's experienced God's blessing of Abraham first hand even when Abraham didn't deserve it he'd been taught to submit to Abraham as a prophet to intercede for him to be blessed perhaps he saw Abraham still prospering perhaps he heard the news of this child that that is impossible if

God is with him in giving this air I better do something for my people Abimelech a king of the nations is seeing this foreigner with the eyes of faith God is with Abraham I think he's like Psalm 2 urges kings be wise kiss kiss in peace God's chosen one I think we're starting to see God's promises to Abraham come true he is a nation coming for peace and blessing then we've got this grievance Abraham raises a grievance about a well that he dug and so he's got the right to use it but Abimelech servants have taken it Abraham is not content with peace faking he's not going to make a peace treaty and just ignore this grievance he's not breaking he's not refusing to enter this peace agreement they reconcile and they make this peace treaty

I think the emphasis is on the land here they made a covenant at Bathsheba verse 32 Bathsheba is at the southern end of the promised land now maybe I'm not quite sure but maybe that's the significance of planting a tree it takes decades generations for a tree to fully grow and here Abraham is calling on the name of God calling him the everlasting God he's worshipping he's saying Yahweh history is in your hands the nations are in your hands the earth belongs to you my offspring my future it's it's you you're the everlasting God I think calling God the everlasting God makes us recall the covenant in chapter 17 verse 8 I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession and I will be their God I think what we're meant to be seeing here he's got the air he's got the nations coming for peace and blessing and here he's planting a tree and he's worshipping the everlasting!

God he doesn't own land yet but he's basically going it's as good as mine already the inheritance is just a matter of time if the everlasting God has made a covenant with me it's just a matter of time the full inheritance!

[33 : 52] is coming if you could imagine going up to Abraham in this moment he's worshipping beside this tree he's planted and just asking what are you doing I think this foreigner might say I'm going to possess all this land one day further than your eyes can see like he's got a well that's great that's all he's got would you think he's crazy Abimelech took him seriously he saw God was with him now that promise becomes even clearer later on in Psalm 2 verse 8 the Lord says to his son ask of me I will make the nations your heritage the ends of the earth your possession in

Israel's history they were a small player on the world stage like you take even the highest points of their history it would still be crazy to believe that promise but especially when their land got conquered they had no king no heir on the throne is it crazy to believe that God's heir is coming he will possess the whole earth it's not crazy if it's by the Lord's impossible doing because he keeps his promise and he's the everlasting God he visits again at the exact appointed time saying to Mary a young virgin more impossible than Sarah behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name

Jesus he will be great and will be called the son of the most high of his kingdom there will be no end everlasting we find another man calling on the name of the Lord in Luke chapter 23 beside another tree Jesus is being crucified on a tree and God the father is not with him he's cursing him he's casting him out and this criminal dying beside him looks at that guy and says remember me when you come into your kingdom is he crazy is he right to think this cursed man is the promised son who will inherit the earth and does he really think after all the sins he is guilty of he admits that that he has any share in that inheritance is he crazy are we crazy this morning worshipping the name of Jesus as Yahweh that he is the heir of all the earth that we are co-heirs of the world to come not we're not crazy if we see who God is in Genesis the son of human ability will not share in the inheritance!

It's always and forever been by faith in God's promise when he visits and he does it's all his doing and it's impossible and he's the everlasting God whose plan to rescue the whole world is doing what is impossible for you and I can do and we are caught up in God's story simply by faith in the promised son that all the covenant promises are yes and amen they're yours they're mine whether our story is dull or full of darkness we can laugh with joy and wonder our life and future is bound up with this son of promise because God does the impossible he always keeps his word where we have God's promise and faith in

[38 : 44] God's promise that's all that's all biblical Christianity the inheritance! It's just a matter of time it's coming plant a tree if that helps I don't know but it's coming it's a matter of time we pray!

Let's pray! Father some of us this morning are doubting whether we are worthy enough to be saved by you we know our faith is regularly failing our worship is often half hearted we're ashamed of things we've done this week there's others of us who are pretty proud we think we're better than other Christians we think we have some rights on you Lord I pray for wherever we're at that you would help us to see it's all you're doing it's all your promise you doing the impossible by your son please press that truth deep into our hearts so that you would at the same time humble us and lift us up with confidence do this so that we will respond in praise and obedience to you in Jesus name Amen