

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

Presented by

Tyler Mullins

In Blake's sermon on Abraham and Ishmael, he explained to you how God had promised to make of Abraham "a great nation" (Genesis 12:1-3). In fact, God had even told Abraham and his wife Sarah, "At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, **and Sarah shall have a son**" (Genesis 18:14). But Sarah—whom the Bible describes as being "barren" (Genesis 11:30) and "past the age of childbearing" (Genesis 18:11)—decided on her own to "speed things along" by convincing Abraham to have a baby with Hagar, one of her maids. The child born to Hagar was named Ishmael. But, as Genesis 17:19 makes quite clear, Ishmael was **not** the son through whom God had promised to bless Abraham in order to make of him "a great nation." An angel of the Lord said quite sternly to Abraham, "**No! Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him** for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him." Sure enough, as Genesis 21:1-5 explains, everything occurred just as God had said it would.

"And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac.... Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born."

But the birth of Isaac was not the **end** of God fulfilling His earlier promise to Abraham. Rather, it was the **beginning**. In the years that followed Isaac's birth, here is what happened.

- When Abraham was very advanced in age, he instructed his chief servant to travel to Mesopotamia to seek a bride for his son Isaac who, according to Genesis 25:20, was 40 years old at the time. Abraham insisted that Isaac marry a young woman from his own country and people rather than marrying a Canaanite. Abraham's servant came across a young woman by the name of Rebekah, who eventually became Isaac's wife (Genesis 24).
- When Isaac was 60 years old, Rebekah gave birth to two sons—Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:24-26).
- Jacob, whose name God later changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28), had twelve sons by two different wives, Leah and Rachel (Genesis 35:22-26). One of those sons was named Joseph, and another was named Judah. Both of these sons would play important roles in God's future plans for His people.
- When Joseph was a teenager, his other eleven brothers grew angry at him because he was his father's favorite son. As a result, those brothers sold him into slavery, and he eventually ended up in Egypt where he became second only to Pharaoh himself (Genesis 37:18-28; 41:40). But, as Joseph would later explain to his brothers when they came to Egypt seeking food because of a terrible famine in the land of Canaan, "God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Genesis 45:5-7).
- Because Joseph held such a prominent place in Egypt, he was in a position to singlehandedly prevent his father and brothers from dying during the famine. As Jacob told his brothers, "So now it was not **you** who sent me here, but **God**" (Genesis 45:8). Through Joseph's actions, he was able to preserve the seed of Israel, which went all the way back to Abraham.

- As a result of what had unexpectedly happened in regard to Joseph, Jacob ended up moving his entire family to Egypt, with God's blessing (Genesis 46:1-7). In fact, God told Jacob, "Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there" (Genesis 46:3).
- As always, God kept His promise. The people of Israel eventually became so numerous in Egypt that the Egyptians began to fear them. As a result, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites (Exodus 1:8-14)—a position that the Israelites occupied for 215 years!
- During that time, however, an Israelite woman by the name of Jochebed gave birth to a baby boy by the name of Moses (Exodus 1), who ended up living in Pharaoh's house. On one occasion Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, and came to the aid of the slave—killing the Egyptian in the process. As a result, Moses fled Egypt and moved to the wilderness of Midian (Exodus 2:11-15).
- While living in Midian, Moses was called by God to lead the Israelites out of their slavery in the land of Egypt, and into the Promised Land of Canaan that God had pledged to give to Abraham's descendants (Exodus 3).
- The Israelites eventually inhabited Canaan, anointed kings for themselves, and ultimately split into two separate kingdoms—the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In approximately 722 B.C. the Assyrians invaded the Northern Kingdom and carried the Israelites away into captivity. The people who composed the Northern Kingdom were never heard from again. Some years later, beginning around 586 B.C., the Babylonians carried the people of Judah into captivity, and only a small remnant of those people ever made it back to Jerusalem, the city of David.
- But, from that small remnant would one day come "the lion of Judah" (Revelation 5:5), Jesus Christ—the Son of God Who would "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). As the writer of the book of Hebrews said, "It is evident that our Lord arose from Judah" (Hebrews 7:14).

These events—spanning from God's call of Abraham in the Old Testament, all the way to the birth and ministry of Christ in the New Testament—covered thousands of years and included hundreds of thousands of people. Some of those people, like Sarah, tried to change or thwart God's divine plan for humankind. But they always failed because God was working purposefully across the centuries to accomplish everything that He had said He would accomplish. No doubt this is exactly what Paul had in mind when he wrote to Timothy about "God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, **not according to our works**, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus **before time began**" (2 Timothy 1:9). When Christ invited the people to whom He spoke to "come, inherit the kingdom **prepared for you from the foundation of the world**" (Matthew 25:32), He wasn't kidding. Before God brought the Universe into existence, He had in mind a specific plan. That plan was set in motion in the Garden of Eden, and continues to this very day. And it is because of that divinely derived and eternally unchanging plan that Jesus is able to issue this invitation to each and every one of us: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Who would have thought that the difference in two tiny babies—Ishmael and Isaac—would one day have such a significant impact on the life of every person on planet Earth? Truly, as God Himself has said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).