

A Good Old Age

Genesis 25:1-18

Sometimes I wonder what a good old age would actually be. But I do aspire to that, to live a good long life, able to enjoy health and strength until the time when the Lord should call me home. Ultimately, of course, how long I live and what degree of health I enjoy is up to the Lord. It is in his hands, part of his secret will that has not been revealed. I have some reason to expect long life. My own parents lived are to their 80s. Three of my four grandparents lived into their 90's, all in fairly good health, particularly my mother's mother, who kept her own apartment and lived by herself until just months before she died at 93. I've been told, the previous generation of my ancestors also included many who enjoyed long, relatively healthy lives.

Abraham lived a similar life, and today in our study of Genesis we come to the end of Abraham's life. We finish one section of the book of Genesis this morning, and will begin a new section tonight. In any outline of Genesis, chapters 12-25 are always identified as the story of Abraham. That story ends this morning, with the death of a man who had lived to a good old age. And as we finish that story, as we finish our study of Abraham, it is appropriate for us to focus again upon God's faithfulness.

Everything about Abraham is a testimony of God's faithfulness, and that will be our subject as we look at the first half of chapter 25. First of all,

I. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IS SHOWN THROUGH THE SONS OF KETURAH.

Not too many people can give the name of Abraham's second wife. We're familiar with his first wife, Sarah, the woman who bore him his son Isaac in her old age, the son of promise who

was conceived only after both Abraham and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.

God enabled them to have that child, whose name would be Isaac. Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90. Sarah lived another 37 years, after which she died. And shortly after that, we read of Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac was 40 when they married. Abraham would then have been 140.

Before Isaac was conceived, we read in both Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 that Abraham's body was as good as dead. God renewed the health of that body, so much so that he was enabled to beget Isaac. And 40 years later, he's still in good health! God's rejuvenation of his body must not have been just a temporary surge of energy. He's ready to remarry, and he bore to his second wife, Keturah, six more sons. God is faithful!

v.1

Some commentators suggest that Abraham and Keturah were already married when Sarah was still alive, since Keturah is referred to as a concubine, or a second wife, a member of a harem. That, of course, would make Abraham guilty of polygamy, and seems to contradict the whole context of his special love for Sarah.

Other commentators, more unwisely I believe, think that Keturah and Hagar are one and the same. There is little support for that. The most obvious view is the simple, straightforward one. At age 140, still full of life even after Sarah's death, Abraham remarried. And had six more sons. Those sons, and the nations whom they represent, show us God's faithfulness, faithfulness to keep his promise. And what was that promise?

A. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations.

Specifically,

Gen. 12:3 “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Gen. 17:1 “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.” 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.”

And,

Gen. 22:15 “Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— 17 blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Abraham would be the father of many nations. And all nations of earth will be blessed through him. Including the nations of the sons of Keturah, nations he fathered long after his body was considered as good as dead!

v.2-4

We don’t know historically who all those nations are. Four of the six are unidentified. Jokshan is identified elsewhere by his two sons, Sheba and Dedan. And of course, Midian and the Midianites are referred to frequently in the Bible. The point is, Abraham is the father of many nations. But even so, one nation is singled out as the focus of God’s covenantal love. One seed of Abraham, one particular descendant would inherit the covenantal promises. He, of course, is Isaac.

B. God promised that his covenant people would descend from Isaac.

And NOT from Ishmael. And not from Keturah’s sons. We see that again in chapter 25.

v.5

He took care of all his sons. He provided generously for all their needs. But his inheritance went to Isaac. There was a clear distinction and a clear separation.

v.6

Isaac received the blessing, the blessing of the covenant, which God had promised.

v.11

Just to review, let me read that promise as we’ve studied it.

Gen. 17:19 Then God said: “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. 21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.”

Gen. 21:9 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.”

Let me put those two things together. First, the promise of the covenant given to Abraham would be passed on through Isaac, and Isaac alone. The covenant people of Israel would descend from Isaac alone. But, also, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Even in the OT, but especially in the NT, we see that universal blessing extending to all the nations. And what was the blessing that would come to all the nations through Abraham?

Ultimately, it was the blessing of salvation. You see, the glory of the gospel, which was made so clear in the NT, is that the blessing of God is for all the nations. God’s elect people are from all the nations, Jews and Gentiles.

And so what we see in history is that Jesus came as a Jew, presenting the gospel to the Jew first and then the Gentiles. And when the nation of Israel rejected the gospel, they were cut off and the Gentiles were grafted in. And when those from among the Jews believe in Jesus Christ, they would be grafted back in.

So there is one tree, symbolizing all of God’s people from all the nations. And we see clearly, in the prophecy of Isaiah 60, that some of these descendants of Keturah would come to Christ through the gospel.

Isa. 60:1 “Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. 2 For behold, the darkness shall

cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you. 3 The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. 4 “Lift up your eyes all around, and see: They all gather together, they come to you; Your sons shall come from afar, And your daughters shall be nursed at your side. 5 Then you shall see and become radiant, And your heart shall swell with joy; Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. 6 The multitude of camels shall cover your land, The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba shall come; They shall bring gold and incense, And they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD.”

And so that you realize that that prophecy is about salvation in Jesus Christ, let me read the first words of the very next chapter, words Jesus himself claimed to fulfill.

Isa. 61:1 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.””

So, God’s faithfulness in sending his son Jesus Christ to die for the sins of his people is shown even through these last six sons of Abraham with his second wife Keturah. Their descendants will be numbered among those who will have eternal life in Jesus Christ. Abraham would be the father of many nations. They would all be blessed in him. For God is faithful to keep his promise.

Now, let me skip to the sons of Ishmael.

II. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IS SHOWN THROUGH THE SONS OF ISHMAEL.

Starting in verse 12, we have a very brief repetition of the line of Ishmael.

v.12-16

This is a review of what we studied in chapters 16 and 17.

Gen. 16:10 "Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." 11 And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has heard your affliction."

Gen. 17:20 "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation."

Gen. 21:17 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."

A. God promised that the line of Ishmael would be a strong and mighty nation.

And as God had promised, so it was. Twelve rulers. A great nation.

v.16

Amazing, isn't it?

There was another aspect to God's promise, God's prophecy.

Though Isaac and Ishmael seemed to have been personally reconciled to each other, working together to bury their father Abraham, still the nations they represented would be at odds, for,

B. God promised that the line of Ishmael would be at odds with the descendants of Isaac.

So they were.

v.17-18

Just as God had predicted.

Gen. 16:11 "And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has heard your affliction. 12 He shall be a wild man; His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

All of that is to emphasize this great truth, that God is faithful to keep his promise. 100% faithful. Not one exception. Not one unfulfilled prophecy. Not one unkept promise.

All of which should enable you to understand more of who God is what he is like. All of that should give you greater encouragement to believe God's promises when you read them. To believe them, to claim them, to cling to them. And to know for sure, that they will be fulfilled.

The greatest of all God's promises has to do with the gift of eternal life, which is given to us through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the promise of the gift of forgiveness of sins. The promise of justification, that we are declared "not guilty" and will never face the condemning wrath of Almighty God. It is the promise of our eternal inheritance, "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade --kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by

God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”

It is the promise of Romans 10,

Rom. 10:9 “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile --the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

You can believe that promise with absolute certainty, for God is faithful! But let’s go back to Abraham, for one final look at God’s faithfulness. Even in death, especially at death, we find God to be faithful.

III. GOD’S FAITHFULNESS IS SHOWN THROUGH THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM.

v.7-10

And so the infallible, historical account of Abraham ends. How is God’s faithfulness seen in that? First, right on the surface, note how long and how well Abraham lived. God was faithful just to keep him alive.

Remember the curse which God inflicted upon all mankind, and all creation. It was the curse of death. Physical death. Which itself represented spiritual death. Separation from God. Banishment from God’s presence. And the destruction of the body. It was the curse of mortality. Perishability. Corruption.

Gen. 2:16 “And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”

As we’ve gone through Genesis, particularly in the years after the flood, you will note also that the average age span of man is decreasing. Before the flood, the age of the patriarchs would reach 900. After, it immediately was decreasing. By Abraham’s time, 175 was very old. And so we read,
v.7-8

A. Despite the curse, Abraham lived to a good old age.

He was advanced, more advanced than most people then. By God’s blessing.

Indeed, “good old age” is God’s blessing, and don’t ever let our society convince you otherwise. It is a blessing to live to a good old age. But much more than that, more than merely living, notice how Abraham is described at his death.

v.8 “full of years.”

That’s just one word in the Hebrew, the word “satisfied.”

The word can be used about someone who just ate a huge steak dinner at an expensive restaurant. His stomach is full, and it was good. His appetite is completely satisfied, his desires entirely fulfilled.

So what does the word mean with reference to Abraham? It means that he died “satisfied with life.”

B. Despite the curse, Abraham died satisfied with life.

He died having a great sense of satisfaction. Contentment.

All his expectations and all his desires, all his dreams had been fulfilled and accomplished. It does not mean that he was disgusted with life or tired of life. It's not that he necessarily wanted to die, just that God's promise in Genesis 15:15 had been fulfilled,

Gen. 15:15 "Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age."

According to God's promise, Abraham would die at a good old age. And he would be at peace. So he did. Other than Jesus Christ, the best example in Scripture of this same thing is the Apostle Paul, who writes in,

2Tim. 4:6 "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."

He, too, died satisfied with life.

Now, that is what we ought to aspire to, whether God gives us 90 years, or 70, or 40. Live your life in such a way that when you die, you can be satisfied with how you have lived.

We might often struggle with this. For myself, I'm not satisfied when there is a whole list of things that I wanted to get done, that I need to get done, that I haven't gotten done. There is a certain frustration to that, a frustration that is the very opposite of this sort of satisfaction which Abraham experienced. In many ways, that frustration has increased this past year with the limitations of my knee injury and now my hip. So some things just don't get done.

So how do we overcome that frustration, especially in the big

picture of life? How can we gain satisfaction, when there are many things we simply cannot do? In simplest terms, the answer to that question is the word priority. I have long realized that everything can't be the first priority. You can't do everything. And too often, we get sidetracked on things that are less than the first priority.

Abraham's first priority was to walk by faith. To believe God. To obey God. And for him, that meant wandering about without a home or a country to call his own. To me, that would be very frustrating. But a home and a country were not his priority. Obeying God was.

So what should our priorities be? What priorities will give us the ability to face death satisfied with the way we have lived? We don't have to guess.

Matt. 22:37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

That's the proper priority in life, and it is that priority that will give you the ability to die satisfied with life. And what a blessing to be able gain such satisfaction.

Back to the theme of God's faithfulness, with one more example of it. One more way that his faithfulness is shown through Abraham's death. It is God's faithfulness to promise eternal life. And so, we see that,

C. Despite the curse, Abraham died with the hope of eternal life.

v.8

"He was gathered to his people."

Again, to refer back to,

Gen. 15:15 “Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.”

Abraham knew that he would go to his fathers. He would be gathered back to his people. In other words, after death, there would be life! Those who had died were still existing, and Abraham would join them. And if there were still other people apart from those among whom he lived, then there must also be a resurrection from the dead.

Abraham knew that he would go to his fathers. He knew that physical death would be the entrance into eternal life. And God’s faithfulness is shown to Abraham with that promise. The reason he was at peace was because he believed that promise. So he died in faith. He lived out his life and then died with the hope of eternal life. As can each one of us, through faith in Jesus Christ.

God’s faithfulness is shown through the death of his people, people who are enabled to face death with the peaceful assurance of eternal life. And so I’ll end with God’s promise for you, so clearly stated by Jesus in,

John 10:28 “And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”