



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 2—Genesis Part 2

Lesson 1: God Gives A New Life to Abraham and Sarah—Genesis 21

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

God is a God of life. God enjoys creating life. God, from the very beginning, proves to be a God who loves to produce this present of life—a gift of existence. In Genesis 2:7, God fills Adam with the breath of life, or the very ability to inhale and exhale, to live. The psalmist refers to God as the “fountain of life” in Psalm 36:9: “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”

Life, of course, means more than the time between birth and death. Life, beyond the physical existence, refers to the relationship that God shares with humanity and that humanity shares with self, others and the entire cosmos. This is why the ultimate gift of God (think Jesus' birth, life, death, burial and resurrection) brings eternal life, or everlasting fellowship. God desires fellowship—community with His creations.

As with the case of Sarah, God also declares God's desire to be in an everlasting relationship with Abraham and his descendants. Therefore, Isaac's life represents more than an old woman who is no longer barren. Isaac represents a fulfilled promise for sure. Isaac, however, represents an intended line of descendants, a people. God promises Isaac to Sarah and Abraham as a child of promise—a promise of lasting relationship.

When Isaac is past weaning, Abraham and Sarah, as was the custom, celebrate with a “great feast” (Genesis 21:8). In ancient times, many children did not live past a few years old. When a child was grown and no longer was to be weaned, it was likely the child would live to be healthy and strong. Abraham and Sarah choose like so many to feast with family and friends to mark the significance of this event. Surely in their eyes, and understandably so, there must have been some doubt that Isaac was truly the child of promise, a promise to the nations.

Of course, we know now, that this child of promise was not only a child of Abraham and Sarah for their own benefit. Isaac was and is a benefit to the whole world (Genesis 21:12). Isaac's life was proof of God's favor on Abraham, Sarah, and all of the great nations that would emerge.

GOD'S STORY

Abraham and all of his descendants were commanded to be circumcised. This act of circumcision was a sign of the people's obedience to God's covenant. As we have already discussed in previous lesson introductions, a covenant, in the biblical sense, means much more than the typical agreement or contract that we discuss and consider entering into today. Agreements and contracts today typically are so specific that they merely include a certain part of someone such as a skill. Whereas a covenant requires and demands a person's total being not merely one or two aspects. For example, I was contracted to write 36 lessons for MissioLife. I use my skill of study and writing to complete this agreement. My marriage, however, is more than a contract. My marriage involves all of me—skills and weaknesses—everything that makes me who I am. In this a covenant and a contract are very different.

God is a covenant God, and the sign of circumcision (usually on the 8th day) was a reminder of the special covenant relationship that God had made with God's people. Abraham's circumcision was indicative of Abraham and Sarah's relationship with God.

OUR STORY

Genesis 21:33-34 holds tremendous significance for us today. Although none of us have dealt with the struggle and controversy specific to Isaac and Ishmael we struggle daily with uncertainty, stress of all kinds, confusion and the unknown. How does Abraham respond? He responds in typical obedient fashion. Abraham worships God by sealing this treaty (21:30-32) in three different ways.

First, Abraham plants a tree—a tamarisk tree. In a sense, Abraham builds an altar to God. In the sandy soil Abraham plants a tree to God. This tree was to be considered a “holy tree.” This “holy tree” was thought to have certain purifying qualities. Also, this tree was a very useful tree, one that later might be used to build something or even for shade, in the middle of the desert.

Second, Abraham calls upon the name of the Lord—the eternal God. Abraham recognizes God as the one who holds all the history—past, present and future—of Abraham's nation in God's hands.

Third and finally, Abraham stays in the land of the Philistines. This, again, is a commitment of Abraham to trust the eternal God.

OTHERS' STORY

We are God's chosen people. This means that we are God's plan for a re-ordered society and ultimately a restored world. God has called out a people in you and in me to represent to the world around us that God is alive and active. We are chosen masterpieces in which to carry out God's plan of wholeness throughout the world.

We choose to actively participate in God's plan because we know that we ourselves are being made new each day and that we were blessed through Abraham not merely for our own blessedness but to be a blessing to others. This is the story of our lives. We are God's people, the Church, created not for our own spirituality or ourselves but for the sake of the entire world. We are God's chosen and holy people for holiness.

THE WORLD'S STORY

Within the Old Testament, to be holy did not mean that the Israelites were necessarily religious. At the center of the word “holy” is a meaning of difference or distinctiveness. Something or someone was holy when they were set apart for a specific purpose in relation to God. This setting apart was not temporary but permanent. God set Israel apart for God's purposes. God was different than the other gods depicted during ancient biblical times. The Jewish nation was to be like God, different from all the other nations and the gods those nations worshiped.

To be holy (sanctified), therefore, was a given. Since God was holy, so were the people of God to be holy. The purity of heart was expected. Also expected was to be holy (image of God), in a way that revealed how different and set apart God was from the other gods by the way the Israelites chose to practically live out their lives.

This, too, is a great reminder for us. We are to be holy in both our sanctification and in our application of our commitment to God every day.