

Keeping His Promise
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Genesis 21:1-8

Here's the big idea of this lesson: God specifically promised Abraham and Sarah they would have a child of their own. He kept that promise by enabling that a one-hundred-year-old man and ninety-year-old woman to conceive and bear a child. If He did that for them He will surely keep His promises to you and me!

Genesis 21:1–8 (ESV)

21 The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. ² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. ⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." ⁷ 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." ⁸ And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

- With great simplicity verses one and two state the facts: the Lord came AS He promised; did exactly WHAT He promised; and did it at the TIME He promised.
- In human terms we'd be pretty pleased with someone who shows up when promised, to do what they promised, at the exact time it was promised.
- But God goes so much further than that. He not only showed up as promised and did what He promised, when He promised...He did it SUPERNATURALLY as only He could. Isn't that just like our God?

- Verse three says Abraham named this baby Isaac just as God had told him a year earlier (17:19). The name literally means, “he laughs.” **Why would “he laughs” be an appropriate name for this promised son?**
- God said you’ll have a son with Sarah --- and Abraham laughed.
- God said Sarah, you’ll have a son next year --- and she laughed.
- Now, this hundred-year-old man and ninety-year-old woman are walking the floor with a newborn baby. Who’s laughing now?
- Every time they called Isaac’s name it was a little reminder “nothing is too hard for the Lord.”
- Can’t you hear them: “That’s our little boy ‘laughter’.” “Why’d you name him that?” “We laughed at God when He promised we’d have him. Guess God showed us not to laugh at Him.”
- Often it’s interesting when we see God fulfill a promise to us, how He leaves us a little reminder so we won’t forget HE did it and not us.
- Verse six tells us Sarah was now laughing with joy. Can you imagine in that culture where fertility was so important, how many times others laughed at Sarah? Now she says, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.” They’re not laughing at me now.
- Verse seven: ⁷ 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.”
- Translation: *“An old woman with a nursing baby. Who’d a thunk it?”*
- Soon we’ll again celebrate the birth of Jesus, the “child of the promise.” In these verses we read that just as He promised, God enabled ninety-year-old Sarah to give birth to the “first” child of the promise: Isaac.
- The heir of Abraham would become the ancestor of Jesus. This passage is the beginning of the salvation story. That’s why followers of Christ need to know this story. Paul writes in Galatians four:

Galatians 4:28 (ESV)

²⁸ Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

- We need to understand our roots as adopted children of Abraham.
- But, this passage is not only a historical record of the beginning of God's plan for reconciling man to Himself. There is also a lesson for us that "God keeps His promises, in His own way, and in His own time."¹
- Let's talk about our "Promise Keeping God."

The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary tells us:

We may define God's promise this way: the divine declaration or assurance made at first to Eve, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and then to the whole nation of Israel that: (1) He would be their God, (2) they would be His people, and (3) He would dwell in their midst.²

This triple promise included: (1) the promise of a seed or offspring (an heir), (2) the promise of land (an inheritance), (3) the promise of blessing on all the nations (a heritage of the gospel).³

Then in Jeremiah's prophecy, God promised a new covenant:
Jeremiah 31:33–34 (ESV)

³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

The New Testament Enlarges the Ancient Promises into these groups.

- God's promises to Abraham about the heir he was to receive,...the sending of Jesus as a Savior "according to the promise".
- [And] "the promise of life in Christ Jesus", the "promise of the eternal inheritance", and the promise that "He Himself made to us: eternal life"...promised "by faith in Jesus Christ".
- [We're promised] the gift of the Holy Spirit...after our Lord's resurrection.
- There are other subjects related to God's promise: rest; an eternal inheritance; the new heavens and new earth; the resurrection; the emergence of an unshakable kingdom; and Gentiles as recipients of the same promise.⁴
- If you are a follower of Christ you fundamentally believe that God will keep His promise to give us everlasting life if we'll receive that free gift.
- But what about the promises of God BEFORE we get to Heaven? Sometimes even the most devoted Christians struggle with the "gap" that seems to exist when we're waiting for God to fulfill His promise. Abraham and Sarah waited over twenty-five years and into old age.
- In a booklet entitled: HOW DOES GOD KEEP HIS PROMISES? Kurt De Haan of Our Daily Bread poses these questions about God's promises:
What if we have done our part by "believing," but we haven't seen any results? Is there something we don't understand? Is there something else we need to do to see God's promises fulfilled?⁵
- I've provided a link to the booklet on-line because there's much more than we can cover in this lesson. <http://web001.rbc.org/pdf/discovery-series/how-does-god-keep-his-promises.pdf> Let me hit a few high points.
- Why is there confusion about the way God keeps His promises? **Can you think of reasons we might mistakenly be confused about this?**
 1. Faulty expectations – Thinking God will only keep His promises the way we expect.

2. Faulty interpretations and applications – We may simply miss the point of what God has said. We may understand a biblical promise accurately but fail to see that God gave the promise to someone else in a particular situation.
 3. Faulty memory – We [might] forget the evidence of God’s faithfulness in our lives and how He has fulfilled His promises to us in the past.⁶
- We need to remember: “God keeps His promises (1) on His terms, (2) to His intended audience, (3) by His methods, and (4) in His time.”⁷
 - o Some of God’s promises are unconditional. He’ll do it no matter what we do or don’t do. (The promised Messiah)
 - o Sometimes His promised HAVE a condition and we don’t do our part! Example: We “void the warranty.” (Adam and Eve)
 - o Sometimes we claim Bible verses that were specific to others.
 - o Sometimes we’re not satisfied unless God does things our way. De Haan writes: “Although His reasons may elude us, and His methods may surprise us, God always fulfills His promises.”
 - o God’s timing is always perfect, but it’s rarely soon enough for us. *“Hebrews 11 gives us a sampling of Old Testament saints who came to realize that God fulfills His promises according to His time plan. They lived by faith, believing that God would eventually do all He promised, even if they did not understand why the Lord delayed action for several years or beyond their lifetime.”*⁸

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Are you struggling with waiting on God to fulfill His promises?
- Have you really spent time in prayer, and in His word to determine the difference between a promise from God and a wish on your list?

- Could it be that God is waiting on YOU to obey His commands in order to see His promises come to fulfillment? Have you “voided the warranty?”
- Are you struggling with the fact that God is fulfilling His promise but not in the way you expected? His ways are higher than our ways!
- Do you regularly remind yourself how God has been faithful in the past?
- Do you ever look back and say, “Thank you Lord for NOT giving me what I asked for,” or “now it’s so clear that God WAS at work”?
- Remember: “God keeps His promises (1) on His terms, (2) to His intended audience, (3) by His methods, and (4) in His time.”
- As Abraham and Sarah learned, God keeps His promises. He not only showed up as promised and did what He promised, when He promised...He did it SUPERNATURALLY as only He could.
- And his greatest promise of all is the promise of eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ! A promise available to all if only we’ll trust Him with our lives.
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¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (p. 97). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Kaiser, W. C., Jr. (2003). Promise. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1331). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

³ Kaiser, W. C., Jr. (2003). Promise. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1332). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

Kaiser, W. C., Jr. (2003). Promise. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1333). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers. **The New Testament Enlarges the Ancient Promises**

The NT promises may be gathered into these groups. The first, and most frequent, are the references to God's promises to Abraham about the heir he was to receive, even Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:13–16, 20; 9:7–9; 15:8; Gal. 3:16–22; 4:23; Heb. 6:13–17; 7:6; 11:9, 11, 17). A second major grouping may be made around David's seed and the sending of Jesus as a Savior "according to the promise" (Acts 13:23, 32–33 HCSB; 26:6). Perhaps we should connect with this group the gift of "the promise of life in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:1 HCSB), the "promise of the eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15), and the promise that "He Himself made to us: eternal life" (1 John 2:25). This promise is what was promised "by faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3:22).

The third major group is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promises appear after our Lord's resurrection (Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33, 38–39).

There are other subjects related to God's promise: rest (Heb. 4:1); the new covenant with its prospect of an eternal inheritance (9:15); the new heavens and new earth (2 Pet. 3:13); the resurrection (Acts 26:6); the blessing of numerous descendants (Heb. 6:14); the emergence of an unshakable kingdom (12:28); and Gentiles as recipients of the same promise (Eph. 2:11–13).⁴

⁵ How Does God Keep His Promises by Kurt De Haan © RBC Ministries.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.