

The Promised Son Arrives

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[2 : 04] Let's go to the Bible. Let's go to the Bible. Let's go to the Bible. Let's do this. Let's do this. Let's do this.

Father, we thank you that your spirit inspired Moses to record not only the event of the birth of Isaac, but to record it in such a way that we see exactly what you want us to see about yourself. So teach us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. Amen. Adoniram Judson was a well-known missionary from the early to mid-19th century.

So we're talking early 1800s to mid-1800s. He's actually known, what he's most famous for is he is known as the first American foreign missionary.

That is, the first missionary to leave from America, to be born in America and to genuinely be an American, and then to leave the shores of America to go to a foreign country for the purpose of taking the gospel to that country.

[3 : 14] He's well-known. And his story is well-known to those who are the students of the history of missions. He himself was the son of a congregationalist minister.

He rebelled briefly in his time at college and briefly became what he claimed to have become a deist for a while and to have walked away from the faith. But that didn't last long.

Eventually, God called him back to himself. And Adoniram Judson not only committed himself to Christ, but he committed himself to do whatever God might call him to do. He was a man of great ambition.

He was a man of great intelligence. He had graduated valedictorian of his class in college at what would later be known as Brown University. He was a very intelligent person. He was well-versed in Latin and Greek and Hebrew.

He was a linguist of sorts during his sort of rebellious years there in between. He wrote a textbook on mathematics. He wrote another textbook on science for grade school girls.

[4 : 18] And so he was always at work writing, always at work learning and expanding his knowledge. He was respected and he had dreams for himself. He believed that he would become a great scholar and he probably could have become a great world-renowned scholar.

He had everything, all the tools necessary to do that. And yet, he sends the calling from God to go into the mission field.

Not just to go into the mission field, but to do something that no one had yet done. That was to leave America and go somewhere else. Why would you leave America? After all, we're talking about the early 1800s.

The vast majority of the continent of North America is still a mission field. It's not necessary. If you want to reach unreached peoples, you don't have to leave the continent. You can just go west and you can find plenty of people who have never heard the gospel that you might go and preach the gospel to.

And yet, he felt this almost irresistible calling to leave the shores of America and go to what he would call the golden shores of the country of Burma. He came across the idea of going to Burma

as he read a book written by a British military officer who had spent time in Asia and some time in Burma and had written a book detailing what the country was like and exactly what the people were like.

[5 : 39] And as Judson looked and read, he found Burma to be a fairly civilized society. They had a highly developed form of writing. They were a very literate culture. A large percentage of the people could read and write.

And he thought to himself, there's no better mission field for a person with the gifts that I have. And he even dreamed and imagined that this civilized culture simply needed to hear the gospel. That's all they needed.

Everything else was already in place for them. So if he or someone would simply go and preach the gospel to them, they were primed and ready and they would convert and there would be a great harvest there.

He felt a strong and powerful calling. But his vision of what his ministry would look like would not match with reality. Even before he was able to go, he had to fight to gain a commission from an American missionary society to even send him and support him and help him to go.

And that fight lasted about two years before he was finally able to build up the support and get a group to sort of gather behind him and send him off. And in February of 1812, he left with his brand new bride.

[6 : 49] I mean, of about a week old, he left with his brand new bride and they left America to sail initially for India. But his troubles even lasted on the voyage over there.

Not physical turmoil, but emotional, mental turmoil. He knew that he was going to come to India and he was going to come into contact. The main person that he would be looking forward to meeting was William Carey.

But William Carey was a well-known, internationally famous Baptist missionary and Judson was a congregationalist. And so he felt like, I need to be ready to argue and debate with this guy when I show up.

I've got to be able to disprove believer's baptism before I even get there. And so he spent much of the voyage, the six-month voyage there, he spent a whole lot of it studying the Scriptures and agonizing over what was the right view of baptism?

Infant baptism or believer's baptism? The reason why it was such an intellectual and emotional case of turmoil for him was because as he studied the Scriptures, he began to be convicted that the things that he had been taught for his entire life on this particular issue were wrong.

[8 : 00] And he had to wrestle and struggle with, switching from being a congregationalist missionary, by the time he arrived in Asia, he was at least in his convictions a Baptist missionary and he would later be baptized while he was there.

But that entire journey he writes in his journals was a difficult journey for him because he was struggling with rejecting some of the things that he had been taught, not just taught in general, but by his own father, his own pastor, for all of his life.

And then his troubles would continue. He would arrive there in India and be delayed for some time. The British who were in control of India did not want any American missionaries there.

They didn't really want British missionaries, but war broke out in the meantime between America and Britain again, and so they didn't want any American missionaries in India, and so he was sent off somewhat hastily.

And then he had to make another voyage across the sea to Burma. During that trip, his wife miscarried and they lost their first child.

[9 : 03] When he arrived in Burma, he found that things were not as he had imagined. Yes, they were a highly literate society, but he could not learn the language quickly. He labored and labored, they say, for roughly 12 hours a day with a tutor that he had found.

There were very few, if any, English-speaking people that he ever came in contact with while he was there, and he labored and labored to understand the language. Finally, years later, being able to produce at least portions of the New Testament in the Burmese language.

And in addition to that, he arrived in 1813. It wasn't until 1819 that he saw his first convert among the Burmese people. And then it would be another three to four years before he had enough converts, they say about 18 or 19 converts, so that he could actually call this fledgling group an established church in the country of Burma.

Things were difficult for him. He would lose more children along the way. His wife, who was of such an important help to him, who actually picked up the language faster than he did, passed away. He married again. And some years later, his second wife passed away. For his entire life, for 37 years, he labored in the country of Burma, returning back to America only one time in all of those 37 years.

[10:28] He would be imprisoned. He would be beaten. He would have to hide out for some time, many times. He spent a year alone in the forest after his first wife died, mourning the loss of his wife and his two children prior to that.

He had a difficult, hard life. And as we look and we compare his early excitement and zeal over what he felt God had called him to, and the things that God was telling him to do, and we compare that with reality, we see that oftentimes, even when we feel as though we have a clear command from God, or a clear promise from God, or we have clear direction that God has given to us, that nevertheless, the road can be very, very difficult.

Judson felt that he had a clear calling from God. In fact, let me read you his words that he wrote early on in his journal. He says this, he says, it was during a solitary walk in the woods behind the college, while meditating and praying on the subject, and feeling half inclined to give it up, the idea of being a missionary, just give it up, that the command of Christ, go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, was presented to my mind with such clearness and power, that I came to a full decision, and though great difficulties appeared in my way, resolved to obey the command at all events.

Though great difficulties did in fact come his way, he did obey the command of God, at whatever the cost, and the cost for him was great. The reality of life and all of its troubles coming down upon him, did not deter him.

They did not cause him to doubt, whether or not he had genuinely heard the call of God, and the command of God to go into all the nations. We find something similar when we turn in the book of Genesis.

[12:31] We find a couple that had been given a promise by God early on. That God would give them children, and that these children would multiply, and that through the families that would be birthed through them, all the other families and nations of the earth would be blessed.

And yet, this promise, this word from God is followed by years of struggle, years of great hardship and great difficulty.

And yet, we arrive here in chapter 21, and we see at last, at long last, the promise comes to fruition. We're told in verse 1, the Lord 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.

I want you to notice how frequently we see this language for speaking, or saying, or promising in these verses. I think Moses, in the way that he records these events, he wants us to focus in on the fact that what we're witnessing here is the fulfillment of God's word, of God's promise to Sarah.

[13:48] Notice, the Lord visited Sarah as he said, the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. She conceived, she bore a son, at the time which God had spoken to him.

These events are the fulfillment of God's word, finally at long last. But that does not mean that the time between the moments in which this word was first spoken, and now finally the fulfillment of this word, that those days were easy, nor that the days that would follow this would be easy days.

They are not. Several times, beginning in chapter 12, several times we see the promise given by God to Abraham about his offspring, about the heirs that he would have, about the children that he would have.

But even that promise is the continuation of a much, much older promise that we find at the very beginning of the book of Genesis. I want you to turn back to Genesis chapter 3. I know that throughout our series in Genesis, we have several times returned back to this very verse.

But it's because I think this verse sets the program, not only for the book of Genesis, but for the rest of the Bible. Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, following the fall of Adam and Eve, God bringing judgment upon the serpent for his involvement, for Satan's role in the fall, says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

[15:18] He shall bruise your head, you shall bruise his heel. Very early on, right after sin enters into the world, God makes the promise of an offspring that would come to the woman, of an offspring that would set all things right, of an offspring that would defeat, indeed, that would bruise

or crush the head of the serpent and bring to an end his influence in the world, who would reverse the effects of the fall and all the curses that followed.

And as we read through the book of Genesis, we are tracking and following and looking for the fulfillment of that particular promise. And you arrive with Abraham, where the promise is repeated over and over.

Probably no more clearly than in Genesis chapter 17. If you'll look there in Genesis 17, this is that covenant ceremony. God has already made a covenant with Abraham in chapter 15, but in chapter 17, He sort of confirms the covenant.

There's a ceremony that takes place to ratify the covenant and to ensure and promise Abraham that these things are going to come to pass. In verse 7 of chapter 17, God says, I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of all your sojournings, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God. You see the emphasis over and over on the offspring of Abraham, the offspring of Abraham.

[16:58] But by this time, Abraham and his wife Sarah are old. There's little chance of her, virtually no chance of her, actually conceiving and bearing a son for Abraham.

Abraham, of course, thinks he's already solved the issue because in chapter 16, we read the story of Sarah suggesting that Abraham go in to Hagar, her handmaid, and impregnate her, and he does that.

And so he has a son, and so in his mind, there is an inkling of hope. This could be the offspring.

This could be the seed. But as you move down through the story, you find that God says no.

Chapter 17, verse 18. Abraham pleads with God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. And God replies, No, but Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son.

Sarah will bear you a son. And Abraham finds this to be ridiculous. He's already laughed at the idea in verse 16.

[18:03] This doesn't make sense to him. She's far too old to bear children. She's 90 years old.

And even if you factor in the fact that she will live to be 127, even if you do that math, she's still well past the normal years of childbearing.

She's past the days of menopause. This cannot happen. This cannot be. This cannot occur. And yet the promise continues. You move on to chapter 18 and God not only gives this very promise again to Abraham, but this time He makes sure that Sarah knows exactly what He's going to do. Verse 10 and chapter 19. The Lord said, I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son. And then we're told, Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.

So they're both fully aware of God's promise. God's impossible promise of a son who would be born not just to Abraham, but to Abraham through Sarah.

So when we arrive finally at chapter 21, and we hear the repeated phrase using different words each time, and He said, as He had promised, as God had spoken, we are reminded that what is happening in chapter 21, what we are seeing is the unfolding and the fulfillment of the promise that God had made to Abraham and that He had then made to Sarah herself.

[19:31] You will bear Abraham a son even in your old age, and though that is impossible, God is faithful to His promise.

He is true to His word, and He fulfills the promise that He made. But if you think about the intervening years between the initial word of promise that came to Abraham and now the fulfillment, you realize that it was a difficult road to arrive at this particular point.

Abraham himself had to deal with danger from being in a foreign land. So afraid was Abraham that he made an arrangement with Sarah that every time they entered into a new part of the country, if she was questioned, if she was asked, she was to tell those who lived there that she was his sister rather than his wife because he was afraid that they would take his life in order to have his wife as their own.

That's an incredible amount of fear to live with everywhere that you are going and every place that you journey, and yet that's exactly what we see Abraham instructing her to do.

And two times we are told that she is taken away from him. Her very life is put in jeopardy. She has a difficult path to walk. And then even after they foolishly concoct this plan to provide a son for

Abraham through Hagar, that foolish plan itself results in more pain and heartache for Sarah as she has to sit by and watch as her servant, her handmaid, almost usurps her position in the family.

[21 : 12] And now Sarah, who thought that this would provide her with a child, is still left feeling alone and hopeless and childless, wondering perhaps if God's Word would actually be fulfilled, if God would come through on His promises to her.

It's been a difficult journey for Sarah to move from the initial promise to the more specific promise given directly to her and now finally to the fulfillment of that Word.

And what we are learning as we walk through that journey with Sarah and with Abraham, what we are learning is that God always, always fulfills His promises. His Word never fails.

His Word is always true, but that does not mean that we will not experience pain and heartache on the path to seeing the fulfillment of all of God's promises.

Whatever they may be, the path that we take to get there may be a very difficult path and it may be a long journey to get there. You may feel as if what the Scriptures have to say about the goodness of marriage and how God blesses marriage, you may be at a point in your life where you're tempted to doubt that reality because your marriage is hard.

[22 : 36] Because your marriage is not what you had pictured in your mind and you're wondering, is God actually blessing this thing? Is this relationship in any way working for my betterment and for my good?

And you are wondering and you are doubting at that moment, even if you don't phrase it in this way, there is a part of you that doubts whether or not God's Word concerning the goodness of marriage is actually true because it's hard for you.

And there are days when you just wish that you had a way out of all of this. I don't doubt that there were moments perhaps when Sarah wished that there were a way out of all of this.

Leaving her family, leaving her home country, traveling to a foreign land, her life put in jeopardy because of the fear and foolishness of her own husband, and then the weight on top of all of that of being known as the childless one, the barren one, that's how we're introduced to her at the end of chapter 11.

That's just who she is in the eyes of everyone else. The woman who could not bear a son for her husband in a culture in which sons are prized more than anything else.

[23 : 50] It's a difficult road for her to walk and all the while there is this promise directly from God. You will bear a son for Abraham.

There are probably many times in many places where we have wondered, I know that God says this. I know that God promises these things.

But I can't see it right now. I don't feel it in this moment. We know that the Word of God says that He will never leave us and never forsake us.

And yet, if you have ever walked through one of those dark, dark valleys of suffering, you can find it near impossible to sense and feel and know that His presence is there among you.

And you can, in those moments, wonder and doubt whether or not that statement in the Word of God is true. We are at many times and in many ways tempted to doubt the truthfulness of God's Word.

[24 : 58] In fact, that's something that the Apostle Paul himself wrestles with. In Romans chapter 9, after writing eight chapters worth of explanation of the Gospel and how God has been saving the Gentiles through faith alone in Christ alone, Paul brings up the question that must have weighed on his mind, especially as the Apostle to the Gentiles, but what about my Jewish brethren?

Weren't the patriarchs their fathers? Weren't the covenants made with their ancestors? Wasn't the Word of God given to them? Don't they possess the law?

Weren't all the promises given to my Jewish kinsmen and yet the vast majority of them are lost?

And he's willing to confront that difficult question head on. What shall we say then?

That the Word of God has fallen? And his answer is by no means. And he devotes three full chapters, chapters 9, 10, and 11 of the book of Romans, to proving that God's Word has not failed.

That it never fails. That we may misunderstand what he means, or we may not be able to have the long-term vision to see when he's going to fulfill his promises and exactly how he's going to fulfill those promises, but nevertheless, his Word never, ever fails.

[26 : 21] Three full chapters he devotes to that. In a very real sense, the entire Old Testament is answering that question.

Can the Word of God fail? There will be an offspring and he will fix all of this.

Along comes Noah. Could he be the one? It's through him that humanity is rescued and saved from a worldwide judgment. Could he be the one?

No. No. He's drunk in a cave. He moves forward. He calls a man named Abraham, promises him offspring.

Chapter after chapter go by. No offspring. No seed. Finally, now, chapter 21. Finally, the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. And in a limited sense, it is the fulfillment of the promises made directly to Abraham and to Sarah.

[27 : 21] But big picture, is this the offspring of Genesis 3? Oh no. This is not the offspring. His son will not be the offspring. His son's son will not be the offspring.

You move all the way forward. There's finally, finally more hope in David. Could David be the seed? No, he's not. For one thing, he's got multiple wives.

For another, he's a murderer and adulterer. He's not. But Solomon. Oh, David was promised an offspring. The promise at least continues through him.

Perhaps it's David, son, Solomon, the wisest man in all the earth. No. He's got a thousand wives and concubines. He heavily burdens the people with taxes that they cannot bear.

Wise as he is, he ends his life with a country on the brink of civil war. His son, his son, can't hold it together even for a few months.

[28 : 25] He's not the seed. He's not the offspring. He's not the one promised in Genesis chapter 3. We've got century after century, even millennia that stretch from Genesis 3.15 until we finally arrive at Matthew 1.1, a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, the son of David.

Finally, at long last, as Paul says in Galatians, he is the promised offspring. Centuries, centuries of what to our eyes would appear to be delay after delay and false hope after false hope.

But read the story carefully. All along, we are given these reminders that God is faithful to His Word. And as clearly here in Genesis 21 as anywhere else, we are reminded, though in our eyes there be a delay, though in our eyes circumstances would point away from the truthfulness of God's Word, that God is not slow about His promise.

He does not count slowness the way that we count slowness. He is always faithful to His promises. And in addition to that, not only does this paragraph teach us that God is always faithful to His promises, but that ultimately, in the end, His promises work for our good.

They work for our joy and our happiness in Him. You say, where do you see that? I want you to notice over and over this emphasis upon laughter.

[30 : 06] Now, to see it as clearly as you need to see it, you need to understand that the name Isaac itself means He laughs. That's what it means. It means He laughs. So let's read through a couple of these verses with that in mind.

Job in at verse 3. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him. He laughs. And Abraham circumcised his son, he laughs, when he was eight days old as God had commanded him.

Abraham was a hundred years old when his son, he laughs, was born to him. And Sarah said, God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears will laugh over me.

This is God saying, I have brought joy into your life. But He's saying far more than that. He's saying, despite the fact that you were doubtful, despite the fact that you didn't think this could be done, I have brought to you your hopes and dreams and wishes.

I have brought to you joy and delight by fulfilling my promises. Because you see, this is not the first time we see this laughter language in the story of Abraham and Sarah.

[31 : 14] Turn back again a page or two in your Bibles one more time to chapter 17. In chapter 17, when God tells Abraham, it's through Sarah. Forget about Ishmael.

He's not the offspring, but it's through Sarah that I will give you a son. Verse 17. Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, Shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old? Shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child? He laughs at the idea. It's ridiculous. What are you thinking, God? I'm 100 years old.

She's 90 years old. It's not going to happen. He's not the only one, though. You just move forward. A little bit. Chapter 18.

When Sarah finds out that it's through her 90-year-old body that God would give Abraham a son, she has the same response. Verse 12.

[32 : 18] So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, After I am worn out and my Lord is old, shall I have pleasure? And the Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh and say, Shall I indeed bear a child?

now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time, I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son. But Sarah denied it, saying, I did not laugh. She was afraid. And he said, No, but you did laugh. If the last words that you had actually heard God speak were, No, you laughed.

Those are the last words you heard. And another year passes, and then finally the fulfillment of the promises. Would you respond the way that Sarah does?

She sees and recognizes that her failure to rejoice in the impossible promises of God has now been, by God's sovereign design, turned into real, joyous laughter.

[33 : 24] She sees the change now. She recognizes the folly of her foolishness in failing to believe God's Word before. Now she sees.

Now she knows. Now she understands. God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears will laugh over me.

She understands. God does not order our steps in such a way that we always see where we're going. He doesn't direct the course of our lives so that it is always obvious to us that He's in the process of fulfilling His promises.

That's not what He does. But He does direct our steps in such a way that when He fulfills His promises, when He comes through on His Word, it is clear to us and to everyone around us who can perceive these things, it is clear that God and God alone could have done this.

God will not leave the fulfillment of His Word up to our own speculation that perhaps it wasn't God that did it, but we figured it out and did it ourselves. That's not how God operates.

[34 : 37] That's not what He's doing here. No. God orchestrates all of these events in the lives of Abraham and Sarah so that at this moment she would clearly see and recognize God did this.

This isn't just happenstance. The circumstances of my life don't just seem or happen to look like the fulfillment of God's Word. The circumstances of my life can be nothing but the fulfillment of God's Word.

Notice how Moses emphasizes verse 2, So Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time which God had spoken to him.

So at the very time that God had said. And then notice verse 5, Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

And then Sarah's words, Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Who would have said that? God had said it. Yet I have born him a son in his old age.

[35 : 44] Over and over. In fact, at the very beginning of the paragraph it's emphasized most clearly. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age. Old age.

Old age. Old age. Right at the time that God said. There can be no other explanation of the fulfillment of God's Word of promise to them. But it would not have been so clear.

It would not have been so clear if in Genesis chapter 12 God promised Abraham children and Sarah had immediately born Abraham children within nine months. It would not have been clear.

It would have been amazing that a woman would bear children after going so long without bearing them. But it wouldn't have been impossible. And yet God gives an impossible promise.

Sarah herself learns that he is working for his glory and he is working for my joy in all of the events of my life.

[36 : 50] The deep dark valleys and now the mountaintops. He is working for his glory. He is working for our joy.

That's what he's doing. When Paul asks the question if God is for us who can be against us? The context in which he asks that question is one of suffering.

Paul is considering and pondering the reality that not only is he and our other believers facing suffering now but that suffering will intensify. It will grow worse. He quotes the Old Testament that we like sheep are being led to the slaughter.

Paul sees and knows that the circumstances that he faces and that many of his fellow believers face those circumstances would cause one to wonder is God for us?

And that's not what he says. What he says is if God is for us who could be against us? In all this suffering and in everything that appears to be a delay in God's promises to these followers of Jesus

Paul says in all those painful circumstances we are more than conquerors through Christ.
[38 : 12] And we like Sarah may have those days where we laugh and think it's not going to happen. It can't happen. Things have taken a turn for the worse.

This person did this over here. This person made this decision over here. Or I made this decision and now it's not going to happen. I know what you said God. I appreciate it. Thanks for the thought. Not going to happen. And yet Paul says in all these things whatever they may be through Christ we are more than conquerors.

The reality is that we live in a sinful fallen world. And whether you follow Jesus or not you will suffer. suffer. It's life in a fallen world. And some of you will suffer a little and some of you will suffer a great deal.

But whether you follow Christ or not people will die that you love. Whether you follow Jesus or not someday you will either die tragically suddenly or you will grow sick and suffer for a while and then die.

[39 : 18] whether you follow Him or not you will experience pain and suffering and heartache in a fallen sinful world. The only question really to be asked is is that suffering is that God's plan to move you toward the joy filled fulfillment of all of His promises?

And the only way to give a yes answer to that question is to trust in Jesus regardless of circumstances regardless of what surrounds you is to simply turn from sin and trust in Jesus and know that the same God who can bring these miraculous events to pass in the life of Sarah can now through the ultimate son of promise save you and rescue you and deliver you and through all your troubles be in the process of fulfilling His word to you.

Let's pray.