



Genesis

Beginnings

Week 4
Chapters 18-21

Promise, Judgment, and Child

1



Where we've been

- ❖ Though God created a good world and gave the humans responsibility for this world, their rebellion disrupted the cosmos. Humanity is separated from God and lives in exile. God sets about to restore creation and humanity through one man – Abraham.
- ❖ Covenant is central to all this. God has made promises to Abraham, promises that **MUST** be kept. The promise-keeping may not be according to Abraham's calendar or plans, but God is faithful to God's covenant.
 - God has promised a child to Abraham and Sarah. As unlikely as it seems, it will yet happen.

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Unexpected visitors (18:1-15)

- ❖ Abraham's hospitality is way over the top. Does he sense what the writer tells us, that this is a visit from the Lord?
 - Do we entertain angels unaware?
- ❖ How does the stranger know Sarah's name? She is listening in and overhears the stranger's prediction of her future. Incredulous, Sarah chuckles at the thought.
- ❖ The stranger pushes the point. Sarah must sense something about this stranger, for she denies she laughed.
- ❖ The key here is to see that the promise will yet be fulfilled.
 - Indeed, Isaac will very much be a child of an extraordinary promise – like Elizabeth's boy, John (see Luke). The surprising pregnancy is a recurring biblical theme.
 - Faith is not "reasonable" and does not fit into the normal scheme of life!

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Tenacious intercession (18:16-33)

- ❖ This is a story every bit as imaginatively told as the story of the three visitors. It is one of my favorites.
 - Don't get distracted by the things like God going to Sodom so he can check it out for himself. What does this episode reveal to us about God and Abraham?
- ❖ It is clear that Abraham now knows he is talking to God. God even considers shielding Abraham from what is about to happen. This is the sort of thing one friend might do for another.
- ❖ What a marvelous negotiation. Abraham won't let go. Abraham makes God admit that the presence of any righteous people means that God must not destroy the city.
 - What an amazing relationship God seeks to have with us all. Here, friend shares with friend. Friend negotiates with friend. It is almost as if the two of them are back in the Garden of Eden. *God wants the same relationship with you and me.* God and Abraham are not equals, but they are friends.

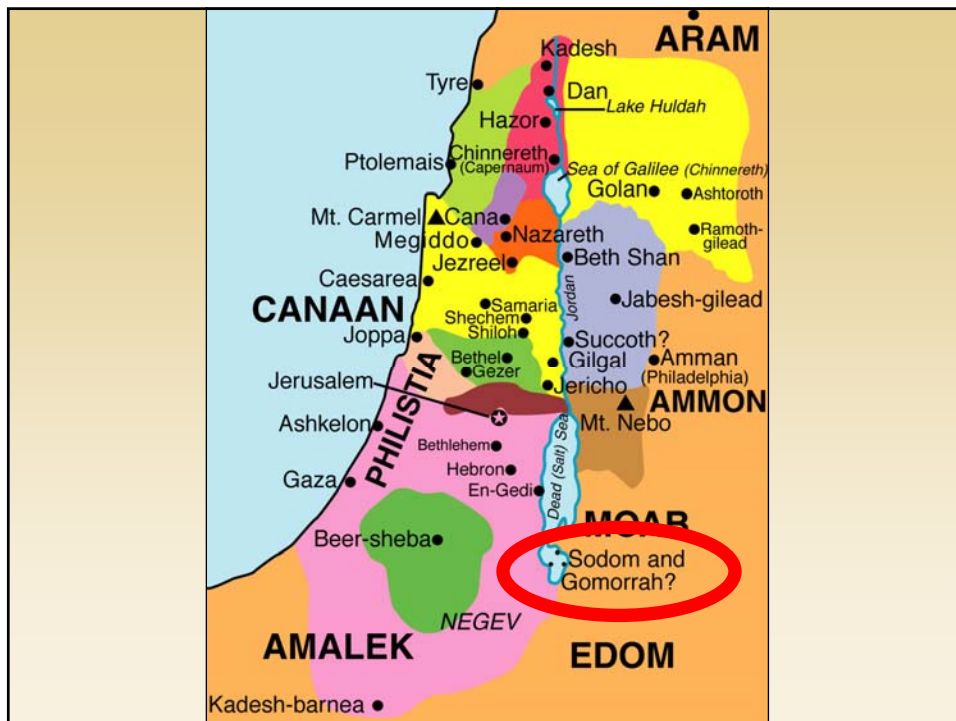
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Sodom's day of destiny (19:1-38)

- ❖ The men gathered around Lot's house demanding sex illustrate how far Sodom has fallen. It answers the question of whether even ten righteous might be found. The answer is no. By the end, it is clear that there is sufficient evidence to move forward with judgment. Even Lot has been pulled down by the Sodomites – this is the place that he chose and now he has offered up his own daughters.
- ❖ As Sarah laughed at the idea of her pregnancy, Lot's sons-in-law scoff at the idea of coming destruction.
- ❖ Lot's wife is destroyed by her longing for all that she has left behind.
 - What ties us to the past in ways that are not good for us?
- ❖ The sordid tale of the daughters matches Lot's offering of these girls to the men in Sodom. Their abuse matches Lot's own.
 - Lot's grandson, Moab, is an ancestor of David and Jesus through Ruth.

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Abraham's fears assert themselves (20:1-18)

- ❖ Abraham must be one SLOW learner. Despite all that has happened and his relationship with God, again, he offers his wife as a sister.
- ❖ God speaks to Abimelech, one who is not part of the community of faith. Abimelech even stands up to God!
- ❖ The story illustrates a moral order. Certain deeds – having sex with another man's wife – has consequences just by virtue of their having happened. Perhaps a bit like gravity in the natural order.
 - People reap the consequences apart from their intentions or even their knowledge of what they have done.
 - This is a much better way of understanding the consequences of sin than imagining God sitting in the heavens ready to send down thunderbolts.
 - In the story, God has to deal with the effects of the sin.
- ❖ Abraham must pray for Abimelech for him to live. God deems that prayer is necessary in such circumstances.
 - We must never underestimate the power of prayer.

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The promised son is born (21:1-7)

- ❖ The promise is kept. The Lord is “gracious” to Sarah and she bears a son.
- ❖ Isaac is circumcised on the eighth day, in keeping with the covenant.
 - Abraham is an even 100 years old!
- ❖ Sarah's laughter of incredulity (chapter 18) is changed into a laughter of joy – though the whole thing is still pretty hard for her to believe.
- ❖ This could have turned out differently. The birth is the product of God's involvement and the faith of Abraham and Sarah.
 - See Romans 4:16-21 and Hebrews 11:11-12

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The rift between Isaac and Ishmael (21:8-21)

- ❖ Isaac is three or so. At a party to celebrate Isaac's weaning, Sarah demands that Hagar and Ishmael leave because she does not like the way that Ishmael "mocks" the child. (In Galatians 4:29, it is "persecutes").
 - Sarah knows that Abraham will have to choose between his sons. The covenant is to pass through Isaac. But this will not be easy for Abraham, not easy at all. It is nearly as poignant as the coming story about Abraham and Isaac.
- ❖ An angel of the Lord again comes to the rescue of Hagar. This time, the angel does not send her back. Instead, the angel provides water and reiterates God's promise of good things ahead for Ishmael.

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A border dispute (21:22-34)

- ❖ Abimelech understands Abraham's relationship with God.
 - Do we understand ourselves to be privileged as Abraham was? Not so we might lord it over others, but so that others might see God's love and power at work in us.
- ❖ Even for Abimelech, Abraham is not inherently trustworthy. There still must be a treaty, a covenant.
- ❖ After the men enter into the treaty, Abram's response is to worship God.

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Where is Jesus in this?

- ❖ Paul deals with the story of Sarah/Isaac and Hagar/Ishmael in Galatians 4:21-31. It is an allegory of slavery (Hagar) and freedom (Sarah).
- ❖ Paul sets up Hagar/Ishmael as Mt. Sinai, the Jerusalem of Paul's day, and the Law. It is about human effort and it is bound to come up short. It is about humans in slavery.
- ❖ In contrast, Sarah/Isaac are the "Jerusalem that is above." This is about freedom and the power of the Spirit. "We are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman" (4:31)
- ❖ It is Jesus who has freed us from slavery. He is our redeemer.
 - Paul's over-arching point is not to let anyone pull us back into some sort of legalistic slavery, bound to a bunch of rules and regulations as if they can ever speak to the state of our hearts.

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