

Isaac

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] Now I'd like us to begin this evening a short mini-season, you might say, just three or four episodes in it of what we shall call special births.

Obviously, many people will be remembering at the end of this month the ultimate special birth with our Lord's coming amongst us. But of course, that is not the only special birth recorded in Scripture. And each one, of course, of which we could have multiplied examples, the time doesn't allow for that. But each one is, of course, pointing forward to that fulfillment in Christ and to the ultimate new birth and special birth that he gives us.

I'd like us then this evening to think about the special birth prophesied and promised of Isaac, Abraham's son of the covenant, son of promise.

So long awaited. We read in verse 10 here, he said, Now the extent to which Abraham recognized that these three men who came to him were in fact a visitation from the Lord and of the Lord.

[1 : 18] And it is almost as though the Lord is the one speaking through their mouths. And some take it that this is almost a personification of the Holy Trinity appearing to Abraham.

We can't really go into the details of all that just now. But suffice to say, this is God renewing his promise of the child of the covenant, of the promise of the boy who would become Isaac.

Now the promise had first been made 24 years earlier. And by the time it came to pass, it would have been 25 years in the fulfilling.

But the fulfillment would have to come if God's word was to be true. And we have to remember all the times that we think in terms of, well, I thought God had promised this, but he hasn't done it. Or he hasn't done it yet. And why hasn't it happened? God hasn't kept his word somehow so far. God cannot, will not ever allow himself to be found in the position of being untrue.

[2 : 22] He cannot. He cannot be untrue. He cannot be anything other than truth itself. He cannot deny himself. But therefore, what God has promised and what God has spoken needs must ultimately come to pass.

All too often, though, I would suggest to you that we are like those who, you know, who dodge behind the artist when he is halfway through his masterpiece. And they perhaps see simply sketchings and blotches of color filled in here and there.

We think, well, that's not very good. That doesn't look very impressive. That's nothing like a thing that's behind you that you're meant to be painting. I mean, I could do better than that myself. And we look at it and we think of this half-done job as though it were the finished product.

Which, of course, it is not. The artist will have been contracted to paint either a particular person or scene or landscape or whatever it is. But until his work is finished, we cannot judge it.

Because it is not yet complete. But all so often, we fall into the same trap of the Lord. We say, well, look, it hasn't happened yet. God has said this and he hasn't done it.

[3 : 31] Why hasn't he done it? Let's look at what there is. My goodness, it's only a half-done job. But why hasn't he fulfilled his word? And we are inclined to rebel. In crying to grumble, which, of course, Abraham himself does not do.

But we do jump to these conclusions. Perhaps, understandably at times. But what we have to recollect is that God, having made a promise, needs, must be true to his promise.

We may think we've got an interest in God keeping his word. And holding on to our faith that God will do us his promise. If we've got an interest, how much more does God have, if we can say it relatively, a vested interest in making sure that what he has promised will come to pass.

If God's word is to be true, the fulfillment would have to come. So what it comes down to for Abraham, as it sometimes does for us, is quite simply, with regard to this special word, what do you believe?

What do you believe? Do you believe the evidence of what you see around you? And all the physical and biological obstacles and difficulties.

[4 : 44] The heartbreaking years of nothing happening while time clicks away. The time clock takes brutally away.

And all the opportunities seem to be passing away beneath our feet. Or, do you believe the promise of God? When over all these empty years you have literally nothing else to go on except that he has promised.

And all we know. We all know what it was like. And we all know what the answer ultimately should be. And we all know what it is. Yes, yes, we must update. Yes, yes, we must hold on.

That's the answer a Christian should give. You say, what should we do? Do we look at simply the evidence in front of us now? Or do we hold fast to God's promise? And as with so many rhetorical questions that are put in a Christian context, we know there's a right answer.

And we know there's a wrong answer. And we know the answer that we should give is, yes, we would believe. And of course, we would trust in God's promise. But we all also know that that is not an easy thing to do.

[5 : 55] And that it is not something that comes readily to mind. And we know what we should say. We know what answer we should give. But it is not easy. And in one sense, I can truthfully say, not in anything like the same time scale as Abraham.

Not in anything like the same issues as Abraham. But each of us has our own issues, our own situations. And for me, I can truthfully say, I've been there. Done that. When there were those times when all the evidence around seemed to be either of abandonment by God.

Or, at the worst case scenario, Satan whispering in your ear saying, you know, who are you talking to? Why are you praying? You know, who do you think you're talking to? There's nobody there.

There's never been anybody there. It's all just, yeah, buildings and religion and stuff. But there's nobody actually there. Who do you think you're talking to? It's all your imagination.

And the little voice, it seems that some of us say, you've been wrong all these years. And of course we block that out. And of course we say, no, of course God is true. Of course there is a true and faithful God.

[7 : 04] But what we do kind of sometimes, maybe you haven't done this, I don't know. But certainly for me, the little sin of compromise of unbelief is, of course God is real. Of course God is true.

But perhaps I made a mistake about what I thought he was saying to me. Perhaps I made a mistake over what I had believed that he was promising.

And maybe he never actually promised that at all. And that's why it hasn't happened. And that's why it hasn't come to pass. Because I made the mistake. God is still God.

But maybe he never actually promised this at all. Maybe he never actually gave me any word of assurance. Maybe I was only fooling myself. And that kind of allows us to still be in our lost, miserable condition.

And yet still not really blaspheming against God. But at the same time, it is still doubting the reality of what he has claimed.

[8 : 03] And what he has promised. And we look for evidence to back up what we think God has promised us. We look for something to show us, yes, you're on the right track.

And there's nothing. There's nothing at all but what he has promised. Those verses that you cling to. Those hopes that you trusted. And all the faith you've always had in all the years is telling you one thing.

But all the evidence of your experience is going in the other direction. And you think, what do I do? You know what you should do. But it's so, so hard to hang on to nothing but faith.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. The evidence of things not seen. And that is something that is comparatively straightforward.

When we're just middling along and it's, things are okay, some things are bad, some things are good. But if you're in that dark place of complete desolation, then it is a hard work to live out in reality.

[9 : 05] That all the time Satan will be just saying, you know, you're only fooling yourself. There's nothing there. There's nobody there. Or else you made a mistake.

God didn't actually say, hey, has God really said? Has he really made this promise? Has he really said this to you? He's never far away as the devil. But holding fast to what the promises of God are. Of course, you balk at Satan's suggestion that there is no God. But you do begin to entertain the possibility that you were wrong. That what you have thought God was making promises about. You were applying particular verses or whatever to yourself. But you were mistaken. God wasn't the fault. But you were still crushed and alone.

You see, if Satan can't get you with the one suggestion, he'll get you with the other. He'll make a real stab at getting you with the other. But, what do we need? What do we need in the Lord? [10:08] What do we also need that Abraham did? Well, the definitive verse, if you like, with regard to Abraham, we read in Genesis 15, verse 6. He believed in the Lord and he counted it to him for righteousness.

We read that verse in our reading this morning from Galatians. We read in Galatians 3, verse 6. Even as Abraham believed God and it was a thank you to him for righteousness. It's this verse 6 of Genesis 15. Where the Lord shows him all the stars in heaven. And he says, as the stars from multitude, so will your seed be. Your descendants will be like this. Even though you've got no children at all, just now. And you're already old. We read, Abraham believed God. He believed in the Lord and he counted it to him for righteousness. Because he had nothing else to go on but the promises that God had said. And of course, when there is nothing to go on, we read of what Job said, of course, in chapter 14.

[11:08] If a man dies, shall he live again? Has God even raised the dead? All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come. That whatsoever God intends to do in my life, whatsoever difference he intends to make, whether he intends to bring me to life after my spiritual death, I will wait upon him till my change come.

Thou shalt call and I will answer thee. Thou will have a desire to the work of mine hands. I will wait till my change come. Change which only the Lord can work.

Only the Lord can do. We go back to that first promise of God to Abraham in chapter 12. Read in verses 2 to 4. The Lord had said to Abraham, get out of thy country and come from thy kindred, from thy father's house, to a land that I will show thee.

I will make of thee a great nation. So lots of descendants. And I will bless thee and make thine name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee and curse them that curse of thee.

And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. There is the Messiah and the promise. In the descendant of Abraham, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

[12:19] And this is the first direct promise of the Messiah to Abraham, that it will be of his descendants. So Abraham departed as the Lord has spoken of them, and Lot went with them.

And Abraham was 75 years old when he departed out of Hara. Now, it still takes faith to go out into the unknown. But there's still perhaps, you know, the possibility that God could still work.

I mean, he's old, but he's not past it completely. He's old, but God can still work, even through the old and so on. But we see also through this chapter in the next the nature of this relationship with the Lord that Abraham has.

And we think, well, of course, that's what you read about people in the Bible. Of course, they were always building altars and sacrificing and so on and calling on the name of the Lord. Yes, some of them were.

The ones that were, you read about. All the others, we must take it, were godless. That's quite a frightening prospect. When you think of the population of the world at that time, it would be less than it is now.

[13:20] But all those, how few, are actually in a living relationship with Jehovah, the Lord God of his own people.

We read verses 7 and 8. The Lord appeared unto Abraham and said, Unto thy seed will I build this land. And there builded he an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain in the east of Bethel.

And pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west and high on the east. And there he built an altar unto the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. Now the first of those in Jehovah was the first altar of God that was built in the Holy Land.

And that's how long ago, that's how few there are of people that are in relationship with the living God. Chapter 13, we read it, verse 4. Verse 18.

Then Abram removed his tent and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in heaven, and built there an altar unto the Lord. He has this ongoing living relationship with the Lord.

[14:26] Wherever he goes, he worships the Lord. God appears to him and he worships the Lord. He sacrifices to him and builds his altars. Whether or not the Lord appears to him, Abram is in this relationship with the Lord.

Now of course, we mentioned earlier how we might think, oh well I was mistaken. I thought God wanted to do a certain thing, but maybe I was wrong. Maybe it actually has a different kind of fulfillment.

A different application. And we see some of this syllilbam beginning to weaken in faith in chapter 16. In chapter 16 of Genesis, we've got Sarai, Abram's wife, bearing no children.

And she had a handmaid, an Egyptian whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing, I pray thee. Go in unto my mate. It may be that I may obtain children by her.

And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And so on. We all know what happens then with Ishmael. And so on. But this is Sarai. To a lesser extent, Abram thinking, okay.

[15:31] God made this promise about our descendants. And okay, it's not happening. And we've waited probably ten years by now at this stage. And it still hasn't happened. So maybe what he meant was that if we take the slave girl, Hagar, and Abraham sleeps with her.

And then the child is but still be physically Abram's child. And it will be legally Sarah's child. Because she's the owner of Hagar. So it counts as hers legally, even though it's not biologically hers.

So maybe that's what God meant. Maybe God intended us to be sensible and use the things he's given us. And maybe that's what his fulfilment was. You see, we often attempt perhaps to explain away the seeming non-fulfilment of what we think God ought to have done by now.

By looking to compromise. And say, oh yes, yes he did keep his word of course. It's just that it wasn't the way we thought. It was this way. It was a more spiritual fulfilment. Or it was a more secondary fulfilment.

It's just that we thought it would be an immediate, genuine child of Abram. And say, oh, but obviously it wasn't meant to be. Or it would have happened by now.

[16:47] And this is what we think God must have meant. Surely this is what God means. Since he appears to be not doing the other thing that he's promised.

And this is probably, as we say, ten years on from chapter 12. So Abram is about 85, 86 by this time. And then we have of course the Ishmael situation who is born.

So there's about ten years elapsed between chapter 12 and this that we read now, chapter 16. Moving on from chapter 16 into chapter 17. Chapter 17 is hugely significant.

Because we have here in chapter 17 again the reiteration of the promise. God has not changed his mind. He has not said, how did you've got Ishmael? That's my promise total.

No. He reiterates the promise again. We have this in verses 1 to 8 in chapter 17. And we have also the name change from Abraham.

[17:46] Or Abram to Abraham. From high father. Which is a high up father. Abram. To Abraham father of many nations. And this is what he changes his name to.

And Abram so far thinks, well this is going to be through Ishmael. So we have the reiteration of the promise. But we also have then, from verses 9 on to verse 14, we have the institution of circumcision.

This Old Testament sacrament. That every male child born into the covenant thereafter was to be circumcised. And all the servants of Abram's house were to be circumcised.

Everyone was to be dedicated to the Lord in this way. Now this is not insignificant. And we'll come back to that in a moment. That Abraham is willing to undergo this.

He's willing to submit himself with the Lord in this way. And then from verse 15 onwards. We've got the promises that God makes with regard to Sarah. And with regard to the promised Isaac.

[18:49] And also to Ishmael himself. Ishmael is a child of the flesh. And therefore the fulfilment that is promised for Ishmael is a fleshly fulfilment. It's worldly.

He'll be great. He'll be great. He'll multiply a number of tribes. He'll become a great nation. That's fine. And through that, partially, yes. Abram's descendants will be multiplied.

And you'll see that physical multiplication of your descendants, Abraham. That's great. But my promise, my covenant, will be with Isaac. Well, Isaac hasn't been born yet. Isaac hasn't even come along yet.

He's not even seen the promise fulfilled yet. And when we have this promise, then Abraham fell upon his face. Verse 17 of chapter 17. Abram fell upon his face and laughed.

Now, we've read in chapter 18 about Sarah laughing within herself. But here's Abraham in the previous chapter. Abraham laughed and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old?

[19 : 47] And shall Sarah that is ninety years old bear? So she's ten years younger than him. And here he is, age ninety-nine, having this promise. Come on, Lord.

He's laughing about it now. It's not going to happen. He that is a hundred years old, going to be a father then. So Abraham laughed. And then in chapter 18, we read that Sarah laughed.

And God, who is not mocked, of course, says, She shall have a son indeed. Verse 19 of chapter 17. And thou shalt call his name Isaac.

Which means he laughs. Abraham laughed. Sarah laughed. God says, yeah, I'll make you laugh. All right. Because this is going to happen. And you're going to call your son, he laughs.

You're going to call your son, Isaac. And, of course, we see the delightful fulfillment of this in chapter 21, where we read verses 5 and 6.

[20 : 44] Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him. And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh. Not now in scorn, not now in doubt, but rather in sheer delight, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

And she said, who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should have given children suck, for I have born a son in his old age. And we see in this the joy and the laughter of the promise at last fulfilled.

God's promise coming to pass. So, chapter 18, if we do the arithmetic, chapter 18 is coming roughly three months after chapter 17.

And we see this because in chapter 18, we read at verse 14, Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed, I will return unto thee according to the time of life.

And say, they shall have a son. It doesn't specify what the time of life is, presumably the time that is required for a child to be conceived and to grow within the womb and then to be born.

[21 : 56] But in chapter 17, at verse 21, he says, My covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

In other words, one year from now, Sarah will be giving birth to a son, and you'll call his name Isaac. And in chapter 18, say, At the time of life, I will return to you and say, I will have a son.

So, we must take it that it is approximately three months later. Now, we have perhaps say, Well, why three months later?

Why not just start right away? Well, without wanting to be indelicate again, if you think about what has happened in chapter 17, what is it that God has required of Abraham?

And of Ishmael? And of all Abraham's male servants? And so on. Circumcision, particularly in that time and culture, would have been surgically brutal.

[22 : 58] It would have been potentially life-threatening. Loss of blood would be huge. And nobody would be in any position to do anything much for weeks, if not months, immediately after it.

So you've got an entire male population in Abraham's household and clan and tribe who are, to all intents and purposes, incapacitated.

And this will take time to heal. Now, even basic, ordinary life challenges would be difficult in the immediate aftermath of that kind of surgery, which Abraham, notice, does not hesitate to undergo. But nothing that would be involved in the conception of a child would be even remotely possible in the immediate aftermath of that.

We're looking at at least three months in that time. But God fulfills his promise and doesn't waste any time.

[24 : 02] The obvious question we might say is, why does God wait so long? Abraham's definitive moment of commitment of faith in this particular promise appears to be, as we said, chapter 15, verse 6.

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. At which point he was probably, as we said, 85 or 86. In other words, 10 years older than he was in chapter 12 of the initial promise.

And if we just look back to what God says to him in chapter 15, after these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.

And 10 years after the promises first made, Abraham said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me? Seeing I go cut childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus, who would inherit everything.

And Abraham said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and lo, one born in my house is my heir. And behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

[25 : 10] And he brought him forth abroad and said, Look now toward heaven and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. And he said unto them, So shall thy seed be. You think nothing's happening, but this is what I'm telling you is going to happen.

And he believed in the Lord. And he counted it to him for righteousness. And yet, it would be another 15 years before that promise was fulfilled.

And when it was fulfilled, that special birth was in the face, we might say in the teeth, of every possible impediment and obstacle, physical, biological, experiential, personal.

We read, of course, in chapter 18, verse 11, Abram and Sarah were old and well stricken in age. It ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. And Abraham, we read, verse 24 of chapter 17, Abraham was 90 years old and nine when he was circumcised in the flesh of his horse.

Another impediment, another difficulty, another problem that is going to have to be overcome. And Abraham laughed and said, Look, I'm going to be 100 years old this time next year.

[26 : 25] Sarah's going to be 90. This isn't going to happen, Lord, surely. And with all these things against them, yet still God intended to do that which would be otherwise impossible.

It's not for nothing that Hebrews 11 and verse 12 said, Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore in number of all.

To all intents and purposes, this was, should have been impossible. It might have been possible when Abraham was still 75, and Sarah still 65, still stretching it a bit, but you know, possible, stranger things might have happened, but here is Abraham aged 100, and Sarah aged 90, and with all the biological difficulties involved still, God fulfilling his promise.

In all the long, silent years of waiting, and hoping, and trusting, and hoping against hope, what God has not done yet is both the greatest test of our faith, and the greatest proof of God's mercy.

Mercy, remember people have said, you know, mercy is not getting what we do merit, what we do deserve. Grace is getting what we don't deserve.

[27 : 57] Now, if we are not getting Christ, if our sins are not covered by his blood, shed upon the cross, then what we deserve is a lost eternity.

What we deserve is hell, but it hasn't happened to us yet. God hasn't yet done what he has promised he is going to do against sin, and if it hasn't happened yet, that's evidence of God's mercy.

And if we are redeemed and saved by Christ, then his precious blood covers all our sin, and we receive that gift of life which we don't deserve. And when God's judgment falls, it doesn't fall upon us.

It falls upon the sin that Christ bears for us upon the cross. And God's holding off in the fulfillment of what he has categorically stated is going to happen is both the greatest act of his mercy in biding his time, but it is also, in terms of the good things that he has promised, it is also the greatest test of our faith.

We look around and we see, well, it hasn't happened. And all we ought to see is, it hasn't happened yet, because God's time is not yet perfected. It is the great test of our faith.

[29 : 19] It is also a great tool of Satan, of his deception, to draw you away from the certainty of what he has promised.

Because if God has promised it, it's going to happen, and it will come to pass. But Satan tells you to look around and say, oh, look, it hasn't happened. God promised it, and it hasn't happened.

Obviously, you can't trust his work. And all we ought to say is, God has promised it, and it hasn't happened yet. Which means it is yet to happen.

He has his methods, which may not be at all what we might foresee or expect. You know, I hesitate to use a worldly example, and this is purely of the world.

We're not suggesting, oh, look, this is the work of God, sort of thing, although ultimately God's in complete control. I have no interest whatsoever in horses and horse racing and so on.

[30 : 16] But there is a fact of historical interest to me, which is that it is in 1967. Some of you may know this fact. The Grand National in 1967, however many horses run in a Grand National, there was one horse that was rated at 100 to 1.

100 to 1. And that's the horse that came in and won. The horse was called Foyeban. And the reason that horse won is because there was a particular fence at which, first of all, one horse fell. And then another horse. And then all the other horses began to pile on top of the others. And all the riders became unseated. And there was a great big carnage pile of horses and bodies and everything falling and being scattered all over the place.

And the only horse which managed to steer around the wall and clear and jump the fence and just can't go home, completely unchallenged, was this 100 to 1 outsider.

If anybody had said beforehand, yeah, yeah, put a bet on that horse, it's going to win. They would say, don't be daft, come on. 101, what's going to happen there? I'm not suggesting, oh, look, the wonderful work of God.

[31 : 28] That's a worldly example. It's a worldly sport and all the betting and sin that's involved in that. I'm not suggesting that at all. What I am saying is that even in the world of men and even in the fallen conditions of sinful habits and so on, we can see seemingly impossible things happen in ways that we could never envisage.

And when God intends to unfold His purposes, God can do anything, but He won't let the glory be shared with anybody else.

He's not going to let His glory be shared with Moses or with Abraham or with the Israelites. He's not going to let anybody say, look, because we're so good, because we're so strong and powerful, this is how we manage to do it.

When God brings His children out of Egypt, they are a band of oppressed slaves. They're not even a proper nation yet. How does He do it? He visits plague after plague after plague upon the Egyptians.

The world's greatest superpower at the time is ground down by one supernatural event after another until finally was a plague upon the firstborn.

[32 : 44] Their hearts are all broken and the fight has gone out with them and they're basically telling us, like, just go, just go, get out of here, we don't care, just go.

Take whatever you want, gold, silver, clothing, anything you want, riches, just go. We've lost our children. What else can be worse? But of course, eventually, the heartbreak cools and they start looking around for somebody to be angry with and somebody to blame and that, I would suggest to you, is the context in which Pharaoh and his horsemen start coming after the Israelites whom they blame.

But how are they defeated? It's not that, oh, God sends a great angelic army to stand against them or God turns the Israelites somehow into fantastic warriors overnight.

No. God puts His pillar of fire and cloud between them and the Egyptians. He sends a mighty east wind to blow the sea back and it stands up in two great walls.

He brings through His children on dry land and then when the Egyptians follow, a saying to do so, as Hebrews tells us, the sea closes over the top of them.

[33 : 55] He uses nature. He uses the things at His disposal. And there the Israelites are suddenly on the other side of the Red Sea and free. And they haven't lifted a finger.

All they have done is they have obeyed God in coming out of Egypt. He brought them out. He did the work. God uses His means. He won't share His glory with anyone.

When David goes against the Philistines on that occasion, God sends hailstones from heaven that destroy more of them. The hailstones the size of great big stones that kill most of the Philistines before David and his men even have to raise a sword.

When the Assyrian multitudes come against Jerusalem and Hezekiah cries out to the Lord and spreads the letter before the Lord, what happens? They wake up one morning those of them that

are left and find it was 120,000 of them are dead or 80,000 I can't remember exactly how many just died in their tents.

Just there they are all dead corpses in their tents quietly, silently in the night. And they've got nothing they can do but pack up and go home. No great flashing lights, no great angelic armies coming with trumpets and fiery chariots.

[35 : 07] They all suddenly die in their tents during the night. And then of course in the follow up to that of course we've got the Israelite Lord in Sylvania when the Lord says and prophesies there through Elisha and He says you know this time tomorrow so much will be sold for a shekel and so on and how much food will be available.

It came to pass that the king that the Lord upon whose hand the king leaned to have the charge of the gate came to pass the time God had spoken to the king saying two measures of barley for a shekel and a measure of fine flour should have shekel shall be tomorrow about this time in the gate of Symeria.

And that Lord had answered the man of God and said now behold if the Lord should make windows in heaven might such a thing be. And he said behold thou shalt seep with thine eyes but shall not eat it all.

In other words it's going to happen. You don't know how it's going to happen but it did happen of course. It happened within the time that God had said but not how anybody imagined God will not share his glory with anyone.

He will do it and the glory will be his. Likewise when King Jehoshaphat is going forwards against the Ammonites and the Edomites and the Moabites who are attacking him and he meets them in the desert and God causes them simply to turn on each other and they slaughter each other for whatever God puts in their hearts he delivers his people he says you won't need to fight in this battle.

[36 : 36] I'll do the fighting I'll make sure your enemies are defeated. The Israelites didn't lift up a hand against them. God overthrew them. Now you might say of course in all these cases oh but that's a bit of a cheat I mean that's not really how many the Israelites aren't winning a great big deal their enemies just kill each other and the Israelites didn't really beat the Egyptians you know God sent all these plagues and the sea opened up and then it closed again you know that's cheating that's not really a straight victory is it?

It's not proper and all these ill stones coming down from heaven that's not the Israelites that's something else that's not the Israelites it's not God's people it's God the great glory is not going to be that of God's people it's God himself our glory is simply that we are the Lord's people such glory as we have is only because we are his we don't win the victories he does we don't have the triumph he does he triumphs in us and if he has promised he will bring it to pass it may not be the way that we imagine or the way that we expect and poor Abraham and Sarah you can see why they get to the stage of thinking well God obviously didn't intend it to be through us you know look at us the state we're in the age we're at and you know nothing's going to happen with us biologically now so maybe Hagar is the way it's meant to go maybe that's what

God meant maybe that's what he intended and the only difficulty with that is that we reduce and diminish the possibilities of what God might do to glorify his name you say well obviously it can't be this and obviously it can't be that there is no can't with God there is no cannot there is no impossibility with God in fact this word says the things which are impossible with men are possible with God there is nothing God cannot do how God will bring it to pass need not concern you and me we don't have to concern ourselves with that even when God will bring it to pass that even and that is not our concern around what I mean even in the New Testament in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 1 verse 4 being assembled together with them

Jesus commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem but wait for the promise of the Father which saith he ye have heard of me for John truly baptized with water but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence when they therefore were come together they asked them saying Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel and he said unto them it is not for you to know the times of the seasons which the Father hath put into his own power but ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth in other words you don't concern yourselves with what I'm going to do with Israel and the kingdom you wait at what I've told you you'll get the power you need you'll take this message to the ends of

the earth you think you're just talking about a wee kingdom of Israel here I'm talking about a kingdom that will stretch round the entire world your vision is too small in what you think God is capable of doing that said personally I believe the scripture teaches that God yet has a purpose for his physical people of Israel the Jewish nation I don't know exactly what that purpose is some have speculated and perhaps read from scripture that God intends to make a huge conversion amongst the Jewish people and then use them as a missionary means of turning others to their Messiah so that there will be a vast great ingathering towards the end of time in which the people of the Jews once converted or those of them who are converted will be instrumental what I think scripture unequivocally does teach is that God is not yet finished with the physical nation of Israel I don't presume to know exactly how he intends to fulfill it but that he is not yet done with them and we can't say oh yes

[41 : 23] Luke 19:48 that's what it was all about descending up to the state of Israel and so on we can't say this is the fulfillment that's the fulfillment this is it Jesus warns against people saying look here is Christ there is Christ this is it now because God has kept these things in the secrets of his own heart all that you and I need to know is that having promised he will fulfill when God will do it is his business but that he will do it we take on trust and faith faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen and we believe him because he has spoken this special birth that he prophesied and that he promised came about in the teeth of all the obstacles that had to be against it even the obstacles of Sarah and Abram's own physical incapacity and all the difficulties that continued to be put in the way right up to the last night so that God's glory would be even greater nobody would say oh yes it's because of this oh yes it's because of that no it's not because of anything except

God and we read in verse 22 the men turned their faces from thanks and went towards Sodom but Abraham stood yet before the Lord in one direction there is a heading off towards judgment and destruction and the other direction if Abraham were to turn back toward his own tent he would see the place of the promise and the fulfillment and the promise of life and Abraham stands there in the doorway as it were between two directions the promise of life and fulfillment not yet happened and the promise of destruction which is rapidly coming which direction would you rather be going in and here is Abraham standing in the door of his tent standing before the Lord Abraham stood yet before the Lord still waiting upon God still trusting in God God fulfilled his promise and brought to pass what he had prophesied he brought that new life into being he brought that special birth he brought the fruit of long and patient faith and faith is by definition that which we have not yet seen fulfilled but God has promised and whatever promises he has made to you whatever promises he has made in your life and as far as spiritual matters are concerned he has promised come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest and I might if

I'm feeling like it not if you're a good enough person not if I like the way that you behave but rather I will give you rest all that the father giveth me shall come to me and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out that is God's written promise which he cannot and will not go against because he is truth and he needs must fulfil what he has promised just as he did to Abraham just as he did with this particular special birth just as he will and does with all the special births that he has promised and prophesied just to be as he did in the life of Abraham and Sarah just as he will in the lives of all who put their trust and faith and faith in him let's come and if he does have his same as he