

April 6/7, 2002

Study Questions
By Faith We Live: A Study of the Life of Abraham
Faith and Rewards
Genesis 21:1-34

Opening Discussion

1. Have you ever been frustrated waiting on God to do something, only to look back later and see God's wisdom in His timing? Share an example from your life.
2. Can a believer live under both the law and grace? Why or why not?
3. Are there sometimes long-term consequences to our sin? Is this true even if God has forgiven us? Could you share some examples?

Bible Study

1. Read Genesis 21:1-21. What are the main details from previous chapters in Genesis that go into the making of this story?

What have been the triumphs of faith and what have been the failures to trust that bring the story to the point it is in chapter 21?

2. In Genesis 21:1-7 note the emphasis on "God said" or "promised" or "commanded." Notice, too, the emphasis on Abraham and Sarah's age. What does God want us to know about Himself from these verses?

If Abraham and Sarah had believed what God wants us to believe about Him from verses 1-7, how might the rest of the story (vs. 8-21) have been different?

3. Was there anything Abraham could do to make his beloved Ishmael part of the promised seed?

What was he learning about the consequences of his choices?

What did Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael need to learn about God? (The very lesson they needed to learn was the very thing that created this mess in the first place.)

4. Read Galatians 4:21-31. What do Ishmael and Isaac represent?

Why did Abraham have to send Ishmael away?

Can the law and grace live together?

5. Compare Romans 7:1-6. Can the believer be "married" to both the law and grace?

6. In what ways do we, as believers, still submit ourselves to the bondage of the law? Why do we do this?

What is the solution?

How is grace an issue of faith, and how is a return to law a result of a lack of faith?

7. Read Genesis 21:22-34. What about God (positive) and Abraham (negative) caused Abimelech and Phicol to cut a covenant with Abraham?

How did God use Abraham's failure in chapter 20 for good in chapter 21? Could God have accomplished the same result if Abraham had not lied to Abimelech in the first place?

8. Genesis 21 is about the reward of faith. After 25 years of waiting, Abraham and Sarah received the promised son. The conflict with Ishmael and Hagar is a reminder of the consequences of sin and doubt. Abraham failed before Abimelech when he feared and doubted (Chpt. 20); but he now reaps the rewards of obedience and faith with a long-term peace agreement in a foreign land. What do we learn about the rewards of faith and the consequences of doubt in this chapter?

Application

1. What is the biggest area where you need faith in your life right now? What will be the reward of faith and what could be the consequences of doubt?
2. Brainstorm areas where we might be tempted to revert to law rather than grace. How do we prevent this from happening?
3. Practically speaking, how do we handle the long-term consequences of sin?

Is this an issue of faith? How so?