

“Salvation to All Peoples through the Special Son”

Text: Genesis 21:1-21

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, First sermon, on April 15, 2018

Introduction: I recently finished a book about Yitzak Rabin, a past prime minister of the modern

state of Israel. He was assassinated (被刺杀) by a radical (极端的) Jew in the year 1995. The assassin (刺客 , 暗杀者) hated Rabin because he was negotiating with (与...谈判) the Arabs, the Palestinians. Rabin was willing to try to bring lasting peace between his people, the Jews, and the Arabs. The Jewish assassin was against any peace, at any time. So he shot Rabin in cold blood. / Sad to say, the assassin was partly successful. Rabin’s peaceful party was replaced by the more hardline (强硬的 , 不妥协的) party, headed by the current prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The roots of this conflict between the Jews and Arabs go back to the book of Genesis. Back to

Abraham. Abraham’s first son, by Hagar, was named Ishmael. Abraham’s second son, by Sarah, was named Isaac, or Yitzak. Isaac is the ancestor (祖先) of the Jews; and Ishmael is the ancestor of the Arabs. Genesis 21 gives us the account of conflict between these two sons, and their two mothers. That conflict continues to this present day.

1. First, let’s look at the BIRTH of the special son, Isaac. His BIRTH.

It’s about a year after those angels first visited Abraham and Sarah and gave them the good news. The news of a son in their old age. Now, this special son has brought joy and laughter into their home. Remember, the name Isaac means “laughter.” Earlier, Sarah had laughed in doubt and disbelief. But now she is filled with the joy of the Lord. [Read vs. 6. It is God, her covenant God, her gracious God, who has made her joyful.

Let me make a side point, here. In my 31 years of ministry(作牧师) , in three different Reformed

churches, I have found way too little joy, in our midst. And too much complaining. Abraham and Sarah display a joy in the Lord. Oh, as sinners, I am sure they had their moments of complaint. But now, especially with little Isaac, their lives are filled with joy. Remember the verse from Nehemiah? Maybe the only verse some of us know from that book of the Bible? Nehemiah says, “the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

How true that is!! We become stronger, spiritually, when we are rejoicing (欢欣) in the Lord.

We become weaker, when we are complaining. When we are filled with negativity (负面情绪) . So “laughter,” “Isaac.” is born. On the eighth day he is circumcised. Remember, that’s the OT sign of God’s covenant of grace (恩典之约) , his covenant of friendship. God is putting that special mark on this special covenant child. And remember that circumcision (割礼) contains that that blood-oath: Abraham is saying “So may I and my son be cut off, discarded (被丢弃) , if we do not keep God’s covenant.”

2. But now, secondly, note the MOCKING of that special son. The MOCKING of Isaac.

It comes from Ishmael, the much older, half-brother of little Isaac. Ishmael is of the age to know better. He’s already a teenager. Vs 9 tells us that Ishmael was “scoffing” (讥诮) or “mocking” (嘲笑) little Isaac. This seems to be much more than hurtful teasing (取笑 , 戏弄) .

It seems like this mockery includes a mockery of father Abraham.

Probably, even, it is mockery of God, and of God’s special promise about Isaac.

We dare to suppose that, because of what the apostle Paul writes in the New Testament.

In Galatians chapter 4. [Read Galatians 4:21-25. Paul is comparing the two main covenants in the OT—remember those two covenants? There is the grace-covenant, with Abraham, and there is the law-covenant (律法之约) , under Moses. By analogy (类比) , Paul says the law-covenant, based on works, was represented by Hagar and her children. Including Ishmael. It speaks of slavery (奴役) , bondage (捆绑) , under the demands of the law. But we Christians, Paul says, are of the free woman, of Sarah. We are of the grace-covenant, the covenant of promise, fulfilled in Jesus

Christ. We are saved, not by the works of the law, but saved by God's promise to us, in Jesus. The shed blood of Jesus and his righteousness (义) is for the forgiveness of our sins. [Read 4:28-29.

The unbelieving Jews of Paul's day were persecuting (逼迫) the believers in Jesus. Just as Ishmael of old was "persecuting" Isaac. So, going back to Genesis 21, Ishmael was doing something far worse than teasing his little brother.

Evidently it was a kind of "persecution." Ishmael was mocking the special role that God had given to Isaac.

Now, Ishmael had been receiving some of the benefits of the covenant of grace. He had been

circumcised (受割礼) , as a sign of that covenant (约) . He had been raised by a godly father, Abraham, the man of faith. Ishmael is now old enough to put his own faith in the Lord. To "keep" God's covenant. But it seems that Ishmael is refusing to do that: he is refusing to trust in the promises of God. Which includes, of course, the future coming of Jesus, the special son of Abraham. Ishmael was not looking forward to Jesus.

And remember the blood-oath, represented in the ritual of circumcision? "So let me be cut off,

let me be discarded, if I do not love my God, trust in God, obey God." Sadly, Ishmael has broken the covenant...and he must be cut off. And he is. In vs. 14f, we read how Ishmael and his mother, were forced to leave Abraham's home.

But again, we see signs of God's grace, His love, even in this sad departure.

First, God's love to Abraham. Over these 13, 14, 15 years, Abraham had come to love his son

Ishmael. No doubt Ishmael was a big help to his father, in his old age. And, no doubt, with that one and only child for all those years, Abraham really loved Ishmael. Now Abraham must force Ishmael and his mother out of the home. What will happen to him? Will he die in that wilderness? But God gives Abraham reassurance (再一次确认) . He says in vs. 13, that Ishmael will live. Even more than that, Ishmael eventually will become the ancestor of a nation of people. Back in chapter 17, God says this about Ishmael, I "will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget (生育) twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation." Ishmael became a great man, giving rise to a great and mighty nation.

God shows kindness to Ishmael and his mother, Hagar. When it seems like they will die of thirst, out in that wilderness, God sends his angel. His messenger. Vs. 17 and following.

The angel tells Hagar that God is listening to her, He has heard her cry for help.

God opens the eyes of Hagar so she can see a well of fresh water.

Mother and son will not die of thirst. They will live. All because of God's kindness.

3. This brings us to our third and final point. The GOSPEL.

The GOOD NEWS about the Special Son. Isaac. Turn back to chapter 17. [Read 17:17.

In the first sermon in this series, we used the picture of a funnel (漏斗) . A funnel, used to pour oil in your car, or to pour liquids in your kitchen. A funnel is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom. In the beginning, God's plan of redemption(救赎) was very wide, like the top of a funnel. But like a funnel, God's plan, over time, narrowed down to one man, to Abraham. And then God's plan narrowed down to one of the two sons of Abraham. The son Isaac.

But remember God's original promise to Abraham? It was this: "through you, Abraham,

[eventually] all the nations of the earth will be blessed." That's Genesis 12:3.

That promise of God, the promise of redemption, the promise of salvation, is fulfilled in Jesus.

Yes, he came first to his own people. The biological descendants of Abraham and Isaac.

But just before Jesus went back to heaven, he told his Jewish disciples (门徒) , the apostles (使徒) : "Go and make disciples of ALL the nations." ALL the nations. All people groups on earth.

So, the funnel of God's plan narrowed down to one man, and then to his one special son.

But from that son, Isaac, Jesus eventually was born. And Jesus sends his Jewish apostles to go out into ALL the world.

In that earlier sermon we used the picture of two funnels, not just one funnel.

The first funnel, wide at the top, narrow at the bottom. But below it a second funnel, turned

upside down. With the narrow opening to the top, and the wide opening at the bottom. Through Isaac, through the Jewish people, down to Jesus. But then the gospel goes out world-wide. As wide as the world. The good news of Jesus must be told to the entire world.

In Genesis chapter 25, we read that a grandson of Abraham, the man Esau, marries one of Ishmael's daughters. We are given various names for the later descendants of Ishmael: some are known as Midianites, later as Bedouins. Others, through Esau, become the Edomites. Today, these descendants of Ishmael and Esau are more generally known as Arabs and Palestinians. They include many of the people of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and other countries.

On the Day of Pentecost (五旬节), ten days after Jesus went back to heaven, Peter and the apostles preached to a large crowd. They spoke the good news about Jesus, dying for the sins of the world. And among those in that large crowd, we are told, in Acts 2:11, some were Arabs! Arabic people! Palestinian people! Yes, many had some Jewish blood, but others, we are told in Acts 2, were Gentile (外邦人) converts to Judaism (犹太教).

And some of these, became followers of Jesus. Jesus became their Saviour (救主). Some of Arabic and Palestinian blood. Descendants of Ishmael. Jesus had died for their sins, also, on that cross. And He was raised (死里复活) for their justification (称义).

Some years ago, I was part of pastor's group on a tour of the Holy Land, of modern Israel.

For two nights we stayed in a hotel on the Mount of Olives, just outside old Jerusalem. The hotel was owned by Palestinians who were friendly and peaceable towards the Jews. Many of these Palestinians were Christians. When I told them I was a pastor, they asked me why so many in North America, always seemed to be on the side of Israel.

They asked: "since we are Christians, and so many in North America are Christians, why aren't more Christians supporting us, Palestinian Christians?"

They said to me: "We are your brothers and sisters in Jesus."

Well, there are reasons for that. And some of the reasons are bad reasons, based on bad theology (神学). For example, many Christians wrongly believe that somehow God is on the side of modern Israel.

Those Christians simply take the covenant promise to Abraham and blindly say: "there it is—God supports Israel." But, here's the truth. The new Testament makes it absolutely clear that old Israel broke God's covenant. The Jewish leaders crucified (把...钉十字架) Jesus. The Jewish crowds shouted: "May Jesus blood be upon us and our children."

No, not that hate Jews in any way, today. We must not hate any people group. Any ethnic(民族) group. But, here's the point:

The good news of Jesus now goes out TO THE WORLD. To ALL people groups. Including ARABS AND PALESTINIANS...and yes, also to those with Jewish blood.

Through Abraham, and through his special son, Isaac, all the nations of the earth are being blessed today. In the good news of Jesus. To those who trust in Jesus as their Saviour. Have you truly trusted in Jesus? If you have, are you helping to bring the good news of Jesus to your people group? To your acquaintances (熟人) and friends?

Conclusion: Isaac was the special son. But from him, an even MORE SPECIAL son was born.

The Son of Mary. The Son of God. Jesus our Lord.

And this Jesus came to save the descendants of Isaac, AND the descendants of Ishmael.

To save all those who will trust in Him. AMEN.