

Genesis 21: 9-13

**Desiring the Kingdom**

One of the promises that God has made for this year is that He will begin making distinctions between those who are truly sold out to Him and those who are not. God will bless His church so that it can be a blessing to others and be a light in the darkness.

Sometimes, this is the most dangerous point for an individual, a church, a movement or any collection of mere mortals, in the Kingdom or otherwise. It is comparatively easy to focus on the Lord when times are tough and you have – literally – no one else to turn to. But sometimes blessings by God leave us with the impression that we can relax; the crisis is past, the need for constant communication with God is... maybe not over, but surely lessened. When we get into *that* mind-set, we are especially vulnerable to the schemes of Satan. And sometimes, we encounter situations where a great blessing is promised but not yet fulfilled, and we are left to wonder what our next move should be.

In the passage listed above, Abraham had been promised by God that he would have a son from his own body as his heir – not only that, but God used the analogy of the stars in the night sky to describe how numerous Abraham’s descendents would be. He even changed His friend’s name from the original *Abram* (for “exalted father,” which surely must have been a nice touch of irony for a man who had no children) to *Abraham* (meaning “father of many nations”) in order to drive home the point.

God *meant* that a son would be born from Abraham *and* his wife Sarah. But another twenty years would pass before God’s Word would be fulfilled. Meanwhile, Sarah saw that both she and her husband were getting older. Most likely convinced that she was *well* past the point of having a baby herself, Sarah decides to “help” God along by offering Abraham her maidservant Hagar as a second wife for him, in order that the promise might be fulfilled – just not through her. This was not an unusual practice in those days, as polygamy was common (especially among those with enough wealth to pull it off). If you read the rest of Genesis, you know the story – Abraham had a “faith failure” in this particular instance, and the child Ishmael is born from this effort to take matters into their own hands. God promises Abraham that Ishmael, too, would become a great nation, but...

*He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers. (Genesis 16: 12)*

This fulfillment can be seen today in the conflict between some of the descendents of Ishmael and the descendents of the son of the promise, Isaac... played out in the Middle East.

When God makes a promise to someone, it *will* be fulfilled. When He makes a pronouncement over someone, it *will* come to pass. However, whether it comes about for God's *best* for that person depends largely on whether or not the focus of God's attention uses that knowledge for God's purposes and His Kingdom, or for their own satisfaction. We can either put God's blessings to use in our lives to "re-invest" them in the Kingdom, or we can put them to work for our own desires and miss the best that God has for us. Often, we start out using His blessings for both; maturity for the believer can be measured by how much the desire to please God grows in our lives, or how much the scale tips toward God's side.

Sometimes, we get the best of both situations; both our desires and God's are satisfied in one action. In most cases, however, it is our desires that have to bend to the Will of God. But the Lord is never unkind in these matters; He never asks us to change our attitude toward something (or give it up altogether) without giving something better in return. Ultimately, we learn that God's way offers far more satisfaction than indulging our desires can ever hope to compete with.

In many cases, our desires revolve around material things – especially here in the United States. There's nothing necessarily wrong with the stuff we create; the problem lies in how strongly we desire such things and what we use them for. The Apostle James knew this struggle well:

*You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4: 2, 3)*

The basic principle toward anything that comes from the hand of God can be summed up in two words: **Kingdom first**. This should be the foundation of our attitudes toward anything, material or otherwise. Our desire must be to see the Kingdom of God advance, first and foremost. It doesn't mean we cannot have what is permissible or cannot enjoy such things while we are on this Earth. But our stuff, ultimately, will pass away and our wills must bend to His; only the Kingdom of God will remain. In regards to both, **Kingdom first** should also be our focus for the here and now, while God prepares us for His next move.