

GENESIS 21 – THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

A. The birth of Isaac.

1. (1) God fulfills His promise to Abraham and Sarah.

And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.

a. **The LORD visited Sarah as He had said:** It took a long time (25 years) for this promise to come to pass, but God was faithful to His promise. God's promises never fail.

b. **As He had spoken:** The promise of a son was not fulfilled because Abraham was perfect in his obedience, but because God was faithful to His Word.

i. Some promises of God are conditional and depend on something we must do. Other promises of God are unconditional, and God will fulfill them not because of what we do, but because of who He is.

2. (2-7)

For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

a. **Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him; whom Sarah bore to him; Isaac:** Originally, the name **Isaac** was meant as something of a rebuke of the laughter of Abraham and Sarah ([Genesis 17:17-19](#) and [18:12-15](#)), but God turned a gentle rebuke into an occasion for joy.

b. **Isaac:** Isaac became a wonderful type or picture of the Messiah to come, Jesus Christ.

- Both were specially promised sons.
- Both conceptions were miraculous.
- Both were born after a period of delay.
- Both mothers were given assurance by truth of God's omnipotence ([Genesis 18:13-14](#); [Luke 1:34, 37](#)).
- Both were given names rich with meaning before they were born.
- Both births occurred at God's appointed time ([Genesis 21:2](#); [Galatians 4:4](#)).
- Both births were accompanied by great joy ([Genesis 21:6](#); [Luke 1:46-47](#); [2:10-11](#)).

1. (8-11) Sarah wants Abraham to cast out both Hagar and Ishmael.

So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my

son, namely with Isaac.” And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham’s sight because of his son.

- a. **The child grew and was weaned:** Some ancients say children were not weaned until 12 years of age and some say five years, but the most reliable research indicates an age of three. Isaac was young.
- b. **And Sarah saw the son of Hagar... scoffing:** This conflict between the two sons was almost inevitable, even though they were approximately 13 years apart in age. Abraham found it hard to agree with Sarah’s complaint, when he did not want to reject his son through Hagar, Ishmael.
 - i. Notice the conflict came *from* Ishmael unto Isaac. Ishmael was the one **scoffing** at Isaac. In [Galatians 4:22-29](#), the Apostle Paul used this conflict as an illustration of the conflict between those born of the promise and those born of the flesh.
 - ii. In [Galatians 4](#), the Jewish legalists who troubled the Galatians protested *they* were children of Abraham and thus blessed. Paul admitted they were children of Abraham, but they were like Ishmael, not Isaac! The legalists claimed Abraham as their father. Paul asked who was their *mother*, Hagar or Sarah? Ishmael was born of a slave, and born according to the flesh. Isaac was born of a freewoman, and born according to promise. Even so, the legalists promoted a relationship with God based in bondage and according to the flesh. The true gospel of grace offers liberty in Jesus Christ and is a promise received by faith.
 - iii. Even as Ishmael and his descendants have persecuted Isaac and his descendants, we should not be surprised that the modern-day people who follow God, yet in reliance upon human strength and wisdom (the flesh), do in fact persecute those who follow God in faith through the promise.

2. (12-14) Under God’s instruction, Abraham puts out Hagar and Ishmael.

But God said to Abraham, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he *is* your seed.” So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting *it* on her shoulder, he gave *it* and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba.

- a. **Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice:** Perhaps Abraham did not want to give up Ishmael because he considered the son of Hagar something of a backup plan. If something should happen to Isaac, there would always be Ishmael. God did not want Abraham to trust in a backup son or in a backup plan. God wanted Abraham to trust in Him.
 - i. Abraham might have been tempted to reject Sarah’s counsel just because it was Sarah who offered it. Instead he sought the LORD in the matter, did what Sarah suggested, and did so apparently without feeling he merely gave in to Sarah’s demands.
- b. **Sent her away:** God’s solution was clear – get rid of the son of the flesh. There was to be no reconciliation with the flesh, no peaceful coexistence. The son of the flesh must simply be put away forever.

i. The solution is the same in our own battle between trusting in the flesh and trusting in the Holy Spirit: *cast out this bondwoman and her son*. Law and grace cannot live together as principles for our Christian life, and there is no question we belong to the free, not the bondwoman.

c. **Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba**: It may have seemed ruthless of Abraham to do this, but it was exactly what God wanted, and exactly what needed to happen.

i. Flesh and blood do not make the strongest bond God wants us to honor. There are circumstances where we can do nothing other than put away family for the glory of God.

ii. God wants us to be ruthless with the flesh in the same manner: *And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires* ([Galatians 5:24](#)).

d. **Took bread and a skin of water**: Abraham was a wealthy man and could certainly afford to give them more supplies, even giving them a donkey or several pack animals. Yet Abraham realized that without God's help, no matter what he gave them, it would not be enough. But *with* God, things would turn out all right.

3. (15-18) **God preserves Ishmael and Hagar in the desert.**

And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation."

a. **The water in the skin was used up**: As Hagar and Ishmael traveled away from Abraham, their supplies eventually ran out. Their water **was used up** and Hagar left Ishmael under the shade of **one of the shrubs**, expecting their soon death in the wilderness.

i. "Behold the compassion of a mother for her child expiring with thirst, and remember that such a compassion ought all Christians to feel towards souls that are perishing for lack of Christ, perishing eternally, perishing without hope of salvation." (Spurgeon)

b. **God heard the voice of the lad**: As Hagar **lifted her voice and wept**, God answered. Curiously, God answered in response to **the voice of the lad** instead of specifically to Hagar's weeping. In some way, Ishmael cried out for mercy and help.

c. **Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is**: Despite the desperate problem in the wilderness, God's promise gave Hagar and Ishmael reason to **fear not**. God showed special favor to Ishmael because he was a descendant of Abraham.

d. **I will make him a great nation**: Though Ishmael was not the son to receive the covenant promise, God was not *against* him. The descendants of Ishmael became a **great nation**, the Arabic people.

4. (19-21) **God's provision for Hagar and Ishmael.**

Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. So God was with the lad; and he

grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

a. **Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water:** Whether the miracle was in the creation of a water source or the revealing of an existing water source, God provided for Hagar and Ishmael.

i. Spurgeon explained the likeness between Hagar and the one who needs God. “As in Hagar’s case, *the supply of their necessities is close at hand*: the well is near.

Secondly, it often happens that that supply *is as much there as if it had been provided for them and for them only*, as this well seemed to have been. And, thirdly, *no great exertion is needed to procure from the supply already made by God all that we want*. She filled her bottle with water — a joyful task to her; and she gave the lad drink.”

b. **So God was with the lad:** The idea is emphasized that God was not against Ishmael and his descendants. God **was with** Ishmael, and had a promise for his future.