

Genesis 21 - The Birth of Isaac

A. The birth of Isaac.

1. (1) God fulfills His promise to Abraham and Sarah.
 - 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. But 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) The child is named Isaac.
 - 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 somewhat 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. Conflict between Ishmael and Isaac.

1. (8-11) Sarah wants Abraham to cast out both Hagar and Ishmael.
 - 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.
 - b. **And Sarah saw the son of Hagar . . . scoffing:** This conflict between the two sons was almost inevitable, even though they are some 13 years apart. Abraham found it hard to side with Sarah when he did not want to reject his son, Ishmael.
 - i. Notice the conflict came *from* Ishmael unto Isaac. Ishmael was the one **scoffing** at Isaac. Galatians 4:22-29 describes for us a spiritual application of this conflict between Isaac (the son born of the promise) and Ishmael (the son 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 will admit they are children of Abraham, but they are like Ishmael, not Isaac! The legalists claimed Abraham as their father. Paul wants to know 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 promote a relationship with God based in bondage and according to the flesh. The true gospel of grace offers liberty in Christ and is a promise received by faith.
2. (12-14) Under God's instruction, Abraham puts out Hagar and Ishmael.
 - a. **Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice:** Perhaps Abraham did not want to give up Ishmael because he was sort of a "backup" plan. If something should happen to Isaac, there would always be Ishmael. But God wanted it clear there was no backup plan for Abraham other than God Himself.
 - i. Abraham might have been tempted to reject Sarah's counsel just because it was Sarah; but he sought the LORD in the matter, did what Sarah suggested, and without feeling he was "giving in" to Sarah.

- b. **Sent her away:** God's solution was clear - get rid of the son of the flesh. There is 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 spare more provisions, even giving them a donkey or several pack animals. But 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. (15-21) God preserves Ishmael and Hagar in the desert.

- a. **Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is:** As God protects and preserves them out in the desert; He answers them by hearing the **voice of the lad**. God is showing special favor to Ishmael because he is a descendant of Abraham.
- b. **I will make him a great nation:** The descendents of Ishmael became the Arabic people.

C. Abraham makes a covenant with a Philistine king.

1. (22-24) Abraham makes a no-hostility treaty with Abimelech.

- a. **Abimelech . . . spoke to Abraham:** How could this be the same Abimelech of Genesis 20? It isn't the same. The **Abimelech** in Genesis 20 is the father of this Abimelech. The son's original name was Benmelech, but he changed his name when he became king. This is explained in the Haggadah, which is a Jewish religious text that tells the story of the Passover.
- b. **God is with you in all that you do:** Abimelech noticed this because of the blessing evident in Abraham's life.

2. (25-31) In return for the treaty, Abraham clears up a dispute about an important well.

3. (32-34) Abraham calls on the name of the LORD.

- a. **Called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God:** Even through this time of conflict in his family and among his neighbors, Abraham kept a real, live walk with God. Conflict can drive us away from God, but we should allow it to push us closer to Him.