

Genesis 21 Bible Study

Finally, the long-awaited child of Abraham and Sarah arrives in Chapter 21! It's been about 25 years since the birth of Isaac was promised and a year since the last reminder of the promise (see Genesis 18:10).

Let's take a look:

21:1 The Lord visited Sarah just as he had said he would and did for Sarah what he had promised. **21:2** So Sarah became pregnant and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the appointed time that God had told him. **21:3** Abraham named his son—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. **21:4** When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him just as God had commanded him to do. **21:5** (Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.) **21:6** Sarah said, "God has made me laugh. Everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." **21:7** She went on to say, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have given birth to a son for him in his old age!" (Genesis 21:1-7)

Who is the one who arrived? What did he do?

They named the child Isaac, as they were told in verse 17:19, which was fitting since Isaac means 'laughter.' *Why was this name perfect for Sarah's child?* (see Genesis 17:12 and 21:6)

21:8 The child grew and was weaned. Abraham prepared a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. **21:9** But Sarah noticed the son of Hagar the Egyptian—the son whom Hagar had borne to Abraham—mocking. **21:10** So she said to Abraham, "Banish that slave woman and her son, for the son of that slave woman will not be an heir along with my son Isaac!"

21:11 Sarah's demand displeased Abraham greatly because Ishmael was his son. 21:12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be upset about the boy or your slave wife. Do all that Sarah is telling you because through Isaac your descendants will be counted. 21:13 But I will also make the son of the slave wife into a great nation, for he is your descendant too." (Genesis 21:8-13)

Abraham threw a party when Isaac was around two or three, at the time of his weaning. *What is the tone between the two sons of Abraham; Isaac and Ishmael?*

This episode is described by Paul in Galatians 4:28-29: 4:28 But you, brothers and sisters, are children of the promise like Isaac. 4:29 But just as at that time the one born by natural descent persecuted the one born according to the Spirit, so it is now. 4:30 But what does the scripture say? "*Throw out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not share the inheritance with the son*" of the free woman. 4:31 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman.

Who is he comparing to Isaac, the son of the promise?

He compares the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael to the persecution happening to the non-Jewish Christians in Galatia. A **Judaizer** was a Christian of Jewish descent who tried to convince non-Jews that they needed to adopt Jewish customs in order to be saved. *Why do you think Paul uses the story of Isaac and Ishmael to describe the Judaizer vs. the Christian saved by grace? (see verse 31)*

After Ishmael was seen mocking Isaac Sarah made a request of Abraham to banish his first born. *Why? (see verse 10)*

How do you think Abraham felt about this demand by his wife?

It was a hard thing for Abraham to do, but we see God's hand on this first sacrifice for the family of God. The Father often asks us to give up what is most dear to us in order to accomplish His plans. *How hard is it when you are called to give up something or someone you love by means of surrender to the Lord?*

Like Abraham, we have full assurance that God will reward our faithfulness. *What does God promise he will do for Ishmael in order to comfort Abraham?*

This expulsion makes sense with regard to the promise and to Sarah's desire for her son to be supreme. "The code of Lipit-Ishtar provides for the freeing of a slave and her son in exchange for their surrender of any property claims.¹" This would ensure that Ishmael would never be referred to as the child of the promise.

Let's see what happens next:

21:14 Early in the morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He put them on her shoulders, gave her the child, and sent her away. So, she went wandering aimlessly through the wilderness of Beer Sheba. **21:15** When the water in the skin was gone, she shoved the child under one of the shrubs.

21:16 Then she went and sat down by herself across from him at quite a distance, about a bowshot away; for she thought, "I refuse to watch the child die." So, she sat across from him and wept uncontrollably. (Genesis 21:14-16)

In what way does Abraham provide for Hagar and Ishmael?

¹ K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 11:27-50:26](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 270.

One might suggest that Abraham was callous towards Ishmael and Hagar in verse 14, but what does this supplying of only rations for a short journey say about Abraham?

Abraham clearly trusted God to do what He said He would do for his firstborn son. *Are there things in your life right now that God has promised but you are providing for yourself or those you love out of fear of God's faithlessness?*

How can Abraham be your example?

In verse 15, we see what happens when we get to the end of our own supply. Now, let's see what happen when we trust God to be our provider:

21:17 But God heard the boy's voice. The angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and asked her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Don't be afraid, for God has heard the boy's voice right where he is crying. 21:18 Get up! Help the boy up and hold him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation." 21:19 Then God enabled Hagar to see a well of water. She went over and filled the skin with water, and then gave the boy a drink. 21:20 God was with the boy as he grew. He lived in the wilderness and became an archer. 21:21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran. His mother found a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (Genesis 21:17-21)

What do the angel of God's words to Hagar tell us about God?

How does God provide for the couple in verses 18 – 21?

21:22 At that time Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do. 21:23 Now swear to me right here in God's name that you will not deceive me, my

children, or my descendants. Show me, and the land where you are staying, the same loyalty that I have shown you.”

^{21:24} Abraham said, “I swear to do this.” ^{21:25} But Abraham lodged a complaint against Abimelech concerning a well that Abimelech’s servants had seized. ^{21:26} “I do not know who has done this thing,” Abimelech replied. “Moreover, you did not tell me. I did not hear about it until today. ^{21:27} Abraham took some sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech. The two of them made a treaty. ^{21:28} Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs apart from the flock by themselves. ^{21:29} Abimelech asked Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?” ^{21:30} He replied, “You must take these seven ewe lambs from my hand as legal proof that I dug this well.” ^{21:31} That is why he named that place Beer Sheba, because the two of them swore an oath there.

^{21:32} So they made a treaty at Beer Sheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, returned to the land of the Philistines. ^{21:33} Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer Sheba. There he worshiped the Lord, the eternal God. ^{21:34} So Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for quite some time.” (Genesis 21:22-34)

Do you remember Abraham’s interaction with Abimelech in Genesis 20:1-18? *Do you recall what Abimelech gave to Abraham for having abducted Sarah?*

What is Abraham’s complaint in verse 25?

Why does Abraham give Abimelech some sheep and cattle? (see verse 27)

The King is a little shocked by the additional seven ewes that Abraham separates out for him, perhaps because it might mean he is

obligated to Abraham for something. *What did Abraham accomplish by this offering? (see verse 30)*

In the end of chapter 21, Abraham plants a tree near the well he had secured from Abimelech. A tree in the ancient Near East represents a fruitful future. By planting this tree Abraham shows his devotion to God and his certainty that God is the source of his prosperity.

A few weeks ago, we talked about altars that we build to remind us of what God has done. This week consider building a small altar of rocks in your back or front yard to remind of the things that God has done for you personally or for us as a people.