

# The Birth of Isaac

## Genesis 21:1–21 (ESV)

**INTRODUCTION:** Genesis 12–21 has been one long arc of promise and patience; this chapter marks the climax of the Abrahamic narrative. The promise of God will be fulfilled by a son born by supernatural means, by the will of God - *Isaac*.

That divine birth will be compared and contrasted with the birth of a son forged by the will of man - *Ishmael*.

The birth of those two boys would serve as a **testament to two different ways of life**. They typify the paths of every single person under the sound of my voice today. Every single individual listening is either on the path of Isaac or the path of Ishmael. It is your responsibility to know which path you are on.

Is your faith a product of God's Divine Power, or something you came up with as a product of human will and ingenuity?

The text will help us to discern the difference.

**CONTEXT: Let's review the story of Abraham up to this point.**

1. Humanity had drifted far from Eden, farther and farther East. Even the postdeluvian world perpetuated sin and rebellion.
2. Then God stepped in to intervene - But this time not by means of an Ark or some apparatus; instead, God will engage in a covenant relationship with a Man in order to bring about the plan of redemption, the long-awaited seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head. That man was Abram of Ur.
3. God called Abram to step out on faith and follow Him into the unknown - he would reverse mankind's drift now from the East, back to the West, essentially back toward paradise.
4. As Abram journeys, God reveals more and more of His plan to save mankind from sin.
  - He promised Abram a land
  - He promises Abram a family
  - There was a problem - Abram and Sarai were not getting any younger, and as of yet, there was no offspring. This is when they began to help God out, which is never a good idea. Sarai offered her servant, Hagar, as a surrogate wife for Abram, so that he could have a child through her. Abram agreed, and Ishmael was born.
  - He appears to Abram again, this time God verifies and validates his promise by entering into a covenant with Abram and giving him the covenant sign - *circumcision*. God also changes the names of Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. It was then that God included Sarah in the covenant promise - indicating that he would not bring about the seed through Ishmael, but rather through the son of Sarah. A promise that Sarah at 99 found hilarious.
  - Last week, we saw that God appeared to Abram again before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, indicating that within a year, Sarah would give birth.

**TEXT: Genesis 21:1–21 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.

*Visited* (Heb. paqad) = to intervene with decisive action. God *is going to do a miracle here to make it possible for Sarah to conceive a child.*

<sup>2</sup> And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup> Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. <sup>4</sup> And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup> And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." <sup>7</sup> And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." <sup>8</sup> And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

I must recognize the contrast the text gives us between the sexual deviancy of Sodom, where men desired sexual freedom, sexual license, and were driven to sleep with anything and everything, except a wife. While a few miles away, God is saving the world through a marriage, a man and woman in covenant, enjoying intimacy with one another. Imperfection, of course, we must remember Hagar - yet through that marriage relationship of Sarah and Abraham, a child is born, joy and laughter fill their home, even in old age. I pray our young people see the difference. Sodom offers wild excitement and ends in death, destruction, and misery. Yet a family brings joy and laughter even into old age.

**ILLUSTRATION:** This week, the stock price of Netflix dropped significantly as a number of people said they've had enough of Sodom. Netflix's animated kids' show **Dead End: Paranormal Park** features a transgender teenage named Barney and includes themes of gender identity, such as a scene where hospital staff are asked to treat and refer to the character as a girl. If there was any doubt of the intent of the show, the show's creator, **Hamish Steele**, took to social media, calling Kirk a "Nazi" and mocking the UK Prime Minister's tribute to Kirk, with profanity.

Three thousand years removed from Abraham, and the contrast is still so stark. Charlie Kirk's life is marked by joy and laughter, and Hamish Steele is pushing the Ethos of Sodom onto children.

Make no mistake, we live in the day of which Isaiah spoke, "wrong will be called right and right will be called wrong".

Sarah expresses deep joy, and she holds baby Isaac, yet because of her own decisions, her joy would be tempered with pain. You see, it had been her idea to assist God in His promise to Abraham by offering Hagar to him. Now, she must reap what she has sown.

<sup>9</sup> But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.

Ishmael was by now a teenager. To teenagers, everything is a joke. You can only imagine the number of jokes Ishmael developed with a 99-year-old pregnant woman in the house. Sarah, didn't get it...

<sup>10</sup> So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac."

Now, this is more than an overreaction to poorly timed humor. The right of Inheritance was one of the most significant issues in the Ancient world. Survival of the bloodline depended on it. Sarah recognizes that as long as Ishmael and Hagar are around, Issac's inheritance and possibly his life would be in danger. So Sarah demands that Abraham cast them out.

NOW - beyond that reality, remember, God is doing something. God is beginning a nation of people through whose "Seed" the entire earth will be blessed. Sarah is not necessarily moved by that reality, but it is a reality nonetheless. So God is working through what Sarah meant for evil and using it for good as He so often does.

You see, the only hope you have for salvation would be through the baby born of the seed that comes from Abraham, to Isaac, then to Jacob, then to Judah, then to David, ultimately emerging through the cry of a baby in Bethlehem. Sarah, isn't thinking in those terms - but God is.

<sup>11</sup> And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. <sup>12</sup> But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. <sup>13</sup> And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring."

Now, ladies, this verse really ought to be on your refrigerator or someplace significant. God tells Abraham, Do whatever your wife tells you. That is right up there with the great commission.

<sup>14</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

This is a difficult passage to make sense of. Everywhere Abraham had wondered, even when he was disobedient, he had been met with the provision of the Lord. Yet, when he sends Hagar and Ishmael away, he sends them, not with servants and provision, but a single skin of water. It seems as if Abraham only wanted them to survive if God, in His mercy, made them survive. I can't imagine the broken heart of Hagar, nor the anger welling up inside of Ishmael at this treatment.

<sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup> Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

What a sad scene. Hagar fears the boy would die, and she couldn't bear it. She weeps and prays that she may die before Ishmael. Now, the next verse is interesting; it seems as though it would say, "God heard the voice of Hagar", but it does not. Look at verse 17...

<sup>17</sup> And God heard the *voice of the boy*, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the *voice of the boy* where he is. <sup>18</sup> Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

Do you think God hears the prayers of children? It appears in this passage, God heard the prayers of the son more than the prayers of the mother. Do you involve your children in praying for the success of your family? You should!

<sup>19</sup> Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. <sup>20</sup> And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. <sup>21</sup> He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

This is the birth of the **Arab** nations. To this day, there are conflicts between the Arabs (offspring of Ishmael) and the Jews (offspring of Isaac).

NOW - much could be said about these two nations of people, yet as students of scripture, we want to compare and contrast these two men - Isaac and Ishmael, as scripture does.

The New Testament views Isaac as an Old Testament prefiguration of Jesus Christ.

**REMEMBER:** The bible was written by forty different authors, spanning the course of 30 centuries, in three different languages, on three different continents - Asia, Africa, and Europe, yet from Genesis to Revelation it is producing one coherent, unfolding message found in the text of John 3:16, about God's love for mankind and what He has done to restore them to fellowship with Himself.

- Anticipation in the Old Testament
- Manifestation in the Gospels
- Proclamation in Acts
- Explanation in the Epistles
- Consummation in Revelation

So it should not surprise us that we would see shadows and types of Christ throughout the Old Testament.

- There are over 300 Prophetic Promises concerning the coming Messiah.
- The sacrificial system itself will teach: man cannot approach God on his own.
- We have a number of typologies—Old Testament figures that prefigure Christ.

However, when it comes to the New Testament, one of its favorite types of gospel is the comparison between the stories of **Isaac** and **Ishmael**.

We see it first in Hebrews 11 =

## The Stories of Isaac and Ishmael Contrast:

### 1. Works versus Faith

The New Testament writers portray the stories of Ishmael and Isaac as a portrait of those who seek to make peace with God by Works, compared to those who make peace with God by Faith.

Remember, **Ishmael** was born because Abraham and Sarah tried to *HELP God* fulfill His promise. Sarah gave her servant Hagar to Abraham so that he could produce a child by his own strength.

Isaac, by contrast, was born when Abraham and Sarah simply by **pure faith**—the fulfillment of God's promise, impossible apart from divine intervention.

#### Hebrews 11:11–12 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself ***received power*** to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

In **Romans 9**, Paul points out that God's covenant blessing came through Isaac, not Ishmael, to show that the promise depends on faith, not works.

#### Romans 9:8 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the **children of the promise are counted as offspring**.

You see, according to the Bible, there are only two religions on planet earth. Salvation by faith alone, and everything else.

**QUESTION: How much did you contribute to your salvation?**

The Church at Galatia was struggling with this issue. They were beginning to think that what Jesus did was great, but it was incomplete. In order to be saved, they needed to be circumcised like the Jews in the Old Testament. Paul writing to them says...

### **Galatians 5:7–12 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup> This persuasion is not from him who calls you. <sup>9</sup> A little leaven leavens the whole lump. <sup>10</sup> I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. <sup>11</sup> But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. <sup>12</sup> I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

Do you understand his argument? He is suggesting that if circumcision contributed to your salvation, why only remove a part of the flesh? Why not remove the entire thing?

He says to add to the work of Christ is, in fact, to REMOVE THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS. What does that mean? What is offensive about the Cross? The message that you are so sinful that the Son of God had to die a brutal death to save you, and you could do nothing to help yourself. That's offensive.

Yet, when you add to the work of Christ, you nullify the offence... you say... I can do something about it. I can join the church, I can get baptized, I can just go through 1001 religious hoops.

LISTEN if those things could save you in any way... why did God let Jesus die on the cross? I'll tell you why... it was the only way.

Just like Sarah, you have to hear the promise and believe it...

*Works versus Faith...*

## **2. Flesh versus Spirit**

### **Galatians 4:28–31 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

Ishmael's birth was "**according to the flesh**"—the product of human effort and natural power.

Isaac's birth was "**according to the Spirit**"—a supernatural work of God in a barren womb.

Salvation is not something that happens through human ingenuity or wisdom; it is entirely and completely a work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born again.” Nicodemus said, “That’s impossible, I can’t enter into my mother again and be born”. Jesus said, “You’ve got it all wrong... You aren’t born again by the flesh, but by the spirit.

**John 1:12–13** — “born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Jesus says the work of the Spirit is like the wind; you can’t see the wind, but you can see the effect of the wind. There is a mystery to it.

Works versus Faith...Flesh versus Spirit...

### **3. Bondage versus Freedom**

**Galatians 4:30–31 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”

**Hagar**, Ishmael’s mother, was a slave; therefore, Ishmael was born into bondage. **Sarah** was free; thus, Isaac was born into freedom.

<sup>31</sup> So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Religion by works always enslaves—“Do more, be better, earn favor.”  
Grace liberates—“It is finished.”

Ishmael’s life pictures striving under the law. Isaac’s laughter pictures resting in grace.

**Jesus makes the same point in John 8:31–38 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

<sup>33</sup> They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.** <sup>35</sup> The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. <sup>37</sup> I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. <sup>38</sup> I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

### **CONCLUSION/INVITATION:**

You see, from Paul’s perspective, there were really only two religions on planet earth - the religion of Isaac and the religion of Ishmael. Let me explain...

Seeing Brad Bray after coming to faith in Christ.