

## Genesis 21: Rejoicing and Rejecting

### I. Fulfillment

- A. **21:1** *The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. 2 And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me." 7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." 8 And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.*
- B. Here finally is the promised child. The promise of offspring goes all the way back to chapter 12. At long last, God does as he had promised.
- C. **at the time of which God had spoken to him** - this was in fulfillment of what God had said back in 17:21 *But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."*
- D. He is named Isaac which means "he laughs" Surely Abraham and Sarah recall that they had both laughed at God's promise (17:17; 18:12) Sarah also gives added significance to the name when she says in verse 6: **God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me."** 7 *And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.*
- E. Abraham circumcises Isaac on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. Recall that God had commanded circumcision: Gen 17:10 *This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised* Here then is obedience and a sign of the covenant.
- F. Isaac was probably weaned at about three years. In biblical times children were weaned later than is usual today. For example 2 Mac 7:27 *But, leaning close to him, the mother spoke in their native tongue as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: "My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you.*
- G. Hence we have here about three years of "laughter" As we shall see, weeping will follow for Hagar and Ishmael.

## II. Forsaking

- A. ***9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. 10 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." 11 And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.***
- B. Ishmael was by this time 16 or 17 years old.<sup>1</sup> It is puzzling that the subsequent text seems to speak of Ishmael as a much younger child. At 17 he would be an adult in the ancient world. Yet he is called a child. Hagar "cast her child under one of the bushes" in verse 15 as if he were a helpless baby. Thus, different traditions about his age seem to be at work here. The problem cannot easily be resolved.
- C. The portrait of Abraham and Sarah again is not a good one. Sarah behaves contemptibly. Here is the unassuageable envy and jealousy of a bitter old woman with no forgiveness or even kindness in her heart. Abraham though, this time is angry, and seems to resist her. Recall it was Sarah's idea that Abraham have a child with Hagar! Now she sees Ishmael playing with Isaac and grows jealous and angry. Ultimately it will be Abraham (with God's approval!) who drives Hagar and Ishmael out. The laughing is over, the weeping enters in.

## III. Forbearance

- A. ***12 But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the lad and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your descendants be named. 13 And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." 14 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.***
- B. God's reaction to all this is puzzling at best. It is a truth of grace that God's ways are not only marvelous but also perturbing and difficult to understand. Abraham does not argue with God, he simply accepts it. Perhaps this too is what we must do. In a way it shows some progress for Abraham. Contrast it to his reaction for God back in 17:18 when he dismissed God's promise and even laughed. Now he quietly submits, despite his anger at Sarah. Perhaps this sets us up for the next chapter.
- C. Lessons:

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<sup>1</sup>Gen 16:16 *Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.* Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born, 14 years later. Now 3 years has likely passed making Ishmael 16 or 17.

1. God often permits human sinfulness and even draws good from it. God will make of Ishmael a great nation, the Arabs. The wrath of this division as we know will be lived out in future years.
2. We are once again reminded how grace works. It is pure gift, undeserved, based more on our need than any merit of ours. God blesses Abraham and Sarah despite themselves, perhaps on account of their descendants.
  - a. Justice - when you get what you deserve
  - b. Mercy - when you don't get what you deserve
  - c. Grace - when you get what you don't deserve.
3. That God chooses Isaac and not Ishmael is his prerogative. God has his reasons for choosing a people but we cannot sit in judgement over God in this fact. We can discuss more this in class. But note here: God's choice of Isaac and his son Jacob (Israel) as the "Chosen people" is penultimate, not ultimate. Recall that God said to Jacob: *and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves:* (Gen 26:26) Thus through Israel would come blessings for all the Land. Jesus would one day tell his Jewish followers to go unto all the nations and bring salvation. Jesus also said to the Samaritan woman that "Salvation is from the Jews." (Jn 4:22)
4. Those "outside" are not abandoned by God. God provides for Hagar and Ishmael in the desert and makes of Ishmael a great nation.

#### IV. Franchising

- A. *And she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. 15 When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went, and sat down over against him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Let me not look upon the death of the child." And as she sat over against him, the child lifted up his voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the lad; 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 lad where he is. 18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation." 19 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. 20 And God was with the lad, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. 21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.*
- B. God, though he permitted the injustice, even instructed it (?) cares for them in the desert. See notes above.

V. Furtherance -

- A. *22 At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do; 23 now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned." 24 And Abraham said, "I will swear." 25 When Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized, 26 Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today." 27 So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. 28 Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. 29 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set apart?" 30 He said, "These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that you may be a witness for me that I dug this well." 31 Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba; because there both of them swore an oath. 32 So they made a covenant at Beer-sheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. 33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. 34 And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.*
- B. This story contrasts strongly with the rejection and expulsion we have just heard. Here we see Abraham live in peace and work for harmony with his neighbors. The portrayal of the pagan King Abimelech surpasses the justice of Sarah.
- C. Later centuries would feature only animosity between Jews and Canaanites but here there is cooperation and mutual respect.
- D. Beer - Sheba literally means well seven (for the seven sheep).

22:1 After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. 9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. 10 Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." 13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." 15 And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, 18 and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba. 20 Now after these things it was told Abraham, "Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: 21 Uz the first-born, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, 22 Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." 23 Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. 24 Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.