

Abraham 5 - Abimelech; the Birth of Isaac; Ishmael Sent Away

Since Abram's name was changed to Abraham when he was 99(Gen 17:1) and the birth of Isaac occurred when he was 100(Gen. 21:5), the events in Genesis 17-21 occurred in a 1 - 2 year period.

- 1 Abraham's name changed with a promise of being a father of many nations 17:4-6
- 2 Covenant of Circumcision given throughout his generations 17:9-14
- 3 Sarah's name changed and the promise she would become a mother of many nations. 17:15-16
- 4 The Lord appeared and revealed Isaac would soon be born and the fate of Sodom 18:1-33
- 5 Journey to Gerar, the half truth of Sarah leads to severe problems for Abimelech 19:1-18
- 6 Birth of Isaac 21:1-7

The LORD set the "*appointed time*" when He gave the promise to Abraham "*at the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.*" (KJV; NKJV; ASV). The NASB; ESV; translate "*at the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son*" (Gen. 18:14-15). So whether Abraham waited a full year(*this time next year*) or just nine months(*according to the time of life*), there was a period of time when the only reason Abraham had for trusting that he would soon have a son was his faith in God.

This period of time was very important and God closely monitored Abraham's faith. It would be a time of faith and great honor given to God or a time of weakness, lack of faith and dishonor to God. There were many reasons to doubt. Abraham was almost a hundred years old and his wife was 90. She had been barren all that time and now her womb was dead. Abraham knew all of this and even thought about it all, but he never wavered even for a moment.

For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 (as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made you") in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. 18 In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be." 19 And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore also it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Rom 4:16-22

This passage summed up the entire time from the time his name became Abraham "*A father of many nations have I made thee*" (Rom 4:17; Gen. 17:3-5) until the birth of Isaac. Even though it was against hope, Abraham had hope because he wanted to become that *father of many nations*. The Spirit was very specific in Romans details not found in Genesis. First, although he carefully assessed all the facts, he never *wavered in unbelief*. He knew his own body was now *as good as dead* since he was almost 100. He also considered *the deadness of Sarah's womb*. But the promise overruled all of that! In a scale, he weighed all the facts that were against hope against the promise of God and never *wavered in unbelief*. Abraham was fully assured that what God had promised He was able perform.

This accomplished two critically important things. First that quality and type of faith *gave glory to God*. When anyone trusts God alone, without any other reasons to do so, it gives glory to God. It places our faith above all human wisdom and all other reasons. It is faith in God's word alone that brings glory to God. Second, that quality of faith was *reckoned to him as righteousness!* When anyone trusts in God's word and God's word alone, they will have righteousness reckoned to them.

Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, 24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. Rom 4:23-25

All who believe in Jesus' death because of our transgressions and resurrection for our justification and who do not waver in doubt about it will have that same righteousness reckoned to them.

The Tragedy of Abimelech

It is an interesting paradox that while Abraham's faith in the birth of Isaac was fixed and absolute, his confidence in God's ability to protect him until that time did not keep him from stooping to half-truths for protection. Because he told everyone that Sarah was only his sister and left out the truth that she was his wife, the King of Gerar, Abimelech took her to become his own wife.

Before matters could take a terrible turn and impact God's eternal purpose since Sarah was already pregnant with Isaac, God intervened.

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." 4 But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? 5 Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this." Gen 20:3-6

Several important truths come out here. First, ignorance did not absolve Abimelech. Sarah was Abraham's wife and regardless of the ignorance, God held him accountable. This is why we often must pray that God forgive us even for sins of ignorance. But God had providentially intervened and kept him from this terrible sin. But in spite of this, it is a critical moment in the eternal purpose and in spite of the sin and weakness of His servant Abraham, God acted. If he did not restore Sarah to Abraham he would die.

And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours." Gen 20:6-7

We learn another interesting fact here that is also corroborated by Job. When a true servant of the Lord commits a sin of weakness, his access to forgiveness through repentance and restored favor with God still make them superior in the sight of God than the sinner who witnessed it. Abraham was a prophet and would pray in behalf of the ignorant but sinful Abimelech. There is a strong implication of Abraham's repentance in this statement. Especially in light of the truth of the rebuke of Abimelech.

So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. 9 And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done." 10 Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?" Gen 20:8-10

Abraham's answer is true, but does not carry an apology which again reveals a weakness that since God overlooked also implies repentance.

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The account ends with Abraham's feeble excuse of the half-truth, Abimelech's gift to remove any stigma from the event and Abraham's praying for Abimelech.

The Birth of Isaac.

The birth of Isaac is directly attributed to the direct intervention of God. "*And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. 2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him*" (Gen, 21:1-2). At this time, the joy and happiness of the occasion is captured in the name given to the boy. There is an important play on words in the Hebrew that can be seen in the definition of the terms.

Yitschaq (yits-khawk'); from OT:6711; laughter (i.e. mockery); *Jitschak* (or Isaac), son of Abraham: (Strong's Numbers OT:3327)

tsachaq (tsaw-khak'); a primitive root; to laugh outright (in merriment or scorn); by implication, to sport: KJV - laugh, mock, play, make sport. (Strong's Numbers OT:6711)

It began when “Abraham fell on his face and **laughed(OT:6711)**” and “God said “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name **Isaac(OT:3327)**.” Gen. 17:17-19

Then “Sarah **laughed(OT:6711)** within herself,” and “the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah **laugh(OT:6711)**,” then “Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not **laugh(OT:6711)**,” for she was afraid, and God replied “No, but you did **laugh(OT:6711)**!” Gen 18:12-15

At the birth, “Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, **Isaac (OT:3327)**. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son **Isaac(OT:3327)** being eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son **Isaac (OT:3327)** was born unto him. 6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to **laugh(OT:6711)**, so that all that hear will **laugh(OT:6711)** with me. ... 9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, **mocking(OT:6711)**. Gen 21:3-6, 9

Ishmael Sent Away

The weaning of a child in those days happened at about the age of three. At that time Abraham celebrated the occasion with a great feast. But in the midst of the feast, Sarah caught a glimpse of Ishmael. Since “Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram,” and “Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him” (Gen 16:16; 21:5), Ishmael would have been fourteen when Isaac was born and around seventeen when this event occurred.

What Sarah saw was Ishmael laughing(ESV), mocking(ASV), making fun of(CJB) or scoffing(NKJV). This is the same word as 6711 above and as noted in that definition, only the context could help with the exact meaning. In this case, Paul helps us understand what was in Ishmael’s heart. The Holy Spirit later described this event as “persecution.”

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Gal 4:28-30

There was something scornful and hateful in the heart of Ishmael and God saw it as an act of persecution, similar to that of Cain with Abel, or the Jews at the time of Jesus and the early church. Sarah’s response seems harsh, but perhaps she recognized the true nature of the feeling and that they could later lead to physical harm. God agreed with her assessment and told Abraham to listen to Sarah and do it. As in all commands God gave to Abraham, he got up early the next morning and did it.

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. 10 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.” 11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham’s sight because of his son. 12 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. 13 Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed.” 14 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. Gen 21:9-14

Paul used this event to illustrate the difference between the sons of Abraham who remained unrepentant in the preaching of the gospel and those sons of Abraham who had obeyed the gospel. All baptized believers from both Israel and the Gentiles are “like Isaac children of promise.”

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written: Gal 4:21-27

The reason Ishmael was cast out is the same reason why God would ultimately cast off Israel in place of the church.

Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. Gal 4:30-31