

Scripture Reading: Genesis 21

“And Jehovah visited Sarah as He had said, and Jehovah 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. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him--whom Sarah bore to him--Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." 7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age." 8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.”

A Chiastic Structure in the Book of Beginnings

Taken from The Literary Structure of the Old Testament by David A. Dorsey

- A: Introduction: journey to Canaan & the promise of descendants (12:1-9)
- B. Abram lies about Sarai in Egypt: God protects her in foreign king's court (12:10-20)
- C. Lot settles in Sodom (and Abram settles in Hebron) (13:1-18)
- D. Abram intercedes for Lot and Sodom militarily (14:1-24)
- E. Promise of a Son: from Abram himself (15:1-21)
- F. Ishmael's birth: promise to him (16:1-16)
- G. CENTER: Jehovah's covenant: Abram's and Sarai's names changed; Circumcision instituted; promise of a son reiterated (17:1-21)
- F'. Ishmael and Abraham circumcised (promise to Ishmael) (17:22-27; 17:18,20)
- E'. Promise of a son: from Sarah herself (18:1-15)
- D'. Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot in prayer (18:16-33)
- C'. Lot flees Sodom, which God destroys, settles in Moab (19:1-38)
- B'. Abraham lies about Sarah in Gear; God protects her in a foreign king's court (20:1-18)
- A'. Conclusion: birth of Isaac (and tension resolved) (21:1-7)

"The Child of Promise is Born!"

As I mentioned last week, we come now in Chapter 21 to the completion of a very long chiastic structure here in the Book of Beginnings about the promise and giving of a son to Abram as well as new names for he and his wife!

I have included this structure again in the order of worship & I am sure as you review it ALL the lessons I have shared in fourteen sermons from this section will come flooding back!

[don't worry, I have to look things up to recall as well!]

- Now it is a wonder that we have something like Sermon Audio where you can go back at your leisure to see or hear what I have shared in any of those past messages!

Of course we do need to remember that in the course of five thousand years of recorded human history and the vast majority of the nations on the seven continents on the earth, very few have had such a tool to enjoy and use!

Thus we should appreciate the literary structure that we often see in the Scriptures and the benefit they have been to the Saints down through the ages when an oral presentation was all they had access too.

Now as a graduate of the government schools that used the Dick & Jane books to make sure I would not learn to read well, I may not be the best example or teacher of such things, but we do need to realize that as God revealed and told His grand story of Creation and Salvation He did so with rich language and helpful structures!

- **So I trust that the outline that Mr. Dorsey put together will help us all to see the BIG picture at this portion of that story!**

We should also remember that while this is the story of the coming of Isaac as the promised son, we saw how there was a focus on the new names given to Abraham, the father of nations, and Sarah his princess!

- **This keeps the true focus where it belongs: On the coming of the Seed, Jesus: Whose name is above all names!**

In fact this is a good place to remember why we are striving to see Jesus in all of our lessons from this Book of Beginnings.

It is important because Jesus Himself said that getting it wrong was a VERY serious problem: When debating the religious leaders of His day, who had vast portions of the Scriptures memorized, He told them bluntly: John 5: “38 But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. 39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”

- **In other words, we don't each get to have our own little personal Messiah who is what we want him to be and says what we think he should say!**

This was the problem that even His own disciples had on many occasions even after news of His resurrection reached them from the women. If you remember, two of the disciples were off to visit Emmaus: Confused and depressed when the risen Jesus came alongside them on the road. After explaining their despair and shock that this man seemed to know nothing of what had happened in Jerusalem we have this powerful rebuke and reaction from Jesus:

Luke 24: “25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

Now I want us to note again that Jesus does not say we will only find some prophecies about Him in the Old Testament, which are certainly there. Jesus does not say that we will only find some types and shadows of Him in the Old Testament, although we do.

- **No Dr. Luke records that Jesus said we can begin here with Moses and move ALL the way through all the prophets and learn about ALL things concerning Jesus!**

So if this is true, then why do we not need the New Testament?

The Old Testament reveals the Messiah and Salvation, but it is not the complete revelation. Jesus promised that we would have all we needed when the Spirit came and He did go on to author the 27 books of the New Testament as well!

It was Augustine the Bishop of Hippo who said, “This grace hid itself under a veil in the Old Testament, but it has been revealed in the New Testament according to the most perfectly ordered dispensation of the ages, forasmuch as God knew how to dispose all things.” His wisdom has been paraphrased down through Church history, but it is very important to remember!

Thus the naming of Abraham and Sarah which is at the center of this portion of Genesis... As well as the coming of the promised son which we see at the conclusion are BOTH central to the story of salvation.

The story that began with the promise to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, a promise that was protected even in the days of Noah when ALL the world deserved destruction.

A promise that was brought forward in Abram's call to leave the land of the Chaldeans and explained to him in many dramatic ways...

- **But now it comes down to the birth of this one son to carry on the line of promise!**

That is what we focus on this morning in our text and it is an event that explodes going forward into the rest of the story of salvation.

Dr. Robert Candlish put it well in his commentary on Genesis: "If there be an occasion on earth fitted to call forth the songs of heaven, next to the birth of Jesus, and not second to the birth of his forerunner John, it is the birth of Isaac. Upon no event, between the fall and incarnation, did the salvation of men more conspicuously depend. And yet few verses of the Bible are more commonplace, and less awakening – at least in our modern view of them – than those that describe the entertainment with which the child of promise was welcomed. Nevertheless, Sarah's song, "God has made me laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me," is the brief model, first of Hannah's [song] and then of Mary's [song]. And the whole ceremonial here briefly indicated has its antitype and accomplishment in the advent of the Messiah."

- **Yes, it is all about Jesus!**

So let's dig into the text and see what lessons we can learn...

"And Jehovah visited Sarah as He had said, and Jehovah 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."

Of course here we see God's faithfulness: Faithfulness to Abraham and Sarah in doing exactly what He promised to do AND faithfulness to all of His chosen race as He provides for the line of promise against all odds from a human perspective!

- **The giving of a child to a couple that had been barren for many decades was a small picture of the coming miracle of the virgin birth that would bring forth our Savior.**

3 "And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him--whom Sarah bore to him--Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him."

- **Here we see again the simple lesson of obedience!**

God had told Abraham what the name of this child of promise would be and that he was to be circumcised on the 8th day:

- **Abraham obeys on both counts.**

Simple obedience is always the best obedience! We remember this each week here at the Lord's Table where we do simply the simple things that Jesus commanded us to do! Seeing obedience in the Word and Sacrament sends us forth, Lord willing, with an attitude of obedience so that we learn to obey in the simple things each and every day of our lives!

- **Remembering always that Jesus said, IF you love Me, keep my commandments!**

We are then reminded that this couple had waited a LONG time for this child of promise and we see the beginning of their celebrations... 5 "Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." 7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

I think it is important to note that it was not so much their age as the barrenness that is a wonder: Remember Abraham will go on to father other children by his second wife which was not unusual in those days, though the lifespans of men was drastically shrinking after the flood.

- **We should also remember that Sarah even at nearly ninety years of age was still a sought after woman of great beauty!**

No one would have believed, including Abraham and Sarah at times that she would be nursing a child of Abraham after so many years.

- **But God knew and was faithful in keeping His promise and now Sarah rejoices.**

She says that God has made her laugh and that others will laugh with her!

OK kids, does anyone remember what Isaac's name means?

- **So we certainly see a theme of laughter here and it is an important theme indeed.**

The Bible skeptics have a field day here with their list of so-called Bible contradictions because they ask who laughed: Abraham or Sarah, just like they can ask who named Isaac, God or Abraham... Shows there are mostly silly things on their lists.

As God made and confirmed His promise over time, we did see both Abraham and Sarah laugh. Abraham had laughed a laughter of wonder when he considered what God was proposing and Sarah's was a nervous laugh almost of unbelief. And these laughters come to maturity as they see the promise fulfilled and realize what God is doing... The name Isaac does relate to laughter, but it is not a TV laugh track or a belly laugh over a good joke and certainly not a nervous laugh or the laugh of a skeptic...

It is not laughter in the abstract at all, but rather means, "one shall laugh" or "there shall be laughter" and laughter in the sense of rejoicing: What we would refer to, as it is in many other places in the Scriptures, as Joy!

It is what is expressed in Psalm 126:2 "Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "Jehovah has done great things for them."

- **Sarah is rejoicing and others will rejoice with her!**

This Biblical joy is the focus of our message this morning and is carried over into verse eight which also begins our next portion of this chapter: 8 "So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned."

In those days a child was weaned much later than we generally do today.

- **And so we see that Abraham and Sarah likely had two or three years of rejoicing over the gift of this son!**

Such a feast or rite of passage were not uncommon as the weaned child began to eat solid food. We often see this today when a child is brought to the family dinner table and we certainly rejoice as we see our younger covenant children coming to the Lord's Table as they are able to eat and drink.

- **Abraham and Sarah are rejoicing because God has been faithful in keeping His promise!**

We are to rejoice as well, not only over this one important event, but also in the greater promises of which it was a part... In Isaiah chapter 51, just before we have the glorious revelation of the sacrifice of Jesus in chapter 53, God hearkens back to this very account:

Isaiah 51: [to His people He says] "2 Look to Abraham your father, And to Sarah who bore you; For I called him alone, And blessed him and increased him." 3 For Jehovah will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, And her desert like the garden of Jehovah; Joy and gladness will be found in it, Thanksgiving and the voice of melody...

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, And look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not be abolished.””

➤ **In that truth there should be MUCH rejoicing!**

The Apostle Paul makes reference to this very passage in the Book of Galatians as he contrasts the child of the free woman Sarah with the child of the bond woman Hagar. We will look at that in more detail next week, but for this morning I want to focus on the that fact that we know the rest of the story, where the Promised Messiah has come to save His people from their sins.

We should remember all the joy we saw in Luke’s Gospel account: Zacharias was told by the angel that there would be joy and gladness at the birth of his son John who would proclaim the coming of the lamb of God.

We then see the still unborn John leaping for Joy in the presence of Jesus as Mary approaches Elizabeth! The Angel announces the birth of Jesus with a pronouncement of joy to the earth! In fact the angel says he brings tidings of great joy which will be to all people... Just as Isaiah predicted!

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us how we are to respond to the persecutions we will suffer as His disciples: “23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.”

The seventy disciples sent out by Jesus returned with joy when they saw how the demons were subject to the name of Jesus!

Jesus would later tell His disciples that there is joy in heaven when even one sinner repents & becomes a child of God!

And finally we see the disciples overwhelmed with joy in the presence of the resurrected Jesus and even after His ascension Luke tells us:

“And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.”

➤ **Luke’s Gospel account begins and ends with joy and that is just what we see in one book of the New Testament!**

Sarah was rejoicing and said others would rejoice, not just because her son was born but because THE Son would come as a result of God’s faithfulness.

The Apostle Paul uses the word rejoice ten times in the short epistle to the Philippians and brings those references to a focus in chapter four where he writes these very familiar words...

Philippians 4: “4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

We have had plenty to be anxious about here in our little church of late: Right up to the recent news about little Makenna!

We don’t rejoice because we like suffering or enjoy trials any more than Abraham and Sarah did in their day!

We rejoice because we know that God is in control and that He knows how the story ends...

- **And it ALWAYS ends well for His people.**
- **That is what He promised!**

Here in our text Sarah and Abraham are rejoicing over one of God's manifold blessings...

We are pretty good on that front, though even there we often fall into the sin of the nation of Israel thinking that it was our own strength and wisdom that got us the blessing...

The really tough part is rejoicing when we really, really want to be anxious because we are facing a really tough situation...

Here again the Christmas accounts give us great hope that is found in a very dark place...

As part of the coming of the Messiah we see the slaughter of the innocents around Bethlehem as King Herod lashes out at the new born King Jesus.

Obviously there is great weeping among the mothers who lost their infants at the hands of Herod's soldiers, but even at this dark place the prophet Jeremiah would have given them hope:

In Jeremiah 31 we read this: "15 Thus says Jehovah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more." [this attack came as no surprise to our God!]

16 Thus says Jehovah: "Refrain your voice from weeping, And your eyes from tears; For your work shall be rewarded, says Jehovah, And they shall come back from the land of the enemy. 17 There is hope in your future, says Jehovah, That your children shall come back to their own border."

And that hope of course comes just a bit later in that very same chapter:

"31 "Behold, the days are coming, says Jehovah, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says Jehovah. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Jehovah: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

- **There is great hope and great joy in the salvation of our God!**

And that is why we are to be those beautiful feet that carry this Good News to all the world!

Communion Meditation: Hebrews 12

"1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls."