

## Truth and Consequences 5-20-07

### Genesis 21

(Read Genesis chapter 21) We have three stories in this one chapter. Let's begin with the first that covers verses one through seven. <sup>1</sup> Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. <sup>2</sup> Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Genesis 21:1-2 (NIV) The time had finally arrived. The promise first given 25 years earlier was fulfilled in the birth of little Mr. Laughter. (Genesis 12:2) What a celebration must have broken out at the first cry of that baby! (Proverbs 13:12) After all those years of waiting, giving up, believing again, the risk they took Gerar, and finally the child of promise was born. Everyone in Abraham's community must have been talking non-stop about the amazing birth to the 90-year-old wife of their 100-year-old leader.

In those first two verses (Genesis 21:1,2), we can see the emphasis of the Holy Spirit. Look at the repeated theme. "...as he had said...what he had promised...God promised him." This is about the power of the Word of God. Nothing is too hard for God. If He says it, you better believe it, because He is more than capable of bringing to pass what He says. (Isaiah 55:11) When God promises something, it will happen. (Isaiah 46:10) Conditions don't matter. When we see God bring His word to pass in conditions that are so impossible, it should increase our faith for the other things He promised. (Romans 10:17) The birth of Isaac should have strengthened Abraham's belief that God would indeed bless the world through him. (Genesis 12:3)

The baby was a miracle in their midst. Every time someone looked at him, they should have thought how great God is. The thing about this birth of baby Isaac is that he is the line through which the Messiah will come, the One who would crush the head of the Serpent and make it possible for us to be born again. (Genesis 3:15)

Isaac's birth is however, no more miraculous than some of your rebirths. Who would think someone as enslaved to sin as some of us were, could have ever been reborn? But God spoke! He called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1Peter 2:9,10) Now, every time I see some of you or look in the mirror, I remember that nothing is too hard for God. When I remember my atheist uncle in his 80s, I know God's word can reach the most obstinate and give them new birth. (share testimony) When those who declared they would never bow the knee to Jesus surrender their lives to Him, I laugh with joy along with those who witnessed to them and prayed for them through the years.

Why did God wait so long in the life of this couple to bring this birth to pass? The same day I began preparing this message, I went to visit an inmate. He was sentenced to 5 years in prison with no early release possible. The local county jail is run with maximum security. They don't have time outside. Movement is very restricted. This young man was there for a month waiting for his hearing. Everyone there can't wait to be sentenced and transferred so they can get to State Prison

**Commented [notes1]:** 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. Gen 12:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** 12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. Prov 13:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** 1 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. 2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Gen 21:1-2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** 10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. Isaiah 46:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** 17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Gen 12:3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Gen 3:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)

where they have time to walk outside, have libraries, and work programs. But this man was seeing God at work. His incarceration had been coincidentally postponed until after his first child was born. Then in county jail, his hearing was postponed. Their premature baby was going through a crisis and he was close enough that his wife could stop by and receive his encouragement. He could see that God was having mercy on him by postponing what he wanted, and at the same time teaching him that God cares about him and is in control of every detail. God was certainly in control of Abraham's circumstances and yours and mine also. God stretches our faith very intentionally, because faith is the very basis of our relationship with Him. (Hebrews 11:6) God longs to deepen our relationship with Him.

<sup>4</sup> *When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him.* Genesis 21:4 (NIV) This was the first baby we read about being circumcised according to the covenant made with Abraham in chapter 17. (Genesis 17:12) He is the beginning of the fulfillment of that covenant in which Abraham was promised to become the father of many nations. Abraham obeyed in calling his son Isaac as the LORD commanded, and in circumcising him the eighth day as God instructed in the covenant. (Genesis 17:19) Though he had failed to be a good example at all times, he was making every effort to obey the LORD's commands.

<sup>6</sup> *Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."* Genesis 21:6 (NIV) When she first laughed at the promise of God, it was a laugh of unbelief. The LORD called her on it. (Genesis 18:15) Now she is laughing with her husband at the amazing thing God had done in them, and everyone else is laughing with joy.

Here again we have some incredible parallels with the birth of the coming Messiah. Isaac's birth was truly a miracle as was the virgin birth of the Messiah. Both Sarah and Mary were assured that the power of God would make it happen. (Luke 1:34,35,37) Both children had an appointed time to be born. (Galatians 4:4) Both Isaac and the Messiah were the promised seed. Both children were named by God himself. (Matthew 1:21) Both children brought great joy to their mothers and caused them to dwell on what God had done. (Luke 1:46-49)

The second story in this chapter is that of the dismissal of Hagar and Ishmael. When the time came for Isaac to be weaned, Abraham threw a great party in celebration. In traditional Israel, this took place when the child turned three. That would make Ishmael 16 years old. He is a young man. During the celebration, Ishmael began to mock Isaac. The word is really an accented form of the word to laugh. The Hebrew denotes something done regularly, not just this one time. The Apostle Paul describes it as persecution. (Galatians 4:29) Mocking seems like a good word choice.

You can imagine how young Ishmael felt at this baby stealing all his attention. He had been the only child and heir, and suddenly all eyes are on the miracle baby from the real wife of Abraham. Perhaps Sarah could see calamity in the future if this was allowed to continue. Instead of trusting God, Sarah again insisted on her own solution. That is what had gotten them into this in the first place. How easily we

**Commented [notes10]:** 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Heb 11:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** 12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner--those who are not your offspring. Gen 17:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** 19 Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. Gen 17:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** 15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh." Gen 18:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** 34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 37 For nothing is impossible with God." Luke 1:34-35, 37 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** 4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, Gal 4:4 (NIV)

**Commented [notes16]:** 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Matt 1:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** 46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. Luke 1:46-49 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** 29 At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. Gal 4:29 (NIV)

become angered and insist on an extreme solution that hurts those we love, instead of working through the difficult path of resolution. She insisted that Abraham send Hagar and her son out of the camp. (Genesis 21:10)

The consequences of a lack of faith in God so many years earlier was coming home to the heart of Abraham. <sup>11</sup> *The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.* Genesis 21:11 (NIV) He had to say "goodbye" to this son he loved and woman that he cared for. It had happened many years earlier (Genesis 16:6), but God had intervened and allowed the boy to mature under Abraham's tutelage. Abraham sought the Lord. <sup>12</sup> *But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.* Genesis 21:12 (NIV) He went on to assure Abraham that He would make Ishmael into a nation of people.

When conflict rises in our homes, we need to go to God for His solution. When our hearts are distressed like Abraham's was, we can seek a word from the Lord. His answers are rarely like the ones we come up with in our natural reasoning. Who would have thought that God would have had Abraham do as Sarah demanded? But God knows all the potential problems that could have risen. God had a plan for Ishmael, and it wasn't in the camp of Abraham. A word from the Lord did not take away the pain, but it did give direction and a sense of peace to do what had to be done, knowing that God was going to preserve their lives. (Genesis 21:13)

Galatians chapter 4 tells us that this is a very symbolic event. Hagar represents those under the flesh, Law, physical Jerusalem, and a physical inheritance. Sarah on the other hand represents the Spirit, the new covenant, New Jerusalem, and a spiritual heritage. These two ladies were symbolic of the flesh resisting the spirit. The old must go. It must be sent away and all hope placed in the new. (Galatians 4:22-26)

The next morning, Abraham obeyed again. As much as his heart hurt within him, he did as the LORD had instructed him. He gave Hagar food and a skin of water and sent them off. The water soon ran out and she laid her son in the shade to die. He had probably been mocking the crying of Isaac at his weaning party. Now he was the one crying because of his thirst and separation from the family he had known. Perhaps those tears were even tears of repentance for his attitude which had resulted in their circumstance. I think he was crying out to the LORD. What did his name mean? Ishmael! God hears. (Genesis 16:11)

<sup>17</sup> *God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.* Genesis 21:17 (NIV) When God asks us, "What's the matter?" He is not trying to gain information. He is asking us to take a look at our heart's condition. Are we trusting? Are we seeking His direction? Do we believe in God who has spoken to us in times past? Then the angel spoke a frequent command in Scripture, "Do not be afraid!" Fear has torment. (1John 4:18) Fear keeps our ears closed to the whisper of the Spirit. Fear doubts God's ability and sovereignty.

**Commented [notes19]:** 10 and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." Gen 21:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** 6 "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. Gen 16:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** 13 I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring." Gen 21:13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.  
23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.  
24 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar.  
25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.  
26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.  
Gal 4:22-26 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** 11 The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery." Gen 16:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.  
1 John 4:18 (NIV)

God caused her to see a well in the distance. (Genesis 21:19) He was guiding them all along. They had almost arrived when fear and doubt overtook them. Isn't that often the same thing that happens in our journey? We think we have strayed in the wrong direction and God has abandoned us, but if we will lift up our eyes, we will see that He has been with us all along. There, in front of us, is the solution to the immediate need. Day by day He meets those needs and sees us on to our destiny, but we must not give in to fear. (Jeremiah 29:11)

**Commented [notes25]:** 19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.  
Gen 21:19 (NIV)

Whatever your situation is today, will you hear God ask you, "*What's the matter? Do not be afraid. Open your eyes.*" Hagar and Ishmael were sustained and led by God. They did not return to Abraham or to Egypt. They were given a whole new existence in Paran. Ishmael became an archer and did become a nation according to the word of the LORD. (Genesis 21:20,21)

**Commented [notes26]:** 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.  
Jer 29:11 (NIV)

There is one more story in our chapter. It is another encounter with Abimelech, about four years after the last one. In our last chapter, Abraham left somewhat humiliated because of his fear and the trouble it got them into. Still, he was exalted in the eyes of Abimelech because God told Abimelech that the prayers of the prophet Abraham would bring healing to his family. (Genesis 20:7) Though Abimelech could not marry into the family of Abraham for an alliance, this passage today shows his efforts to make formal treaty of friendship. He saw God was blessing Abraham. If Abraham was on his side, surely his God would also be on his side as well. (Genesis 12:3)

**Commented [notes27]:** 20 God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.  
21 While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.  
Gen 21:20-21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** 7 Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die."  
Gen 20:7 (NIV)

Abimelech started by reminding Abraham how kind he was to him in the situation with his wife, Sarah. He asked for a promise of reciprocal kindness to him and his descendents. Abraham promised, but had a bone of contention to bring up.

**Commented [notes29]:** 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."  
Gen 12:3 (NIV)

The well he had dug at Beersheba had been taken over by Abimelech's servants. Abimelech claimed he never knew of it, and that this news to him. Having lived in the Far East, let me tell you, this is typical. This whole story rings so true to the culture. One party will claim ignorance and that there is nothing they can do about it. The other, if they are clever enough, will find some way so that everyone can save face and go away happy.

Abraham had given the king some of his herds as sign of goodwill. The king had given to him, and now he was giving back. But in that herd there were seven ewes that were set apart from the rest. <sup>29</sup> and Abimelech asked Abraham, "*What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?*" Genesis 21:29 (NIV) He knew that something was up. This was intentional, he just didn't figure out what it was about. <sup>30</sup> He replied, "*Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well.*" Genesis 21:30 (NIV) Now if a Westerner were to do this, we'd simply say, "Look, I dug the well; you know it! But I'll give you 7 sheep for the official deed and we'll call it even." In the East that is insulting. Instead, he implied that the sheep will be a reminder that he dug the well. No one is

insulted. Everyone wins. We could learn a lesson from the wise resolution of conflict. Beersheba means "well of seven" or "well of oath".

<sup>33</sup> *Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.* Genesis 21:33 (NIV) The tree was a symbol of his being rooted in the land. With Abimelech recognizing the hand of the Lord on him, the treaty gave him some security from invaders. He also now had assurance that this was truly his land, for the well was officially recognized as his. The tree was a sign of Abraham's conviction that he was there to stay. It was also a symbol of fruitfulness and prosperity.

Then Abraham worshipped. He called on the name of YHWH, the El Olam. This was a special revelation of a name of God, used only here in Scripture. This sense of God working everything out and the peace and assurance that brought gave rise to this revelation of God's name. We might translate it, God over all, eternally. (Psalm 90:2) That is the same revelation that young man in prison was getting. It couldn't be a more different circumstance, but truth being taught was the same.

Do you know God as the God who is over all eternally, El Olam? Sometimes it takes the difficulties of life and the consequences of our actions to get us to stop and look and see what God is doing in our lives. (Psalm 119:71) Maybe we've been waiting 25 years for the promise, like Abraham and Sarah. Or maybe we are in a desert of life and think we can go no further. Or maybe it seems life is cheating us out of what our own hands have earned us. But in all these situations, God showed up, stretched their faith, and cared for those who put their hope in Him.

Abraham called on the name of the LORD. The Apostle Paul reminds us that those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:13) That doesn't mean saying His name just right. It means trusting in who He is, believing that He hears and cares. It means knowing it's all in His hands. It is an intentional surrender to your Maker, knowing that He has all the details planned out from before you were conceived. (Psalm 139:15,16) That is El Olam. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, whether you are 16 years old or 86. Put yourself in His capable hands today, and experience His salvation.

**Commented [notes30]:** 2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. Psalms 90:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes31]:** 71 It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. Psalms 119:71 (NIV)

**Commented [notes32]:** 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." [Romans 10:13 (NIV)]

**Commented [notes33]:** 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, 16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalms 139:15-16 (NIV)