

GENESIS

Lesson 38

Lesson 38 – Genesis 21: Isaac is Born; Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

The Birth of Isaac

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. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

⁶ Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." ⁷ And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

⁸ The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹ But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰ and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

¹¹ The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹² But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. ¹³ I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

¹⁴ Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

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.

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.

The Treaty at Beersheba

²² At that time Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. ²³ Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you now reside as a foreigner the same kindness I have shown to you."

²⁴ Abraham said, "I swear it."

²⁵ Then Abraham complained to Abimelek about a well of water that Abimelek's servants had seized. ²⁶ But Abimelek said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today."

²⁷ So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelek, and the two men made a treaty. ²⁸ Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, ²⁹ and Abimelek asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?"

³⁰ He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well."

³¹ So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.

³² After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God. ³⁴ And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Genesis 21:1-32 [NIV]

Isaac and Ishmael Contrasted

In this lesson, we will be contrasting the birth of Ishmael with the birth of Isaac. Isaac's birth occurred approximately one year after the date of the destruction of Sodom and her sister cities. (Genesis 18:13) This would place his birth in approximately 1699 BC.

Read the verses referenced below and answer the following questions:

1. How old was Ishmael when Isaac was born? See Genesis 16:15 and Genesis 21:5.

2. Regarding all of the characters in our lesson:
 - a. What was Sarah's reaction to the coming birth of Ishmael? See Genesis 16:3-6.

 - b. What was her reaction when Isaac was born? See Genesis 21:6-7.

As Isaac the baby grows, he is weaned. Jewish tradition holds that this can happen between eighteen months and five years of age. As we see from Genesis 21:8, this is a time of great celebration, and Abraham throws a feast to celebrate the event. Meanwhile, Sarah notices that Ishmael, who is now seventeen to nineteen years old, is mocking the baby and the celebration. (Genesis 21:9) She asks Abraham to "get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

We now come to the verses in the Bible that separates the Christian faith from the followers of Islam. Genesis 17:20 and Genesis 21:11-13.

3. What does God tell Abraham about casting out Ishmael and his mother?

We see then another contrast between Ishmael and Isaac. Jesus will be descended through Isaac and not through Ishmael. See Genesis 17:19-22. See also, Matthew 1:2, Luke 3:23-24 and Galatians 3:16.

God did, however, promise Abraham that He would also make a Ishmael a great nation. We can find the descendants of Ishmael referenced in Genesis 25:12-18 and Genesis 37:28. Referred to as the Ishmaelites, they lived in the southern end of the Holy Land across from the eastern border of Egypt.

Later, Isaac will have twin sons, Jacob and Esau, Jacob will marry Rebecca, from Abraham's "country and [my own] relatives" and not from "the daughters of the Canaanites." (Genesis 24:3-4)

Read the verses referenced below and answer the following questions:

4. Who will Esau marry in order to spite his parents, Isaac and Rebecca? See Genesis 28:6-9.

5. Where did Hagar get a wife for Ishmael? See Genesis 21:1.

We have noted many contrasts between the births of Ishmael and Isaac, the wives of each, and the impact that each son's descendants would have on the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths—literally around the world.

A new beginning is symbolized in the Treaty at Beersheba. (Genesis 21:22-34). Loosely translated, the name means the "well of seven," due to the reference to the seven ewe lambs. Beersheba will become a well-known and respected shrine throughout the Old Testament. Many Bible verses in the Old Testament reference the location in terms of worshipping Yahweh, and it becomes a great city. (Genesis 26:33) Today, it is the largest city in the Negev region of Israel.

God's plan is perfect, and His will is always accomplished. In spite of all the human obstacles—Sarah being barren, Abraham and Sarah being beyond the age of having children, the troubles with a surrogate relationship, the destruction of Sodom and the sister cities, and the impact on Abraham's nephew Lot—God prevails. As a result, today we know that these events laid the framework for the birth of God's only son, Jesus, and thus the salvation of mankind. Nothing is impossible for God. (Matthew 19:26 and Luke 1:37)

In the next lesson, we examine the Philistines and the biblical critics.

In Christ,

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