

Genesis 21: The Son of Promise

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In Genesis 21 we read about God causing Sarah to conceive a son, Isaac. It is the wonderful culmination of the promises God has been making to Abraham and Sarah since Genesis 12. It is in Isaac that God's work of making a great and peculiar nation from Abraham will be accomplished. As well, it is through Isaac that the seed promise will continue, a promise that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in which "all nations shall be blessed". That is the "Blessing" that becomes a great part of the conversation for the remainder of the book of Genesis.

Isaac is named for the Hebrew word "laugh". It is because Sarah (and Abraham) had laughed at the promise God made them a year earlier. Sarah's attitude is now one of praise; she hopes everyone will laugh with her. In Hebrews 11 we are told that it was Sarah's faith that enabled her to conceive.

There is also the difficulty of the strife between Ishmael and Hagar. We have already seen the struggle between Hagar and Sarah, and now the two boys are fighting. This is probably not the strife of siblings but perhaps something more sinister. After all, Ishmael is an older teenager to this toddler, and his attention might be more nefarious than mere child's play. Sarah decides that Ishmael needs to go, and has Abraham send them away. God watches over them and establishes Ishmael as a great nation himself, today understood to be the Arab nation.

This sending away brings a difficult issue to consider. Was it right for Sarah to send away Hagar and Ishmael, almost seemingly to their deaths? Let us first consider that God justified Sarah's action to Abraham, and that in fact there is an important lesson for us here.

Lesson 1: Protect your blessings

According to God, Sarah was right to want to send Hagar and Ishmael away (but remember, God said He would protect them). This was because Isaac was the promise. Sarah understood this, and was prepared to do anything to protect this blessing. This is an important lesson to us. God gives us great blessings. The greatest gift is our salvation, that pearl of great price (Mat. 13:45-46) that we ought to treasure and protect. As well, God gives us blessings in our loved ones (whether our children or our church family) that we ought to seek to protect. Sarah had the right mind and heart here when she decided that her blessing needed to be protected above all else.

Lesson 2: Remove any possible hindrances

The Hebrew writer states in Hebrews 12 "lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us". Sarah knew that Ishmael would forever be a hindrance, and needed to be removed. We too ought to remove anything that assaults our salvation and our home and our families.

The point here is simple. You should do EVERYTHING to save yourself (Acts 2:40, Philippians 2:12), including making decisions that seem harsh but are necessary. You should do EVERYTHING to save your own home and family.