

Promise Keeper

- ¹ The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised.
- ² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.
- ³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.
- ⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.
- ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.
- ⁶ And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me."
- ⁷ And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."
- ⁸ And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.
- ⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.
- ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac."
- ¹¹ And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.
- ¹² But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring."
- ¹³ And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring."
- ¹⁴ So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.
- ¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes.
- ¹⁶ Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.
- ¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.
- ¹⁸ Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation."
- ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.
- ²⁰ And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow.
- ²¹ He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Genesis 21:1-21

The Promise Keepers

Many of you may remember a little over 20 years ago now that a unique phenomena swept through the city of Boulder. In 1991, Coach McCartney hosted an event at the CU Events Center called "Promise Keepers: Where Are The Men?" it drew 4,200 men. The next summer, with the theme "What Makes A Man?", 22,000 men from every state in the Union showed up at Folsom field. The next year the theme was "Face to Face," and over 50,000 men packed Folsom. I can still remember lining up for lunch, standing around singing hymns that began to echo down the long, winding line. It made you wonder what heaven might be like. From

here, the numbers skyrocketed to 278,000 the next year and finally 738,000 the next, before things began to quickly fizzle out.

Promise Keepers focus was always on calling men to be true men, which meant calling them to both make and **keep their promises**. A promise is also called **your word**. Now more than ever, we need people to be men and women of their word, for it often seems like you can't trust anyone to keep it anymore. When you keep your word, it shows that you are a person of honesty, virtue, and integrity. **Integrity** is a great word. It means **to be whole**. The opposite is disintegrated. To disintegrate is to break up into small bits; to fragment, fracture, shatter, or splinter. That is what is happening to our civilization all around us, primarily because our leaders and role models and heroes are not people of integrity.

But being a person of integrity, being a promise keeper only makes sense if there is someone who always keeps his promises, someone who is fully blameless, innocent, and pure; someone who is fully honest, virtuous, and incorruptible, someone who is both the perfect example and the life-source of all promise keeping. The Promise Keepers movement was like a falling star—bright and brilliant for a short time, but quickly fading into black. I suspect this was in some part due to the emphasis that was placed on man and pumping him up with emotional highs, while God, for the most part, was treated as the coach and cheerleader who trained you and rooted you on to keep your promises. In Scripture God's promises, and therefore God himself, are treated much more powerfully than that.

The God Who Keeps His Promises

The Birth of Isaac

The passage today is story of the birth of Isaac and the banishing of Ishmael (**Gen 21:1-20**). It begins with **a visitation from the LORD**. This word "visit" (*paqad*) signals that something very important is going to happen. Because when God visits people, it is for the sake of salvation: to bring Israel out of Egyptian slavery (**Gen 50:24-25; Ex 4:31**), to end famine (**Ruth 1:6**), to bring exiles home (**Jer 29:10**). One later usage is almost exactly what ours will be, "**The Lord visited Hannah, and she conceived**" (**1 Sam 2:21**).

Notice whom the LORD visits. He **visited Sarah**. Then notice why. "**As he said.**" **Gen 21:1** is actually a form of poetic parallelism. The second half parallels the first: "**And the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised.**" God is presented as the **Great Promise Keeper**. But what had he promised? "**The LORD said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son'**" (**Gen 18:10**). Even earlier, "**Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac**" (**Gen 17:19**).

So **Gen 21:2** says, “And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.” Notice how carefully the language is crafted. **First**, it tells us that **Sarah** conceived. This is not the son of Hagar. This is not the son of some foreign woman. It is Sarah, Abraham’s wife, a woman who was well past the years of child bearing. All of the near disasters that could have short-circuited this promise from the previous chapters have come to naught. A miracle of miracles—Sarah conceived.

Next it says she bore **Abraham** a son. This is not Abimelech’s son (see Gen 20). It is Abraham’s son. This child was born from a body “**which was as good as dead**” (**Rom 4:19**), Paul tells us. **Third**, it says Abraham had a son in his old age. This man was 100 years old (**vs. 5**). This amplifies the miracle clearly present in Genesis. The Apostle tells us that it comes from a God “**Who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist**” (**Rom 4:17**). Finally, the verse says that God did this “at the time of which God had spoken to him.” A year later, and God’s impossible promise comes to pass. A miracle baby is born.

The baby is a boy. Abraham calls “**his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him**” (repeating the impossible for emphasis), “**Isaac**” (**Gen 21:3**). God had told them two times (one for each of them) that they would have a son and both of them laughed (**17:17**; **18:12**). Now the fulfillment is mentioned twice. God told them to call him Isaac (**17:19**). **Abraham obeyed**.

Abraham’s obedience in response to the fulfilled promise of God continues into the next verse. “**Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him**” (**21:4**). This was back in ch. 17, “**He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring**” (**Gen 17:12**). Romans tells us that circumcision served the purpose for Abraham of confirming his faith that he had while he was uncircumcised (**Rom 4:11**). For Isaac, it serves a different purpose. It shows him that he is a child of Abraham, and therefore must have the faith of Abraham (**Rom 4:12**). But the focus *here* is on Abraham’s obedience. This is the obedience that comes from faith. When God tells you something, if you believe him, then you will obey. See the order? Faith, then obedience. We’ll say more about this later.

The Joy of Sarah

In **vs. 6**, we read about Sarah’s **laughter**. Previously, she had laughed out of **incredulity**. “**No way will I have a child as old as I am. Haha.**” Now, it is the laughter of **happiness**, overwhelming joy, and faith. “**He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!**” (**Ps 113:9**).

Sarah's words here and in the next verse are very poetic in the Hebrew, and the name Isaac is at the center of it all, for Isaac means "laughing, laughter, he laughs." God has made her laugh by performing such a great miracle. Therefore, all who meet Sarah, all who think of Sarah will laugh with her, for her joy is complete. She continues, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age" (Gen 21:7).

The short story of the birth of Isaac is here in this text to cause you to wonder at the power and promise keeping of God. It is flooded with the impossible. It repeats itself again and again. This was a real boy who became the father of the Israelites, a people still around to this day. His birth was nothing short of a miracle, and when you think of it, you are to think about the power of God to do anything he wants, anything he promises to do. Do not doubt the power of God, and do not doubt his promises, for he keeps them exactly as he says. This is surely much more profound than God sitting around coaching us and cheering us on in our own promise keeping, as important as keeping our promises is. Calvin says, "He never feeds men with empty promises, nor is he less true in granting what he had promised, than he is liberal and willing in making that promise" (Calvin, Gen 21:1).

The People Who Still Sin

Isaac's Weaning

But this is the Bible, and that which is so wondrous and incredible, that which we ought to keep our eyes on often quickly fades from our view. The problem does not reside in God, of course, as if he fails sometimes. The problem lies in us, in our sin and weakness, lack of faith and obedience.

For one more verse, things are great. "The child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned" (Gen 21:8). Isaac is probably three years old by now, as breast feeding in that culture went much longer than it does in our own (2 Macc 7:27). It was traditional to throw a feast for a child that makes it past this point, for many of them would die long before this. Hannah and Elkanah also throw a feast when Samuel is weaned (1 Sam 1:22-25).

Sarah's Bane

It is just here that Sarah's bane raises its ugly head. "The old animosity between her and Hagar breaks out again, leading to a final parting of the ways; Hagar and her son (never called Ishmael in this section) are driven out into the wilderness to fend for themselves."¹ Here is how it happens.

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 81.

“Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing” (Gen 21:9). The ESV’s “laughing” is a good choice in that it helps you see the word plays going on with Isaac which means “laughter” and Ishmael’s laughter. But this choice of word may not help us understand what “Hagar’s son” was actually doing, and note, he is not actually mentioned by name here. He is just Hagar the Egyptian’s son. This is deliberate, and I’ll tell you why in a moment.

But first, what was Ishmael doing? There is plenty of speculation to go around. But listen to some of the other words that are chosen in various translations. Most have “mocking” (KJV, NAS, NET, etc) or “making fun of” (CJB). The JPS has “making sport.” A couple have “playing” (RSV, TNK). The word is the same as laughing, but the form of the verb (piel) is used in all other places (Gen 19:21, Ex 32:6, and Jdg 16:25) in very negative way. So what might he be doing?

The ancient Jews translated this as “mocking in a strange worship” (Gen 21:9 JTE) or “mocking with a strange worship, and bowing to the Lord” (Gen 21:9 PJE). The idea is that Ishmael, the older brother by 13 years is not going to stand around and let Isaac take his birthright. So he begins to mock the promise of God by mocking the son of the promise and the God who gave it. Ishmael himself was born to a very old man, so perhaps as so many others have done when supernatural power stares them smack in the face, he didn’t see the miracle for what it was. In this case, calling Hagar “the Egyptian” may be a hint that she never left the paganism of her birthplace. The last verse of our passage seems to suggest the same thing, for she later finds a wife for Ishmael from the Egyptians (Gen 21:21).²

The idea of “playing” is slightly different, but equally plausible. Wenham says, “It does not imply that Ishmael has done something amiss with Isaac. It suggests on the contrary, that Sarah saw Ishmael ... playing the role of Isaac.”³ This is a more subtle form of the same idea. Rather than outright mockery of God, Ishmael would actually be taking the spiritual role that was ordained for Isaac rather than himself. Ishmael would be the chosen one, against God’s choice. “I will not listen to this nonsense about Isaac. I am older. I will be the one to continue the line.”

Whatever is going on is clearly sinful, a mockery of the very promise of God being fulfilled before his eyes. But it is this wordplay on “laughter,” a word that went from incredulity to joy with Sarah that now takes her from joy to severe and harsh anger. “So she said to Abraham, ‘Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac’” (Gen 21:10). Sarah

² We should remember, of course, that Joseph and Moses take Egyptian wives, and this is not necessarily a bad thing.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 82.

now mocks Hagar and her son's position. Hagar is nothing but a bond-servant wife. In saying, "cast her out," Sarah demands that Abraham **divorce** Hagar.⁴

We might ask, how are we supposed to think about what Sarah says here? Is she just being a mean-spirited jerk? Is this the old "eye for an eye" before Moses ever came along? Is she perfectly justified in what she says? We do know one thing. We know that "the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son" (21:11). This isn't some unknown enemy out to kill Abraham, some political figure on TV that is easy to hate, some far away religious fanatic murdering Christians. This is Abraham's son, the son by the way that Sarah told Abraham to have with her maid-servant. **It is always more difficult to be harsh with people we are close to.** This can be both good and bad.

Abraham did not want to do what Sarah said (last time he listened to her, look where it got them). "But God said to Abraham, 'Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring'" (12-13). The first part of God's response might seem kind of shocking. He is going against Abraham and with Sarah. But in actuality, Sarah knows exactly what she is doing this time. This is not a faithless demand to bring about the promise her way. This is the result of her faith in the promise come to pass.

We have very well attested ancient laws on just the point Sarah is raising from the **Hamurabbi** (1750 B.C.) and **Lipit-Ishtar** (1930 B.C.) **law codes**.⁵ Essentially, if a man has children from his "first wife" and then also children from slave-wife, if the man declares them both "my children," then they would legally share the inheritance with one another. This is exactly what Abraham has allowed, in calling Ishmael his son. Now, add to it that Ishmael's mockery has something to do with the promises of God, and you can see what Sarah is up to, because of what Ishmael is up to. He wants at least a share of the pie, if not the whole thing. So Sarah

⁴ **Going Deeper:** We have run into a very harsh view of divorce in Reformed circles that essentially sees it as the unforgivable sin. In fact, this issue split our church many years back. It is a pernicious and unbiblical doctrine, for it would mean that Abraham committed the unforgivable sin, because in fact, Abraham did divorce Hagar. For more on this see John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 95; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 82; and for a full treatment on divorce, including Abraham, see Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives On Divorce and Remarriage," *JETS* 40:4 (Dec 1997): 529-550 (esp. 535-36).

⁵ "If a man marries a wife and she bears him a child and the child lives and a slave woman also bears a child to her master, the father shall free the slave woman and her children; the children of the slave woman will not divide the estate with the children of the master" (*LI* 25). "If a man's first-ranking wife bears him children and his slave woman bears him children, and the father during his lifetime then declares to (or: concerning) the children whom the slave woman bore to him, 'My children,' and he reckons them with the children of the first-ranking wife—after the father goes to his fate, the children of the first-ranking wife and the children of the slave woman shall equally divide the property of the paternal estate; the preferred heir is a son of the first-ranking wife, he shall select and take a share first" (*Ham* 171).

is actually demanding that Abraham act according to the law of the day (though not God's law), that he divorce Hagar. The law reads, "...the father shall free the slave woman and her children; the children of the slave woman will not divide the estate with the children of the master."⁶ Sarah has the promise in view.

God is essentially telling Abraham that it is OK to do this, even though it is not coming from him but from the pagan law codes. Why? Because God has promised something to Ishmael as well. God will remember his promise to Hagar (16:12) and Abraham (17:20) regarding this boy. He will do this for Abraham's sake.

At this point, we see Abraham obeying God yet again. "So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba" (14). "Sending away" is technical language for a divorce (see Deut 22:19; 24:1, 3). Did you know Abraham was a divorcee?

So now Hagar and Ishmael are gone. Isaac alone remains to inherit the promises. It might be tempting to end our story here today, except that what takes place now is related to the main idea of God keeping his promises. Hagar finds herself, yet again, in the middle of a desert, alone because of Sarah's anger (cf. 16:7-16). It says that the water in the skin was gone (21:15), so she put the child under one of the bushes. Obviously, things are very bad for the two of them.

I do not think the idea is that Abraham gave her a single canteen filled with a gallon of water, and a couple days later this happens. From what we see of Abraham's love for his son, he probably gave them both many provisions, certainly enough to find her way to civilization. But Hagar wanders; she gets lost. Ishmael is a teenager by now, and the fact that he is so weak that she puts him under a bush and then "went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot" because she could not "look on the death of the child" (16), shows that they are both near the end, ravaged with hunger, parched with thirst, weak, alone, destitute, hopeless.

And Hagar lifted up her voice and wept (17).

And God heard the voice of the boy. For the second time, the Angel of God calls to Hagar ("from heaven"). It may say "God" (elohim) rather than "LORD" (Yahweh), to hint that Hagar is no longer part of the covenant, since Jehovah/Yahweh is the covenant name of God. Nevertheless, he says to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is"

⁶ Martha Tobi Roth, Harry A. Hoffner, and Piotr Michalowski, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., vol. 6, Writings from the Ancient World (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 31.

(17). In chapter 16, she called him **El-Roi**—the God Who **Sees**. Now he also **hears**. “**Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation**” (18). Just as he fulfills his promise to Sarah, so now he begins to fulfill his promise to Hagar.

The story concludes with God opening her eyes so that **she sees a well of water** (19). Curiously, it was by a spring of water that the Angel of the LORD found her the first time (16:7). Now she is revived by the water from the Angel of God, “**and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow**” (19b-20). Finally, she survives and ends up finding an Egyptian wife for her son (21), and they live in the wilderness, perhaps beginning the fulfillment of the prophecy that he would be a wild donkey of man (16:12).

What are we to make of these two stories: the birth of Isaac and the banishment of Ishmael? Well, the NT has a lot to say about this passage, but before I get to that, I want to make **two observations** about the end of the Ishmael story. First, consider how difficult it must have been for Abraham to send his firstborn son away. Could you do that? The next chapter will play into this, multiplying it a hundred fold, as it is the chapter where God tells Abraham to sacrifice his only-begotten son. How much worse would that have been for Abraham?

NT Applications

Election and Common Grace

Second, consider **the kindness of God** towards Ishmael and Hagar, and do so in the context of who these people are. One is an Egyptian slave-woman. The other is a child born the natural way. Both have mocked God’s chosen people. Little to nothing is said about either of them having faith. It was difficult for me to figure out if what I’m about to say is a NT application or something that I derive because of a NT application. I think it is the latter. But think about this.

The Apostle says, “**Not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring/seed, for ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named’**” (Rom 9:7). This verse quotes **Genesis 21:12**, and comes in the context of the **doctrine of election**. We know that God did not choose Ishmael, and from both our own passage and Romans we learn that when he was cast away, he was cast away from the promises of God. The Apostle says he is no longer Abraham’s child, but we must be children of Abraham if we are to be saved.

Nevertheless, as one commentator puts it, “**But though Hagar is mother of the non-elect Ishmael, it is notable how sympathetically she is portrayed here.**”⁷ To

⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 81.

me, it is even more profound how God treats Ishmael himself, but both are tied together. Is God depicted here as some kind of petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak, a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, capriciously malevolent racist bully (to tip the hat to the deeply hardened Sir Richard Dawkins)? Well, that's just how many view the God of Calvinists.

But the God of Calvin was the God of the Bible. And this is [a God who loves all mankind](#) and does not delight in the death of the wicked, even if he does not choose them for salvation or to partake in the blessings of the promise, allowing his wrath to abide upon them. It all seems so impossible for both to be true. How could God love and yet not elect them to salvation? And yet just here we see a God who makes and keeps his *good* promises to both the elect and the non-elect alike. He is the God who hears the cries of the slave-woman, who comes to her, who sends her water, who revives her non-elect son, who showers blessings upon him, turning him into a mighty nation, the father of twelve princes.

These are all real blessings, not fake ones. I have actually had people tell me that the only reason God does these things is to heap burning coals upon their evil little heads in preparation for hell. This is a despicable, heretical thing to say. These are real, albeit temporal blessings designed to point them to Christ. We do not know if Hagar came to Christ, though we do know Christ came to her, and opened her eyes to see water by a well, so that she might have life. Speculating about the salvation or damnation of Hagar is pointless and fruitless. What we do know is that God showed [special common grace](#) (to coin a term) to a people who were cut off from the blessing of Abraham, and the point here is that you must consider *this* God in light of what he says he does for *these* people right *here*. And it is most remarkable how the Bible consistently puts God's loving common grace side by side with the doctrine of election. That is something you all must continually ponder as you consider what I am about to say.

Two Covenants: Slave and Free

The NT actually has a lot to say in commenting upon our section of Scripture today. Its interpretations and applications are varied, yet point in a single direction. One of the most stunning applications is how the Apostle in Galatians 4 refers to [two sons](#) as being born, one of [a slave woman](#) and one of [a free woman](#) ([Gal 4:22](#)). The slave son was born "[according to the flesh](#)," while the son of the free woman was born "[through promise](#)" ([23](#)).

He then says that we may interpret this [allegorically](#). These woman are two covenants. One is from Mt. Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar ([24](#)).

Paul's allegory is rooted in typology and law, he is not just playing fancy free with the text. Hagar and Ishmael are types of the covenant of works (as Reformed people call it), by both their situations in life and their actions towards the covenant people of God (both Hagar and Ishmael sinned against the covenant people, by mocking Sarah and Isaac, and by thinking that the promise could come through them, though God had said otherwise). In this, they anticipate any who will later think that the blessing will come by any means other than the promise of God through grace. Paul says this is exactly what his own people were doing in his day (25). This makes them slaves, slaves to sin and death.

But there is a free woman, Sarah. She represents a heavenly city coming down from above (26), because she is the woman of the promise who gave birth though she was barren (27). She is the covenant of grace, and she is the mother of all who come to God through his gracious promises and covenant.

Two Kinds of Birth, Two Kinds of Children

They come because they are free. They do not come in order to become freed. Coming to Christ is a result of grace. They come because they have been given life through a miraculous birth by the Holy Spirit. “Just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now” (Gal 4:29). To be born according to the flesh is to be conceived as Ishmael was, by a scheming and plotting of your own, sinful devices. You think what you are doing is good, even religious, helping God do his work. But you can't help God do his work. His work is miraculous work, not ordinary work. Your plans end in ruin, destruction, misery, persecution, turmoil, and death. Your plans create misery for yourself and others, even though they may seem to religious and devotional to you.

Rather, you must be born-again, by the spirit rather than by the letter of the law or by the devices of your choosing. Spirit gives birth to Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh. How does this occur? The Spirit blows where he will. But he is pleased to blow where Christ is proclaimed, and so even now you hear his sound. Like the rushing of the wind against the trees, so the Spirit's sound blows through your soul and conscience, telling you that these things are so. You know that you cannot be saved of your own plotting. You know you cannot help God do anything. So come to life. Be born again by his Word and Spirit. This is what Isaac teaches you.

Faith

Then, the NT tells us that “by faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age” (Heb 11:11). It wasn't because she “named it and claimed it.” She didn't make herself do this. She didn't look within for some magical

power. Rather, “She considered him faithful who had promised” (11). And Abraham too believed by faith in the promise as it says, “Of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring/seed be named’” (11:18). Has it not happened? Has not the promise come to pass? Has not God promised that anyone who looks to the son lifted up will be healed of their snake-bites? Has not God promised that any who trust in him have life? Has God not proven himself faithful to his promises in our story? Look at Isaac and believe, for behold a dead man and a dead woman gave birth to a nation, and through that nation, many nations are being ruled by God’s son.

The Genealogy of Christ

Another of the applications made by the NT from our passage is the simple genealogy. “Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob was ... the father of Joseph (not that Joseph, creating an irony) the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ”(Matt 1:2, 16). And backwards, “Jesus ... being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph ... the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham ... the son of Noah ... the son of Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:23, 34, 36, 38). For though Jesus’ genealogy can be traced from Abraham, it is traced back to God himself, for Jesus is the Son of God. No ordinary son of God like you and I. No. Not created. But eternal. Unique, like Isaac – Only begotten. God of God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father. Therefore, he is able to save to the utter most.

There is an interesting connection made between the visitation of God to Sarah in Gen 21:1 and the visitation of God much later to an old woman named Elizabeth. “Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years” (Luke 1:7). Does this sound like anyone we have been talking about today? But her husband Zechariah said of his son John, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people” (Luke 1:67-68). “For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins” (1:76-77).

John and Isaac both point you towards the birth of the Savior, born of an even more impossible birth, through a virgin Mary. Your faith is not placed in faith itself, or in some flimsy cardboard container hoping to save you from the flood of God’s wrath. It is placed he who came in a miraculous way, died and rose again from the dead, who lives ascended in heaven, and is awaiting the time when he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

Obedience

So finally, this leads me to the last of the NT's applications. The births of the two boys in our story are as different as the actions of the mothers who gave birth to them. Sarah trusted in the promise by faith. Hagar mocked the promises, and paid the consequences. And so their actions are different. The last way the NT applies our passage is by helping us think about **the obedience that comes from faith**. We have seen this exemplified in Abraham three times.

Abraham **called his son Isaac**, because God had told him to. Abraham **circumcised his son Isaac** when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him to. **Acts 7:8** says, "He gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day." The last thing Abraham did was **send away, divorce, the slave women**, in obedience to the Lord's command.

And so the Scripture says, "**Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman**" (**Gen 21:10; Gal 4:30**). So, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman (**Gal 4:31**). For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (**5:1**). Do not try to be justified by the law (**5:4**). For though the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness (**5:5**). What matters is faith working through love (**6**). Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another (**13**). Love your neighbor as yourself (**14**). Do not bite and devour one another (**15**). Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh (**16**). Do not be filled with wickedness, evil, and depravity; sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies (**19-21**). But be filled with the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (**23**).

<p>Genesis 21:2 ²And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.</p>	<p>Galatians 4:22 ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.</p>	<p>Hebrews 11:11 ¹¹By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.</p>	
<p>Genesis 21:3 ³Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.</p>	<p>Matthew 1:2 ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,</p>	<p>Luke 3:34 ³⁴the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,</p>	
<p>Genesis 21:4 ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.</p>	<p>Acts 7:8 ⁸And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.</p>		
<p>Genesis 21:9 ⁹But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.</p>	<p>Galatians 4:29 ²⁹But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.</p>		
<p>Genesis 21:10 ¹⁰So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac."</p>	<p>Galatians 4:30 ³⁰But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."</p>		
<p>Genesis 21:12 ¹²But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named."</p>	<p>Matthew 1:2 ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,</p>	<p>Romans 9:7 ⁷and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."</p>	<p>Hebrews 11:18 ¹⁸of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."⁸ FAITH</p>

⁸ David A. Jones, *Old Testament Quotations and Allusions in the New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), Ge 21:2–Heb 11:18.