

# Genesis 21

## April 14, 2024



### CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?

What Scripture has been shaping you recently?

Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?

What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?

What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?

What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?

What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

### MAIN POINT

The key to protecting the relationships God has put in our lives is to trust God's promises and savor His grace.

### INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

**What is the best news a friend or family member shared with you recently? What made this news so good in their eyes?**

**How did you respond to the good news of your friend? Are you always happy for other people when they share good news with you? Why or why not?**

While we would like to think that we are always happy for our friends when they receive good news, this is not always the case. If we are honest, we often struggle with feelings of resentment or jealousy, particularly when those closest to us receive blessings we think we deserve. This was the case with Abraham's wife, Sarah. God had promised her a son but when she witnessed her servant, Hagar, give birth to a son first, she was consumed with envy (Genesis 16). By looking at the story of Sarah and Hagar, we will see that jealousy, if left unchecked, hinders both our relationship with God and others. Instead, God wants us to protect our relationships with those He has put in our lives.



## **UNDERSTANDING**

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GENESIS 21:1-7.

**Given Sarah's jealousy and lack of faith (Genesis 18:9-15), how would you expect God to respond to her? Why didn't Sarah's actions disqualify her from receiving God's blessing? What does that tell us about God?**

**Verses 6-7 point out that Sarah laughed again at what God had done in her life. Read Genesis 18:12-15. How was her laughter different this time?**

While we might expect Sarah's suspect faith and bitter resentment to disqualify her from receiving God's great promise to give her a son who would bless all nations, this was not the case. Thankfully, God's blessing is not contingent upon our performance or good deeds. Grace, by its very definition, is always undeserved. In Genesis 21, God followed through in fulfilling a promise that neither Abraham nor Sarah deserved by giving them a son in their old age. When Sarah first laughed at God's promise, she revealed her doubt in His power and her lack of faith in Him. But now that God had made good on His promise, Sarah's laughter revealed her awe and amazement at what He accomplished through her. Finally, she arrived at a place of trust and gratitude.

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GENESIS 21:8-21.

**Receiving the promise of a son did not cure Sarah of her jealousy (vv. 9-11). What caused Sarah to lose sight of God's grace and fall back into jealousy?**

Whatever the behavior of Ishmael, one thing is certain: Sarah determined that the two boys could not be raised together, and she demanded the expulsion of both Ishmael and his mother. This was difficult on Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael, yet the comfort of the Lord continued in each of their lives.

**God continued to show kindness to Hagar in the face of Sarah's bitter actions (vv. 15-21). How might remembering the persistent nature of God's grace help us overcome feelings of jealousy?**

**One definition of grace is "unmerited favor." How might acknowledging God's grace in our lives help us overcome feelings of jealousy, resentment, and bitterness?**

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GENESIS 21:22-34.

The CSB uses the term "alien" in this passage (v. 23). Most translations do not use that term, but many of them do use "sojourner" or a variation of it. The Hebrew word is sometimes translated "stranger" and refers to an individual or group who is not home



and is dependent on the hospitality of others. Often, as in these instances, the “alien” or one sojourning is a foreigner to those around them.

**What in Genesis 21 tells you Abraham was an immigrant? In whose land was he an immigrant? How did the two sides respond to each other? Surveying from verse 22 on, what was the context of this agreement?**

Abraham had left his home on the promise of a land, but that land was not yet his—he was an alien or foreigner in the place he had been promised. And God blessed Abraham. Yet Abraham’s success did not cause contention between him and Abimelech; rather, the two men covenanted in grace and lived together in peace.

### **APPLICATION**

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

**What causes you to lose sight of the grace of God in your life? How can we maintain our focus on God’s grace when life is difficult? What about when life is good?**

**How do we demonstrate faith in the gospel when we rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15)? What are some practical measures we could take to respond joyfully to the grace of God in the lives of those around us?**

**What promises of God could you hold on to this week as you seek to cultivate a heart of gratitude to Him? What might it look like for you to not only acknowledge God’s grace but also savor it?**

### **PRAYER**

*Close your time together by sharing prayer requests, praying for each other, and the group.*

Thank God for His unmerited love and kindness. Pray that He would help us let go of our jealousy by remembering His promises and savoring His grace.

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

*Encourage your group to look ahead to next week’s scripture passage as we continue our study of the life of Abraham:*

**April 21, 2024 --- Genesis 22**



## COMMENTARY

Genesis 21

**21:1-2.** The setting is Abraham's household where the early days of Isaac's birth and circumcision are recalled. Verses 1-7 consist of a birth narrative (vv. 1-4) and the exultation of Sarah at the birth of her child in Abraham's old age (vv. 5-7). Verses 1-2 describe the visitation of the Lord, resulting in the miraculous pregnancy of Sarah who bears a son "to Abraham in his old age" (vv. 2, 7). Verse 1 possesses parallel half-lines, emphasizing the faithfulness of the divine word revealed to Abraham and Sarah (17:16, 19; 18:10, 14). Not only was Sarah's pregnancy impossible by human resources alone, but the birth was at the "very time" promised.

**21:3-4.** Verses 3-4 describe Abraham's obedient response at Isaac's birth: he names (17:16) and circumcises the child on the eighth day (17:10, 12, 19) precisely as the Lord had directed.

**21:5-7.** This paragraph ties together the explanation of Isaac's name and the elderly age of the parents. Dual references to the age of Abraham form the boundaries of the passage (vv. 5a,7b). Abraham, the narration clarifies, is a century of years (v. 5), and Sarah radiates with happiness at the thought she bears Isaac to her husband "in his old age" (v. 7b).

Sandwiched between the chronological notices is the explanation for the name Isaac (vv. 6-7a). Usually the person who names the child also provides the explanation, whether mother or father (4:24; 5:29). In this case the father announced the name (v. 3), and the mother supplied its significance. Moreover, customarily if an explanation occurs, it immediately follows the giving of the name, but here the narrative describing the circumcision of the boy (v. 4) and the age of the patriarch (v. 5) intervene. These modifications are made to point out the importance of each parent in the work of grace. Abraham's doubting laughter is transformed into obedient faith by his naming the child Isaac as the Lord has said (17:17, 19). Verses 4-5 continue the narrative's attention to the father's obedience. Sarah's doubting laughter is transformed into a joyous faith (18:12-13). This privilege of declaration in vv. 6-7 is appropriately Sarah's, for she after all was the butt of the joke as the barren wife (16:4). The language of the birth report in vv. 3 and 5 are a literary reflex of the parallel episode of Ishmael's birth and naming (16:15-16). By the similarity in language, the passage points up the remarkable nature of the child's birth to parents in their elderly state. Sarah's exuberance rightly attributes the child to God, who grants her "laughter"; here she makes her point by a play, substituting "laughter" for the name "Isaac," v. 6a.

**21:8-10.** The Bible does not indicate Isaac's age when he was weaned. In some cultures, children receive nourishment from their mother into their fifth year; beyond age two this provides comfort more than nourishment. When the day came for Isaac to be weaned, Abraham held a great feast to assist the child psychologically in taking this step. During the party, however, Ishmael was mocking Isaac. The apostle Paul understood this to mean he was persecuting Isaac (Gal 4:29). "Drive out" (Hb garash) is



the same term used to describe the expulsions of Adam and Cain following their sins (3:24; 4:14).

**21:11-13.** It was a very difficult thing for Abraham (lit “it was very bad in Abraham’s eyes”) to expel his firstborn son from the household. However, God’s guidance and comforting assurances enabled Abraham to do the right thing. Because Ishmael was Abraham’s offspring, God would not allow the child to die in the wilderness; instead, God would make him a nation. And though Isaac was not Abraham’s firstborn, the patriarch’s offspring would be traced through his lineage.

**21:14-19.** Abraham’s love and concern for Hagar and Ishmael are reflected in his diligence—getting up early and giving them provisions. The banished pair wandered in the Wilderness of Beer-sheba, an area some 20 miles west of the southern end of the Dead Sea. When Hagar and Ishmael ran out of water, Ishmael almost died, perhaps of heatstroke. Overwhelmed with grief, Hagar placed him in the shadow of one of the bushes and then went about a bowshot away—just far enough to avoid hearing his voice as he lay dying. Though Hagar may not have known that where there is large vegetation in a desert there is also a high water table, God opened her eyes to the fact that a well of water was nearby. God had providentially directed her wanderings and given her a demonstration of His faithfulness.

**21:20-21.** Honoring His promises to Abraham (v. 13; 17:20) and Hagar (21:18), God protected Ishmael, who eventually settled in the Wilderness of Paran, west of the Gulf of Aqaba in the northern Sinai Desert. Hagar, who was herself an Egyptian (16:3), got her son an Egyptian wife. Ishmael would produce 12 sons (25:13-15).

