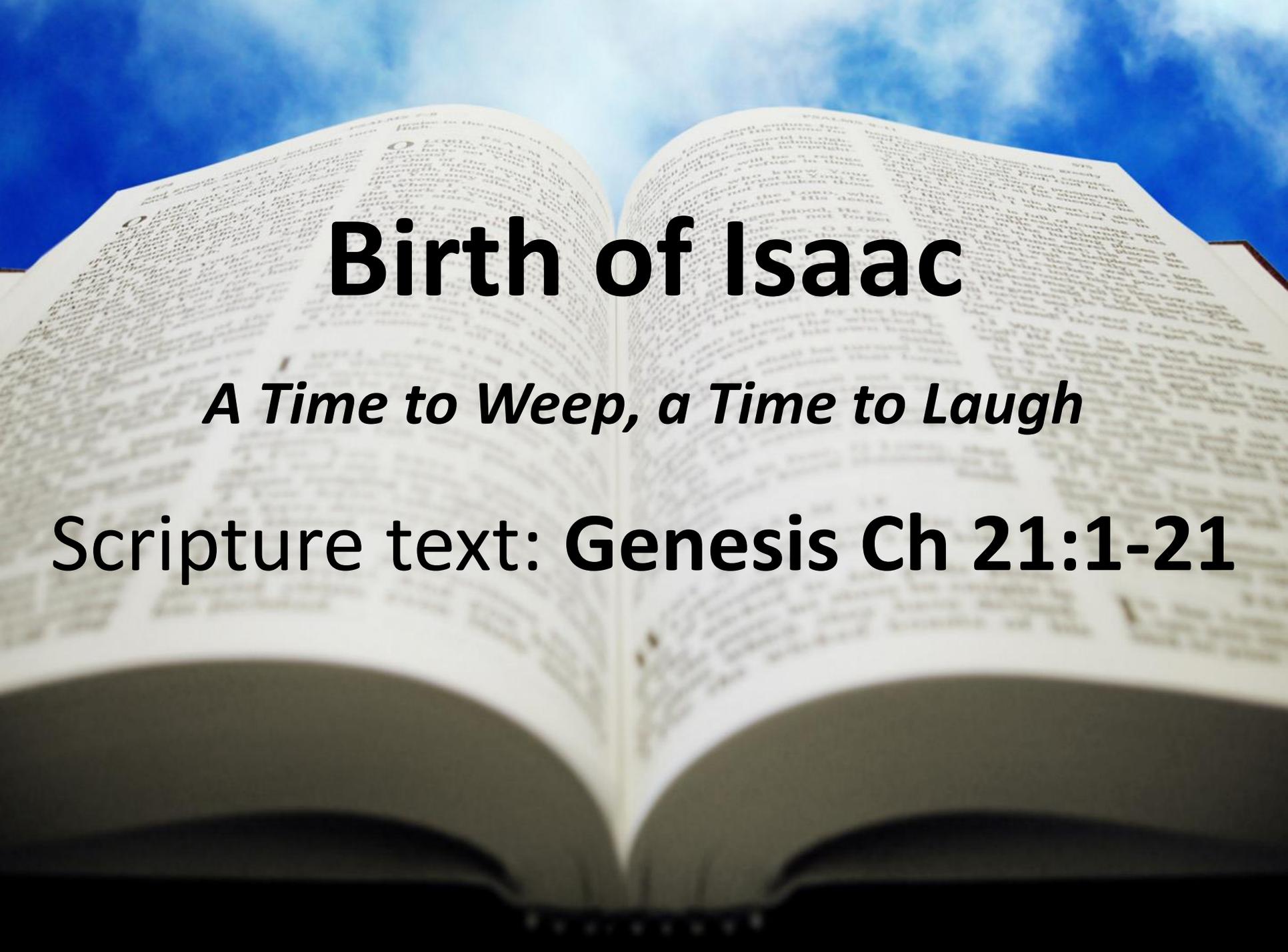


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# Birth of Isaac

*A Time to Weep, a Time to Laugh*

Scripture text: **Genesis Ch 21:1-21**

**“The Christian life is a land of hills and valleys,”** said Scottish preacher George Morrison, basing his words on Deuteronomy 11:11.

Solomon expressed the same idea when he wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:4 that “[there is] **a time to weep, and a time to laugh.**” Heaven is a place of unending joy; hell is a place of unending suffering; but while we are here on earth, **we must expect both joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. You cannot have hills without valleys.**

**Deuteronomy 11:11-12** But the land that you are going over **to possess is a land of hills and valleys**, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for. The eyes of the LORD your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

**Ecclesiastes 3:4** a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

This is especially **true of family life**, for the same people who bring us joy can also bring us sorrow. Relationships can become strained and then change overnight, and we wonder what happened to a happy home. A Chinese proverb says, **“Nobody’s family can hang out the sign ‘Nothing the matter here.’ ”**

The coming of Isaac into their home brought both sorrow and joy to Abraham and Sarah. As you look at the persons involved in this important event, you can learn some **valuable lessons** about basic Christian doctrine and how to live the Christian life.

## **Abraham and Sarah: faith and promise (Gen. 21:1–7)**

Sarah had borne the burden of childlessness for many years, a heavy burden indeed in that culture and at that time. People must have smiled when they heard that her husband's name was Abraham, **“father of a multitude.”** He was the father of one son, Ishmael, but that was far from a multitude; and Sarah had never given birth. **But now all of her reproach was ended, and they were rejoicing in the arrival of their son.**

**Genesis 21:1-7** The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And **Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son** in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And **Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.** Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, "**God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.**" 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."

But the birth of Isaac involved much more than parental joy, for **his birth meant the fulfillment of God's promise.** When God had called Abraham, He promised to make of him a great nation that would bless the whole world. Then He repeatedly promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants and to multiply them greatly. Abraham would be the father of the promised seed, and Sarah (not Hagar) would be the mother. The birth of Isaac reminds us that God keeps His promises, in His own way, and in His own time. In spite of their occasional failures, Abraham and Sarah believed God; and God honored their faith.

**Genesis 12:1-3** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And **I will make of you a great nation**, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**"

**Genesis 17:5-8** No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, **for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.** I will make you **exceedingly fruitful**, and I will make you into nations, and **kings shall come from you.** And I will establish my covenant between me and you and **your offspring** after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, **for an everlasting possession,** and I will be their God."

**Genesis 13:14-17** The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, **for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.**"

**Genesis 15:2-6** But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, **you have given me no offspring**, and a member of my household will be my heir." And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "**This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.**" And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." **And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**

**Hebrews 6:13-15** For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "**Surely I will bless you and multiply you.**" And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.

**Hebrews 10:36** For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

**James 1:2-8** Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, **for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.** And let steadfastness have its **full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But **let him ask in faith, with no doubting,** for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

The birth of Isaac was certainly the revelation of **God's power**. That was one reason why God waited so long: He wanted Abraham and Sarah to be **“as good as dead”** so that **their son's birth would be a miracle of God and not a marvel of human nature** (Rom. 4:17–21).

Abraham and Sarah experienced God's **resurrection power** in their lives because they yielded to Him and believed His Word. Faith in God's promises releases God's power (Eph. 3:20–21; Phil. 3:10), **“for no word from God shall be void of power”** (Luke 1:37, ASV).

**Romans 4:17-21** as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who **gives life to the dead** and calls into existence the things that do not exist. **In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations**, as he had been told, "**So shall your offspring be.**" He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. **No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.**

**Ephesians 3:20-21** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

**Philippians 3:10** that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

**Luke 1:37** For nothing will be impossible with God."

**Finally, the birth of Isaac** was a step forward in the **accomplishing of God's purpose**. The future redemption of a lost world rested with a little baby boy! Isaac would beget Jacob, and Jacob would give the world the twelve tribes of Israel; and from Israel the promised Messiah would be born. Down through the centuries, some of the **“living links”** in the chain of promise may have seemed insignificant and weak; but they helped to fulfill the purposes of God.

You may wonder **if what you do is really important to God** and His work in this world; but it is, **if you are faithful to trust His Word and do His will.** The next time you feel defeated and discouraged, **remember Abraham and Sarah; and remind yourself that faith and promise go together.** God keeps His promises and gives you the power you need to do what He wants you to do. No matter how long you may have to wait, you can trust God to accomplish His purposes.

# Isaac and Ishmael: Spirit and flesh

In Galatians 4:28–29, Paul makes it clear that Ishmael represents the believer’s first birth (**the flesh**) and Isaac represents the second birth (**the Spirit**). Ishmael was “born of the flesh” because Abraham had not yet “**died**” and was still able to beget a son (Gen. 16). Isaac was “**born of the Spirit**” because by that time his parents were both “**dead**” and only God’s power could have brought conception and birth. **Ishmael was born first, because the natural comes before the spiritual (1 Cor. 15:46).**

**Galatians 4:24-28** Now this may be interpreted allegorically: **these women are two covenants.** One is from **Mount Sinai**, bearing children for **slavery**; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the **Jerusalem above is free**, and she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! **For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.**" Now you, brothers, **like Isaac, are children of promise.**

**1 Corinthians 15:45-49** Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. **But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.** The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. **Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.**

**When you trust Jesus Christ**, you experience a miracle birth from God (John 1:11–13), and it is the work of the Holy Spirit of God (John 3:1–8).

Abraham represents faith, and Sarah represents grace (Gal. 4:24–26), so Isaac was born “**by grace ... through faith**” (Eph. 2:8–9).

This is the only way a lost sinner can enter the family of God (John 3:16–18).

**John 1:9-13** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. **But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

**Ephesians 2:4-9** But **God, being rich in mercy,** because of the **great love** with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**--by grace you have been saved--and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **For by grace you have been saved through faith.** And this is not your own doing; **it is the gift of God,** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**John 3:16-18** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever **believes in him** should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but **in order that the world might be saved through him**. Whoever **believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

It is worth noting that, in the biblical record, **God often rejected the firstborn and accepted the second-born.** He rejected Cain and chose Abel (Gen. 4:1–15). He rejected Ishmael, Abraham’s firstborn, and **chose Isaac.** He bypassed Esau, Isaac’s firstborn, and **chose Jacob** (Rom. 9:8–13); and He **chose Ephraim** instead of Manasseh (Gen. 48). In Egypt, the Lord condemned all the firstborn (Ex. 11–12) and spared only those who were “**twice-born**” because they were **protected by faith in the blood of the lamb.**

**Genesis 4:3-7** In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. **And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.** So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? **If you do well, will you not be accepted?** And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

**Romans 9:8-13** This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but **the children of the promise are counted as offspring.** For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, **though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--in order that God's purpose of election might continue,** not because of works but **because of him who calls--**she was told, "**The older will serve the younger.**" As it is written, "**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.**"

**Genesis 48:13-16** And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. And **Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger**, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, **crossing his hands** (for Manasseh was the firstborn). And he blessed Joseph and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

**Exodus 11:4-7** So Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight **I will go out in the midst of Egypt**, and **every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die**, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and **all the firstborn** of the cattle. There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, **that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.**

Isaac pictures the child of God not only in his birth but also **in the joy that he brought**. Isaac means “laughter,” and this time it was not the laughter of unbelief (Gen. 18:9–15). In the parables recorded in Luke 15, **Jesus emphasized the joy that results when lost sinners repent and come to the Lord**. The shepherd rejoiced when he found the lost sheep, and the woman rejoiced when she found the lost coin; and they both asked their friends to rejoice with them. The father rejoiced when his prodigal son came home, and he invited the neighbors to a feast so they could share in his joy. **There is even joy in heaven when sinners turn to God** (Luke 15:7, 10).

**Luke 15:7-10** Just so, I tell you, **there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.** "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, '**Rejoice with me**, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, **there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.**"