

Welcome to Promise Land Bible Church  
We're glad you're here!



An open Bible is shown from a low angle, looking up at the pages. The pages are filled with text, but it is out of focus. The background is a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds. The title 'Spirit and Flesh' is centered over the pages in a large, bold, black font. Below it, the scripture text 'Scripture text: Genesis Ch 21:1-11' is also centered in a slightly smaller, bold, black font.

# **Spirit and Flesh**

**Scripture text: Genesis Ch 21:1-11**

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.**"

**Nowhere do we read that Ishmael caused great joy in Abraham's home.** Abraham loved his son and wanted the best for him (Gen. 17:18). From before his birth, **Ishmael was a source of painful trouble** (Gen. 16); and after he matured, he caused even greater conflict in the family (21:9).

The old nature is not able to produce the fruit of the Spirit, no matter how hard it tries (Gal. 5:16–26).

**Genesis 17:18-21** And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."

**Genesis 16:3-6** So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and **gave her to Abram her husband as a wife.** And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, **she looked with contempt on her mistress.** And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "**Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.**" Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

**Galatians 5:16-18** But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for **these are opposed to each other**, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**

**Galatians 5:19-21** Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**Galatians 5:22-25** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.**

Note a third comparison between Isaac and the child of God: He grew and was weaned (Gen. 21:8). The new birth is not the end, but the beginning; and **the believer must feed on God's Word and grow spiritually** (Matt. 4:4; 1 Cor. 3:1–3; Heb. 5:12–14; 1 Peter 2:1–3; 2 Peter 3:18).

**As we mature in the Lord, we must “put away childish things”** (1 Cor. 13:9–11) and **allow God to “wean us”** (Ps. 131) from **temporary helps that can become permanent hindrances.**

**Matthew 4:4** But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but **by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**"

**2 Peter 3:18** But **grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

**1 Corinthians 3:1-3** But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

**Hebrews 5:11-14** About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though **by this time you ought to be teachers**, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.** But solid food is for the mature, **for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.**

**1 Peter 2:1-5** So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. **Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation--if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

**1 Corinthians 13:8-12** Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. **When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

The mother weans the child because **she loves the child and wants it to be free to grow up** and not be dependent on her. But the child interprets her actions as an expression of rejection and hatred. The child clings to the comforts of the past as **the mother tries to encourage the child to grow up and enter into the challenges of the future**. The time comes in every Christian life when **toys must be replaced by tools and selfish security by unselfish service** (John 12:23–26).

Like every child of God, **Isaac experienced persecution** (Gen. 21:9; Gal. 4:29). Ishmael was apparently an obedient son until Isaac entered the family, and then the **“flesh” began to oppose “the Spirit.”** It has well been said that **the old nature knows no law but the new nature needs no law,** and this is certainly illustrated in Abraham’s two sons.

**Galatians 4:29** But 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.

Jewish children were usually weaned at about age three, so Ishmael was probably seventeen years old at the time (Gen. 16:16).

What arrogance that a boy of seventeen should torment a little boy of only three! But God had said that Ishmael would become “a wild donkey of a man” (16:12), and the prediction came true. The flesh and the Spirit are in conflict with each other and always will be until we see the Lord (Gal. 5:16–26).

**Genesis 16:15-16** And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. **Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.**

**Genesis 21:4-5** 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.**

When, like Isaac, you are born of the Spirit, you are born rich (Gen. 21:10). **Isaac was the heir of all that his father owned, and God's children are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ"** (Rom. 8:17).

Abraham cared for Ishmael while the boy was in the home, but **"Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac"** (Gen. 25:5).

**Romans 8:14-18** For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but **you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons**, by whom we cry, "**Abba! Father!**" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that **we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ**, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**

Finally, Isaac was born free while Ishmael was the son of a slave (Gal. 4:22). Freedom is one of the key themes in Galatians (5:1) and one of the key blessings in the Christian life (4:31). Of course, Christian freedom does not mean anarchy; for that is the worst kind of bondage. It means the freedom to be and to do all that God has for us in Jesus Christ. “No man in this world attains to freedom from any slavery except by entrance into some higher servitude,” said Phillips Brooks; and that “higher servitude” is personal surrender to Jesus Christ. No one is more free than the child of God who delights in God’s will and does it from the heart.

**Galatians 4:22-23** For it is written that **Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.** His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but **his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.**

**Gal 5:1** It is for freedom that **Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then,** and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

**Galatians 4:28-31** Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are **children of promise**. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? "**Get rid of the slave woman and her son**, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers, **we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.**

## **Sarah and Hagar: grace and Law (Gen. 21:9–13)**

Sarah was wrong when she told Abraham to marry Hagar (Gen. 16:1–2), but she was right when she told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael out of the camp. The Apostle Paul saw in this event an **allegory involving the Law of Moses and the grace of God** (Gal. 4:21–31).

**Sarah represents grace** (the heavenly Jerusalem), and **Hagar represents Law** (the earthly Jerusalem under bondage). The lesson is simply that **God's children are to live under the blessings of grace and not the bondage of Law.**

The conflicts in Abraham's home could have been solved four ways. Isaac could have been sent away, but that would mean rejecting the promises of God and all that God had planned for the future. Isaac and Ishmael could have lived together, but that would mean **constant conflict**. Ishmael's nature could have been changed to make him more agreeable, but **that would have required a miracle**. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6), and it always will be flesh. **The only solution was to send Ishmael and his mother out of the camp and make Isaac the sole heir.**

**John 3:3-7** In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." How can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. **Flesh gives birth to flesh**, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, **'You must be born again.'**

When you consider the facts about Hagar, you will better understand the relationship between Law and grace in the Christian life.

**John 6:63-65** The Spirit gives life; **the flesh counts for nothing.** The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, **"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."**

To begin with, Hagar was Abraham's second wife. She was added alongside Sarah. Likewise, the Law was "added" alongside God's already existing promises and was temporary (Gal. 3:19, 24–25). God did not start with Law; **He started with grace.** His relationship to Adam and Eve was based on grace, not Law, even though He did test them by means of one simple restriction (Gen. 2:15–17). **The redemption of Israel from Egypt was an act of God's grace, as was His provision, the sacrifices, and priesthood.** Before Moses gave the Law, Israel was already in a covenant relationship with God ("married to God") through His promises to the patriarchs (Ex. 19:1–8).

**Galatians 3:19** Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.

**Galatians 3:24-26** So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

**Genesis 2:15-17** The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the **LORD God commanded the man**, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but **of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat**, for in the day that you eat of it **you shall surely die.**"

Only 1 Law, as stated above. Abundance of freedom, only one rule/Law. What do we have today?

**Exodus 19:3-6** while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "**Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob**, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, **if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant**, you shall be my **treasured possession** among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and **you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

**Second, Hagar was a servant.** “Wherefore, then, serveth the Law?” Paul asks in Galatians 3:19, and he gives the answer. The Law was God’s servant (a “schoolmaster” or “child tutor”) **to keep the infant nation of Israel under control and prepare them for the coming of the Redeemer (3:24–25; 4:1–5). The Law was given to reveal sin (Rom. 3:20) but not to redeem us from sin. Grace does not serve Law; it is Law that serves grace!** The Law reveals our need for grace, and **grace saves us completely apart from the works of the Law (Rom. 3:20, 28).**

**Romans 3:19-23** Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those **who are under the law**, so that every **mouth may be stopped**, and the **whole world may be held accountable to God**. For by works of the law **no human being will be justified in his sight**, since **through the law comes knowledge of sin**. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the **Law and the Prophets bear witness** to it--the righteousness of God **through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe**. For there is no distinction: **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**,