

### **Life of Faith, Pt 13: God is True Though Everyone is a Liar (Gen 20-21)**

This morning we're going to be looking at Genesis 20 and the first part of chapter 21, but I want to start reading the context back in Genesis 12.

Genesis 21 is God fulfilling what He promised in Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17, 18

[God is faithful to His promise to give a son to Abraham and Sarah]

On this day, somewhere in America, people are pledging promises to each other in marriage, but statistics tell us many won't keep the promises they make today. On this *year* in America some promises of government won't be kept, not only in areas of rate or tax increases (where some don't even expect politicians to deliver promises), but recently fundamental assurances of privacy have crumbled, and questions remain about alleged dishonesty of U.S. government officials after Benghazi. That's all just in recent headlines.

On this *day* in America, many people will mislead, deceive. In this *hour*, in *this place*, perhaps some have lied already. Maybe it's by saying things not completely true in casual conversation before the service, or singing words you didn't mean or don't really believe. Genesis 12 gives a contrast to our world, in contrast even to people the Lord saves out of the world who still struggle with honesty, there's One who is the truth and life in a world where everyone is a liar. We are all liars, it's a matter of degree and the definition of lying. But in Numbers 23:19 it says *God is not a man, that He should lie*

Man lies, but it is impossible for God to lie. There is One who is a Promise Keeper to us who are all promise breakers. Another verse says "*Let God be true but every man a liar*" (Rom. 3:4). Paul says to Timothy "*If we are faithless He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself*" (2 Timothy 2:13). That's good news for us, Amen? This is the God who speaks here:

12:1 *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; <sup>2</sup> And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; <sup>3</sup> And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."* ... <sup>11</sup> *It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; <sup>12</sup> and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup> "Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me ..."*

But the lie backfires in v. 15 when Pharaoh takes her to be part of his harem

<sup>17</sup> But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. <sup>18</sup> Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? **Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?**" <sup>19</sup> "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife..." [a pagan Gentile rebukes the father of the Jews]

God remains faithful to His promise to Abraham to bless him, here *in spite of Abraham*. God chose or elected Him unconditionally. It was sovereign grace that called Abraham, God's effectual calling of an undeserving sinner, just like us, not because he was better than the pagans around him (in fact here he has to be rebuked by a pagan king, and will be again in chapter 20)!

**20:1** Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar. <sup>2</sup> **Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister."** So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. <sup>3</sup> But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married." <sup>4</sup> Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a nation, even though blameless?" <sup>5</sup> "Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'?" And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." <sup>6</sup> Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her." <sup>7</sup> "Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours." <sup>8</sup> So Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were greatly frightened. <sup>9</sup> Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? **You have done to me things that ought not to be done.**" <sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?" <sup>11</sup> Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife." <sup>12</sup> "Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife;" <sup>13</sup> and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'

Title of today's message: God is True Though Everyone is a Liar

That language from Romans 3 really summarizes today's message. In Rom. 4 Paul spends a whole chapter on Abraham and how he was saved, justified, not because he was such a good and righteous guy, but because Abraham was *declared righteous by God*, and saved by an imputed righteousness. God gave a righteousness that wasn't Abraham's to Abraham as a gift by grace through faith on that hour he first believed. It was completely outside of him, completely from the righteousness of the Lord credited to Abraham at saving faith (like us). And in the chapter before that, Rom. 3, it also says what was true of Abraham and all is we're by nature unrighteous, untruthful.

ESV "*Let God be true though every one were a liar ...*" and then Paul goes on to say "*None is righteous, no, not one ...* [and he explains of the universal sinfulness of all people] ... *they use their tongues to deceive.*" (v. 4, 10, 13). Then it closes that section of quotes from the OT to say of all fallen unsaved mankind: "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*" Now ironically, that's exactly what Abraham says of Gerar in Genesis 20, v. 11, but then Abraham uses his tongue to deceive. This chapter proves *there is none righteous, no not one*, and even those whom the Lord has declared righteous by faith, like Abraham, can still be deceived and still use their tongues to deceive. There is not even one who has never lied, but God is true though everyone's a liar.

God is true to His Word even to His people who fail to keep theirs. Heb. 11 is the great faith chapter that spends several verses on Abraham and Sarah's faith, mostly from chapters *before Genesis 20*. Then Hebrews 12 says for the race of faith we need to keep putting off the sin that so easily entangles, looking to or fixing our eyes on Jesus. For Abraham, lying seems to be a besetting sin, a recurring sin that so easily entangled him when he took his eyes off the Lord. In the context of Hebrews 11, the "by faith" chapter, the sin that easily ensnares, entangles, or clings closely, we could argue it's lack of faith ultimately. Our unbelief manifests in particular sins that cling to us.

One author sums up Genesis 20 as "2 steps forward, 1 step back" (or some times, it's 1 step forward, 2 or 3 steps back). The writer says of Abraham's step back into the sin again of Genesis 12: 'the whole cycle was reenacted, and Abraham fell into exactly the same trap all over again. The issue was really the same one we saw in Genesis 16 [there Abraham seeks children as God promised, but outside the bounds of marriage by sinful means with Hagar] ... The question with which Abraham struggled, just like so many of us, was this: Can God keep his promises without any help from me?'<sup>1</sup>

Abraham tries to help God out, then God has to help Abraham out of the mess Abraham created. God doesn't help those who help themselves or who think they themselves can help God! But the good news is God is faithful to His promise despite man's mess-up and He is gracious to clean up and keep using His flawed servants. God keeps His Word to those who don't deserve it, which is all of us (Gen 21 is His gracious provision in the birth of Isaac).

### OUTLINE:

1. The failure of man (20:1-13)
2. The faithfulness of God (20:14-21:7)

#### **1. The failure of man (v. 1-13)**

Verse 1 starts with Abraham the pilgrim travelling in the land of Gerar, the land of people later called the Philistines. It was part of the promised land that Abraham had been sojourning in as an alien or as a pilgrim, but in v. 2 we see a "pilgrim's regress." He regresses to his old habit, saying of his wife "she is my sister." Abraham is a pilgrim in v. 1, and we have seen him make progress in the chapters before, but as pilgrims make progress, sometimes in the process, pilgrims regress, or go backwards in faith 1 or 2 or more steps.

The same thing that happened in Gen 12 happens again in Gen 20:2. The king sees beautiful Sarah who he hears is single, the brother of Abraham, so in the end of v.2 King Abimelech takes her to be his wife. This threatened God's promise because God told them in Gen 18 Sarah will bear Abraham a son *in 1 year*. If she's now living in the King's palace as his concubine away from Abraham, how can she bear, much less conceive, his promised child?

Derek Kidner writes of the flow of Gen 20-21: 'on the brink of Isaac's birth-story here is the very Promise put in jeopardy, traded away for personal safety. If it is ever to be fulfilled, it will owe very little to man. Morally and well as physically, it will clearly have to be achieved by the grace of God.'<sup>2</sup>

I think this is also the point of the end of chapter 19 in the context. If you remember from last time, Lot's family also regressed. Lot lost his wife in another way, and repercussions of sin from dad's sinful choices also resulted in his beloved losing purity in a way outside God's plan - incest to produce Lot's children (Moabites and Ammonites, enemies of Israel later). Abraham had also pursued children outside God's plan with Hagar - also violating the purity of his beloved Sarah outside God's plan (Ishmael -> Ishmaelites, also later enemies of Israel). Both sins weren't just immorality, but also idolatry.

The book *Living in the Gap Between Promise and Reality* explains this well

'In the last chapter, we say Lot's daughters giving in to the temptation to say, "If I can't have \_\_\_\_\_, then God is not enough." They said to themselves, "We must have children if our lives are going to be meaningful. We can't get them in the usual way, so ... [you know the rest]" They had to choose between having children and living in obedience to God's law - and they chose children. Here [in Gen 20] Abraham was saying that his personal safety was more important than obedience. If he couldn't have both, then he would choose safety [as he admits in Gen 20:11, he thought he might die if he didn't lie]. Safety, preserving his own life, had become his idol, just as obtaining children was an idol for Lot's daughters.

How many of us have similar idolatries. Perhaps your idol is control. So you say to yourself, "Lord, I trust you -- but I need to know at all times how everything is going to work out." Or perhaps your idol is comfort. You say, "Lord, I'll go wherever you want me to go -- but don't ask me to leave behind my nice home and pleasant lifestyle." For another, it may be the opinions of other people: "Lord I want to witness for you -- but only if I can do it without people thinking I'm..." Whenever there is something more important to you than obeying God, you have set up an idol in your heart.<sup>13</sup>

The anatomy of idolatry sometimes comes out when confronted, like v. 10. In v. 11 we see the fear of man was what dominated and drove Abraham (it similarly brought a great NT man of faith, Peter, to lie and deny his Lord). Fear of man is a strong idol that can only be smashed by a far bigger God.

In v. 11 Abraham thought there was no fear of God in that place, but fear of man had become bigger to him than the God he should have trusted then. In v. 11 he's speaking to himself about his feelings and fears, but he should have been *preaching to himself about his faithful God, the far greater King*. Our fears and feelings and fashioned idols in our hearts must all bow before God just like later in this land of the Philistines their idol Dagon had to bow before God's presence, broken into pieces, before the ark of God's covenant.

But Abraham is not thinking about God's covenant promises or presence in v. 11, the God who spoke to him audibly in chapter 12 and 13, the God who was with Abraham mightily in chapter 14 to conquer multiple armies with only 318 men, the God who appeared personally in fire in chapter 15 and cut the covenant and walked through the animals to affirm his promise to Abraham and his seed all the promised land from Egypt to Iraq as an eternal possession (partially temporarily seen in OT but Jesus will reign over it all).

God appeared visibly again in chapter 17 to reaffirm the covenant with a visible sign, and then in chapter 18 God appeared physically in bodily form as a man, the Lord we later know as Jesus Himself promises in Gen 18:14 that He would return that same time next year, and Sarah would have a son. This is the same God who showed power to annihilate an entire society in chapter 19, Sodom and Gomorrah, by fire and brimstone, which Abraham saw in Gen 19:27-28. Surely God has power to protect Abraham in Gen 20!

The God who by the words of His mouth spoke the heavens and the earth into existence in Gen 1, the God who by His fingers created the universe and all its starry hosts, the God who by His hand created woman in Gen 2 as man's partner and perfect help-meet, the God who by His mighty arm made a flood of judgment cover the entire planet in Gen 6, surely this God is big enough to come through on His promise to keep Abraham and Sarah alive and to give them a son and descendants as numerous as the stars of Gen 1!

But this is our problem as well. We know by faith intellectually that God is an out-of-nothing-making universe-creating solar-system-decorating walls-of-Jericho-shaking lions-den-taming dead-people-raising God, but then we think He can't take care of us or our family or our problems! Despite God's reputation and track record as a red-sea-divider and fiery-furnace-cooler, we act as if we think He's not big enough to handle our situations and problems.

Our temptations and tendencies and idolatries may differ from Abraham's, but this story is relevant to us all. How do you know something is an idol? You're willing to sin to get it, or you sin if you don't get it. Idols aren't just bad things we want, they can be good things we want that eclipse God or take the place only God should have in our heart. Wanting to have kids is not a bad thing (but in chapter 16 and 19 biblical principles were violated in order to get it, and later in Genesis 30, Rachel sins by becoming bitter when she doesn't get it: "give me children or I die"). Wanting to be safe isn't such a bad thing, but in Genesis 20, Abraham deceives and manipulates to seek it

In v. 13 NIV: *'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."* In other words, "if you really love me..." but when men say things like that, it's often their own self-love driving it, and using emotional manipulation to control only makes their idol obvious. Abraham tries to justify himself in v. 12 by explaining it's partially true that they were brother-and-sister (not by blood but by another marriage), but the problem is it was deceptive, hiding the fact that they were husband and wife

Hiding truth or a half-truth is a lie. Our lies affect other people besides us. Verse 3 says this not only compromised Abraham's wife, it also jeopardized Abimelech's life. It threatened His kingdom (v. 9b), and future kids (v. 18). We never sin in a vacuum. Our compromises affect our family and others.

[not fair? Welcome to a sin-cursed world, messed up since Gen 3]

Gen 20:5 makes clear Sarah was also guilty in this sin: *“Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’* If a man leads his wife into sin or asks her to sin (ex: lie to cover and say he's not home, or agree to lie on income taxes, or if he asks her to watch or do anything violating her conscience), she's not to follow or submit by sinning, as she must obey God rather than man. Godly leaders lead away from sin. Abraham is a deceiver-leader in v. 5 and has to be rebuked by an unbeliever

God says in v. 6 that Abimelech had integrity of heart and didn't sin, but He doesn't say that of Abraham, who did sin and wasn't showing integrity here. Ironically, God doesn't talk to Abraham in Gen 20, God talks to Abimelech and Abimelech relays God's message to Abraham who is called a prophet by God in v. 7. A pagan king has to tell God's prophet what God said, not the other way around. Ironically, Abraham who is supposed to be a blessing to all nations, has now brought God's curse on this nation. Sadly, Abraham the witness for the truth, is seen in v. 8 by all the king's servants as a liar. In v. 8 the men fear God, the very thing Abraham thought they didn't in v. 11.

In the end of v. 9, Abimelech calls what Abraham did a "great sin" and tells Abraham he did what should not be done. That's point #1: the failure of man  
**#2. The Faithfulness of God**

Abraham blows it royally before the royal court, but the King above kings in heaven is faithful to His promise from earlier in Genesis despite great sin.

<sup>14</sup> *Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him.* <sup>15</sup> *Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; settle wherever you please.”*

Did Abraham deserve that? Absolutely not! It was grace to the undeserved (which all grace is). It proves when we're faithless God remains faithful. He is true though all men are liars. Gen 12 ends very similarly: Pharaoh gives many flocks and servants and his wife back unharmed, but with a rebuke. It was a lesson that God's promised blessing and loving isn't based mere men.

Jesus loves me when I'm good, when I do the things I should  
 Jesus loves me when I'm bad, though it makes Him very sad<sup>4</sup>

We need to remember, as justified believers, the doctrine of justification teaches us God loves us and views us with favor always only because of Christ, because He sees us in Christ, covered with the perfect righteousness of Christ. He loves me as His Son because I'm in His Son, based on His Son in whom the Father is always well-pleased. So there's nothing I can ever do to make Him love me more and nothing I can do to make Him love me less!

That should motivate us to not be bad, to not make sad our Father. God can be grieved by sin, but He always loves and looks with favor on us in Christ. When Paul lays out that doctrine in the NT, Abraham is Paul's exhibit A. If Gen 15:6 isn't clear enough it's all by grace through faith alone, read Gen 20

F. B. Meyer writes of this pattern in Genesis and Scripture: 'It would almost appear as if the Spirit of God took delight in showing that the original texture of God's saints was not higher than that of other men ... What they became, they became in spite of their natural selves. So marvelous is the wonder-working power of the grace of God that he can graft his rare fruits on the wildest stocks. He seems to delight to secure his choicest results in natures which men of the world might reject as hopelessly bad.'<sup>5</sup>

Notice how faithful God is to His promise to bless Abraham: <sup>16</sup> *To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver ...*

50 pieces 'was the most that could be offered for a bride. This was the price of twenty brides! Abraham's folly is met by amazing grace.<sup>16</sup> v. 16 says it's *vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared ...*[ESV *It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you...*]

KJV and some of your footnotes say the Hebrew is "a covering of the eyes for all"—every other time this word is used, it's for the covering of clothing. It may be a subtle or sarcastic way to say "buy some clothes, cover up, so that other eyes won't also be looking at you as a target as well" (others think it means covering of her shame). The NKJV takes this as a rebuke in v. 16. Abraham as head of his home should have been the covering for his wife.

A godly man should want to protect his wife's (and daughters) purity and modesty and integrity and how men view them. Godly headship should seek to shield women, guard, and guide them in how they conduct themselves to protect them from ungodly men's eyes and desires for what is not theirs. A head of a home should make sure those who go out from it are covered.

Matthew Poole translates this “covering of the eyes” as ‘a protection to thee from the wanton eyes and attempts of others, [so] they know thee to be the wife of another man...Or...this I give to thee to buy thee a veil.’<sup>7</sup> In the OT, what a woman wore signified her relationship to headship, single, widowed. Cultures change but how one is covered (or not) still communicates today.

Whatever exactly v. 16 meant in ancient Hebrew, the irony is again that this ungodly king seems more concerned for her honor than her godly husband. Ultimately God is the one who protects Sarah’s purity by not allowing this king to touch her, as v. 6 says. God takes marriage seriously, and adulterers in His law deserved the death penalty, as v. 3 makes clear, even before God gave laws to Moses. God basically tells Him in v. 3 “touch another man’s wife, you’re dead.” Even “almost adultery” brought a curse on Abimelech.

<sup>17</sup> *Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife ...*

Later in Leviticus God says that even for unintentional sins or sins of ignorance, there is need for a mediator, and clearance, and God gave instructions for those sins how to make things right with Him. But we also should see we need a mediator greater than Abraham (his promised Seed):

<sup>17</sup> *Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children.* <sup>18</sup> *For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.*

There’s an encouraging note for Sarah here. If God opened the wombs of Abimelech’s household, who were outside the covenant, surely He could open the womb of the wife of the head of God’s covenant, just as promised. Despite Sarah’s lying to Abimelech, God protects her from lying with him. Abraham and Sarah were guilty of sin but receive grace greater than all sin.

**21** *Then the LORD took note of [‘visited/was gracious to’] Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised.* <sup>2</sup> *So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, **at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.*** <sup>3</sup> *Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.* <sup>4</sup> *Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, **as God had commanded him.*** <sup>5</sup> *Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.* <sup>6</sup> *Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.”* <sup>7</sup> *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.”*

God keeps His promise to His undeserving and unfaithful child Abraham and gives him a child in chapter 21. The woman who laughed in disbelief in chapter 18 is now laughing for joy in God-given wonder, love, and praise. This wife who had been barren for decades is now bearing a child for her husband who she thought was as good as dead (and the NT says he was). In v. 7 she marvels, at an age we put in nursing homes, she's nursing a baby!

We need to marvel at marvelous infinite matchless grace freely bestowed on all who believe! We should be encouraged, as we wait for the promise of God and providence of God in our life. This wasn't on Abraham's timetable (it was 25 years after chapter 12), but God faithfully fulfils His promises. If we are faithless, God remains faithful, because God cannot deny Himself. If we ever doubt that, we need to remember a 100-year-old with his newborn.

This should be an encouragement to the senior saints among us. Most don't live as long as Abraham anymore, but God is not through with you as soon as you reach what modern America calls retirement age. It was after age 65:

- Laura Ingalls Wilder cranked out her first book *Little House on the Prairie*
- Colonel Harland Sanders perfected 11 herbs and spices for you KFC fans
- Oscar Swahn in his 60s won an Olympic gold medal and a silver at age 72
- Golda Meir at age 71 became prime minister of Israel
- Grandma Moses at age 76 began her famous career as a painter
- India was led to freedom from British rule by a 78-year-old Mahatma
- 84-year-old Aquino led the Philippines' fight for independence from Spain
- Irene Wells Pennington in her 90s took control of the family business and turned a \$600 million oil company into some serious money
- And Abraham and Sarah in their 90s are just getting warmed up as parents

We can be thankful God is not through with us when the world thinks we're through, but God is faithful to use older believers to change the generation to come. Senior saints here, we need you to remind us of God's faithfulness. God blessed Abraham and Sarah, not so they could check out on life and kick back, but so they could be a blessing (Gen 12:3) to generations to come

Ps 71:18: *even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come*

May God answer that prayer in this church as the older instruct the younger. Psalm 92:13 NKJV *Those who are planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God. <sup>14</sup> They shall still bear fruit in old age ...*

We need to remember this truth, and we need your help to remind us of it. Go back to Genesis 17 to remember the context and the covenant promises. Genesis 17 begins when Abraham is 99 years old and the Lord appears and promises the covenant and to multiply his children, making him a father of many nations. In v. 12 He commands Abraham to circumcise newborn boys on the 8<sup>th</sup> day as a sign of the covenant, which Abraham obeys in chapter 21

Look at Genesis 17:15 *Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.*

Sarai's name originally meant "my princess," presumably her dad gave her that special term of endearment as his precious little girl. Now her heavenly Father in v. 15 renames her *Sarah*, "a princess," possibly emphasizing her identity isn't just that family anymore, or even just Abram's family or the nation Israel to come from her. She will be a princess to bless all the earth's families and nations, which is what God promised to her husband (12:3).

God's precious promise in v. 16 now includes her also: ***“I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”***

This 90-year-old lady would have children of nations from her. It says in 1 Peter 3:6 that Christian Gentiles are children of Sarah. A godly wife, Peter says, doesn't need gold jewels like a princess of the world, she doesn't draw attention to herself by her dress but has a "*gentle and quiet spirit...precious in the sight of God*" (v. 4). Don't dress like the world's royalty or celebrities, young ladies, be God's princess, precious in His sight, as daughters of Sarah

God names Sarah "a princess." A princess becomes a queen and queens give birth to future kings (v. 16b). This barren elderly woman would bear a line of kings. Her stigma of infertility would be replaced with nobility and royalty! Later in Genesis, we read this line would go through Isaac to Jacob through Judah, a line of kings, leading to a King of kings over all nations!

<sup>17</sup> *Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” ... [skip to v. 19] But God said, “No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac ...*

He laughed in v. 17, then God in v. 19 names the son *Isaac* = “he laughed.”

Abraham can't help but chuckle picturing a bun in Sarah's 90-year-old oven. But God gets the last laugh in naming their son Isaac (*he laughed*). Every time Abraham later introduced his son was a reminder of God's grace despite Abraham's initial incredulity and later infidelity in chapter 20, God is faithful. Sarah also laughs in chapter 18:12 when she hears this promise:

**18:12** *Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"* That was the first time God visited her, but He visits her again in chapter 21, v. 1, and she does conceive in her old age, despite her lack of faith, and in Genesis 21:6, Sarah says "**God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.**"

This is not the laughter of amusement, it's the laughter of amazement that when we are faithless, God remains faithful. Every time Sarah shared this story with the younger generation, she could laugh at herself and her little faith, and invite them to laugh with her. Saying Isaac's name would remind her behind the frowning providence of barrenness God had a smiling face of grace that had filled her emptiness with a baby inside her and laughs of joy.

Notice also that true believers don't stay in patterns of disobedience. In v. 3 they obey now in naming their son Isaac. In v. 4 they obey in circumcising their son on the 8<sup>th</sup> day as commanded. Never again do they lie like Gen 20. It's encouraging to know that even great father Abraham was not faithful all the time, but it's encouraging to know our faithful God always was and is.

James Boice writes: 'Abraham's lack of faith disturbed everything so far as he was concerned. Yet - this is a glorious point... - Abraham's lack of faith disturbed nothing so far as God was concerned. Abraham may have doubted God's ability to take care of him, but God's ability to do so was not altered in the slightest. He may have doubted God's grace, but God remained as gracious as he had ever been ... It is good to serve a God like that, a God who remains sovereign even when we doubt his ability to care for us, a God who remains gracious even when we sin. To serve a God like that is this world's greatest joy and opportunity. To know that he is like that is the greatest incentive you will ever have to keep from sinning.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Iain Duguid, *Living in the Gap Between Promise and Reality: The Gospel According to Abraham*, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> Duguid, p. 113-14.

<sup>4</sup> One of the lines of the children's hymn "Jesus Loves Me."

<sup>5</sup> F.B. Meyer, *Abraham*, p. 149.

<sup>6</sup> Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, p. 289.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, 1685.

<sup>8</sup> James Boice, *Genesis*, p. 653.