

# Genesis 21: The Promised Child

---

Forestgate Presbyterian Church ~ May 20, 2012

This chapter provides a stark contrast between two children: **in** with Isaac, **out** with Ishmael. These two children represent two **covenants**. (Gal 4:24)

Those who are part of Sarah's covenant should expect to be **persecuted** like Isaac. (Gal 4:29)

The first verse of the chapter describes God's actions in a **repetitive** form (using God's covenant name).

The story of Sarah's barrenness (Gen 11:30) comes to an end:

- God keeps His promise (Gen 21:1)
- Abraham responds in obedience: naming and circumcising Isaac (Gen 21:3-4)
- Sarah responds with praise (Gen 21:6)

Discuss the timing of God's promise:

- Could any human action hasten or delay the promise?
- Does God risk "missing the deadline" by waiting until the last minute?
- After waiting 25 long years, how does the promise now look in hindsight?
- Does God's lack of full disclosure undermine the credibility of the promise?
- What are the potential benefits of promises long delayed? What are the potential traps?

Notice how the covenant unfolded during these last 25 years (see reverse).

Laughter comes in many shades:

- Abraham—joy
- Sarah—unbelief at first, joy after the birth of Isaac
- Ishmael—mockery
- corporate laughter—"all who hear will laugh with me"

Casting out Ishmael was done in part to establish Isaac as the only rightful **heir**. (Gen 21:10)

God promises to bless Ishmael with **descendants** on account of Abraham. (Gen 21:13)

Sarah's petition to Abraham becomes a **prophetic** word. (Gal 4:30)

Abraham receives **confirmation** of Sarah's word and **promptly complies**. (Gen 21:12, 14)

*"It should engage our care and pains about children and young people to consider that we know not what God has designed them for, nor what great use Providence may make of them."*  
—Matthew Henry (referring to Ishmael)

Abimelech reappears and is now seeking a **covenant** with Abraham and his **descendants**. (Gen 21:23)

Before the covenant can be ratified, Abraham and Abimelech must be **reconciled**. (Gen 21:30)

The Hebrew word translated "called on" can also refer to **proclamation** (*qara*). (Gen 21:33)

This chapter covers the period from Isaac's conception (Abraham was 99) until after Isaac was weaned (~3 years). This chapter also looks forward to include Ishmael's growth into manhood and marriage to an Egyptian woman.