

# THE BOYS

GENESIS 21:1-21 MARCH 2, 2022

The odds of a person becoming a hall-of-famer in a given sport are astronomically low. The NCAA calculates that only 0.08% of high school players go on to have a professional career.<sup>1</sup> Of the few to actually play at the NFL or MLB level, just 1% will be inducted to the hall of fame.<sup>2</sup>

No one would've bet on Kurt Warner becoming a hall-of-famer. The *LA Times* wrote: *"He had been cut by the Green Bay Packers, stocked shelves in an Iowa grocery store, starred in the Arena Football League, and played in NFL Europe. When St. Louis Rams quarterback Trent Green suffered a knee injury late in the 1999 preseason, the then 28-year-old Warner was tabbed to start."*

Kurt went on to deliver the Rams first super bowl win. Nine years later, Kurt led the Cardinals to the Super Bowl. Terry Bradshaw interviewed Kurt and said, "You're not going to like this, but you're the third oldest quarterback to ever play in the Super Bowl. How does that make you feel?" Kurt replied: "Everybody's going to be tired of hearing this, but I never get tired of saying it. There's one reason that I'm standing up on this stage today: That's because of my Lord up above. I've got to say thanks to Jesus; you knew I was going to do it, but I've got to do it."<sup>3</sup>

Kurt Warner was making plays, but he knows where his help comes from. He's quoted as saying, *"I believe that the Lord has a plan for each of us that's better than anything we can imagine, even if that plan isn't obvious to us at every stage. He prepared me for this over a long period of time - in lower-profile locker rooms and the grocery store and in Europe, through all the personal tragedies and in spite of the people who doubted me along the way."*<sup>4</sup>

It reminds me of Abraham, the unlikely hall-of-father. He was a husband, a father, a pilgrim, a rancher, a warrior, a business man, and a friend of God. Now, *decades* after the promise first came, after *such* a long walk through a strange land, Abraham receives the son God wanted him to have.

The theme of this passage is how God is faithful to do His work. It's not *our* doing. Our part is to participate in His supernatural work, even when it seems impossible. We're not to rush Him, we're not to try to overrule Him, we're not to try to keep editorial control over what He wants to do. When we do those things, division and damage is the result. When God works, glory is the result. But, there's an elephant in the room. Looming over the wonderful blessing of this new baby is the irreconcilable consequences of Abraham's previous decision to try to do God's work for Him.

**Genesis 21:1 - The Lord came to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised.**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://pressboltnews.com/odds-of-becoming-professional-athlete/93740/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/Sports/sports-hall-fame-job-best/story?id=32950401>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdTLqmY5x3M>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kingdomsports.online/the-kingdom-sports-blog/2021/2/3/genesis-41-kingdom-sports-blog>

God is faithful. Put your name there: The Lord came to YOU as He had said, and the Lord did for YOU what He had promised. He is coming and He will not fail in *any* of His promises. We don't have to coax Him to pay us attention or get involved.

One translation puts it this way: "The Lord singled out Sarah."<sup>5</sup> You and I have been singled out for particular good works that the Lord wants to partner in with us. The way we discover them is by hearing from God and paying close attention to His leading and instruction.

**Genesis 21:2 - <sup>2</sup>Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time God had told him.**

This is a great example of how God does supernatural work through our every-day lives. It was *impossible* for Abraham and Sarah to have a child. And, yet, the Lord accomplished it. But, the work was done through the "ordinary" circumstances of life and family.

Why did He wait so long, since (after all) we're talking about the drama of redemption? Why wait and give Abraham so many chances to derail the whole thing through fear or doubt or missteps? Well, first of all, God is not bound to time the way we are. But also, the Bible shows us that He *loves* the reveal Himself. He loves to prove who He is and how good He is and how He is able when no one else is able - that *He* is God and there is no other.

**Genesis 21:3-4 - <sup>3</sup>Abraham named his son who was born to him—the one Sarah bore to him—Isaac. <sup>4</sup>When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him.**

Abraham was not perfect. In fact, the very last passage told the story of how he almost fouled everything up. But from here on, he's turned a page. We see in Him a willingness and an obedience and a faith that outshines what we've seen before. He is quick to obey what God had asked him to do in both naming and circumcising his new baby boy. And, of course, we see that God's promise of a son was truly and literally fulfilled. *This* is how God fulfills prophecy: *Actually*. Not mystically or just spiritually, but just as He did here, with a real, live, bouncing baby boy.

**Genesis 21:5 - <sup>5</sup>Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.**

Sarah was 90, by the way. Henry Morris points out that what God did for them was not just a one-time burst of help.<sup>6</sup> We see this depicted in movies, sometimes. The heroes muster enough power to open the gateway for one brief instant, but then they're weakened for a time. No, Abraham and Sarah (it seems) we're dramatically rejuvenated. Abraham didn't just father 1 son, he went on to father 6 more. Sarah wasn't just able to carry and deliver a baby, but then to nurse him as well.

---

<sup>5</sup> Robert Altar *The Hebrew Bible*

<sup>6</sup> Henry Morris *The Genesis Record*

After 100 years, Abraham was embarking on the most important work of his life. The herding, the trading, the delta-force rescue ops, the building of a household were significant, but *this* was the most important thing. *This* was the primary calling God had given them. What's your calling?

**Genesis 21:6 - <sup>6</sup>Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and everyone who hears will laugh with me."**

God is such a Redeemer! Sarah's earlier laugh had been one of scorn and disbelief. We remember that awkward lunch that the Lord had had with them when she laughed at His promise. But God brings beauty from ashes. Our failures are not too much for Him. He loves us so much that He looks down on the squalor of our hearts and says, "I can work with that." And that personal work is meant to be put on public display. "Everyone who hears." This was a story that needed to be told. Yes, it was immensely personal and private in some ways, but God wants to take His personal work in your life and use it as a testimony of His grace and power.

Now, linguistically, it's possible that Sarah is saying, "Everyone who hears will laugh at me."<sup>7</sup> We imagine that most people would rejoice with her and just be so excited for them, but is that always your experience? Sometimes, people scoff at how God is working in our lives or how He is leading us. But, even if people were laughing at her, Sarah didn't care. She was full of the joy of the Lord.

**Genesis 21:7 - <sup>7</sup>She also said, "Who would have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne a son for him in his old age."**

There's an outward focus in her song of praise. She's thinking about the Lord and her husband and her children and grandchildren. God was removing self-centeredness from her heart. That is *always* part of what the Lord wants to do in us. The more I am alive to self, the less I am alive to the Spirit.

**Genesis 21:8 - <sup>8</sup>The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned.**

This would've been an interesting party, because it had a bunch of *Philistines* as guests!<sup>8</sup> Abraham is still living among them. It drives home the idea that God's desire is to use your life to preach to the unbelievers around you. We're meant to be salt and light in a rotten and dark world. God says, "Yes, go to the Philistines and be different. Be set apart. Show them how great My power is and how great My love is and how faithful I am."

**Genesis 21:9-10 - <sup>9</sup>But Sarah saw the son mocking—the one Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham. <sup>10</sup>So she said to Abraham, "Drive out this slave with her son, for the son of this slave will not be a coheir with my son Isaac!"**

---

<sup>7</sup> Alter

<sup>8</sup> Morris

If we read Hebrew, we'd see that Moses keeps using forms of this word for laughing. Sarah is laughing, those who hear will laugh, Isaac name *means* laughter, and here this word for mocking is connected with that word, too. Scholars say Ishmael was "Isaac-ing" Isaac.<sup>9</sup>

Maybe you've heard it said that the Hebrew indicates that Ishmael molested Isaac.<sup>10</sup> That seems to go farther than the language and context suggest. But, if Ishmael was just joking around, why does Sarah react so harshly?

Linguists tell us that mocking here can mean 'insulting' or 'making sport of.'<sup>11</sup> So we have this little toddler (2 or 3 years old) and his older brother who's 16 or 17, cruelly making sport of him. Maybe even getting in his face and saying, "You think you're gonna be in charge? We'll see about that!"

Paul helps us understand a little more about what was going on here. In Galatians he uses Ishmael and Isaac as an analogy for us about our life with Christ, and he says that Ishmael *persecuted* Isaac.<sup>12</sup> A term that means to drive away or to aggressively chase, like a hunter pursuing a catch.<sup>13</sup>

So, now Sarah's reaction seems more reasonable. If Ishmael was trying to drive out Isaac, then *he* must be driven out. This is not a case of "boys will be boys." No, it's more like when Adam was driven out of Eden and when Cain was driven from society<sup>14</sup> - a consequence of willful sin.

### **Genesis 21:11 - <sup>11</sup> This was very distressing to Abraham because of his son.**

Abraham *loved* Ishmael. There was a lot of bad blood between Hagar and Sarah, but this was his boy. He had even floated Ishmael as heir to God a few chapters ago. "If only *Ishmael* were acceptable to You!" And we'll see that God also cared about Hagar and Ishmael as people.

But now, things had come to a head as they did earlier with Lot. Abraham had people in tow who were not compatible with what God was going to do. And it broke Abraham's heart.

### **Genesis 21:12-13 - <sup>12</sup> But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed about the boy and about your slave. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her, because your offspring will be traced through Isaac, <sup>13</sup> and I will also make a nation of the slave's son because he is your offspring."**

God was going to be gracious to all the parties involved, but first there needed to be this painful work of excising the son of the flesh. This family could not continue the way things were.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.thetorah.com/article/does-ishmael-molest-isaac>

<sup>11</sup> Derek Kidner *Genesis* | *NET Study Bible Notes*

<sup>12</sup> Galatians 4:29

<sup>13</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/1377.htm>

<sup>14</sup> *CSB Study Bible Notes*

**Genesis 21:14 - <sup>14</sup>Early in the morning Abraham got up, took bread and a waterskin, put them on Hagar's shoulders, and sent her and the boy away. She left and wandered in the Wilderness of Beer-sheba.**

That's it? No donkey or wagon or proper supplies? Some bread and a single skin of water? This seems terribly uncompassionate. There are a variety of suggestions why they were sent out with so little. One commentator thinks Abraham gave them so little on purpose so that they would be forced to stay nearby and he could, perhaps, continue to look after them.<sup>15</sup> Archaeologists have also found a legal code from roughly that time called the Lipit-Ishtar Law Code which forbade a slave and her offspring from receiving *any* part of the inheritance,<sup>16</sup> so *maybe* it was a legal thing. Or maybe it was a providential way that God was leading, since He *did* want to do a work in Hagar and Ishamel's lives, too.

Whatever it was, we can see that - many long decades after - Ishamel still had affection for his father. Nearly 75 years after this day, Ishmael will return and meet up with Isaac to bury Abraham. I think that says something about Ishmael's love for his dad and how he felt about him.

For his part, Abraham was quick to obey. We see such a heart of obedience here, even when it *hurts* to do it. He rose early. He did just as he was commanded and in so doing, he trusts the Lord.

**Genesis 21:15-16 - <sup>15</sup>When the water in the skin was gone, she left the boy under one of the bushes <sup>16</sup> and went and sat at a distance, about a bowshot away, for she said, "I can't bear to watch the boy die!" While she sat at a distance, she wept loudly.**

This is a terrible scene. Perhaps Hagar had thought, "Well, I went out on my own when I was pregnant and found a spring of water, we'll be ok." But not this time. They are about to die from thirsts and exposure. But then God shows Himself.

**Geneis 21:17 - <sup>17</sup>God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What's wrong, Hagar? Don't be afraid, for God has heard the boy crying from the place where he is.**

*What's wrong?* That's sort of a rude question, isn't it? Not when we consider the whole of Hagar's story. She had already met with God, face to face! And He had told her that she would have many offspring and that Ishmael had a future ahead. And yet, in her time of need, Hagar didn't call out to "The God Who sees," "the God who hears." She gave up.

Now, if God was with them all along and had these plans for them, why allow any of this suffering? Why bring them to death's door in the desert? Their suffering was not caused by God, God *saved* them from it. The world is the way it is because of human sin. Hagar and Ishmael were out in that

---

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin *Genesis*

<sup>16</sup> Waltke

wilderness because of sin. God was not responsible for their suffering. The opposite is true! He's took it on Himself to *rescue* them!

**Genesis 21:18-19** - <sup>18</sup> **Get up, help the boy up, and grasp his hand, for I will make him a great nation.** <sup>19</sup> **Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. So she went and filled the waterskin and gave the boy a drink.**

Living by faith is a hands-on kind of life. God has individual plans for our lives and our families, and they always include us getting up and grasping the hands of the weak and afflicted people around us. We're to deliver Living Water to those who are about to die of spiritual thirst.

What was this well doing in the wilderness? Who dug it? We don't know. *Someone* did. Maybe you feel like your spiritual efforts are like digging a well in the wilderness - something that seems totally pointless and makes no difference. But God doesn't waste anything He leads us to do.

**Genesis 21:20-21** - <sup>20</sup> **God was with the boy, and he grew; he settled in the wilderness and became an archer.** <sup>21</sup> **He settled in the Wilderness of Paran, and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.**

We think of Ishmael as a villain, but it's interesting to read here that God was with him. Will we see Ishmael in heaven? I don't know. But we have to marvel at the gracious, loving faithfulness our God shows to the most undeserving people.

Ishmael didn't become a shepherd, he became a hunter and he made his home in the wilderness, rather than the fruitful land of promise.

This brings us to how Paul wants us to think about this story. He talks about how Ishmael is like a Christian trying to live by the Law - we would call it *legalism*. Isaac represents living in the Spirit. Paul lays this out in Galatians 4 and he says we need to drive out the son of the flesh - drive out legalism from our relationship with Christ.

In Genesis 13 we saw that Abraham and Lot could not co-exist together. It's a picture of how the life of faith cannot co-exist with lust and materialism. Now, we swing to the other side and find that we cannot coexist with legalism. A legalistic mentality will do on a spiritual level what Ishmael does. It's not a shepherd, it's a hunter, and it's hunting the work of the Spirit! It persecutes and it seeks to supplant the true work of God's grace. It's always looking to snipe some prey and keep you settled in the wilderness, rather than in the bountiful blessings of grace. We've got to drive it out.

"Brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave but of the free woman. For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm, then, and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery."<sup>17</sup> Instead, let's continue in faith and be people who grow the way Abraham did, enjoying the awesome, transforming work of God along the way.

---

<sup>17</sup> Galatians 4:31-5:1