

# **BFFs FOREVER**

## Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 21:1-21

Topic

The weaning of Isaac is accompanied by two very different types of laughing

Title

*"Laughing Matters"*

### Introduction

According to some researchers there are more than fifty distinct types of laughter.

How you laugh can send very different signals. Research for a TV comedy channel linked the following types of laughter with inward states of mind:

- Belly-laugh: open and trustworthy.
- Chuckling: kind and thoughtful.
- Cackling: enjoying the misfortune of others.
- Snorting: a snobbish expression of disapproval.
- Sniggering: insensitive, unsympathetic and immature.

Laughter plays an important role in our text. There are two very distinct types of laughter:

1. The first is pretty obvious. At Isaac's birth Sarah said, in verse six, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." The name Isaac, in fact, means *laughter*. Isaac's weaning a few years later is also accompanied by a joyous laughter.

2. The second type of laughter isn't immediately obvious. It's in verse nine where you read that Ishmael was "scoffing." **It's the same Hebrew word translated "laugh" in verse six.**

This whole episode takes on more significance when the apostle Paul chooses it as an illustration comparing two ways of continuing in the Christian life. Writing to the churches in the region of Galatia he compared believers who continue to depend upon the power of God to Isaac, while comparing those who live according to man-made rules in their own human energy to Ishmael.

The Christians in Galatia had a choice to make. **Believers in every geography and generation have that same choice to make.** As Warren Wiersbe puts it, "individual churches and Christians can make the same mistake the Galatians were making: they can fail to cast out Hagar and Ishmael... [giving] opportunity for the flesh to work."

Focusing on their respective laughters, I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Is Yours The Kind Of Laughter That Rejoices At The Power Of God?, or #2 Is Yours The Kind Of Laughter That Scoffs At The Power Of God?

- #1 Is Yours The Kind Of Laughter That Rejoices At The Power Of God?  
(v1-7)

Abraham was 100 years old. Sarah was 90 years old. Besides that, Sarah had passed through the change of life and, naturally speaking, could not expect to become pregnant. Her womb was dead.

**But she *did* become pregnant and Isaac was born according to the power of God in fulfilling His promise.**

Genesis 21:1 And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.

Genesis 21:2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

The phrases that jump out at us, that apply to believers in every generation, are “as He had said... as He had spoken... at the set time...” The one that we struggle with is “at the set time.” We generally believe God will do all He has “said” and “spoken,” but we don’t know His timing and, so, our faith struggles.

God had His own “set time” in order to accomplish something wonderful for Abraham and Sarah.

I wonder how many miraculous things we miss because we will not wait for God’s “set time?”

- Many a young man or a young woman has grown impatient waiting for God’s “set time” to introduce them to their mate and have settled for their own choice.
- Whole churches can make the mistake of growing impatient waiting for God’s “set time” by seeking to fulfill His promises by human energy using the techniques you find in the world - upselling, intimidation, heaping guilt on people, etc., etc.

Genesis 21:3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him - whom Sarah bore to him - Isaac.

When God had at first promised Abraham that Sarah would become pregnant and bear him a son, she laughed from a hiding place behind the tent curtain. With a godly humor, the Lord told her to name the boy Isaac, meaning *laughter*.

Genesis 21:4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

Circumcision of the flesh was *always* intended to be a reminder that a person must be spiritually circumcised in their heart. The physical rite pointed to what was wrong with us - that we were born in trespasses and sins needing to be saved. God wants to give us a new heart, and that is what He does when we are saved.

Isaac was circumcised after his miraculous birth. If you've been born-again the Bible says "you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ" (Colossians 2:11). **The sin nature you were born with is spiritually cut away.**

As long as we are in these bodies, our unredeemed physical bodies, we are subject to the vestiges of the influence and inclinations of our flesh to yield our members to sin. But our sin nature has been cut-away and we have received a new nature and can therefore instead yield our members to serving God.

Genesis 21:5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

It had been twenty-five years since Abraham left his home to follow the Lord. Twenty-five years to receive the promise of God for a son and heir.

Has God said something to you? Has He spoken to you? Then in His "set time" He **will** perform it by His power. He's preparing you to receive it.

Genesis 21:6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me."

Genesis 21:7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

God had made Sarah "laugh" many years earlier, but it was a snickering from her unbelief. Now He had made her "laugh" again, transforming it into a laughter of rejoicing.

Not only that, her whole life would become a source of laughter for others. They would hear the story of God's promise, then see its fulfillment by God's power, and laugh with the joy of the Lord.

Sarah's womb was dead but from it God brought new life. Do you realize that **you** were dead in your trespasses and sins? Then, at God's "set time," you heard the Gospel and were born-again into newness of life.

If, like me, you were saved later in life and delivered from many terrible things and from life-dominating sins, you laughed with rejoicing in the joy of your salvation.

Probably everyone you knew could see the change in you. They laughed, too. Some with rejoicing; but others with scoffing. Which brings us to Ishmael.

#2 Is Yours The Kind Of Laughter  
That Scoffs At The Power Of God?  
(v8-21)

Sarah probably thought everyone would laugh with rejoicing. There was one person who did not.

Genesis 21:8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

I'm not sure at what age a child was "weaned" four thousand years ago. It doesn't really matter, does it, when a child in the Bible was weaned? It's relative to your own time and culture.

Whenever it was, Abraham threw a feast. Should we have weaning feasts? We could call them "Weaning Roasts."

I *will* suggest this. Do everything you can to rejoice at the milestones - however small - in your family. Make life fun. There will be enough tragedy.

Genesis 21:9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.

Big half-brother Ishmael was 16 or 17 years old at the time. I think it's safe to say there had been no 'weaning roast' for him. Though Abraham's son, his legal status was that of a servant in the household.

Genesis 21:10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac."

Sarah's demand seems harsh. We read into this our own culture and its values. I'm not saying this was something to be taken lightly, or to base our own family discipline upon, but it was an acceptable discipline given the legal status of Hagar and Ishmael as servants. This was more similar to dismissing a servant than disowning a son. At least to Sarah.

Genesis 21:11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son.

Abraham was against this idea. I don't think it's going to far to say that he loved Ishmael. He was troubled until he heard from the Lord.

Genesis 21:12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.

Genesis 21:13 Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed."

Abraham could send Ishmael away with confidence God would be with the lad.

Genesis 21:14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba.

Again, this reads as harsh treatment. Here's the thing. God knew what He was going to do for Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham's part was to obey and to trust God.

Genesis 21:15 And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs.

Genesis 21:16 Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept.

It sounds like Abraham sent them out into the wilderness to die but I'm guessing he told them to make for one of the cities - maybe even Gerar where he had recently been treated with great hospitality.

Evidently Hagar made a wrong turn. Lost, she thought they were going to die.

God sometimes deals with individuals severely in order to draw their attention to their true condition. *They are lost and dying!* God's mercies can seem severe mercies, and many times they are - but in the light of eternity they are really precious opportunities.

Genesis 21:17 And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.

Genesis 21:18 Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation."

I don't know what Ishmael said. I do know that people cry out to God when all hope is lost. **God hears those cries.**

Genesis 21:19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink.

God wanted her to lead her son to the water that would give him life. Not just in the physical sense, but spiritually, too.

Genesis 21:20 So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

Genesis 21:21 He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Was Ishmael saved in this encounter? After all, it says that "God was with the lad." I don't know. God is "with" everyone - in the sense that God the Holy Spirit is seeking to lead men, women, and children to faith in Jesus Christ. All men benefit from the common grace of God without all men receiving salvation by grace through faith. If Ishmael is an example of God's dealings with the nonbeliever, it is a comfort to see how far God will go to reach even those who mock His power.

God promised Abraham and Sarah a son and heir. Almost immediately, and for many years afterward, they set about trying to fulfill God's promise in the energy of the flesh.

- When the fulfillment of God's promise seemed to be taking too long, Abraham suggested one of his servants, Eleazar, be his heir.

- When it seemed to be taking even longer, Sarah suggested Abraham have a child by her maidservant, Hagar.
- When it seemed impossible for God's promise to be fulfilled, Abraham suggested the child of Hagar, Ishmael, be his heir.

All of that was the flesh at work seeking to help God achieve His spiritual purposes. It resulted in the birth of Ishmael - described earlier as a "wild man." It was in that same attitude of trusting in the flesh that Ishmael laughed with scorn.

**Whenever we put our flesh to work seeking to help God achieve His spiritual purposes, things that can only be achieved by His power, we are laughing like Ishmael laughed.**

The very suggestion we are like Ishmael offends us. Trouble is, we can be like him without even realizing it. In fact, in some cases we've been taught that it is the best way to follow Jesus. There are still legalistic churches and Christians who project extra-biblical, man-made rules upon you by which you are judged to be either more spiritual or less spiritual.

**Your salvation was not obtained by any effort of yours and neither is it maintained by any effort of yours. It all by grace from start to finish.**

Writing to the Galatians, to whom he used the illustration of Ishmael and Isaac, Paul asked this question: "Did you begin in a spiritual way only to end up doing things in a human way?" (Galatians 3:3 God's Word Translation).

In the case of the Galatian believers, most of whom were Gentile, they were being told that the way to continue in the Christian life was to add Jewish rites and rituals to their walk. Only if they were circumcised and kept the Sabbath, they were told, would they be truly saved and spiritual.

They had begun "in a spiritual way," but were now wanting to continue by "doing things in a human way." It is far too typical of us to be like them.



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Scoffing at the power of God still takes that form today as we see many believers becoming more and more fascinated with Jewish rites and rituals - thinking it is the more 'spiritual' way to walk with Jesus.

Then there are many other additions to the Christian life made by scoffers, like the teaching that you must be baptized to be truly saved and spiritual, or that you must speak in tongues.

As you prepare to re-enter the world and effect the people God has sent you to minister among, listen to the laughter of your heart. Are you scoffing or rejoicing?

Let's be those who rejoice, who having begun in the spirit continue to walk in the spirit.



