

Genesis 21A (2011)

- Abraham and Sarah have led remarkable lives
 - When we first came to know them in Chapter 12, they were living as pagan worshippers
 - Then God visited them in Ur interrupting their lives and setting them on a new course, westward
 - They walked hundreds of miles to an unknown country, where they were told they would receive an inheritance in a future life
 - Meanwhile, they are left to wander in a country that was not their own
 - They've visited Egypt, fought battles with foreign kings
 - Watched judgment fall from Heaven against cities
 - Been separated twice as Sarah was taken by two different kings
 - They've gained a son by a concubine, but still long for one of their own
 - And they've both received promises from God on multiple occasions that a son would eventually come
 - It's been a busy twenty five years
- A year ago they were promised that the child would arrive shortly
 - And now Sarah's pregnant and the time has come

Gen. 21:1 Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised.

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

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

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

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

Gen. 21:6 Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."

Gen. 21:7 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."

- Chapter 21 opens with our focus squarely on the Lord and His word
 - In vs.1-2, we're told three times that the Lord had spoken or said or promised that Sarah would have a son
 - And in v.2 we're told that she conceived and bore the son she was promised
 - And Abraham produced this child when he was in his old age
 - And Sarah was likewise beyond her years to bear
 - But nevertheless here they were with a child...literally a miracle birth
 - And the entire tone of these first verses is one of faithfulness on the part of the Lord
 - He said it and it happened
 - There were only two things that might have caused Sarah and Abraham to doubt
 - There was time between when God spoke and when He acted
 - And during that time, things looked hopeless
- Those are the circumstances when the Lord works best and does His most effective at building our faith in Him and His word
 - The first promise came twenty five years earlier
 - And God had always planned for the birth to take place at this time and in this place
 - Isaac has arrived right on time
 - But twenty five years is a long time to wait
 - And even the most patient person begins to wonder and doubt after twenty five years
 - Abraham and Sarah let their impatience get the better of them at least once, when they tried to produce the child by their own flesh
 - And while they waited, they took note of each passing year and their weakening bodies

- And their eyes told them everywhere they looked that childbearing was simply not a possibility
 - But what the body cannot do in weakness and what the eyes cannot see, faith can accomplish
 - And Abraham and Sarah's faith in the Lord's word brought them to this point
- And so we're told that the Lord's word was fulfilled after 25 years
 - Much like the promise we received that our faith has saved us
 - And in the moment our bodies fail, we will stand before Jesus for our rewards in our next life
- And now that Abraham and Sarah's joy is complete, they respond in obedience to the Lord's instructions
 - Abraham names the child Isaac as he was told
 - And Abraham circumcises Isaac on the eighth day as the Lord commanded
 - Isaac becomes the first child under God's covenant to be circumcised on the eighth day
 - He is the first born since the covenant was established
 - And Sarah is astonished at watching God fulfill His promise
 - She remembers the Lord's words at the tent opening when He caught Sarah laughing at the promise
 - Isaac means laughing, and now Sarah exclaims that the name has become a source of joy for her
 - Now others will laugh with her when they learn she bore a child at such an advanced age
 - She is incredulous at watching the Lord's work
- Isn't this how we all reaction to the Lord's grace in our lives?
 - So often we find ourselves in a difficult or even desperate situation
 - Though we know the Lord will be faithful to pull us through somehow, still we doubt at times

- We may grow depressed and despondent fearing the worst
- And then the Lord comes through and saves the day in some way, and we sit back and laugh to ourselves
 - We wonder how we ever doubted the Lord in the first place
- If you've been there with me, then you can sympathize with Sarah here

Gen. 21:8 The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

Gen. 21:9 Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking.

Gen. 21:10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac."

Gen. 21:11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son.

- At somewhere between age 2 and age 3, a child would be weaned
 - And weaning was cause for a celebration
 - So Abraham holds a party for his son Isaac, but there is a problem on the weaning day
 - Sarah caught Ishmael mocking Isaac
 - The word for mocking is similar to the word for Isaac, making it a play on words
 - Ishmael's name isn't used here, but rather his identify
 - Moses emphasizes that he is the son of an Egyptian
 - And remember he's probably in his late teens by now, making fun of a toddler
 - And so Sarah reacts angrily demanding that Abraham put this episode behind them by expelling the child and his mother from the household
 - The issue comes down to inheritance
 - Sarah does not want this child to share in the inheritance of the family wealth
 - Ishmael was the first born in the family and Sarah wanted to be sure there was no challenge to Isaac for the position of honor in the family

- So she demands that Abraham send Hagar away with her son
 - She was asking Abraham to divorce the woman that Sarah had given to him in the first place
 - In effect, Sarah was insisting that Abraham could only be a parent to one son, not both
- Obviously, this pained Abraham greatly
 - Sarah was asking him to send away a son he undoubtedly loved greatly
 - Abraham knew that Isaac was the promised son, not Ishmael, but that didn't lead Abraham to love Ishmael any less
 - And now he was hearing from his wife that he must send his son away forever
 - Since Ishmael was already a young man, this wasn't as cruel as we might have assumed
 - We're not talking about a woman and her toddler leaving the home
 - Nevertheless, it's still a very hard thing for Abraham to consider
- What should Abraham do here? Should he divorce his wife and lose his son?
 - At this point, Abraham would have almost certainly tried to seek a compromise
 - He probably wanted to find a way that both boys could grow up together
 - One child would be the one that Abraham created in his flesh through the Egyptian woman
 - The other child would be the one God made possible by grace through a promise that Abraham received in faith
 - But certainly there must be a way the two can co-exist
 - But God agreed with Sarah and directed Abraham accordingly

Gen. 21:12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named.

[Gen. 21:13](#) “And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant.”

[Gen. 21:14](#) So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.

- God appears to Abraham again and makes clear that separation is actually the right thing to do
 - He tells Abraham to put aside his feelings of distress over Ishmael and Hagar
 - Instead, do as your wife has told you
 - This is the only time in all the Bible God tells a husband to do as his wife instructs
 - I’m surprised that Abraham didn’t respond saying she’s not my wife, she’s my sister
 - God gives Abraham the reason for the separation: Isaac is to be the one through whom God’s promise will be carried
 - God made a promise to Abraham concerning not only himself but also his descendants
 - And now God reiterates that Isaac was given to Abraham specifically to carry that promise forward
 - Ishmael would have nothing to do with the promise
 - Furthermore, God doesn’t want Abraham’s descendants to be numbered through Ishmael
 - Everything that is Abraham’s must also be Isaac’s
- But God knew that this separation would be difficult for Abraham, and so God comforts Abraham with the news that Ishmael is still one of Abraham’s offspring
 - And therefore God is obliged to bless this offspring and make him into a nation
 - Since that was the promise God gave to Abraham and his descendants

- Though Ishmael will not become a part of Israel, nevertheless he will father all the Arab nations
 - And we can see how God used Abraham's mistake to chastise the nation of Israel
 - In fact, these two people groups will become enemies for most of human history
- So Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away
 - The manner of the send off carries significant symbolic meaning
 - The bread and water were basic rations and they signified no inheritance
 - She was receiving nothing of Abraham's estate
 - Then he placed the water and bread on her shoulder
 - This indicated that she would receive no further support in the future
 - She must bear her own needs now
 - Abraham was making clear that he was cutting her and Ishmael off from any portion in His family wealth now and in the future
 - Knowing Abraham had a heart for his child, we must assume that Abraham was trusting in God's promise when he cut them off so completely
 - He heard God say He would care for them and bless Ishmael, and so Abraham acted in faith to God's word
- Then Abraham gave her his son, indicating he was no longer under Abraham's authority
 - The boy was now under Hagar's authority
 - Abraham was disowning his son
- Finally, he sent her away
 - She was required to separate herself physically from Abraham and his encampment
 - The effect of all these steps was to signify that Abraham saw Hagar and Ismael as dead to him

- This kind of separation was as close to a separation from death as was possible
 - It mirrors the way the Prodigal Son asked his father for his portion of the inheritance
 - His request was a way of saying that the son felt his father was as good as dead to him
- We know Abraham is merely following God's instructions in all that he is doing
 - But that leaves us questioning why God is doing this?
 - We might ask why God is permitting much less ordering a divorce?
 - And why must Abraham separate so completely from the son he loves?
 - Is this fair to Hagar and Ishmael?
 - The answers come to us from Paul in the New Testament
 - And he shows us that the real life account of Isaac and Ishmael are also a story designed by God to teach a greater truth concerning His Son
- Paul gives us the framework for understanding God's intentions here in Galatians 4

[Gal. 4:21](#) Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?

[Gal. 4:22](#) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman.

[Gal. 4:23](#) But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.

[Gal. 4:24](#) This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.

- Paul's letter to the church in Galatia is our most powerful letter for placing the Law of Moses and the grace of the New Testament in their proper perspective
 - Unfortunately, the church in Galatia had been taught by Judaizers that living according to the Law was still a requirement for the Christian
 - This teaching was wrong, but it was attractive to a group of Christians who felt satisfaction in pursuing the rigors of the Law

- But for Paul it presented a clear and present danger to the Gospel
 - Teaching Christians that following the Law was God's expectation, created the impression that both God's grace and the Law were intended to work together for our righteousness
 - And nothing could be farther from the truth
 - As Hebrews 7:19 says, the Law made nothing perfect
- So in Paul's fourth chapter, he begins to draw an example from our story of Isaac and Ishmael here in Chapter 21 of Genesis
 - Remember, the Jewish people understood the Law to mean the five books of Moses, including the book of Genesis
 - So Paul asks to those who are interested in following the Law, do they not read the Law?
 - Meaning haven't they read Chapter 21 of Genesis?
- Then Paul begins to remind them of our story this morning, of Abraham's order to set loose Hagar and Ismael
 - Abraham had two sons, one was the product of a bondwoman
 - A bondwoman means a concubine, a type of slave
 - Abraham's first son was born to a slave woman, the product of slavery
 - His second son was born to Sarah, a free woman
 - Therefore, Isaac would be born free from the beginning
 - Furthermore, the son born to the slave woman came by way of the flesh
 - Abraham produced this child by his own efforts in his body, not according to God's spirit
 - But the son born to the free woman came by way of God's word, a miracle birth by God's spirit
- Then Paul gives us the connection to Law and grace: he says there is a picture formed between these women, their children and two covenants
 - The covenant that came at Mt. Sinai is pictured in Hagar

- Mt. Sinai was the place that God delivered the Old Covenant, the covenant of Law in which Moses received the Law
- Those who are under that covenant, the covenant of Law, are in bondage to the flesh
 - They are bound by a Law that exposes their sinfulness and leaves them condemned
 - They are a slave because the Law's demands are never ceasing and the possibility of escape from its condemnation is nil
 - The Law places demands on the flesh and the flesh is weak
 - Even when men tried to keep the law, it was an act of the flesh, of human will
 - And as such, it can never bring us to righteousness

[Rom. 3:20](#) because by the works of the Law **no flesh** will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

- The Law is holy and good, but it is powerless to turn sinful flesh into righteousness
 - Instead, it produces slavery
- Also, Hagar is the Egyptian, and this reinforces the idea of slavery
 - Egypt of course will be the nation to enslave Israel before they received their covenant of Law
 - What's more, Egypt is the picture of the world, of the principles of the world

[Gal. 4:25](#) Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

[Gal. 4:26](#) But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

[Gal. 4:27](#) For it is written,

"REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR;
BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR;
FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE
THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND."

- Paul uses present day Jerusalem as a picture of all people.

- They are in slavery with Hagar too, since they are her children
 - Paul meant that the Jerusalem that is on Earth today is a reflection of the world
 - It is part of the world today, filled with sinful people like every other city
 - And all people are in slavery held under condemnation by the Law
 - Our sinful nature is condemned by the Law, since the Law tells us we don't measure up to God's standard
- But there is another Jerusalem waiting for us
 - This one exists in the Heavenly realm and one day it descends to replace the one that we have today
 - It also has a population of people who will occupy its borders
 - Those who are of faith in Christ are citizens in that future Jerusalem, and we will live there set free from sin
 - And we will not be under condemnation by the Law, since we will have been made perfect by the work of Christ
 - For Sarah who had no prospect for children, became a mother to far more children than did the fertile Hagar
- Then Paul reaches the main point of the allegory

[Gal. 4:28](#) And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

[Gal. 4:29](#) But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

[Gal. 4:30](#) But what does the Scripture say?

**“CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON,
FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE
FREE WOMAN.”**

- Paul says we who have believed in the Gospel are like Isaac, children of the promise
 - God's promise to Abraham and Sarah was to produce a physical heir
 - And they believed in that promise and it brought them the son they desired

- Likewise, we were “produced” as a result of that promise
 - Because that promise included the promise of a Messiah who would save a people
 - Since we have been saved by that Messiah, we are the products of God’s promise to Abraham, just as Isaac was a product of the same promise
- But then Paul calls us to consider what happened between the slave child and the free child?
 - The slave child persecuted the free child
 - This is always the way it will be
 - The children of the world, of the flesh, of sin and the enemy will always have enmity for the children of God
 - Just as God placed enmity between the serpent’s seed and the woman’s seed
- And so God commanded Abraham to cast out the slave woman and her son because the two simply cannot coexist
 - These two have nothing in common and one must leave when the other arrives
 - There is no compatibility
- Paul finishes with the exhortation

[Gal. 4:31](#) So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman. [Gal. 5:1](#) It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

- Having come to faith, we are children of the promise, of the New Covenant given by faith in Christ
 - We are no longer children of the slave woman, children who are under condemnation of Law
- Christ set us free by completing the works of the Law on our behalf
 - And therefore, Paul tells us not to subject ourselves again to the yoke of slavery

- Paul tells us in Romans that we have been released from the Law by way of a death
- That's what we see here in the story of Abraham and Hagar
 - Abraham isn't divorcing this woman as much as he is declaring her dead
 - He is declaring Hagar and Ismael to be dead to him
 - And by that death, Abraham is freed from that relationship
 - And now he moves forward with only the child of promise
 - And this is the lesson to us today
 - Our faith in Christ brought us into a new and better covenant
 - And through Christ's death, we are said to die to the Law and are freed from its requirements
 - And now we are free to serve Christ by the Spirit
 - But the two are not designed to coexist...one replaces the other