

Abraham: The Father of the Faithful

Lesson 8: The God Who Keeps His Word: The Birth of Isaac -- Genesis

21:1–7

Twenty-five years. That is how long it had been since God first told Abram, back in Haran, that He would make him a great nation. Twenty-five years of moving, waiting, hoping, failing, and waiting some more. There had been the detour into Egypt, the parting from Lot, the covenant in the dark, the shortcut with Hagar, the new names, the laughter of disbelief. And through all of it, the cradle stayed empty. Sarah was ninety now. Abraham was a hundred. By every reasonable measure, the window had not just closed; it had been bricked over years ago.

And then, in seven short verses, the long wait simply ends. Listen to how the text says it, because the wording is doing something deliberate: “The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.” As he had said. As he had promised. At the time of which God had spoken. Three times in two verses, the narrator points back to the promise. This birth is not luck, not coincidence, not nature finally cooperating. This is God keeping His word, exactly, precisely, on time.

They name him Isaac, which means “he laughs,” and the name carries a whole history. Abraham had laughed when he first heard it, face in the dust, thinking it absurd. Sarah had laughed behind the tent flap, the bitter laugh of a woman who had stopped letting herself hope. But now, with a newborn at her breast, Sarah laughs again, and it is a completely different laugh. “God has made laughter for me,” she says, “and everyone who hears will laugh with me.” The laughter of doubt has become the laughter of joy.

This little passage is one of the quiet mountaintops of the whole Bible, because it shows us, in the face of one impossible baby, that God does what He says He will do. Not approximately. Not eventually, in some watered-down form. Exactly as He promised, at the appointed time. Every longing soul who has ever wondered whether God forgot, whether the promise was real, whether the waiting would ever end, needs to sit in this room and hear a ninety-year-old woman laugh.

Group Discussion: Three times in two verses, the text insists that Isaac’s birth happened just as God had said, had promised, and had spoken. Why do you think Scripture so deliberately stresses that God kept His word here? What does it do for our faith to know that God does exactly what He says, even after a long delay?

Personal Reflection: Sarah waited twenty-five years, through doubt and a failed shortcut, before the promise arrived. Think about a promise of God, or a longing you have laid before

Him, that has gone unfulfilled for a long time. How has the waiting affected your trust, and what would it mean for you to believe that God still keeps His word in His own perfect timing?

Read Genesis 21:1–7

Study Questions

1. The passage stresses three times that the birth happened “as he had said,” “as he had promised,” and “at the time of which God had spoken” (vv. 1–2). What does this deliberate, repeated emphasis teach about the faithfulness of God to His word, and why does Scripture want us to see that this was promise kept, not coincidence?
2. God proved utterly faithful to a promise that took twenty-five years to arrive. Where are you currently waiting on God, and how has the long delay shaped your trust, drawing you closer to Him or quietly eroding your confidence that He will keep His word?
3. Isaac was born “at the time of which God had spoken” (v. 2), the appointed time, after decades of waiting. What does this teach about the difference between God’s timing and ours, and why is the long delay better understood as God’s appointed timing than as God forgetting or failing?
4. Most of us struggle far more with God’s timing than with God’s power. Where is your impatience with God’s timing showing up right now, and what would it look like to trust that He has an appointed time, even when it feels painfully slow?
5. The name Isaac means “he laughs.” Earlier Abraham and Sarah had laughed in doubt (17:17; 18:12), but now Sarah laughs for joy: “God has made laughter for me” (v. 6). What does this transformation teach about how God can take our doubt, and even our cynical laughter, and turn it into genuine joy through His faithfulness?
6. Many of us carry old doubts or a hardened cynicism, often born from disappointment, that quietly shapes how we approach God. What doubt or cynicism have you been carrying, and what would it look like to bring it honestly to God and ask Him to turn it, in time, into joy?
7. Sarah’s response to the fulfilled promise was overflowing, public joy: “everyone who hears will laugh with me” (v. 6). What does this teach about the right response to God’s faithfulness, and why is remembering, celebrating, and testifying to God’s faithfulness so important for a life of faith?
8. It is easy to plead earnestly for something and then, once it comes, to take it for granted and move on. How well do you remember and celebrate the ways God has kept His word to you? What is one specific instance of God’s faithfulness you could deliberately give thanks for and tell someone about this week?
9. Isaac was the child of promise, given not by human effort but by God’s faithful word at the appointed time, and Paul says believers, “like Isaac, are children of promise” (Galatians 4:28). How does Isaac’s miraculous birth display the gospel pattern that God fulfills His promises in His time, a pattern that culminates when, “in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son” (Galatians 4:4), and how does this assure us that in Christ all God’s promises are Yes (2 Corinthians 1:20)?

10. Look back across this passage. You have watched a twenty-five-year wait end in a single impossible birth, doubt turn to laughter, and God keep His word exactly as He spoke it. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this part of Abraham's story. What is the single truth about God's faithfulness, His timing, or His promises that you most need to carry into this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Galatians 4:4, in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of woman; Galatians 4:28, you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise; 2 Corinthians 1:20, all the promises of God find their Yes in Christ; Hebrews 11:11, by faith Sarah received power to conceive, because she counted Him faithful who had promised; Romans 4:18–21, Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised