

Genesis 21

Outline adapted from “The Outline Bible”

- I. The celebration of Abraham (verses 1-21)
 - a. The fulfillment (verses 1-7)
 - b. The nature of the fulfillment (verses 1-2): Sarah gives birth to the heir of the covenant!
 - c. The name of the fulfillment (verses 3-7): He is named Isaac, meaning “laughter,” because everyone who hears of this will laugh.
 - d. The feast (verse 8): the purpose is to celebrate Isaac’s weaning.
- II. Ishmael is sent away (verses 9-21)
 - a. Sarah sees Ishmael mocking Isaac (verse 9)
 - b. Sarah demands that Abraham order Hagar and Ishmael to leave the camp (verses 10-11).
 - c. The farewell: After Abraham is reassured by God that Hagar will be provided for, he sends her away with a supply of food and water (verses 12-14).
 - d. The fear (verses 15-16): In the wilderness Hagar fears both of them will soon die of exposure.
 - e. The faithfulness (verses 17-21): *The deliverance and development of Ishmael* (21:17–21): God provides food and water for Ishmael in the wilderness and later guides him into adulthood.
- III. Treaty with Abimelech (verses 22-34)
 - a. **The persons** (21:22): Abimelech and his commander, Phicol, come to make a treaty with Abraham.
 - b. **The plan** (21:23–24): Neither Abimelech nor Abraham will harm each other.
 - c. **The problem** (21:25–26): Abraham complains that Abimelech’s servants have taken away one of his wells. Abimelech says he knew nothing about it.
 - d. **The pact** (21:27–30): A special peaceful covenant between the two men is ratified as Abraham gives Abimelech some sheep and oxen.
 - e. **The place** (21:31–34): This is done at Beersheba (“well of the oath”).¹

Swindoll:

GOD ISN'T in a hurry, so He didn't have a problem waiting a quarter century before fulfilling His promise and allowing Abraham and Sarah to conceive. Who knows why He waited that long? It was His call; His timing is perfect. Personally, I believe Abraham would not have been ready any earlier. Abraham needed spiritual maturity, so the Lord waited.

We view all events from the limited perspective of time. It's like trying to drive a car while looking through a straw. We're down here at street level, and our vision barely takes in the landscape. God, however, isn't constrained by time or human perspective. He views events on earth from above, taking in the whole panorama of time from [Genesis 1:1](#) to the end of things, and He sees all events at once. While we hurry because we might be late for something, the

¹ H. L. Willmington, [The Outline Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), Ge 21:22–34.

Lord doesn't need to rush, because He maintains complete control over time. He has prearranged the unfolding of His plans down to less than a nanosecond. For us, within the flow of time, waiting often feels like an eternity. When I'm with people I don't know well, I sometimes ask, "Are you waiting for anything?" Invariably, they have an answer. Everybody I know is waiting for something. Waiting for relief. Waiting for an answer to prayer. Waiting for a dream to be fulfilled. The people who have grown deep in their relationship with God have learned to wait with anticipation instead of worry. They know that God keeps His promises, so they don't fret over whether the fulfillment will come but only when it will take place.

REFLECT

What are you waiting for right now? What does it mean to you that God is always on time? This is what the LORD says: "At just the right time, I will respond to you. On the day of salvation I will help you."

[ISAIAH 49:8²](#)

Verse by verse study:

- I. The celebration of Abraham (verses 1-21)
 - a. The fulfillment (verses 1-8)

Genesis 21:1–8 (ESV)

¹*The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised.*

²*And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.*

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

⁴*And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.*

⁵*Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.*

⁶*And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me."*

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."*

⁸*And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.*

- b. The nature of the fulfillment (verses 1-2): Sarah gives birth to the heir of the covenant!
- c. Notice it says the Lord visited as he said, and did to Sarah what he promised.
- d. The promise was that she would have a son and that is what happened.

² https://insight.org/resources/daily-devotional/individual/perfect-timing?utm_source=mailchimp&utm_medium=email&utm_content=ifldailydevo&utm_campaign=daily-devotional&goal=0_daec2b65fd-4ce6bc6123-106822917

- e. CSB: **As he had said and what he had promised** in v. 1 are almost identical in Hebrew, stressing God's faithfulness to his word. It is further emphasized by **at the appointed time God had told him** in v. 2. It was appropriate then that Abraham should do **as God had commanded him** in v. 4.³
- f. Cross reference: Gen 17:16, 21; 18:10, 14; Gal 4:23⁴
- g. NET: *The Hebrew verb translated "visit" (״בָּרַךְ, paqad) often describes divine intervention for blessing or cursing; it indicates God's special attention to an individual or a matter, always with respect to his people's destiny. He may visit (that is, destroy) the Amalekites; he may visit (that is, deliver) his people in Egypt. Here he visits Sarah, to allow her to have the promised child. One's destiny is changed when the LORD "visits."*⁵
- h. Dr. Constable: *God "visited" Sarah (AV, NKJV, ESV, RSV), "came to" her (HCSB), "took note" of her (NASB), "was gracious" to her (NIV, TNIV), and "showed favor" to her (NEB, v. 1). The Hebrew word used here is a common metaphor that describes God's intervention in nature and human affairs. It also appears when God intervened to save the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (50:24–25; Exod. 4:31), and when He ended a famine (Ruth 1:6). It also occurs when He caused Hannah to conceive (1 Sam. 2:21), and when He brought the Jewish exiles home from the Babylonian Captivity (Jer. 29:10). Thus this word's presence here highlights the major significance of Isaac's birth.*⁶
- i. *McGee listed nine similarities between the birth of Isaac and the birth of Jesus: (1) They had both been promised. (2) With both births there was a long interval between the promise and the fulfillment. (3) The announcements of the births seemed incredulous and impossible to Sarah and to Mary. (4) Both Isaac and Jesus were named before their births. (5) Both births occurred at God's appointed time. (6) Both births were miraculous. (7) Both sons were a particular joy of their fathers. (8) Both sons were obedient to their fathers, even unto death. (9) The miraculous birth of Isaac is a picture of the resurrection of Christ.⁹⁴⁸ Also, both births resulted in their mothers' rejoicing in God's goodness to them.*⁷
- j. Verse 2: Sarah conceives and bears a son to Abraham...

v. verse

v. verse

v. verse

³ Robert D. Bergen, ["Genesis,"](#) in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 40.

⁴ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁵ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:1.

⁶ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ge 21:1.

⁹⁴⁸ McGee, 1:88.

⁷ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ge 21:1.

- k. ESV SB: *The miraculous birth of Isaac, the special offspring of promise, prefigures the coming birth of Christ, in accordance with all the promises of God.*⁸
- l. In his old age...
- m. Cross reference: Acts 7:8; Gal 4:22; Heb 11:11⁹
- n. At the time of which God had spoken to him.
- o. The name of the fulfillment (verses 3-7): He is named Isaac, meaning “laughter,” because everyone who hears of this will laugh.
- p. Abraham names his Isaac which means “he laughs.”
- q. Cross reference: Gen 17:19, 21
- r. Notice verse 3 is specific that this son is from Sarah.
- s. NET: *Heb “the one born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.” The two modifying clauses, the first introduced with an article and the second with the relative pronoun, are placed in the middle of the sentence, before the name Isaac is stated. They are meant to underscore that this was indeed an actual birth to Abraham and Sarah in fulfillment of the promise.*¹⁰
- t. Verse 4: Abraham circumcises him when he was 8 years days old.
- u. ESV SB: *Circumcision represents purification and holiness, anticipating the purity of Christ (Luke 2:21; 3:22; Col. 2:11; see Gen. 17:10).*¹¹
- v. Specified: as the Lord commanded him.
- w. Gen 17:12; Acts 7:8
- x. Verse 5: Abraham is now 100 years old.
- y. NET: *The parenthetical disjunctive clause underscores how miraculous this birth was. Abraham was 100 years old. The fact that the genealogies give the ages of the fathers when their first son is born shows that this was considered a major milestone in one’s life (G. J. Wenham, Genesis [WBC], 2:80).*¹²
- z. CSB SB: *Though **Abraham was a hundred years old** at Isaac’s birth, at least four pre-flood patriarchs had fathered children when they were older than he (5:6, 18, 25, 28).*¹³
- aa. Verses 6-7: we see Sarah’s respond which corresponds to the naming.
- bb. NET: *Sarah’s words play on the name “Isaac” in a final triumphant manner. God prepared “laughter” (יִשְׁחָק, ysékhoq) for her, and everyone who hears about this “will laugh” (יִשְׁחָקוּ, yitskhaq) with her. The laughter now signals great joy and fulfillment, not unbelief (cf. Gen 18:12–15).*¹⁴

⁸ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 85.

⁹ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

¹⁰ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:3.

¹¹ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 85.

WBC *Word Biblical Commentary* (a commentary series)

¹² Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:5.

¹³ Robert D. Bergen, [“Genesis,”](#) in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 40.

¹⁴ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:6.

- cc. Dr. Constable foot note: *On the alternate reading of verses 6-7 as “God has made a joke of me laugh at me ...,” see Isaac Rabinowitz, “Sarah’s Wish (Gen. XXI 6-7),” Vetus Testamentum 29 (July 1979):362-63. This reading has not won support from most commentators.*¹⁵
- dd. Verse 7: we see the expectations of the response.
- ee. The feast (verse 8): the purpose is to celebrate Isaac’s weaning.
- ff. NET: *Children were weaned closer to the age of two or three in the ancient world, because infant mortality was high. If an infant grew to this stage, it was fairly certain he or she would live. Such an event called for a celebration, especially for parents who had waited so long for a child.*¹⁶
- gg. CSB SB: *The Bible does not indicate Isaac’s age when he **was weaned**. In some cultures children receive nourishment from their mother into their fifth year; beyond age two this provides comfort more than nourishment. When the day came for Isaac to be weaned, **Abraham held a great feast** to assist the child psychologically in taking this step. During the party, however, Ishmael was **mocking** Isaac. The apostle Paul understood this to mean he was persecuting Isaac (Gl 4:29). **Drive out** (Hb garash) is the same term used to describe the expulsions of Adam and Cain following their sins (3:24; 4:14).*¹⁷

II. Ishmael is sent away (verses 9-21)

Genesis 21:9–21 (ESV)

⁹But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.

¹⁰So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.”

¹¹And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.

¹²But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

¹³And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.”

¹⁴So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes.

¹⁶Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Let me not look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

¹⁷And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.

¹⁵ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003).

¹⁶ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:8.

Hb Hebrew

¹⁷ Robert D. Bergen, [“Genesis,”](#) in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 40.

¹⁸*Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”*

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 boy a drink.*

²⁰*And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow.*

²¹*He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.*

- a. Sarah sees Ishmael mocking Isaac (verse 9)
- b. This word has the idea of a sexual immorality. We see that same word in Genesis 39 when Joseph is falsely accused.¹⁸
- c. This is not just a normal childhood bullying or game...
- d. NET: *What exactly Ishmael was doing is not clear. Interpreters have generally concluded that the boy was either (1) mocking Isaac (cf. NASB, NIV, NLT) or (2) merely playing with Isaac as if on equal footing (cf. NAB, NRSV). In either case Sarah saw it as a threat. The same participial form was used in Gen 19:14 to describe how some in Lot’s family viewed his attempt to warn them of impending doom. It also appears later in Gen 39:14, 17, where Potiphar accuses Joseph of mocking them.¹⁹ Paul in Gal 4:29 says that Ishmael persecuted Isaac. He uses a Greek word that can mean “to put to flight; to chase away; to pursue” and may be drawing on a rabbinic interpretation of the passage. In Paul’s analogical application of the passage, he points out that once the promised child Isaac (symbolizing Christ as the fulfillment of God’s promise) has come, there is no room left for the slave woman and her son (who symbolize the Mosaic law).²⁰*
- e. **Moody Bible Commentary is good:** *Following Isaac’s weaning (v. 8), when he would have begun to “step out” from under the direct supervision of his mother, the enmity that God had declared would exist between the promised son and Ishmael (see 16:12) inevitably began to materialize. Thus Ishmael would have been around 16 or 17 years old at this point. He was 13 a year before Isaac’s birth (17:21, 27), with the weaning lasting for two or three years (1Sm 1:22–24; 2:11; 2 Macc 7:27; and in the*

¹⁸ Dr Michael Rydelnic shares on Saturday, Nov 3, 2018 (Open Line)

NASB New American Standard Bible

NIV The New International Version

NLT New Living Translation

NAB The New American Bible

NRSV New Revised Standard Version (1989)

¹⁹ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:9.

²⁰ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:9.

v. verse

*Talmud in b. Ketub. 60b; b. Yebam. 43a). Ishmael acted in a **mocking** manner toward his younger brother. The word **mocking** is a deliberate example of wordplay, being identical to the name Isaac (“laughter”) but used here in the negative sense of mockery. Furthermore, some ancient rabbis noted something more sinister than mere sibling teasing, rather identifying a variety of evil actions. The ancient Jewish commentary, called the Midrash (cf. Gen. Rab. 53:11) notes that in addition to mockery (Pr 22:18), the word was associated with sexual immorality (Gn 39:17), idolatry (Ex 32:6), and attempted murder (2Sm 2:14). Although no conclusive meaning is offered, the Midrash does accurately demonstrate that Ishmael was likely not engaged in innocent play. The strife between brothers in this passage reflects a common theme in Genesis (see comments on 4:8).²¹*

- f. **Dr. Constable:** Normally, in ancient Near Eastern culture, the son of a concubine became the heir of his mother but not of his father (cf. Judg. 9:1–3). Now that Abraham had a son by his wife, Sarah did not want Ishmael to share Isaac’s inheritance. Weaning would normally have occurred at age two or three (cf. 1 Sam. 1:22–24; Hos. 1:8; 2 Macc. 7:27–28).²²
- g. Reformation Study Bible: *The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael remove any threat to Isaac’s inheritance. The accounts of the birth of Isaac and the removal of Ishmael are linked by another reference to laughter, Ishmael’s “scoffing” at Isaac (v. 9 text note).*²³
- h. Sarah demands that Abraham order Hagar and Ishmael to leave the camp (verses 10-11).
- i. Notice the wording in verse 10: So she said to Abraham, “Banish that slave woman and her son, for the son of that slave woman will not be an heir along with my son Isaac!”
- j. “the slave woman” Reformation Study Bible: **slave woman.** *The Hebrew word here differs from the one translated “servant” in 16:1 (16:1 note). In her anger Sarah stresses Hagar’s servile status—an indication of the animosity between these two rivals.*²⁴
- k. “the son of”
- l. We do not see a name

b. Ketub. Babylonian Ketubbot (Talmud)

b. Yebam. Babylonian Yebamot (Talmud)

cf. compare or consult

Gen. Rab. *Genesis Rabbah* (Midrash)

²¹ Michael A. Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, eds., [“Genesis,”](#) in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 79.

²² Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ge 21:8.

²³ R. C. Sproul, ed., [The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version \(2015 Edition\)](#) (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 46.

²⁴ R. C. Sproul, ed., [The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version \(2015 Edition\)](#) (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 46.

- m. “will not be an heir along with my son Isaac.
- n. ESV SB: *The distinction between the miraculous son of promise and the son from human planning prefigures the distinction between the church and natural descendants of Abraham (Gal. 4:30).*²⁵
- o. NET: *Heb “drive out.” The language may seem severe, but Sarah’s maternal instincts sensed a real danger in that Ishmael was not treating Isaac with the proper respect.*²⁶
- p. Verse 11 shows that this demand displeased Abraham because Ishmael was his son.
- q. Reformation Study Bible: *As a father, Abraham feels genuine love and affection for Ishmael (17:18). In addition, he may be displeased with Sarah’s request on account of customs prohibiting the expulsion of Hagar and her son (16:6 note).*²⁷ *According to the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1750), the despised mistress in this situation could not sell her maidservant, but she could mark her with the slave mark and count her among the slaves.*²⁸
- r. CSB: *It was **very distressing to Abraham** (lit “it was very bad in Abraham’s eyes”) to expel his firstborn son from the household. However, God’s guidance and comforting assurances enabled Abraham to do the wise thing. Because Ishmael was Abraham’s **offspring**, God would not allow the child to die in the wilderness; instead, God would **make him a nation**. And though Isaac was not Abraham’s firstborn, the patriarch’s **offspring** would be **traced through** his lineage.*²⁹
- s. The farewell: After Abraham is reassured by God that Hagar will be provided for, he sends her away with a supply of food and water (verses 12-14).
- t. In verse 12 the Lord speaks...
- u. Dr. Constable sharing a quote: *“But how could God ask Abraham to do evil if divorce is always a sin? The answer must be that divorce in this case is either not a sin or else is the lesser of two evils.”*³⁰ Further:

For other instances where God apparently commanded divorce, see Deuteronomy 21:10–14 and Ezra 9–10. Since God makes the rules, He alone can also alter them according to His sovereign will.

²⁵ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 86.

²⁶ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:10.

²⁷ R. C. Sproul, ed., [The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version \(2015 Edition\)](#) (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 46.

²⁸ R. C. Sproul, ed., [The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version \(2015 Edition\)](#) (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 38.

lit Literally/literally

²⁹ Robert D. Bergen, [“Genesis,”](#) in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 40–41.

³⁰ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ge 21:8.

“The key to Sarah’s demand lies in a clause in the laws of Lipit-Ishtar where it is stipulated that the father may grant freedom to the slave woman and the children she has borne him, in which case they forfeit their share of the paternal property.”⁹⁵⁴

The “laws of Lipit-Ishtar” were laws that governed life in Mesopotamia that antedated the Mosaic Law.

The focus of this revelation is a clarification of God’s purposes for each of the two sons. God would bless Abraham through Ishmael as well as through Isaac.

“As Cain suffered both banishment from the divine and protection by the divine, so Ishmael is both loser and winner, cut off from what should be his but promised a significant lineage.”⁹⁵⁵³¹

- v. The Lord does say that the descendants will be named through Isaac.
- w. *The importance of this is picked up in Rom. 9:7 and Heb. 11:18.*³²
- x. In verse 13 the Lord continues: God will make a **great nation**... notice the Lord does not use her name either... “the son of the slave woman...”
- y. Because... so this is the reason... “he is your offspring.”
- z. God is going to bless Ishmael.
- aa. This does all go back to Abraham and Sarah taking matters into their own hands in Genesis 16 and remember in Genesis 16:4: Hagar looked with contempt upon her mistress and there were issues.
- bb. Verse 14: Abraham gets up early.
- cc. CSB SB: *Abraham’s love and concern for Hagar and Ishmael are reflected in his diligence—getting up **early** and giving them provisions. The banished pair wandered in **the Wilderness of Beer-sheba**, an area some twenty miles west of the southern end of the Dead Sea. When Hagar and Ishmael ran out of water, Ishmael almost died, perhaps of heatstroke. Overwhelmed with grief, Hagar placed him in the shadow of **one of the bushes** and then went about **a bowshot away**—just far enough to avoid hearing **the boy** as he lay dying. Though Hagar may not have known that where there is large vegetation in a desert there is also a high water table, **God opened her eyes** to the fact that **a well** was nearby. God had providentially directed her wanderings and given her a demonstration of his faithfulness.*³³
- dd. Abraham took bread, skin of water, and gave those to Hagar.
- ee. The skin was used as a bottle.
- ff. The verse is very descriptive:

⁹⁵⁴ Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 147.

⁹⁵⁵ Hamilton, *The Book ... Chapters 18-50*, p. 81.

³¹ Tom Constable, [*Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ge 21:8.

³² Crossway Bibles, [*The ESV Study Bible*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 86.

³³ Robert D. Bergen, [*“Genesis.”*](#) in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 41.

- gg. He put it on her shoulder.
- hh. "along with the child..."
- ii. The child would be about 14 years old
- jj. Genesis 16:16 says that Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was born.
- kk. Abraham is now 100 years as verse 5 of this chapter shares.
- ll. ESV SB: *While these words might suggest that Ishmael was placed on Hagar's shoulder, this is hardly likely, since Ishmael is about 16 years old (see 16:16; 21:5, 8) at this time. The last thing Abraham did was to give Ishmael to Hagar, probably after "putting it" (the bread and water) on Hagar's shoulder. The Hebrew term for "child" (Hb. yeled) may denote an older teenager; it is used, e.g., of Joseph in 37:30. **wilderness of Beersheba.** Water was difficult to find in this region. Man-made wells appear to have been the main source of water (see 21:30; 26:18–22). On "Beersheba," see note on 21:31.*³⁴
- mm. She is now wandering in the wilderness of Beersheba.
- nn. The fear (verses 15-16): In the wilderness Hagar fears both of them will soon die of exposure.
- oo. Verse 15 shares that the water was used up.
- pp. Verse 16: put ourselves in her place. Verse 16: *Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.*
- qq. NET: *A bowshot would be a distance of about a hundred yards (ninety meters).*³⁵
- rr. She does not want to watch him die.
- ss. They are suffering.
- tt. She weeps, probably audibly.
- uu. The faithfulness (verses 17-21): *The deliverance and development of Ishmael (21:17–21): God provides food and water for Ishmael in the wilderness and later guides him into adulthood.*
- vv. Verse 17: God hears Ishmael crying.
- ww. NET: *The text has not to this point indicated that Ishmael was crying out, either in pain or in prayer. But the text here makes it clear that God heard him. Ishmael is clearly central to the story. Both the mother and the LORD are focused on the child's imminent death.*³⁶
- xx. The angel of God called to Hagar...
- yy. This may be a Theophany, Christophany, or special angel.

³⁴ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 86.

³⁵ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:16.

³⁶ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:17.

- zz. Moody: *There is no textual indication as to whether **the angel of God** who called to **Hagar** was a theophany (as in 18:1–8). Significantly, the word for **God** is Elohim, reflecting His power but not His covenantal, relational name Yahweh.*³⁷
- aaa. The angels says that God has heard...
- bbb. ESV SB: **God heard the voice of the boy** (v. 17). *Although this passage avoids using his personal name, “Ishmael” means “God hears” (see 16:11). Although it was Ishmael’s misbehavior that led to the expulsion from Abraham’s household, God reaffirms his promise: “I will make him into a great nation” (21:18).*³⁸
- ccc. Verse 19: God enabled Hagar to see a well.
- ddd. Verses 19-21 are about their future.
- eee. Ishmael grows up, lived in the wilderness, became an expert with the bow, he marries from the land of Egypt.
- fff. Hagar is likely from Egypt.
- ggg. CSB: *Honoring his promises to Abraham (v. 13; 17:20) and Hagar (21:18), God protected Ishmael, who eventually settled in **the Wilderness of Paran**, west of the Gulf of Aqaba in the northern Sinai Desert. Hagar, who was herself an Egyptian (16:3), got her son an Egyptian wife. Ishmael would produce twelve sons (25:13–15).*³⁹
- hhh. NET: *The wilderness of Paran* is an area in the east central region of the Sinai peninsula, northeast from the traditional site of Mt. Sinai and with the Arabah and the Gulf of Aqaba as its eastern border.⁴⁰
- iii. Dr. Constable: *Ishmael became the father of 12 sons (25:13–16), as Jacob also did. From Ishmael’s sons came the Arab nations, that have ever since been the chief antagonists of the Israelites. The term “Arab” (someone from Arabia) came into use for the first time in the ninth century B.C.⁹⁵⁶ Hagar chose a wife for her son from her homeland: Egypt (v. 21).*⁴¹

III. Treaty with Abimelech (verses 22-34)

Genesis 21:22–34 (ESV)

²²At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, “God is with you in all that you do.

³⁷ Michael A. Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, eds., [“Genesis,”](#) in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 79.

³⁸ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 86.

v. verse

³⁹ Robert D. Bergen, [“Genesis,”](#) in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 41.

⁴⁰ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:20–21.

⁹⁵⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 156.

⁴¹ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ge 21:8.

²³Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned.”

²⁴And Abraham said, “I will swear.”

²⁵When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized,

²⁶Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.”

²⁷So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant.

²⁸Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart.

²⁹And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?”

³⁰He said, “These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.”

³¹Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath.

³²So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines.

³³Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

³⁴And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

- a. Dr. Constable: *Since Abraham had become a powerful individual in the land, as a result of God’s blessing, King Abimelech initiated a bilateral treaty with him for his own protection. This was evidently the same “Abimelech” whom Abraham had dealt with previously (ch. 20). They made a parity covenant (i.e., between equals, vv. 31–32). This is the first of several parity covenants in Genesis (cf. 26:28; 31:43–45). This covenant treaty was a remarkable admission of Abraham’s standing and blessing by God, and an expression of Abimelech’s confidence in the future existence of the patriarch’s family.*⁴²
- b. **The persons** (21:22): Abimelech and his commander, Phicol, come to make a treaty with Abraham.
- c. **Phicol is the commander of Abimelech’s army**
- d. **Dr. Constable:** “Phicol” (v. 22) seems to have been a title rather than a proper name, probably of Anatolian origin.⁹⁶⁰⁴³

⁴² Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ge 21:22.

⁹⁶⁰ See Thomson, 2:352. On the origin of Phicol, Abimelech’s army commander, see J. D. Ray, “Two Etymologies: Ziklag and Phicol,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36:3 (July 1986):358-59; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, pp. 91-92. Cf. 26:26.

⁴³ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ge 21:22.

- e. **CSB SB:** *Isaac's miraculous birth and the success of Abraham's prayer (20:17) convinced **Abimelech** that God was with the patriarch **in everything**. Fearing that Abraham, who had hundreds of trained fighters in his camp (14:14), might mount a successful attack on Gerar, Abimelech and his military commander Phicol asked Abraham to **swear** that he would never **break an agreement** of peace with their community. Abraham calmed their fears by making an oath of peace.⁴⁴*
- f. **This shows Abraham's status. God is with you... in all that you do!!!**
- g. **The plan** (21:23–24): Neither Abimelech nor Abraham will harm each other.
- h. Won't deal falsely with Abimelech or Phicol
- i. Or their offspring
- j. Descendants
- k. It seems that this is their children and then grandchildren, etc
- l. Posterity seems to apply to all future generations of people.
- m. As they have shown Abraham kindness, they want kindness in return.
- n. AND- to the land in which he is living.
- o. NET: *The word "land" refers by metonymy to the people in the land.*⁴⁵
- p. Verse 24: Abraham's swears this.
- q. **The problem** (21:25–26): Abraham complains that Abimelech's servants have taken away one of his wells. Abimelech says he knew nothing about it.
- r. **This** concerned a well which would be a big deal then.
- s. **It** seems that Abimelech's servants had taken possession of a well.
- t. **Abraham** has a dispute, but Abimelech knew nothing about it.
- u. NET: *The Hebrew verb used here [verse 25] means "to argue; to dispute"; it can focus on the beginning of the dispute (as here), the dispute itself, or the resolution of a dispute (Isa 1:18). Apparently the complaint was lodged before the actual oath was taken.*⁴⁶
- v. **The pact** (21:27–30): A special peaceful covenant between the two men is ratified as Abraham gives Abimelech some sheep and oxen.
- w. Abraham gives to Abimelech.
- x. NET: *Since the king wanted a treaty to share in Abraham's good fortune, Abraham used the treaty to secure ownership of and protection for the well he dug. It would be useless to make a treaty to live in this territory if he had no rights to the water. Abraham consented to the treaty, but added his rider to it.*⁴⁷
- y. **Notice the seven ewe lambs are a witness of the covenant.**
- z. **Those are things they would do.**

⁴⁴ Robert D. Bergen, "[Genesis](#)," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 41.

⁴⁵ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:23.

⁴⁶ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:25.

⁴⁷ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:30.

- aa. **Genesis 31:48 a pile of stones is a witness.**
- bb. **The place** (21:31–34): This is done at Beersheba (“well of the oath”).⁴⁸
- cc. **NET:** *The name Beer Sheba (בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע, bé’er shava’) means “well of the oath” or “well of the seven.” Both the verb “to swear” and the number “seven” have been used throughout the account. Now they are drawn in as part of the explanation of the significance of the name.*
- dd. ⁵⁸ **sn** The verb forms a wordplay with the name *Beer Sheba*.⁴⁹
- ee. **Remember** that Moses is inspired by God to write these books for instructions but also to tell the Israelite people about the land before they enter the promised land.
- ff. Verse 32 Abimelech and Phicor return to the land of the Philistines.
- gg. **NET:** *The Philistines mentioned here may not be ethnically related to those who lived in Palestine in the time of the judges and the united monarchy. See D. M. Howard, “Philistines,” Peoples of the Old Testament World, 238.*⁵⁰

ESV SB: **also see below from Dr. Constable: land of the Philistines.** *The use of the term “Philistines” here is generally taken to be anachronistic, since the name is normally associated with non-Canaanites from the Aegean region who inhabited southwest Canaan from about 1180 B.C. onward—nearly a thousand years after Abraham’s time. (In 1 Samuel the Philistines are portrayed as the main opponents of the Israelites.) In light of this, the term may be used here and elsewhere to replace an earlier, obscure term; Genesis contains various examples of such modernizations (see note on Gen. 14:13–16; also Introduction: Author, Title, and Date). Alternatively, archaeological evidence from various sites in Canaan points to the possibility that some people from the Aegean region (esp. Crete and Cyprus) may have already been settled in southwest Canaan. This raises the possibility that Abraham and Isaac (see ch. 26) had dealings with people who came from the same area as the later Philistines.*

21:33 Everlasting God (Hb. ‘El ‘Olam). *In Hebrew ‘El is the common Semitic term for “God,” followed by the attribute “of everlastingness” (Hb. ‘Olam). See note on 14:18.*⁵¹

- hh. **NET:** *The planting of the tamarisk tree is a sign of Abraham’s intent to stay there for a long time, not a religious act. A growing tree in the Negev would be a lasting witness to God’s provision of water.*⁵²

⁴⁸ H. L. Willmington, [*The Outline Bible*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), Ge 21:22–34.

⁴⁹ Biblical Studies Press, [*The NET Bible First Edition Notes*](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:31.

⁵⁰ Biblical Studies Press, [*The NET Bible First Edition Notes*](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:32.

⁵¹ Crossway Bibles, [*The ESV Study Bible*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 87.

⁵² Biblical Studies Press, [*The NET Bible First Edition Notes*](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:33.

- ii. Verse 33: Abraham calls on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. NET: *The expression refers to worshiping the LORD through prayer and sacrifice (see Gen 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 26:25).*⁵³
- jj. Verse 34: Abraham is in the land of the Philistines for many days.

Interesting apologetics:

Dr. Constable:

*Critics of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives have pointed out that references of “the land of the Philistines” in Genesis (vv. 32, 34; cf. 26:1) are evidence that the Bible contains errors. These critics believe that the Philistines did not enter Canaan until about 1200 B.C., whereas Abraham evidently lived about 800 years earlier. They base this assumption on the lack of archaeological evidence of Philistine occupation. But this is an argument from silence. Perhaps one day archaeological evidence will be discovered that validates the presence of Philistines in Canaan in Abraham’s day.*⁹⁶³

One explanation of this reference to Philistines is that the Philistines of Genesis were peaceful, and those of Judges and later were warlike. Perhaps the same name describes an earlier but entirely different race of people. They may have resembled the later thirteenth-century Philistines, who also emigrated from the Aegean area into Palestine.⁹⁶⁴ Or, to consider another possibility, perhaps the Philistines of 2000 B.C. were Minoan and thus peaceful, whereas those of 1200 were Mycenaean and thus warlike.⁹⁶⁵ Other explanations follow:

“I hold that the Philistines came from the neighboring coast of Africa, perhaps from Lower Egypt, though Josephus seems to place Caphtor, their ancient home, higher up the valley of the Nile.”⁹⁶⁶

“I suggest that the Philistines of Genesis represent the first wave of Sea Peoples from the Aegean, and that the later Philistines represent the last wave (cf. 1200 B.C.).”⁹⁶⁷

“Biblical historical data are accurate to an extent far surpassing the ideas of any modern critical students, who have consistently tended to err on the side of hypercriticism.”⁹⁶⁸

⁵³ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 21:33.

⁹⁶³ See Free, pp. 65-66.

⁹⁶⁴ Kitchen, *Ancient Orient ...*, p. 80; Edward E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament*, pp. 94-95.

⁹⁶⁵ Barker, p. 134. See also Vassos Karageorghis, “Exploring Philistine Origins on the Island of Cyprus,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10:2 (March-April 1984):16-28.

⁹⁶⁶ Thomson, 2:288.

⁹⁶⁷ Hamilton, *The Book ... Chapters 18-50*, p. 94. See also Archer, *Encyclopedia of ...*, pp. 94-96.

⁹⁶⁸ Albright, *The Archaeology ...*, p 229.

By planting a tree, Abraham indicated his determination to stay in that region. Tamarisk trees (v. 33) were long-lived and evergreen.⁹⁶⁹ This tree was an appropriate symbol of the enduring grace of the faithful God, whom Abraham now recognized as “the Everlasting God” (El Olam).

“The Hebrew word ‘olam is often translated with ‘eternal,’ ‘eternity,’ but it does not contain the conception of timelessness or otherworldly time but rather of time which extends forward and backward without end.”⁹⁷⁰⁵⁴

⁹⁶⁹ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, p. 282.

⁹⁷⁰ von Rad, p. 237.

⁵⁴ Tom Constable, [*Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ge 21:22.