

A Promise to Sarah

Gen 17:15-17; 18:9-15; 21:1-7
SS Lesson for 10/13/2013

Devotional Scripture: Heb 11:8-12

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God's Word should always be accepted as reality (1 Thess 2:13)

God's Word is eternal and enduring (1 Peter 1:23)

Reality because of God's Faithfulness (21:2)

Because God is God, He is totally faithful (Deut. 7:9)

God is faithful even if we are not (2 Tim. 2:13)

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson examines the **Promise to Sarah**. The **study's aim** is to see God at work with people of faith in seemingly impossible situations. The **study's application** is to trust God's Word and His character in our daily walk and worship..

Key Verse: Gen 18:14

14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Three men visited Abraham near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron (cf. 13:18; 14:13) to confirm the time of the fulfillment of the promise. These three were the Lord (18:1, 10, 13; cf. comments on "the Angel of the Lord," 16:7) and two angels. Though one is justified in seeing lessons here about hospitality, the angels certainly did not visit Abraham for the purpose of teaching him this. Why did the Angel of the Lord approach Abraham in this manner? Why did He not use an oracle, a vision, or a voice? Possibly He meant it as a test for both Abraham and the Sodomites. The moral states of Abraham and Sodom may have been indicated by their different treatments of strangers. Abraham's peaceful, quiet visit contrasted greatly with Sodom's outbursts of brutality and inhumanity (cf. chaps. 18-19). But more likely Abraham's visitors meant to convey intimate fellowship. To eat together was important for fellowship, peace offerings, and treaties. When the Lord was ready to specify the fulfillment of the covenantal promise, He came in person and ate in Abraham's tent. Nothing could more significantly communicate their close relationship. Abraham... hurried to them (18:2), hurried back to the tent (v. 6), ran to the herd (v. 7), and his servant hurried (v. 7); Abraham bowed low before them (v. 2); he had water brought to wash their feet (v. 4); he served them freshly baked bread (v. 6), a choice... calf (v. 7), curds and milk (v. 8), and he stood while they were eating (v. 8; cf. vv. 1-2). All this suggests that he perceived who his visitors were. After the meal one of the angelic visitors announced that a son would be born to Sarah in a year. This Angel of the Lord was clearly the Lord Himself (cf. 16:7). The thought seemed ludicrous to Sarah and she laughed in her heart. The Lord's reply rebuked the woman: Is anything too hard (better, "marvelous") for the Lord? Basically this account is a call to believe that God can do the impossible. He confirmed His promise by a personal visit—and ate with them—to announce that the time was at hand. It was the annunciation of a humanly impossible birth. When something as incredible as this is declared, the human response is consistent: like Sarah, people are taken off guard, laugh, and then out of fear deny that they laughed (18:15). But God knows human hearts and that Christians often do stagger at what He says He can do. Is a child from a dead womb too marvelous for the One who called all things into existence? It is no laughing matter. He can do it. Nothing is incredible for those in covenant fellowship with the Lord because nothing is too difficult for Him.

Commentary from Barnes Notes

The narrative affords a pleasing instance of the primitive manners of the East. The hospitality of the pastoral tribes was spontaneous and unreserved. The washing of the feet, which were partly at least uncovered in walking, the reclining under the tree, and the offer of refreshment, are indicative of an unchanging rural simplicity. The phrases "a little water, a morsel of bread," flow from a thoughtful courtesy. "Therefore are ye come." In the course of events it has so fallen out, in order that you might be refreshed. The brief reply is a frank and unaffected acceptance of the hospitable invitation. The unvarying customs of Eastern pastoral life here come up before us. There is plenty of flour and of live cattle. But the cakes have to be kneaded and baked on the hearth, and the calf has to be killed and dressed. Abraham personally gives directions, Sarah personally attends to the baking, and the boy or lad—that is, the domestic servant whose business it is—kills and dresses the meat. Abraham himself attends upon his guests. "Three

seahs." About three pecks, and therefore a superabundant supply for three guests. An omer, or three tenths of a seah, was considered sufficient for one man for a day (Ex 16:16). But Abraham had a numerous household, and plentifulness was the character of primitive hospitality. "Hearth cakes," baked among the coals. "Butter" - seemingly any preparation of milk, cream, curds, or butter, all of which are used in the East. The men now enter upon the business of their visit. "Where is Sarah thy wife?" The jealousy and seclusion of later times had not yet rendered such an inquiry uncourteous. Sarah is within hearing of the conversation. "I will certainly return unto thee." This is the language of self-determination, and therefore suitable to the sovereign, not to the ambassador. "At the time of life;" literally the living time, seemingly the time of birth, when the child comes to manifest life. "Sarah thy wife shall have a son." Sarah hears this with incredulous surprise, and laughs with mingled doubt and delight. She knows that in the nature of things she is past child-bearing. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Sarah laughed within herself, within the tent and behind the speaker; yet to her surprise her internal feelings are known to him. She finds there is One present who rises above the sphere of nature. In her confusion and terror she denies that she laughed. But he who sees what is within, insists that she did laugh, at least in the thought of her heart. There is a beautiful simplicity in the whole scene. Sarah now doubtless received faith and strength to conceive.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

God visited Abraham and repeated His promise of providing him with a son. At first Sarah did not believe that she could bear a son in her old age. However, God challenged her by saying, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Such an admonition is applicable for God's people even today. This text helps answer questions in the realms of both faith and biblical example. Concerning faith, Christians should exercise faith in God even when circumstances seem to be against us. In a world fraught with tragedy, natural disasters, economic recession, and constant concerns, placing our faith in God seems difficult at best and impossible at worst. Yet we must constantly remind ourselves that God uses difficult circumstances to prove Himself faithful. The biblical concept is a paradox, but it pervades the Christian life nonetheless. Paul experienced this paradox to the fullest extent when he received a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). Whatever this ailment was, it caused Paul to beg God to remove it. God refused to take it away, but Paul grew tremendously out of this experience. Notice his amazing conclusion: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (vs. 10). Paul came to realize that pain and uncertainties are the arenas in which God forges strong believers. He then celebrated those things that caused him pain because through them Christ was glorified and His faithfulness made more evident. And we should echo this anthem in our Christian walk. This is not to say that we should enjoy painful things; rather, we should celebrate God's using those things to introduce Christ's strength into our lives. In regard to the examples of different people and lifestyles in the Bible, it is instructive to consider how many flawed and weak characters are recorded in Scripture. Consider Samson and his sensual way of living. Think also of King David. While he was used by God to save Israel numerous times, as well as to write Scripture, he nonetheless committed adultery and murder. Consider also the life of Jacob, Sarah's grandchild. He was notorious for his tricky and deceitful tactics. Yet God saved, sanctified, and used these people who are honored throughout the pages of the Bible. Sarah later came to place her faith in God's promise of a son: "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Heb. 11:11). We can take heart that God uses people who struggle in their faith. While God does not sin or condone unbelief, we can be assured that He loves us no matter what. Our responsibility is not to make ourselves perfect before God. Rather, it is to place our faith in God and His forgiveness, repent of sin, and seek to obey consistently. Moreover, we must be sensitive to His convicting work as He continues to form us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The concept of the outline of the lesson was adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
17:17	hen Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"	Promises Regardless of Obstacles
18:13	And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?'"	Promises Regardless of the Doubt of Sarah
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.	Promises Fulfilled Through the Reality of the Birth of Isaac

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Some people make promises to God that are intended to manipulate God into doing what they want. The phrase foxhole religion describes another category of suspect promises. The one making this type of promise commits his or her future, with all sincerity, to God if God will only spare the person from imminent danger. But the promise may fade from memory once the danger has passed. Today's lesson is about promises that God made to Sarah about her having a son. God's promises are not like ours—he never manipulates; his memory doesn't fade. When God promises, he keeps his word, and we receive the benefits. God made several promises to Abram. When Abram's family left Harran, the Lord said that he would make Abram to be a great nation (Genesis 12:2). Abram entered Canaan at age 75, and he was told that this was the land that God planned to give to his descendants (12:7). After Abram and nephew Lot went their separate ways, Abram was again told that all the land he could see would be given to his descendants (13:15). But Abram and his wife were childless. With the passing of the years, Abram may have been thinking again how he could "help" God resolve this problem of Abram's having a proper heir. In Genesis 16, Abram's wife, Sarai (renamed Sarah in today's lesson), offered a culturally acceptable way that could fulfill what had been promised: she would give Hagar, her maidservant, to Abram. The resulting offspring would be from Abram's body, and Sarai could have a son through Hagar. This attempt to run ahead of God turned out to be a bad idea, as Genesis 16:4b-6 shows. The Lord appeared to Abram 13 years later to reveal new dimensions of the covenant (Genesis 17:1). First, Abram's name (meaning "exalted father") was changed to Abraham (meaning "father of a multitude"; 17:5). It was strange for a man who had only one son (Ishmael) to have such a name! Even so, Abraham's acceptance of the name shows that he understood that to change a person's name shows that you have authority over that person. Today's text takes us into a second name change initiated by the authority of God.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

The details of God's dealing with the godly couple, Abraham and Sarah, may seem to be a very small part of human history, but they are of prime importance in the spiritual realm. God does the impossible and promises that which only He can perform. His promises and their fulfillment are not capricious. They are part of His great eternal plan for man's redemption and His Son's glorification. One of the best reasons to believe in God's Word is fulfilled prophecy. God makes a particular point of this, saying, "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning" (Isa. 46:9-10). Of course, the greatest of fulfilled prophecies surround the coming of the Lord Jesus. His birth, death, and resurrection are prophesied in great detail throughout the

Old Testament. The exact unfolding and completion of these prophecies are recorded in the New Testament. In this week's lesson, a very detailed example of prophecy and its fulfillment commands our attention.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Promises Regardless of Obstacles (Gen 17:15-17)

15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.

16 And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."

17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

Obstacles overcome by a name change (15)

God changed Jacob's name because of His perseverance (Gen 32:28)

28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

God changed Solomon's name because He loved him (2 Sam 12:24-25)

24 Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; 25 and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.

God changed Peter's name because He had a rock-like purpose for him (John 1:40-42)

40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

God will change the saved saints names because they overcame the world (Rev 2:17)

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

Obstacles overcome by blessings (16)

Blessings where things happening at the appointed time (Rom 9:9)

9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

Blessings because of obedience (1 Peter 3:6)

6 like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Blessings in the heavenly realms (Eph 1:3)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Blessings through the promises to Abraham (Gal 3:8-9)

8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Blessings of a new covenant through Jesus (Heb 9:15)

15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Obstacles of Doubt (17)

Doubt causes weakened faith (Matt 14:25-31)

25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Doubt makes one unstable (James 1:6-8)

6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Christians should be merciful to those who doubt (Jude 1:22)

22 Be merciful to those who doubt ;

Abram recovered from his momentary doubt and became fully persuaded that God could do what He promised (Rom 4:19-24)

19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead — since he was about a hundred years old — and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness — for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead

Promises Regardless of the Doubt of Sarah (Gen 18:11-14)

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.

12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

13 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?'

14 "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

Doubt because of age (18:11-12)

Doubt because human limitations (Gen 17:15-17, 19)

15 God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." 17 Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" 19 Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

Doubt, but with God all things are possible (Matt 19:26)

26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible ."

Doubt that should be turned into perseverance (James 1:4-6)

4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

Doubt that should be helped (Jude 1:22)

22 Be merciful to those who doubt

Doubt that should turn into reliance on God (Mark 11:22-24)

22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Doubt that does not stop God from being faithful (2 Tim 2:13)

13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Laughing for Joy (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

"Did you hear the one about ... ?" So goes the opening line of countless jokes. Most of us enjoy a good joke, and if the story is told well, it doesn't even have to be plausible to make us laugh. Some people like side-splitting, belly-laugh-producing jokes; others prefer subtle humor. Whatever our preference, laughter is good medicine. In recent years science has established that laughter is good for our physical, mental, and emotional health. A good laugh relaxes muscles, reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and enhances the function of the immune system. It even reduces pain. Sarah's decision to name her child Isaac—meaning "he laughs"—was especially poignant. At first, Sarah laughed at God's "ridiculous" announcement. That was a laugh of derision, and it's hard to see any "good medicine" in it. It was a scornful laugh that originated in the pain of barrenness. But by the time her child was born, Sarah was laughing for joy. This was a laugh of thanksgiving for a promise fulfilled. If we see God as Sarah came to see him, we will also find our lives filled with delight. Think about it: When was the last time you laughed with joy over something marvelous that God did in your life?

Doubt because of not understanding (18:13)

God is never slow about keeping His promises (2 Pet 3:9)

9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Some questions should give over to faith (Job 38:1-4)

1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: 2 "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? 3 Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. 4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.

Sometimes we don't understand because God's promises are spiritual (John 3:9-12)

9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. 10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

We need to study God's Word more so we will be able to understand His promises (1 John 2:24-26)

24 See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is what he promised us--even eternal life. 26 I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

Doubt dispelled because of God's power (18:14)

God cannot lie and therefore His promises are unbreakable (Titus 1:2)

2 a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,

God has the power to do what He has promised (Romans 4:21)

21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

God is greater than anything and we can be assured that He is our refuge (Ps 18:1-3)

1 I love you, O LORD, my strength. 2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. 3 I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

God always gives us everything we need to endure until the fulfillment of His promises (2 Peter 1:3-4)

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Promises Fulfilled Through the Reality of the Birth of Isaac (Gen 21:1-7)

- 1 And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.
- 2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.
- 3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him-- whom Sarah bore to him-- Isaac.
- 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.
- 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

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

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."

Reality because God said it (21:1)

God's Word, like His purposes, will be accomplished (Isa 55:11)

11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

God's Word will happen as God pleases (Isa 46:10)

10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

All things work out in conformity to God's Word (Eph 1:11)

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

God's Word should always be accepted as reality (1 Thess 2:13)

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

God's Word is eternal and enduring (1 Peter 1:23)

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Reality because of God's Faithfulness (21:2)

Because God is God, He is totally faithful (Deut. 7:9)

9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

God is faithful even if we are not (2 Tim. 2:13)

13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

We really don't understand the impact of what we do so all that we do should be directed by God (Prov 20:24)

24 A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way?

We must persevere and hope in the promises of God (Hebrews 10:36)

36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Reality because of obedience (21:3-7)

Obedience that leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Obedience that proves the reality of ourselves (2 Cor 9:13)

13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Obedience that leads to perfection (Heb 5:7-9)

7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

We were saved to be obedient (1 Peter 1:2)

2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

It is only through obedience that we are seen as righteous by God (Rom 2:13)

13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Obedience that leads to the knowledge of God (1 John 2:3)

3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh

From the series: Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs

The events of Genesis 21 verses 1 through 7 can be seen in three different dimensions. In verses 1 and 2 we see the divine dimension in the birth of the son as a gift from God. Verses 3 through 5 record the response of Abraham to the birth of this son. Finally, in verses 6 and 7 we have the jubilation of Sarah over the arrival of the long-awaited child, who is the joy of her life.

An Act of God (vss. 1-2)

I have a friend who is an insurance agent, and he would be quick to tell me that an "act of God" in his line of work is a disaster over which man has no control. Isaac was an "act of God" in a very different sense. He was the result of divine intervention in the lives of Abraham and Sarah, both of whom were too old to bear children. It was the fulfillment of a promise made long before the birth of the child and often reiterated to Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:2; 15:4; 17:15-16; 18:10). Several things are striking about this passage. First, we cannot miss the note of calm assurance. There has been no suspense. The event comes without surprise, reported as though nothing else could have happened than what did. And, of course, this is precisely right. Second, there is a distinct emphasis on the aspect of fulfillment. The birth of Isaac came without surprise simply because that was what God had promised would happen. Four times in these two short verses the element of fulfillment is stressed ("as He had said," "as He had promised," verse 1; "at the appointed time," "which God had spoken," verse 2). It was God who promised the child; it was God who accomplished His word. And this was done right on schedule. God's purposes are never delayed, nor are they ever defeated by man's sin. God's purposes are certain. What God has promised, He will accomplish. Third, the son seems to be given almost more for Sarah's benefit here than for Abraham's. "The Lord," Moses wrote, "took note of Sarah ... and ... did for Sarah" (verse 1). I do not think it too far afield to suggest that Sarah wanted that son more than Abraham did. You will remember that Abraham besought God on behalf of Ishmael, seemingly to

accept him as the son of promise (cf. 17:18). Neither did Abraham seem to take the promise of a son too seriously when he was willing to subject Sarah to the dangers of Abimelech's harem at the very time she was about to conceive the promised son (cf. 17:21; 18:14). And so, even though Abraham may not have had the desire for this child as much as his wife, God kept His promise.

Aloof Acceptance (vss. 3-5)

The next verses seem to confirm my suspicion that Abraham was not ecstatic about Isaac, at least not nearly as much as his wife. His response to the birth of Isaac might be described as "dutiful." In obedience to the instructions given him in Genesis 17, Abraham named the baby Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day. Abraham thus followed God's instructions out to the letter, but perhaps without the joy that could have been experienced. We are reminded that Abraham was now 100 years old. In a way, Abraham and Sarah were more like grandparents to Isaac than parents. Who of us would have been overjoyed at the birth of a child at this age? When Abraham could have been drawing Social Security payments for 35 years, he became a parent. And at the age of 113 he would enter into the teenage years with his son.

Sarah's Ecstasy (vss. 6-7)

If Abraham's response to the birth of this child is merely dutiful, Sarah's is delirious. The name Isaac meant "laughter." Both Abraham and Sarah, when they were told of the son who was to be born to them, laughed (cf. 17:17; 18:12). More than anything, their laughter was prompted by the absurdity of the thought of having a child so late in life. But now the name Isaac took on a new significance, for he was a delight to his mother, who experienced the pleasures of motherhood so late in her life.

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Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Neither time nor natural laws can keep God from accomplishing His plans (Gen. 17:15-17)
2. God's timing is always perfect (Gen. 18:9-10; cf. 17:16; 21:2)
3. Our truest responses often come when we think no one is listening (Gen. 18:11-12; Luke 6:45)
4. Nothing is too hard for the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe (Gen. 18:13-15)
5. Because God is faithful, He can and will do what He promises (21:1-3)
6. Only God can turn the laughter of unbelief into the laughter of joy (vss. 4-7)