The Birth of Isaac

Michele suffered through a bout with shingles last fall. Fortunately, she completely recovered with no lingering effects in about 3 weeks and there has been no recurrence. If you have not had the vaccine for this condition, I highly recommend it. For those not familiar with shingles, it comes from the same virus that causes chicken pox which most of us had in childhood. Shingles can be quite painful causing a rash to break out, often on the neck or face (Michele had it in her ear). She decided that the only thing worse than her having it would be for me to have it. While she stoically soldiered through, I would have complained loudly and required constant attention. Although shingles can be contagious spreading from one person to another, it is much more likely that it will develop from the virus that remains in you after having chicken pox. The lies dormant for many years and often stress can trigger it to become active. That was the case with Michele as the shingles appeared during the middle of a particularly trying semester at USCA. In our study of Genesis chapter 21 we see something that had lain dormant for years suddenly becoming a problem in Abraham’s life. Abraham and Sarah so desperately wanted a son that they enlisted Sarah’s maidservant Hagar to provide them a surrogate son (see chap. 16). Although there was friction between Sarah and Hagar initially, there is no further mention of it and years had passed since the birth of Hagar’s son Ishmael. Although Ishmael was born from a sinful relationship, there is no doubt that Abraham loved his son and had enjoyed his company for 14 years. The birth of Isaac brought dramatic changes to the family dynamics. Sarah’s animus toward Hagar and her son which had been dormant was resurrected when Ishmael mocked his half brother and Abraham once again had to deal with the consequences. Hagar had previously fled from Abraham and Sarah against God’s wishes because He told her to return to them. Now God instructs Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael because He knew that Ishmael and Isaac could not live in the same household. Ishmael was born of the flesh and Isaac was born of the promise and they represented the old covenant and new covenant respectively (see Gal. 4:22-29). The 2 covenants could not coexist, it would be like pouring new wine into old wineskins (see Mark 2:21-22). God dealt with Abraham’s distress over banishing his son by reminded him of the promise that Ishmael would be blessed to become a nation. Hagar had to be reminded of the promise also as she gave up hope that she and her son would survive in the desert. Ishmael not only survived, he thrived fulfilling God’s prophecy that he would become a nation through his 12 sons who became tribal leaders (Gen. 25:12-18).

The birth of Isaac brought great blessings to Abraham and Sarah turning Sarah’s laughter of doubt into laughter of joy. David Guzik points out the following similarities between the births of Isaac and Jesus:

Both births were announced well in advance, 25 years for Isaac, centuries for Jesus

Both births revealed to the parents by God

Both births were miraculous, Isaac born of a mother beyond childbearing years, Jesus born of a virgin

Both were given names by God before birth

The chapter ends with another meeting Abraham had with Abimelech with much different results. Their meeting came as a result of Abimelech observing how God had blessed Abraham so abundantly and he sought to make a peace treaty with him out of either fear or respect. Ray Pritchard wrote an excellent piece on what is known as the Treaty of Beersheba (link below). The treaty with Abimelech provides us with a wonderful example of conflict resolution showing how Abraham demonstrated humility, courage, honesty, patience and kindness. This treaty enabled Abraham to live in peace with his neighbors creating a good environment in which to raise his son who would become the foundation of the Jewish nation.

<https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1996-06-23-how-to-make-peace-with-your-enemies/>

This chapter reveals how our past decisions often result in consequences that surface much later. I wonder if Abraham kept looking over his shoulder wondering when God might deal with him over his choice to have a son with Hagar. It also shows God’s mercy in how He comforted Abraham as he dealt with the pain of sending his son away.