International Bible Lessons Commentary
Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series
L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

Genesis 18:9-15; 21:1-7
King James Version
October 21, 2018

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, October 21, 2018**, is from **Genesis 18:9-15; 21:1-7**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Lessons Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Lesson Forum*.

(Genesis 18:9) And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

Later, the LORD (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, or One or Two of the Three Persons of the Trinity with one or two angels: see Genesis 18:1-10) came to Abraham on their way to investigate Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham prepared a feast for them under a tree while Sarah waited within the tent (probably having helped with the meal preparations). She was listening to the conversation (as the LORD knew) when "They" brought the conversation around to Sarah and her having a child despite her old age. By asking the question of Abraham, the LORD wanted to get Sarah's special attention.

(Genesis 18:10) And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

The LORD called Sarah by her new name, the name He had told Abraham to give her (Genesis 17:15). And the LORD also extended their time of waiting for their child. Without giving a specific date or reason (but implying "soon"), God allowed Sarah to hear the promise directly from Him and not just from Abraham. Notice: Sarah was behind the LORD, but He knew of her presence and He would hear her laugh to herself. The Bible does not tell us if the LORD had ever spoken to Sarah before this time, but He may have done so.

(Genesis 18:11) Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

Inspired by God, Moses emphasized in three ways that God's plans for Abraham and Sarah were humanly impossible. They were "old." They were "advanced in age." Moreover, Sarah no longer produced the eggs that would be needed for her to conceive a child, which is "the manner of women." Moses wanted to emphasize that Sarah knew what God planned was impossible the way she and Abraham were physically because of their old age.

(Genesis 18:12) Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

Sarah's laugh could not be heard with human ears, for the Bible says she laughed "to herself." But God could hear her and read her mind. Sarah knew that physically speaking, without God's intervention, it would be impossible for either Abraham or her to conceive a child. She had already felt the sting of Hagar's contempt, so she knew the situation was impossible humanly speaking – the Bible repeatedly emphasizes this fact. After suffering Hagar's scorn, could she now have the pleasure of giving birth to and raising her own child? The child would be conceived naturally, but with God supernaturally making them able to conceive. The conception of Isaac would be similar to the conception of John the Baptist.

(Genesis 18:13) And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

God did not speak to Sarah directly, but He spoke to Abraham as the head of the family. Perhaps God wanted Abraham to consider how much effort and time he had given to Sarah's spiritual development and instruction. Had Abraham tried to build up her faith in God whenever she expressed doubts about the delays of God in giving her a child? Remember: Abraham had conceived Ishmael through Hagar because Sarah had a weak faith in God and disbelieved God's willingness to give them a child. God addressed himself to Abraham in the hearing of Sarah, and God asked the question in a way that would influence Abraham to ponder the reason Sarah not only laughed but said in her mind what she said; for Abraham did not hear what Sarah said to herself (unless of course she spoke out loud, but only to herself).

(Genesis 18:14) Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

God answered Sarah's question with respect to what was then physically impossible when God asked a rhetorical question (expecting "No" for an answer). It would be "wonderful" for Sarah and Abraham to have a child in their old age, and God could make that wonderful event happen according to His perfect timing (not their timing).

(Genesis 18:15) Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.

Sarah responded as anyone might respond after hearing God speak to Abraham about her laughter and question. Imagine how afraid she would have been if God had addressed her directly instead of talking to Abraham! Knowing her, God was sensitive to her feelings and fears. She was afraid of what God might say or do, so she spoke to Abraham and God and denied what she had said to herself (which may indicate that she had not laughed

out loud or verbally). God corrected her without condemning her, for God understood how she felt in the situation and her response had probably been instantaneous and involuntary, perhaps from nervousness (which we can understand).

(Genesis 21:1) And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

God consistently keeps His promises and gives believers the opportunity to demonstrate their faith in God as they keep on believing as they wait for God to do what He has promised. God's perfect track record in promise-keeping is a good reason for all believers to keep believing. "The LORD" is the one who made the impossible happen.

(Genesis 21:2) For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

The conception of Isaac was possible because God made physical changes in both Abraham and Sarah. Earlier, Abraham conceived Ishmael, but at the time Isaac was conceived Abraham was too old to have children. God's actions that changed Abraham were long-lasting, because Abraham later conceived other children through Keturah (after Sarah's death). God's change of Sarah did not result in her conceiving additional children.

(Genesis 21:3) And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

The name "Isaac" means "he laughs" or "laughter." God commanded Abraham to name his son "laughter," perhaps because Isaac fit so perfectly the experiences of Abraham and Sarah as they waited on God to keep His promise (see Genesis 17:19). Furthermore, as our heavenly Father, God wants us to find laughter and enjoyment in what He does for us. From Genesis 12-21, the Bible develops the account of God's promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a son according to God's way of working and God's perfect timing (and not according to Sarah's idea of having Abraham conceive a son through Hagar).

(Genesis 21:4) And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

Abraham circumcised Isaac according to the command of God. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham (see Genesis 17:9-14). Earlier, Abraham was circumcised at the age of 99, and also his son Ishmael at the age of 13 (see Genesis 17:23-25). God's covenant was to be an everlasting covenant with Isaac and his offspring (Genesis 17:19). So, all of Abraham's descendants were to be circumcised.

(Genesis 21:5) And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

Abraham was circumcised at the age of 99 according to the covenant God had made with him (Genesis 17 1-5). Isaac was born about one year later, when Abraham was 100 years old. Abraham had obeyed God in faith when he had himself and his household circumcised, and God fulfilled His part of the covenant when Abraham conceived Isaac and Isaac was born and circumcised at eight days of age. Likewise, Jesus was circumcised at eight days of age (Luke 2:21). Now, the New Testament emphasizes our spiritual circumcision: "In him [Christ] also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2:11).

(Genesis 21:6) And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

Sarah and Abraham experienced joy that expresses itself in laughter. Laughter is not bad, and laughter can express faith and thanksgiving when a person receives from God what God has promised. Not only would Sarah laugh, she would also experience joy and others would laugh also.

(Genesis 21:7) And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.

Sarah emphasized the fact that having a son born to them was humanly impossible because of their age. The birth of Isaac gives additional proof that with God all things are possible and wonderful. Nothing is impossible with God, and we can do all things when God works to achieve His purposes through us. Later, the Messiah, the Son of God, would be conceived when the Holy Spirit overshadowed a virgin, Mary, another humanly impossible and wonderful thing for God to do for her and all who would believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In what ways did God show His love and concern for Sarah?

2. What is the difference between laughter that expresses joy and laughter that expresses doubt? What might have been the difference between Abraham's laughter and Sarah's laughter?

3. Read Genesis 18:1-10. In Genesis 18:9, who do you think "They" refers to?

4. Why do you think the LORD made Abraham and Sarah keep waiting for their child to be conceived by Sarah, after telling Abraham that he would have many descendants through the birth of her son?

5. What happens to people sometimes when God does not do what they want done when they want it done?

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Contact: P.O. Box 1052, Edmond, Oklahoma, 73083 and lgp@theiblf.com.