

General Church Education



Family Lesson: Genesis 21
The Birth
of Isaac

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Family Lesson 1 – I

The Birth of Isaac
Genesis 21

Family Talk:
THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

Rev. Donald Rose

When we look back and remember a happy time, we know the feeling of one of the Psalms, which says, “**Then our mouth was filled with laughter.**”

Here is how part of *Psalms* 126 goes: “**Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then said they among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad.**”

When it is clear to us that the Lord has done great things for us, we are in a state of good appreciation and joy. One of the ways in which we show our joy is in innocent laughter.

Let us think of a good kind of laughter. Let us think of how a group of people feels when a baby is born, that is, when the Lord does that great thing for us called birth.

The Writings tell us that laughter can be many different things. No one enjoys being laughed at in a mean way. We don't enjoy being mocked or scoffed at, the way the boy Isaac was scoffed at by Ishmael in the story we just read. Knowing that we don't enjoy that kind of scoffing towards ourselves and knowing the Golden Rule, we remind ourselves not to hurt the feelings of others with the wrong kind of laughter.

There are good kinds of laughter, too. There is a place in the Word that predicts the happy time of heaven. It says, “**The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof**” (*Zechariah* 8:5). It is very interesting that this saying about “playing” also means “laughing.” “Boys and girls laughing.”

There is a laughing one hears from a distance, and one can tell that it is good-hearted laughter. The Lord gives us good times like that, times we can remember and say, “Then were our mouths filled with laughter.”

Who could count the smiles that are brought to a family and the friends of family when a baby is born to them? And who knows how much happy laughter will be shared as the baby grows up?

Sarah had wanted a baby for so long. When at last the baby was born, they gave him the name that means good laughter. The name is Isaac. And Sarah said something so beautiful. “**God has made me laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me**” (*Genesis* 12: 5).

The Writings say that to feel another person's joy as joy in oneself, that is loving (*DLW* 47). In this story of a baby's being born into the world, let us be glad in Sarah's gladness, and let us be glad in the good feeling that she wished to share with others when she said, “**God has made me laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me**” (*Genesis* 12:5).

The Birth of Isaac
Genesis 21
LEVEL 1 – A GIFT FROM THE LORD

MATERIALS NEEDED

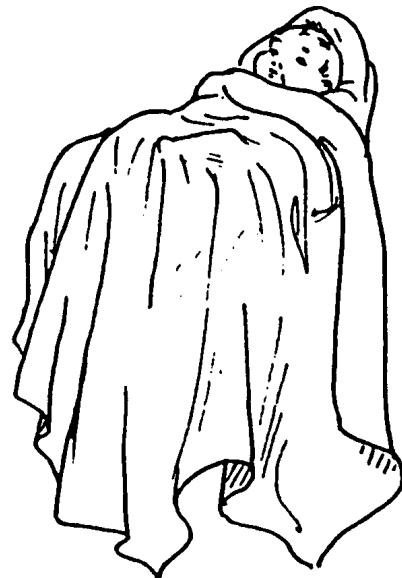
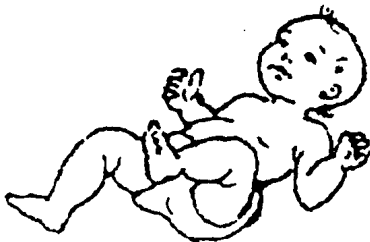
Scissors
Small piece of soft white cloth
Glue

1. Someone may have to help with the cutting for this project.
Cut out the picture of the baby that is not wrapped.
Wrap the baby in a piece of soft white cloth.

Or

Cut out the picture of the baby that is already wrapped.

2. Look at the picture of the old man and woman on the next page.
Abraham and Sarah are smiling.
The Lord gave Abraham and Sarah a baby when they were very old.
3. Put the baby in their arms.
4. Write the names (**Sarah, Isaac, Abraham**) below the pictures (or someone in the family can write them for you):





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LEVEL 2 – BABY ISAAC



MATERIALS NEEDED

Crayons
Scissors
Small strips of fabric to wrap Isaac in
Scotch tape or stapler

Baby Isaac

Abraham was married to Sarah. They lived for a long, long time, always wishing the Lord would send them a baby. When they were the age of grandparents, they stopped wishing, because they thought they were too old and having a baby would be impossible.

Nothing is impossible for the Lord! He had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation. So when Abraham was *one hundred years old*, the Lord sent him a son.

Sarah laughed, first because she thought it must not be true, and then because she was happy. So she named her baby boy **Isaac**, which means “laughter.”

When babies were born in ancient times, they were wrapped in strips of cloth called “swaddling clothes.” Can you think of another little baby who wore swaddling clothes?

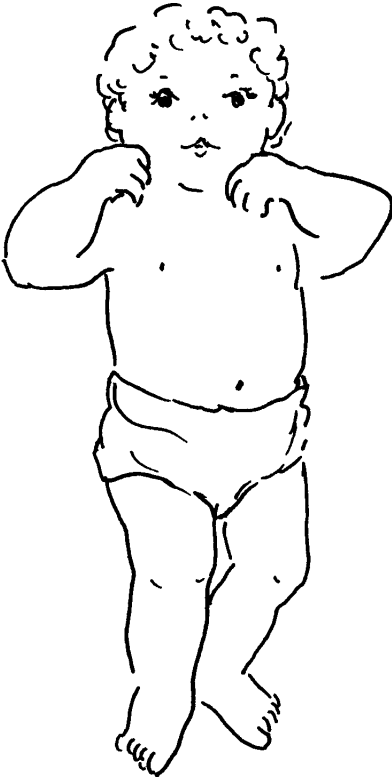
On the next page is a paper doll for you to cut out and play with.

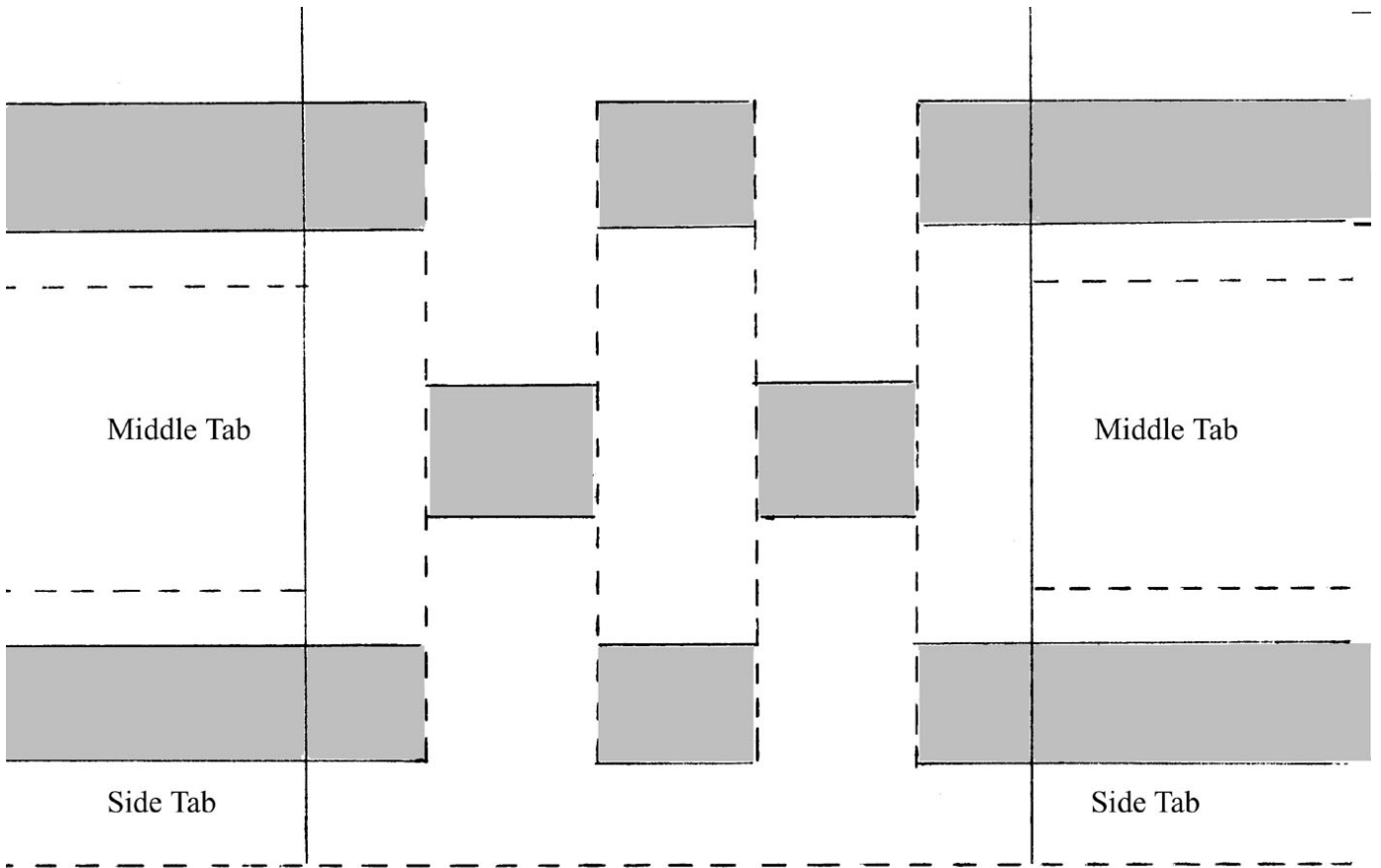
It is baby Isaac.

You could wrap Isaac in swaddling clothes.

On page 3 is a basket for you to cut out and make,
for Isaac to sleep in.

Be happy when you play with your doll, and think how happy
Abraham and Sarah were to have a son after waiting so long.

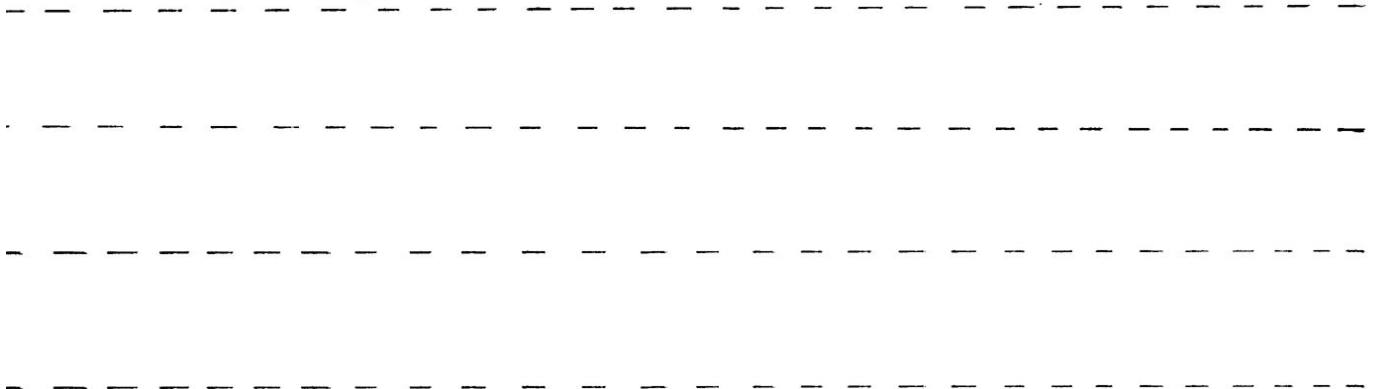




Basket for Isaac

1. Your child may wish to color the strips (before cutting them out). This will help the weaving stand out.
2. Cut along all dotted lines. Small sewing scissors work well for slots.
3. Weave strips through slots, following the pattern of the shaded areas. Tape or staple ends of strips to edges of a basket to hold them in place.
4. Bring middle tab inward and side tabs in front and behind the middle tab. Tape or staple in place.
5. Repeat at other end.

Strips →



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LEVEL 3 – A GREAT NATION

MATERIALS NEEDED

The Word or a Bible
Pen or pencil

Do you remember what the Lord promised Abram when He asked him to go to Canaan? He said:

**“I will make you a great nation; I will
bless you and make your name great.”**
(Genesis 12:2)

Abram went on the journey as the Lord asked, but he wondered how the Lord would keep His promise. Abram asked:

**“Lord God, what will You give me,
seeing I go childless?”** (Genesis 15:2)

The Lord answered by taking Abram out at night and telling him:

**“Look now toward heaven, and count the stars
if you are able to number them....
So shall your descendants be.”**
(Genesis 15:5)



Abram and Sarai are given new names

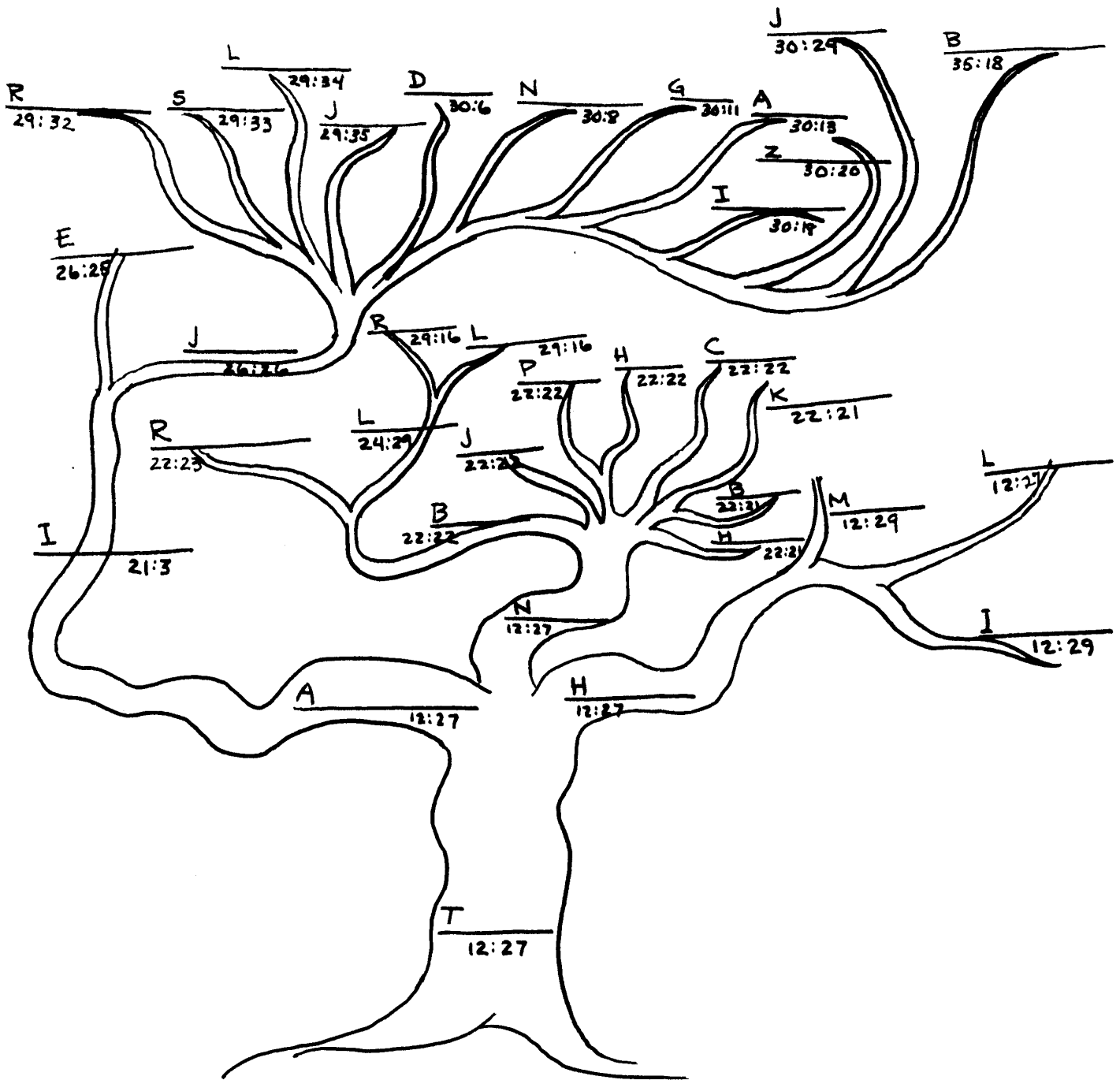
Abram believed the Lord, but he did wonder as they got older and still Sarai had no children.

Then when Abram was ninety-nine and Sarai eighty-nine, the Lord gave them each a new name. Abram became Abraham, and Sarai became Sarah. Then the Lord told them they would have a son in one year.

So when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah ninety, their son Isaac was finally born; and Abraham knew that indeed he would become the father of a great nation.

Application

On the next page is a chart of Abraham's family.
Look up the chapter and verse of Genesis under each line.
Find the names of his father and brothers and their families,
and the descendants of Abraham who would begin a great nation.



- 1) Of Abraham and his two brothers, who had the most children?
- 2) Isaac married the daughter of his cousin. Draw a red line between their names.
3. Jacob married the daughter of his mother's brother. (She was also his grand-father's brother's great grand-daughter!) Draw a blue line from Jacob to his mother, and a red line from Jacob to his wife.

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LEVEL 4 – ISHMAEL AND ISAAC

Have you ever had an idea that something might be good or worthwhile, but you don't see how and don't want to admit it? Ishmael felt that way about Isaac.

Isaac was just a baby, probably at the age where he was running around and getting into everything. Everyone was treating Isaac as a very special and important person. His father gave a feast in his honor.

Ishmael couldn't understand why Isaac was so important, and didn't want to admit that Isaac might be more important than himself. So Ishmael made fun of Isaac.

Ishmael and Isaac represent two different parts of our minds.

Isaac is the part that listens to what the Lord says, and wants to know what the Lord wishes us to do.

Ishmael is the part that learns facts and figures out how to do what we want.

Isaac

THE ISAAC PART OF OUR MIND KNOWS THAT OUR LIFE IS THE LORD'S AND WE SHOULD DO HIS WILL.

THE ISAAC PART OF OUR MIND KNOWS THAT TRUE HAPPINESS COMES FROM CONSIDERING OTHERS BEFORE OURSELVES.

THE ISAAC PART OF OUR MIND WANTS TO LEARN ABOUT SPIRITUAL THINGS.

Ishmael

The Ishmael part of our minds mocks the idea that our life really belongs to the Lord. We seem to live all by ourselves, and the Ishmael part would prefer that, since it would mean that we can do what we want.

The Ishmael part of our mind can't see this at all. The only satisfaction it can see in unselfishness is being recognized for it and feeling superior, which is really just the opposite of forgetting yourself.

The Ishmael part of our mind thinks that scientific truth is the only kind there is. It doesn't want to believe that there's anything more to know. It feels important because it knows lots of facts and can make clever arguments out of them—
Ishmael became an archer, and arrows represent arguments. His attitude toward spiritual truth is "Prove it!" or, "I'll believe it when I see it."

A scientist can be an Isaac or an Ishmael

Some scientists are like Ishmael. They think that scientific truth is the only kind there is. Some don't believe in God because they can't prove He's real scientifically.

But many scientists do believe in God. While concentrating on natural truth, they don't lose sight of spiritual truth. They know that facts don't explain everything. The Ishmael and Isaac parts of their minds work well together. Ishmael is important, but Isaac must take the higher place in the mind.

Looking for something higher

But it's not until Ishmael's delights go sour on us (things like learning facts and feeling superior) that we are willing to look for something higher, and ask God for help—like Hagar, Ishmael's mother, in the wilderness. Only when we experience the emptiness of selfish natural pleasures can God show us something better and more lasting.

Application

The purpose of looking at inward ideas of the Isaac story is to make you aware of the Isaac and Ishmael parts of your thinking. Your project is to write the word Isaac or Ishmael after each of the following eight statements:

1. It is best to obey the Lord, even when it isn't easy. _____
2. Religious teachings are too "goody-good" to be worthwhile. _____
3. It is wiser to take the long view on how something will affect us and others than to just do it impulsively. _____
4. Since there is no proof of life after death, we might as well assume that this life is all there is. _____
5. When other people can't answer a question or don't know something its great to make fun of them. _____
6. Parents and other adults are so ignorant they hardly understand anything. _____
7. We should help people because we should be of use to others, not because of any glory or reward we might get out of it. _____
8. If I don't understand something, it is better to be patient and ask to have it explained than to decide it is useless. _____

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LEVEL 5 – THE NAME ISAAC

Some Bible Discoveries about the Word “Laughter”

Your assignment is to read what follows on the subject of “laughter” as it appears in the Word and then to answer the questions at the end.

The name Isaac

The name Isaac is a surprising name—or it was until a Biblical character received the name—and then, of course, as happens with Biblical names, thousands were named after him. It is the Hebrew word for “laughter.”

Abraham and Sarah laugh

The word “laugh” occurs twice in verse 6 of the chapter we are looking at. It is a lovely verse portraying the joy of a woman who is glad to have the son she longed for.



And Sarah said, “God has made me laugh,
so that all who hear will *laugh* with me.”

(Genesis 21:6)

Remember Sarah spoke in Hebrew, so the word she used for laugh was a form of the name Isaac. Because we speak English, we wouldn't realize it.

If asked where the first reference in the Bible to *laughing* is, you probably would have no idea. It is first mentioned in Genesis 17:17, where the birth of Isaac is foretold. Abraham was extremely old, but he was told that he would have a son. He expressed joy as much as he expressed his feeling that this was “unbelievable” when he fell on his face, and *laughed*.

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?”

(Genesis 17:17)

The good news was affirmed together with the news of the most unusual name this son would have.

“And God said,...Sarah your wife shall bear you a son,
and you shall call his name *Isaac*.”

(Genesis 17:19)

Picture the scene—a man “laughs” with joy and is then told that he will have a son whom he is to name “laughter.”

The next time laughing is mentioned is in Chapter 18. It is perhaps the most memorable incident on laughing that one can find in the Bible. In Chapter 18 we have the reaction of Sarah when told that she will have a son. Notice that from verse 12-15 of that chapter, the word “laugh” is used four times. Also notice that Sarah's laughter was a different kind of laughter. It involved disbelief because she was old:

Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure....”

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

“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.”

But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. And He said, “No, but you did laugh!”
(Genesis 18:12-15)

Ishmael “scoffs” at Isaac

Still another kind of laughter is mentioned in Chapter 21. In English it says that Sarah saw Ishmael *scoffing* at Isaac (verse 9). In Hebrew the word translated as “scoffing” is the same word as “laugh.” Isaac is being laughed *at* by his older half brother.

Laughter has many feelings

We can see that laughter can have a wide spectrum of feelings behind it. As the Writings say, there are many things in laughter. It can have contempt in it, as it did with the mocking Ishmael. It can have sheer joy in it as with the rejoicing of Abraham. It can have a trace of doubt in it as it did with Sarah when she first heard the news.

Think about laughter in your own life. Do you remember times when people have laughed with you about happy or funny events? Do you remember times when people have laughed at you, and how you felt at that time? Have you sometimes laughed at people in an unkind way? In the future, try to notice if you are misusing the gift of laughter to express contempt rather than gladness.

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”

(Matthew 7:12)

Application

Here are some questions to reinforce what you have read:

1. What does the name Isaac mean? _____

2. In what connection is this word first used in the Bible? _____

3. The Hebrew word for “laugh” is not always translated with the English word “laugh.” What other meaning does it have? _____

4. What was Abraham's reaction to the news that he would have a son?

Why? _____

5. What was Sarah's reaction to the news?

Why? _____

6. How did Ishmael show his contempt for Isaac? _____

7. What did Sarah exclaim in happiness at the birth of her son?

Optional

Choose a T.V. show to watch. Notice how each character uses laughter. Is it used to express something positive or something negative. Fill in the chart for some of the characters, explaining how laughter was used in a positive or negative way.

Character	Positive	Negative