

Isaac, the Boy Whose Name Means Laughter

The anglicized name Isaac is a transliteration of the Hebrew term *Yiśhāq* which literally means "He laughs/will laugh." Abraham and Sarah were far beyond the age range of childbearing when their heart's desire, the promise of a child, was given to them. Abraham laughed! Genesis 17:17 says, "*Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?*" We see Sarah laughs with surprise when she discovers she is to bear a child, "*The LORD said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh and say, Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?*" (Genesis 18:13). Later Sarah laughed in sheer joy because it was true and laughter would be brought into a world that needed laughter! "*And Sarah said, God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me*" (Genesis 21:6). Sadly, Ishmael, the half-brother of Isaac laughed with mockery: "*And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking*" (Genesis 21:9). Scholarship says the word "mocking" here is an intensive form of the verb for Isaac's name, "He laughs." Here we see the adolescent Ishmael exercising a play on his brother's name, attempting to turn it from joy in laughter to scorn as a joke.

Laughter is good for our environment and it is good for us. God has arranged the book Proverbs as basically a collection of inspired axioms with contrasting parallels that accentuate the meaning. Please notice three perfect examples dealing with our subject: "*A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken*" (Proverbs 15:13). "*All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast*" (Proverbs 15:15). "*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones*" (Proverbs 17:22).

Children are known to laugh a great deal more than adults; an average baby laughs around 300 times a day compared to an average adult, who laughs only about 20 times a day. God commands us, "*Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice*" (Philippians 4:4). It makes me wonder if this was part of God's desire for our good and His glory when Jesus, knowing there would be joyful benefit from His command, said, "*...Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 18:3). "*But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 19:14).

Norman Cousins lived over twenty years beyond his life expectancy by using laughter (according to his testimony) to lengthen his life. He said, "I made the joyous discovery that ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep." Even if it was not proven to increase the length of our life, I would still be in favor of laughter if for no other reason, it makes life's journey a much more pleasant one.

I believe Isaac lived up to his name. His name meant happiness!

1. Isaac was joyful because he lived an exchanged life.

God told Abraham to take his son Isaac and offer him up to God as an expression of devout love to his Lord. On the way up Mount Moriah we observe Isaac inquiring, *“And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”* (Genesis 22:7). In prophetic utterance Abraham speaks of the Lamb of God who would come to die for us to take away the sins of the world, *“And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together”* (Genesis 22:8). God stopped Abraham and brought a lamb caught in the thorns and the Bible said Abraham, *“...offered him up in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovoah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen”* (Genesis 22:13b-14). One reason we know this was direct prophecy is because Jesus said, *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad”* (John 8:56). Not only did Abraham see it in the male ram, Isaac vicariously appreciated it when he was loosed and witnessed the sacrifice of the lamb in his place. For the rest of his life, he lived knowing he was alive because another died for him. We, too, will be happy in life if we always understand we have eternal life and a more abundant life because of Christ who took our sins, our death and our Hell.

2. Isaac was joyful because he ordered his life according to God’s plan.

“And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahairoi; for he dwelt in the south country. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming” (Genesis 24: 62,63). One leading Bible scholar said it was unknown why Isaac had chosen this place to meditate or why it was here that he met his bride. I submit that Isaac knew of Hagar, his father’s concubine who had been ousted by his mother. Isaac also knew the experience of Hagar and his half-brother’s deliverance in this. The full name of this place is “Beer-lahai-roi” (Genesis 16:14) which means, “Well of the One who Lives and Sees Me.” I believe Isaac believed in God Who saw him and also had a plan for his life. No wonder this is the reason he chose this as his prayer spot as well as a home for himself and his bride that God, in His planning, brought to him (Genesis 25:11).

3. Isaac was joyful because he met and married the one true love of his life.

The Bible says that Isaac *“...took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her...”* (Genesis 24:67). This simple eleven-word statement says much we all can learn from! This man Isaac was the happiest of all the patriarchs. Throughout the Scripture we see God referencing the three generations, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Grandfather and grandson had a world of difficulty for having multiple wives and families. Isaac is married to only one woman! He was a happy man for the Bible says, *“...rejoice with the wife of thy youth”* (Proverbs 5:18). Please notice this is one woman. There is a promise of joy given by Solomon, *“Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity...”* (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

4. Isaac was joyful because he witnessed God's promised provision that was not based on his environment or circumstances.

In Genesis 26:1 the Bible says, *“And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.”* We cannot miss how God in His wisdom and for our edification juxtaposes Genesis 26:12 in the same chapter, *“Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him”* (Genesis 26:12). Isaac's provision was not deprived because there was famine in the land. God can just as easily provide for our needs according to His promises in hard times as well as good times. Happy is the person who knows they will be taken care of by God: *“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19).

-Pastor Pope-

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