



# The Story Behind Laughter

Source Sheet Developed by M<sup>2</sup>

Laughter is the prominent theme of this story, as Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac's roles are all defined by laughter. Did this laughter symbolize joy, ridicule, despair, or something else altogether? As you read the text, consider why laughter is the focus and what it is meant to represent. [Click here](#) to access our **Laughter Gif** board to review all types of laughter, which can help you interpret this Biblical story.

After learning these texts, be sure to consider how you have used humor to help navigate your way through personal trials and tribulations.

## Scene 1

### Genesis 17:16-19

I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her." **Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed**, as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?" And Abraham said to G-d, "O that Ishmael might live by Your favor!" G-d said, "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and **you shall name him Isaac**; and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come.

### בראשית יז: טז-יט

וּבְרַכְתִּי אֹתָהּ וְגַם נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָךְ בֵּן וּבְרַכְתִּיהָ וְהָיְתָה  
לְגוֹיִם מְלֻכֵי עַמִּים מִמֶּנָּה יֵהְיוּ: וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָהָם עַל-פָּנָיו  
וַיִּצְחַק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבִּי הֲלָבֹן מֵאֵה-שָׁנָה יוֹלֵד וְאִם-שָׂרָה  
הַבְּתִילֶשְׁעִים שָׁנָה תֵלֵד: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל-הָאֱלֹקִים לֹא  
יִשְׁמְעָאֵל יְחִיָּה לְפָנָי: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אָבֵל שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ  
יֵלֵד לָךְ בֵּן וְקָרָאתָ אֶת-שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי  
אִתּוֹ לְבְרִית עוֹלָם לְזָרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו:

- ? What do you believe Abraham's laughter symbolized? How is it best represented on the Laughter Gif board?
- ? Why do you think Abraham and Sarah were commanded to name their son Isaac?

Scene 2

Genesis 18:9-16

בראשית יח: ט-טז

They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he replied, "There, in the tent." Then one said, "I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!" Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. **And Sarah laughed to herself**, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?" Then G-d said to Abraham, "**Why did Sarah laugh**, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?' Is anything too wondrous for G-d? I will return to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah lied, saying, "**I did not laugh,**" for she was frightened. But G-d replied, "**You did laugh.**"

ויאמרו אליו איה שרה אשתך ויאמר הנה באהל: ויאמר שוב אשוב אליך בעת תהיה והנה בן לשרה אשתך ושרה שמעת פתח האהל והוא אחריו: ואברהם ושרה זקנים באים בימים חדל להיות לשרה ארח פנשים: ותצחק שרה בקרבה לאמר אחרי בלתי היתה לי עדנה ואדני זקן: ויאמר ה' אל-אברהם למה זה צחקה שרה לאמר האף אמנם אלד ואני זקנת: היפלא מה דבר למועד אשוב אליך בעת תהיה ולשרה בן: ותכחש שרה: ויאמר לא צחקתי כי: ויראה ויאמר: לא כי צחקת:

- ? We're told that Sarah 'laughed to herself'. According to the Laughter Gif board, what type of laughter might that have been? Why would she keep it inside?
- ? Why would Sarah have denied laughing? What did she fear that her laughter represented?
- ? Why would G-d and Sarah be caught up on such a seemingly trivial point like laughter?

Scene 3

Genesis 21:1-7

בראשית כא: א-ז

G-d took note of Sarah as He had promised, and G-d did for Sarah as He had spoken. Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which G-d had spoken. Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of **Isaac**. And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as G-d had commanded him. Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, "**G-d has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me.**" And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children! Yet I have borne a son in his old age." The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. **Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing.** She said to Abraham, "Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

וה' פקד את-שרה כאשר אמר ויעש ה' לשרה כאשר דבר: ותהר ותלד שרה לאברהם בן לזקניו למועד אשר-דבר אתו אלקים: ויקרא אברהם את-שם-בנו הנולד-לו אשר-ילדה-לו שרה יצחק: וימל אברהם את-יצחק בנו בן-שמונת ימים כאשר צוה אתו אלקים: ואברהם בן-מאת שנה בהולד לו את יצחק בנו: ותאמר שרה צחק עשה לי אלקים כל-השמע יצחק-לי: ותאמר מי מלל לאברהם היניקה בגים שרה כפי-ילדתי בו לזקניו: ויגדל הילד ויגמל ויעש אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל את-יצחק: ותרא שרה את-בן-הגור המצרית אשר-ילדה לאברהם מצחק: ותאמר לאברהם גרש האמה הזאת ואת-בנה כי לא יירש בן-האמה הזאת עם-בני עם-יצחק:

- ? What does Sarah's experience with laughter indicate about the powerful nature of laughter?
- ? On the Laughing Gif chart, what type of laughter is Sarah projecting that everyone will exhibit?
- ? Ishmael (Abraham's firstborn son with Hagar) was caught 'playing', which comes from the same Hebrew root for laughter. Why did this distress Sarah to the point that she wanted him banished from the house?