

MEANING OF THE NAME ISAAC

CULTURAL INSIGHT

Isaac comes from a Hebrew root that means “to laugh.” This word can mean both positive and negative laughter. It encompasses the laughter of joy and rejoicing, the laughter of disbelief, the laughter of derision, and even the private laughter of a married couple. The authors and editors of Genesis used the variety of meanings in this Hebrew root to produce numerous puns on Isaac’s name: When Abraham first heard the promise that Sarah would have a son, he fell on his face and laughed (Genesis 17:17). Likewise, when the three visiting strangers reiterated this promise, Sarah laughed, and Jehovah called her out for it (Genesis 18:9–15). She specifically referenced this when naming the baby, stating, “God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me” (Genesis 21:6). In Genesis 21:9, the Hebrew word used for Ishmael’s “mocking” Isaac is the same root referencing laughter. Likewise, when the Philistine king Abimelech saw Isaac and Rebekah together “sporting,” it is the same root word used (Genesis 26:8).

Related verses

Genesis 17:17

Genesis 18:12–15

Genesis 21:6

Genesis 21:9

Genesis 26:8

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