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Hagar and Ishmael Are Sent Away

21: 8-21

Hagar and Ishmael are sent away DIG: From Sarah's perspective, why must Hagar and Ishmael be sent away? From God's perspective? How is Abraham's distress due to past mistakes? How did God use human emotions to further His plan? How did Elohim help Ishmael, even though he was not the son that God had promised Avraham?

REFLECT: Who, like Hagar or Ishmael, is the one with whom you don't get along? How are you handling the discord? What can you do to change the situation? Is there something or someone you need to separate yourself from? Like Hagar, where do you need God's comforting presence in your life?

This problem constitutes another trial for **Abraham**. For several years, **Abraham** was content in believing that **Ishmael** would be **his** heir. **He** had been building the personal **father/son** relationship which normally develops between all parents and their children. But now that **Isaac** was born, things changed.

Isaac had brought so much joy to **Abraham** and **Sarah**. It seemed the **laughter** that had filled **their** household would go on forever. **The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Avraham held a great feast (21:8). The weaning was regarded as a joyous occasion, as we find with Samuel, who on being weaned was taken by his mother to the Tabernacle at Shiloh.** Children were **weaned** between the ages of two or three in those days. But in the midst of the laughter, apparently, **Hagar** and **Ishmael** were almost forgotten. By this time **Ishmael** was in **his** mid teens, probably around sixteen years old (**16:15-16**). One person's cause for joy can be another's cause for resentment.

Anger welled up in **Ishmael** as **he** saw **Isaac** become the center of attention. **But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Avraham was mocking Isaac (21:9).** The animosity of **Hagar** toward **Sarah** had been instilled in **Ishmael** toward **Isaac**. **The rabbis teach that Sarah assumed that Ishmael's mocking was the echo of what he had heard from his mother.** The Hebrew word for **Isaac**, *yitzchak*, and the Hebrew word for **mocking**, *metzachek*, have the same root. Literally, it means **Ishmael**

was *isaacing Isaac*. **He** was not playing with **Isaac** as some have suggested. In the B'rit Chadashah, Rabbi Sha'ul says **Ishmael persecuted him**, or *pursued him with hostility (Galatians 4:28-31)*. Children often do this to each other. The problem here was that **Ishmael**, who was around sixteen years old, was mocking **Isaac**, who was two to three years old. *Metzachek* is found several times in **Genesis** where it is used in the negative sense of ridicule (**19:14, 39:14 and 17**). It is interesting that **Ishmael's** name is absent from this entire section. **He** is referred to as **the son, his son, or the boy**, but never **Ishmael**. It is as if **he** was not even there, and as far as being **the son** of promise, **he** was absent from the mind of **God**.

In a jealous fit, **Sarah** demanded that **Abraham get rid of, or drive out, that slave woman and her son**. Thus, **Abraham** was faced with a test. All throughout **his** life, **Abraham** had been called by **God** to trust **His** promises. Now circumstances called for a trial of **his** ability to do so concerning **his** son **Ishmael**, whom **he** loved. The way **Abraham** would respond to this trial would prepare **him** for **his** ultimate test (**to see link click [Fm - Take Your Only Son Isaac, and Sacrifice Him as a Burnt Offering](#)**). Could **he** trust in **God's** ability to fulfill **His** promises enough to slay the very one in whom those promises were to be fulfilled?

Sarah's concern was one of **inheritance**. The Code of Hammurabi said that the **son** of a **slave woman** had a legal claim on the father's **inheritance**. But even knowing that, **Sarah** said that **Hagar and Ishmael** had to go, **for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac (21:10)**. This same verb, *garas*, is used to describe Adam being *driven out* of the Garden (**3:24**), and Cain being *driven out* of the presence of **ADONAI (4:14)**. **Sarah** couldn't even bear to call **Hagar** by name. **She** just referred to **her** as **that slave woman**. But most importantly, **she** didn't want **Ishmael** to have any part of the spiritual **inheritance** that was rightfully **Isaac's**. The whole situation was a tangled web of jealousy, anger and malice that bore bad fruit.

Abraham was a kind and generous **man**; however, this **matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son Ishmael (21:11)**. But, **Elohim, the God of righteousness**, made it clear **to Abraham** that **He** was *not* going to accept **Ishmael** as the son of promise. *It was not possible for the two families to live together*. In **His** sixth of seven appearances to **Avraham (12:1-7, 13:14-17, 15:1-21, 17:1-21, 18:1-33, 22:1-18)**, **God** said: **Do not be distressed about the boy and your maidservant (21:12a)**. In every age **God's** message to **His** people has been: **Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God (John 14:1)**. **He** said further: **Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned (21:12b)**. Without a doubt **Ishmael's** presence in the home would have made it extremely difficult to fulfill

God's purposes for **Isaac**. There could be no doubt about it, Ishmael had to go. Discipleship always involves *discipline*, and *discipline is always necessary for spiritual blessing*. **God** was taking the tangled threads of **Abraham's** life, weaving them into **His** own divine pattern, and overriding everything for good. Happy for us if, like Paul, we can rely on **the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Romans 11:33)!³⁴³**

As **Abraham's son**, **Ishmael** would receive **his** own special blessings from **God (17:18)**, but **he** would not, and never could have been, the child of promise. After **Sarah's** death, **Avraham** would have six other sons by a new wife, Keturah (**25:1-2**); but like **Ishmael**, none of those could have been the child of promise. Later, Paul would quote Moses and repeat once again: **It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned (Rom 9:7-9).**³⁴⁴

*Muslims teach that it is through **Ishmael** that the promises of **God** are fulfilled.* But Paul teaches the spiritual lesson that as far as salvation goes, between law and grace, the flesh and the spirit cannot coexist (**Galatians 4:21-31**). Paul argues that those who are born after the flesh, are the spiritual descendants of **Hagar**, great in number but nevertheless under the burden to keep the commandments, and they seek salvation through the impossible task of making sinful flesh keep the Torah perfectly. The Torah speaks of **God's** Covenant with Moses, a conditional covenant, given on Mount Sinai in Arabia where **Ishmael** lived.

Those who are to share in **God's** heavenly promises, centered in Jerusalem, are children of faith, like **Isaac**. The Torah can never give life; but **God's** promise, received by faith, gives eternal life (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). These children of faith are not in bondage to **Elohim's** covenant with Moses, whose terms are impossible to obey. But they are under **God's** covenant with **Abraham**, given unconditionally and appropriated solely by faith in the promises. Those who live by faith are *free*, like **Sarah**. However, those who live by the flesh are *slaves*, like **Hagar** (see the commentary on **Galatians Bq - Abraham had Two Sons, One by a Slave Woman and One Free**).³⁴⁵ As a result, **they** could not coexist; when **Isaac** showed up, **Ishmael** had to go!

But because **Ishmael** was **Abraham's son**, **Elohim** would make him **into a nation also**. **Abraham** need not worry that **Hagar** and **Ishmael** would die in the desert. **God** said: **I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also because he is your offspring (21:13)**. **Ishmael** will benefit from the blessing aspect of **God's** covenant with **Abraham**, and **he** showed no signs of rebellion.



As painful as it was to do, **Abraham** did not procrastinate. **Early the next morning he took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar.** It was an ancient Egyptian custom for the women to carry burdens on their shoulders, so **he set the food and the skin of water on her shoulders and then sent her off with her son.** In view of **Abraham's** wealth, this wasn't very much to send off with **them.** But **Abraham** had faith that **God** would take care of them. **He** knew that no matter how much **he** gave them, it would not be enough; but with **God,** **they** would not lack. Quite possibly, **he** knew it would be for **their** own good if **they** would quickly learn **they** must depend on **God,** and no longer on **Abraham,** to supply their needs. **He** loved that **boy** and I don't think **he** ever saw **him** again. **Ishmael** was **his son** and it was heartbreaking for **Abraham** to have to give **him** up. For about sixteen years **he** had been the joy of **his** life. But **Hagar went on her way with Ishmael and wandered in the desert of Beersheba (21:14).** The food and the skin of water was no doubt enough to enable them to reach another settlement, had **they** not become lost.³⁴⁶

Archaeology has revealed that there were numerous settlements at this time in the vicinity of what would later become known as **Beersheba,** and it seems that **Hagar** and **Ishmael** set out in this direction. However, **they** lost their way. After wandering for some time, **when the water in the skin was gone, she put her son under one of the bushes** because **Ishmael** was at the point of death **(21:15).** **He** had probably given most of the water to **his** mother. Finally, **he** fell down. Unable to continue, **Hagar went off and sat down nearby, about a bow shot away, for she thought to herself, "I cannot watch my son die. And as she sat there nearby, she began to pray and sob" (21:16).** **God** brought **them** to the point where **they** could no longer continue in **their** own strength. **They,** like **Abraham,** would need to learn to trust **Him.**



Then **God** heard Ishmael crying and the **Angel of God**, *the preincarnate Christ*, called to **Hagar** from heaven. This is the second time that the preincarnate **Christ** had rescued **Hagar**. Earlier, when **she** ran out into the desert because of **her** mistreatment at the hand of **Sarai**, **He** found **Hagar** near a spring in the desert (16:7a). There, **He** was called the **Angel of the Lord**, *the redeemer*, because **she** was still under the roof and protection of **Abraham**. Here, **He** is called the **Angel of God**, because **Hagar** was then a foreigner to the covenant of promise (Ephesians 2:12). But **He** is the **God** of all mankind, and **He** graciously said to her, **“What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there”** (21:17). Then **God** opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink (21:19).

The **Angel of God** said: **Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation** (21:18). And **God** would fulfill **His** promise, because **He** was with the boy as he grew up (21:20a). In the book of **Acts** it is written that **ADONAI** was with **Joseph** (Acts 7:9) and **Jesus** (Acts 10:38). We often encourage each other with the words of **Messiah**: **And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age** (Matthew 28:20). How wonderful to know **God’s** acceptance through **Christ** and **His** presence is with us always. Here we read the very same presence is with **Ishmael**. **God** must have loved **him** very much. **He** heard his cry when **he** was lying under the bushes and performed a miracle for **his** mother in order to take care of **him**, just as **Elohim** did with **Abraham**, **David** and others after **His** own heart. **He** was with **Ishmael**. **God** never says anything bad about **Ishmael**.

Since there was no farming, **Ishmael** provided for himself and **his** mother by becoming an archer as they lived in the desert (21:20b).

*The Muslims teach that **Abraham** took **Ishmael** and **Hagar** and made a new settlement in Mecca, called **Paran**, because of a divine instruction given to **Abraham** as a part of **God’s** plan. They teach that **Hagar** ran around seven times between two hills, **Sofa** and **Marwa**, looking for water; this became then an Islamic ritual for the annual Pilgrimage in Mecca by millions of Muslims from all over the world. The **well of water** (21:19) is still present, now*

called Zamzam. They also teach that both **Abraham** and Ishmael later built the holy stone Ka'bah in Mecca. The supposed spot where **Abraham** used to perform prayers near the Ka'bah is still present, now called Maqom Ibrahim, or the Station of **Abraham**. Therefore, during the day of Pilgrimage, Pilgrims in Mecca and Muslims all over the world commemorate the supposed offering of **Abraham** and **Ishmael** by slaughtering cattle.³⁴⁷

While he was living in the Desert of Paran, a desert region in what is now the Sinai Peninsula, **his mother got a wife for him from Egypt, the idolatrous land of her upbringing(21:21)**. **She** became so identified with this region that Sha'ul would say of **her**, "**Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia**" (**Galatians 4:25**). Obtaining a **wife** for a **son** is still the common practice in the Near East. **Genesis 10** tells us that the Egyptians were descendants of Ham, who were anti-Semitic, which only adds to the antagonism that was already there. Here, **Ishmael** drops out of the picture until we learn of his death after bearing twelve sons (**25:12-18**). But the **great nation** that **God** had promised had begun.

In a sense, **Ishmael** was a symbol of **Abraham's** and **Sarah's** lack of faith. **God** knew that **they** should have faithfully waited for the promised **son**. However, when **Ishmael** was conceived, **God** did not angrily reject **him** and toss **him** aside. Instead, **God** loved **the boy** and agreed to bless **him**. When our frail faith results in costly mistakes, **God** can turn our penitent regret into blessing for **His** own purposes.³⁴⁸