

# Hagar and Ishmael Not Forgotten

Printed Text • Genesis 21:8–20

Devotional Reading • Luke 2:52

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DISCOVER how God was with Hagar and Ishmael; BELIEVE that God is at work, even in the midst of hopeless situations; and TRUST in God's presence and provision, even when experiencing injustice.

## In Focus

Carol slowly opened the envelope. She already knew what was inside: the same birthday card and \$100 check that her father sent her every year since she had turned thirteen.

Her father had never really been a part of her life. Carol prayed often that he would take more of an interest in her, maybe even attend church with her. She tried to wait patiently for God's timing, but a part of her resented this annual token "gift" from him. Carol's father and mother had dated in high school and married shortly after that. When Carol's mother became pregnant, her father had broken all ties. Not long after, he married again, and now lived a happy little life with his new wife, their two daughters, and a dog in the suburbs.

He sent regular child support payments, but rarely visited Carol, even though they lived in the same city. If they happened to bump into one another at stores or on the street, he would say hello and then claim to have to hurry off somewhere. When she graduated from high school, he had sent a note congratulating her and a check. Friends had told her that he attended the graduations of both of his other daughters and had showered them with floral bouquets.

After years of scraping together enough for tuition, Carol was one semester away from finishing college and graduating with honors. She already knew that her father would have some excuse for not attending. She knew there would probably be another note and a check.

*How do you avoid bitterness while looking forward to God's timing?*

## Keep In Mind

"And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation." (Genesis 21:17–18, KJV)

## Words You Should Know

- A. Cast Out (Genesis 21:10)** garash (Heb.) — To drive out forcibly, as an enemy; to separate in divorce
- B. Grevious (v. 11)** yara (Heb.) — Causing shaking or trembling; being greatly displeased

## Say It Correctly

**Arabah.** AIR-uh-buh

**Paran.** Pah\_ROM

**Kadesh.** KAY-desh

## KJV

**Genesis 21:8** And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.

9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

14 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

16 And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow shot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

17 And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

20 And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

## NLT

**Genesis 21:8** When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to celebrate the occasion.

9 But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac.

10 So she turned to Abraham and demanded, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won’t have it!”

11 This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son.

12 But God told Abraham, “Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted.

13 But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar’s son because he is your son, too.”

14 So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar’s shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

15 When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush.

16 Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away. “I don’t want to watch the boy die,” she said, as she burst into tears.

17 But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, “Hagar, what’s wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.

18 Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants.”

19 Then God opened Hagar’s eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.

20 And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became a skillful archer.

## The People, Places, and Times

**The Wilderness of Paran.** Paran is a desert area located in the northeastern section of the Sinai Peninsula, with the Arabah on the east and the wilderness of Shur on the west. The region experiences very little rainfall (fewer than 10 inches per year). The Wilderness or Desert of Paran was one of the places where the Israelites spent part of their 40 years of wandering. It was from Kadesh, in Paran, that the twelve scouts were sent into the Promised Land to gather information prior to what would have been the Israelites’ entry just a little more than two years after the Exodus from Egypt (Numbers 10:11). King David spent some time in the wilderness of Paran after Samuel died (1 Samuel 25:1). This region is part of modern-day Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

## Background

The incident in today’s lesson is not the first time Hagar left Abraham’s household because of Ishmael. When Hagar first became pregnant, jealousy, hostility, and turmoil ruled the day too. Even though it was Sarah’s idea to have her servant Hagar bear a child for her by Abraham, Sarah treated the pregnant Hagar so harshly that the Egyptian girl ran away into the wilderness. There, an angel of the Lord appeared to the abused Hagar and instructed her not only to return, but to also submit herself to Sarah! The angel promised Hagar that from her seed would come countless descendants. Hagar was told she would have a son, and was instructed: “Call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction” (Genesis 16:11).

God’s instructions challenge Hagar. She was instructed to return to the very same abusive and painful situation that sent her to the wilderness in the first place. God’s direction, while uncomfortable for the young girl, held the promise of wonderful blessings from the God who heard and responded to her crying in the middle of the desert. When Hagar is again in a desperate situation in the desert, God again hears her.

*When and how has God unexpectedly shown up for you?*

### At-A-Glance

1. The Cause of the Conflict (Genesis 21:8–10)
2. The Comfort in the Conflict (vv. 11–13)
3. The Cost in the Conflict (vv. 14–16)
4. The Provision in the Conflict (vv. 17–20)

## In Depth

### 1. The Cause of the Conflict (Genesis 21:8–10)

When Genesis 21 opens, a feast is being held to celebrate the weaning of Isaac. Children tended to nurse longer in those days, so Isaac may have been as old as three or four years old when he was

finally weaned. The enjoyment of the day was interrupted when Sarah observed Ishmael mocking his little brother. Though Ishmael's behavior seemed questionable, we must recognize that for the past 13 years he had been the only child of an aging man who desperately wanted children. Abraham was a very wealthy and very powerful man, and Ishmael had enjoyed a privileged childhood that he now had to share with a brother.

Sarah demanded that Abraham "cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son" (v. 10). Though her motivation was wrong, Sarah was absolutely right on one key point— Ishmael was not the child of promise! It was Isaac whom God had promised would bring Abraham a line of descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky. Ishmael was not the result of God's supernatural movement in the life of Abraham; he was the result of impatience and self-indulgence on the part of Sarah and Abraham. Isaac, not Ishmael, was God's choice.

## **2. The Comfort in the Conflict (vv. 11–13)**

Sarah's request that Abraham expel Hagar and Ishmael is heartbreaking to Abraham. However, God reminded Abraham of His promise, telling him to do as Sarah said and to send both Hagar and Ishmael away. In the face of this heart-wrenching pronouncement, God comforted Abraham by assuring him that His blessing toward Ishmael would mirror the blessing He had in store for Isaac.

What a powerful reminder that the God we serve is in control of everything. We must develop a spirit of obedience—even when we don't understand what lies ahead. We must trust that God knows and that He cares. He requires that each of us commit to obediently trusting and following His Word. Even in the midst of our anguish, our comfort lies in knowing God loves us and wants what is best for us. God's will, not our immediate comfort, must reign supreme if we are to triumph.

*What is something difficult God has asked you to do? Did you do it?*

## **3. The Cost of the Conflict (vv. 14–16)**

After receiving provisions from Abraham— bread and water—Hagar and her son left the safety of the tents of Abraham and headed off into the desert. Instead of heading west into Egypt, Hagar and Ishmael traveled east into the wilderness of Beersheba. Soon enough, the water Hagar received from Abraham ran out, and she and Ishmael faced a slow and agonizing death by dehydration. Unwilling to watch her son die, Hagar moved a "bowshot" away from her son and began to cry.

## **4. The Provision in the Conflict (vv. 17–20)**

God had not abandoned Hagar or her son. Through His angel, God addresses Hagar by name. He knows her, and He knows all about her troubles. She is called to trust God. "Fear not," she is told, "God hath heard the voice of the lad." The same God who heard her voice years ago assures her that He now hears Ishmael's voice.

God responds when someone cries out from a situation of helplessness and hopelessness.

God renews His promise regarding Ishmael's descendants becoming a nation. It is only when Hagar obeys God that she sees a well from which she can draw the water to sustain both of them. God's blessing to her was made evident in a real and needed way.

The account ends with the indication that God's promise had been fulfilled. Ishmael's future had been accurately prophesied: his descendants, the Arabian nomads or Bedouins, indeed roamed the wilds of the desert. Ishmael himself becomes an archer and a skilled hunter who would be more than able to kill game for food and be a formidable opponent to any human enemy.

Discuss a time God when provided for your immediate and long-term needs at once.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. How did Abraham feel about Sarah's demand (Genesis 21:11)?
2. What provisions did Abraham make for Hagar and Ishmael (v. 14)?
3. What promise was made to Hagar in the desert (v. 18)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. In verse 9, it appears that Sarah wanted Hagar and Ishmael cast out because Ishmael posed a threat to Isaac's inheritance. Do you think there may have been other factors that caused Sarah to demand the eviction of Hagar and Ishmael? Are these types of issues still faced by families today? How are Christians expected to deal with these types of issues?
2. Do you think that Hagar's Egyptian ethnicity contributed to her victimization? If you do, why do you believe this?

### **Liberating Lesson**

Very often when we are feeling isolated, hurt, or even victimized, it is difficult to remember that the God we serve is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. He knows everything that is going on in our lives. He knows when we are hurt, and He knows who is hurting us. Our faith demands that we trust Him to reconcile every situation in His appointed time. God is everywhere all of the time. There is no situation that we endure alone. He is available to comfort us if we ask Him. God is all-powerful. When present trials make us anxious or fearful, we must remember that the provision for all we need rests in His hands. Christians are not immune from tests, trials, and tribulations, nor are Christian families immune from dysfunctions. Through these hardships, we must hold on to the promise and the hope that only God can provide.

### **Application for Activation**

It is often difficult for us to recollect abusive incidents that have occurred in our families. It is much easier to maintain a safe distance between us and the offending relative. This week, ask God to provide an opportunity for you to be reconciled with someone in your family and begin the healing process that will allow you to fully embrace, rather than just tolerate, that family member. Spend time in prayer and Scripture study so that you may be prepared when this opportunity presents itself. If you are not presently at odds with a family member, think of what other types of families (or communities) you are a part of; think of someone you might be at odds with and reconcile your differences with that person.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Genesis 21:8–20

Ishmael was the elder son of the Hebrew patriarch Abraham, and the reputed ancestor of a group of Arabian tribes. The Ishmaelites, who lived as nomadic traders, are his descendants. The twelve sons of Ishmael and his Egyptian wife became princes and progenitors of as many tribes, just as Isaac's son Jacob did (Genesis 25:12–18). The region occupied by these Ishmaelites included most of central and northern Arabia. The Ishmaelite people are frequently mentioned in the Bible (see Genesis 37:25; Judges 8:24).

It may be a revelation to some that the current conflict in the Middle East goes all the way back to these passages in Genesis, in particular the heartrending conflict in Abraham and Sarah's family regarding their oldest son, Ishmael, born of Sarah's Egyptian handmaiden Hagar, and Isaac, the long-awaited son of promise. Many consider Ishmael the father of the Arabian nations, and Muslims universally claim religious descent from him. Jews and Arab Muslims claim Abraham as their founding patriarch, a historical fact. The vast differences between their religions began with Ishmael, claimed by the Arabs, and Isaac, claimed by the Jews. Thus, the conflict that started in Genesis continues to this day.

What seems plain in Scripture to Christians, a Muslim would consider distorted. According to the Muslims' account, Abraham took Ishmael to Mecca to sacrifice him, rather than taking Isaac to Mount Moriah (where the Jewish Temple would be built). Moreover, the Koran (Qur'an) claims that Ishmael then inherited the land of Israel, and not Isaac. However, Christians must remember to trust to our sacred Scriptures over any other religious writings. Through many hands and many years, God protected His Word and caused it to be handed down through the generations. That is a much more solid foundation than the Qur'an, which is a record from single so-called prophet of a single supposed revelation which he had, that outright contradicts much of God's previous revelation of Himself to His people.

One of many practical applications can be made here in a call for peace among families, for we never know how far our family disputes may travel, or what long-term consequences may result. Further, we always need to be alert for God's voice and His guidance, and to be obedient to Him when He speaks to us.

**Genesis 21:8 And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. 9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.**

This event is part of the various types of laughter that surrounded Isaac's life, which God foresaw when He selected his name. Still, we aren't told exactly why Ishmael, who was thirteen or fourteen years older than Isaac, would act this way toward his baby brother. In Hebrew the term "mocking" is tsachaq (tsaw-KHAK). It is used thirteen times in the Old Testament and means "to make fun of, or

repeated laughing,” as contrasted with a gentle teasing. Seemingly, in Hebrew, the word itself sounded like laughter. Isaac here was about three to four years old, which most scholars agree was the age when children in ancient times were weaned. One could only imagine that with such a difference in their ages, nothing justified a teenager mocking a toddler, especially a family member. The greater reality of the events, however, is much more significant than what appears on the surface to be just another case of normal sibling rivalry.

**10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.**

As Sarah previously had done with Hagar (16:3–4), she complains to Abraham once again to resolve the issue for her, this time by casting Hagar out. In Hebrew, the phrase “cast out” is *garash* (gaw–RASH); it is used in the sense of driving out forcibly, as in driving out an enemy (see Joshua 24:12, 18) or the separation from a divorce (see Leviticus 21:14). Abraham had previously told Sarah that since Hagar was her handmaiden, she was free to do with her as she pleased. This time Sarah was asking her husband to cast out both Hagar and Ishmael, his son. This was a much weightier matter and was not within Sarah’s sole discretion as before. Things had come to a head for Sarah, just as in our lives we often come to a point where a hard decision must be made regarding a sinful desire, which continually works against the Spirit (cf. Romans 7:19; Galatians 5:17). An even closer parallel is when we must come to terms with a family member who interferes or conflicts somehow with our pursuit of God, a case for which this lesson is very instructive.

A female servant serving as a surrogate mother, such as Hagar, was an accepted cultural practice of the day. According to this practice, Hagar should have been accorded the same privileges as a wife, privileges Sarah asks Abraham to ignore by sending her away. Sarah knows that she is the primary wife and her child is the one whom God has chosen, so she uses her power to expel any rivals. Sarah could have used her position of power to aide Hagar, a fellow woman from an underprivileged social class. Instead, Sarah uses her power to lord it over her servant and tries to disinherit her. Today too, we still see many mistreated by people in positions of power, even if that person should have learned better from their own trials. While we should respect those in authority, we must also stand up for oppressed and exploited people, and trust that God will ultimately hold those with such authority culpable for their actions.

**11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham’s sight because of his son. 12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.**

Even though he was well aware by now that Ishmael was not the promised heir, Abraham struggled with the difficult decision to cast out his own son. “Grievous” in Hebrew is *yara’* (yaw–RAH); it signifies shaking or trembling. It is used during times when God is greatly displeased with Israel (1 Chronicles 21:7). Abraham was visibly shaken to consider such a drastic measure. Abraham has had many years to get to know and love Ishmael; he understandably was torn.

As any person of faith would do in the throes of a serious conflict, Abraham apparently prayed, because God responded during his struggle. Now the decision was God’s, and by trusting God’s wisdom, Abraham found the peace and courage to carry out even the most difficult of decisions, to cast out both his firstborn son and the boy’s mother. Surely it was God’s reminder of His previous promise, repeated several times now, that made Abraham realize what was at stake. Sarah had previously made a mistake in encouraging her husband to have a child with Hagar; this time she was not wrong in wanting to protect the child of promise from the child of flesh, of whom God had not approved. By obeying, Abraham opened the door for God’s higher purpose for all who would follow.

**13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.**

With this repeated pronouncement (see Genesis 17:20), God essentially created the Arab nations of the world. Though Muslims correctly claim their most ancient descendants are Ishmael and Abraham, they incorrectly believe Ishmael, rather than Isaac, originated the bloodline of the world's Savior (and so deny that Jesus Christ is that Savior). They attribute their prophet Muhammad's ancestry to one of Ishmael's sons (either Nabut or Kedar), and through Muhammad came the Twelve Imams. Out of respect for the seed of Abraham, God did make a nation of Ishmael as promised, but it was a nation born in conflict, destined to wage war with Israel throughout much of both biblical and modern history.

**14 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.**

It must be remembered that while Sarah asked Abraham to cast Hagar and Ishmael out, his love for Ishmael would have stopped him from doing it had God not instructed him to do what Sarah asked. Abraham already had learned the rewards of faith, trust, and obedience. Little did he know, however, that even though this was a very difficult trial for him, he was to face a much greater trial when God would ask him later to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise (Genesis 22:1–19). Abraham would obey God then, and he also obeys God in this instance by sending Hagar and Ishmael out. Since he does still care for Ishmael, he does not close his heart entirely to them, but sends them with a few provisions: bread and water.

Both mother and child were humbled at the hand of God for His purposes, an experience with which many are familiar. When we learn to be thankful for God's humbling and trust His hand even in the worst trials, we are truly growing in understanding (Deuteronomy 8:2, 16; 2 Chronicles 34:17; Daniel 4:37). Christians must wait patiently on the Lord when we face a seemingly hopeless situation, knowing that God knows what is best for us.

**15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. 16 And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow shot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.**

Had Hagar remembered God's words to her the first time she was cast out (see Genesis 16:7–14), she might not have been so quick to despair. Hagar was comforted not in response to her faith, but solely out of God's mercy and grace. God responded to the voice of Ishmael, demonstrating the reason for God naming the child as He did, "God hears." God heard the cries of the child of flesh and responded with mercy. Christians must trust this promise, that God hears, is not empty piety but powerful reality for us today, too. The Lord hears us, and—as Hagar realized her first time lost in the desert—the Lord sees us (Genesis 16:13).

Even though we are born into the slavery of sin, God still hears our cries when we call out to Him and responds with His forgiving love and merciful grace. Like Hagar, though, we often fail to see God's providence, and we also easily forget His promises to us. Even a tiny amount of faith can make it easy to simply listen for God's voice and see His provision!

Ultimately however, Scripture is not a list of case studies of people we should or should not emulate, but a revelation of God about Himself to His people. More important than learning to be more faith-sighted than Hagar, is to learn to be merciful and just like God. He assures Hagar that He will keep His promise and provides for her needs. The Christian life is to be one of integrity and of standing up for the dispossessed and abandoned. We hold ourselves accountable not to human standards of justice, but to God's. God knew it was just to separate Ishmael from his father so that Isaac could inherit as the child of promise. However, God also knew that Hagar and Ishmael would then need a new source of provision, which He willingly became.

**19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. 20 And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.**

In God's care for Ishmael in the desert, even though it was by His command that Abraham cast them out, He fulfilled His promise to Abraham to make a nation of Ishmael (Genesis 17:20). God preserved Ishmael's life, but that did not mean that Ishmael's character would change; God had also told Hagar that her child would be a "wild man" and would live a life of hostility "against every man" (16:12). This part of God's Word also came to fulfillment as promised, even as Ishmael became a huge nation. Ishmael's descendants were antagonistic throughout history toward Israel (God's chosen people), and to this very day they continue to cause dissension within the family by persecuting both Christians and Jews.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

The Lord Blesses Hagar and Ishmael  
(Genesis 16:1–15)

## **TUESDAY**

Hear My Prayer, O God  
(Psalm 5)

## **WEDNESDAY**

The Pure in Heart Will See God  
(Matthew 5:3–12)

## **THURSDAY**

Abraham and Ishmael Are Circumcised  
(Genesis 17:23–27)

## **FRIDAY**

The Twelve Tribes of Ishmael  
(Genesis 25:12–18)

## **SATURDAY**

Remember Me, O Lord  
(Psalm 106:1–5)

## **SUNDAY**

God Hears Ishmael's Voice  
(Genesis 21:8–21)