

Not How the Story Ends

Genesis 21:8-14

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A. Overwhelming Circumstances (vs. 9-11):

1. Now Sarah saw – After a careful observation Sarah had a complete understanding of what was taking place between Isaac and Ishmael.

a) Ishmael was born when Abram was 86 years old (Gen. 16:15-16) and he was 100 years old when Sarah gave birth to Isaac (Gen. 21:5). So at the time when Ishmael was mocking Isaac, Ishmael was about 16 years old (14 when Isaac was born, and since 2 years had passed before this incident of Ishmael mocking Isaac, he is now 16).

b) In Eastern countries this is always a season of domestic festivity, and the newly weaned child is formally brought in the presence of the assembled relatives and friends, to partake in some simple viands. Isaac, attired in the symbolic robe, with the badge of birthright, was then admitted heir of the tribe.

2. Mocking – Ishmael's joking with his brother was very negative-like someone in combat. It seems like he was jealous of all the attention his brother was receiving.

a) It seems that Ishmael, probably because of things said by his mother, realized why all the fuss was being made and became jealous of Isaac. In Galatians 4:29 (Galatians 4:29-30; *"But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also"*) Paul says that Ishmael persecuted Isaac; this means that there may have been a bit of pushing back on forth.

3. Said – Sarah responded to what she saw by repeatedly talking to Abraham about it. She had no intention of letting the issue go.

4. Drive out the maid and her son – Sarah commanded Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael from living among them. Sarah was not going to accept no from Abraham.

a) There is a contract in the Nuzi documents that contains a clause prohibiting the expulsion of the children of the secondary wife by the primary wife. The situation in Genesis is different on two counts; first, it is Abraham who sends them away; and second, Hagar is given her freedom, which, according to one ancient law code (Lipit-Ish-tar) would mean that her children would forfeit any inheritance rights.

b) This meaning of the verse is to sense a military invasion to take over a city, so action must be taken to prevent this. The action that must be taken was for Abraham to divorce Hagar so that there is no claim of the inheritance.

c) Sarah wished for Abraham to divorce Hagar, or to perform some sort of legal act by which Ishmael might be excluded from all claims on the inheritance. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.).

5. Shall not be an heir – Sarah was decisive about not providing the slightest opportunity for Ishmael to inherit anything that was due to Isaac.

6. All this took place after Hagar listened to God and returned to live with Abraham and Sarah with a commitment to submit to Sarah (Genesis 16:7-15). Hagar did this for a number of years.

B. From Bad to Worst (v. 12):

1. God said to Abraham - God provided to Abraham a prophetic revelation that summoned Abraham to pay attention to.
2. Distressed; Be sad – God repeatedly told Abraham that he does not need to allow himself to fall to shatter into pieces over the matter. In other words God implied that He had everything in control and therefore there was no reason for Moses to be overwhelmed by this issue.

a) He had absolute power over the lives of his children: death, Gen 42:37; use of body, Gen 19:8

3. Greatly/Exceedingly – Abraham’s distress was double what was normal. He was very very upset about what Sarah was telling him to do.
4. Listen to her; heard – God commanded Abraham to provide his full undivided attention to Sarah in an effort to gain a full understanding of what she was saying.

C. But God (vs. 13-14, 17, 19-21):

1. I will make – God had already decided before this time to set up and put in place, by His power and authority, a nation that would be led by Ishmael.
2. Gave Hagar bread – Abraham wanted to generously put on Hagar’s shoulder, bread, as if he wanted to always provide this to her.

- a) Putting the food on her shoulder seems to symbolize responsibility. Abraham gave Hagar one alimony check; after that she was on her own.
- b) By the word "bread" we are to understand the food or provisions which were necessary for her and Ishmael, until they should come to the place of their destination; which, no doubt, Abraham particularly pointed out. The bottle, which was made of skin, ordinarily a goat's skin, contained water sufficient to last them until they should come to the next well; which, it is likely, Abraham particularly specified also. This well, it appears, Hagar missed, and therefore wandered about in the wilderness seeking more water, until all she had brought with her was expended.
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3. She departed; Walk - When Hagar left the word indicates that she had no idea where she was going or what was taking place and going to become her new way of life.

- a) It did not seem like she even cared to go home to Egypt (maybe she would not be welcomed home having a mixed son). Her wandering is described as staggering, staying. It seems like she was emotionally despondent. She had done nothing to Sarah.

4. Wandering away - Hagar was mentally and spiritually lost. This situation was trusted upon her after she was told to return by the Lord (Genesis 16:7-10). She returned knowing that Sarah was possibly going to continue to mistreat her. She apparently obeyed God so that she was now not being kicked out because of anything she had done. She is unprepared and has nowhere to go and no idea what to do.

- a) Hagar and Ishmael were homeless (21:15), hopeless (21:16), and God's response is "do not be afraid (21:17)." During this time, God did not ask her to explain her need,

he just promised her a nation (Gen. 21:18). In her homelessness and hopelessness she was told to go, I have heard your son's cry (Gen. 21:17-18).

b) She was without:

- Direction
- Provision
- Protection

5. Wandering away - Hagar is without any form of protection as she wanders. For her it is a time when she is alone and rejected, but God is always with her and no longer communicates through an angel.

6. God was with the lad – God never forgets His Word (16:10-12; 21:18).

a) Twice in this chapter God declared that he would make Ishmael into a (great) nation, once in comforting Abraham (v.13), and once in comforting Hagar (v.18).

7. God was with the lad – Hagar trusted God and God remembers her commitment to walk with Him (16:13). She stayed in submission to Sarah for 14 years.

8. God was with the lad – Unlike chapter 16:10 where an angel of the Lord spoke, God now speaks to Hagar.

9. God was with the lad – God was always with them because God heard Ishmael crying (21:17).

a) The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael and their subsequent life in the desert of Paran would require them to acquire survival skills. As a skilled archer, Ishmael could provide food for his family and perhaps could find occupation as a mercenary (Is. 21:17 for reference to the bowmen of Kedar, Ishmael's son).

b) It will be the Ishamelites that will rescue Joseph from the cistern and take him to Egypt to fulfill the promise God gave to Abraham (15:13-14).

10. God was with the lad – God will never leave us nor forsake us (21:20-21).

a) Ishmael lived in the desert . . . became an archer (v. 20; cf. 16:12), and married an Egyptian (21:21). The Desert of Paran is in the northeast portion of the Sinai peninsula.