Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael
Gen 21:9-21
SS Lesson for 09/23/2007

Devotional Scripture: Gal 4:22-31

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THE JEWISH ASPECT FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR
Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The concept of the outline of the lesson came from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary. The lesson examines **God's Faithfulness** - with examples of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael. The **study's aim** is to learn that God has a special plan for everyone. The **study's application** is to experience the faithfulness of God keeping His promises and how God is always faithful regardless of man's faithfulness.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Divorce is common in various cultures today. In addition to family strife, we often see infighting in the workplace, and even in the church. In a word, human relationships are messy. What we need is a model of right relationships! God himself provides us with such a model. God loves us even when we behave unlovingly to others. God protects and provides, even for those who are not in a relationship with him at the moment. When faced with conflict, we often put our energy into assigning blame so we can figure out who has the burden of making amends. In today’s lesson, we do not see God in the role of cosmic referee in which he tries to undo people’s bad choices. Rather, God works with us, through our flaws. This will teach us that it’s more important that we help others grow into the people whom God wants them to become than it is for us to critique them and choose sides. Today, Muslims see Abraham as their father in the faith, much like Jews and Christians do (compare Romans 4:16). Muslims, however, trace their spiritual lineage back to Abraham through Ishmael, the son who was cast out of Abraham’s household. According to the Qur’an (or Koran), the holy book of the religion of Islam, Abraham was told by God to take Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, to a far land. They traveled many days until they came to a deserted place. Unbeknownst to them, so the story goes, this was the spot where Adam had built the first place to worship God. Abraham left Hagar and Ishmael there. When Hagar and Ishmael were near death from lack of water, the Qur’an claims that the youngster began to kick in the sand, and a well sprang up. This became the well Zamzam, and the city that grew around it is known today as Mecca. Muslims falsely believe that a descendant of Ishmael named Mohammed restored true worship of God at this site in the seventh century AD. Unrest and violence in the Middle East today are partly fueled by different ideas concerning how people are connected to Abraham and his sons. Jews claim the side of Isaac, the child of promise according to Genesis. Muslims believe that their ancestor Ishmael was the primary child of promise blessed by God. Each side sees itself as the “insider” and the other as the “outsider.” This religious rivalry, combined with politics and nationalism, has led to instability and war, disrupting the lives of many innocent people. The fundamentalist brand of Islam believes there is no room for accommodation with infidels, those who don’t believe as they do and who don’t follow the teachings of Mohammed to the letter. This week’s lesson looks at the story of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael from the Bible’s point of view. It is a sad story of a family broken apart because of foolish behavior and bitterness. We grieve with Abraham as he is forced to choose between his two sons. Many studying this lesson have experienced the pain of family fighting and break-up. Today’s text offers hope to us in that we see that God did not curse one side of a family squabble while blessing the other side. Last week’s lesson focused on how Abraham and Sarah were able to have a son in spite of advanced age. Regarding Sarah specifically, we learned of many admirable qualities: her faith, her courage, and her sense of humor and joy. Yet there was another side to Sarah that was not so admirable. Today we see a headstrong woman, who could be jealous and scheming. In the end one of her schemes backfired, and her jealousy caused her to act with cruelty. Sarah and Abraham lived in a world where it was common for households to include slaves. One of their slaves was an Egyptian girl named Hagar (Genesis 16:3). Hagar was Sarah’s personal attendant. When Abraham and Sarah’s attempts to produce a child were unsuccessful, Sarah hatched a scheme to remedy the problem: she offered to let Abraham have Hagar as a type of slave-wife, hoping this union would yield a child. Sarah’s logic in this seems strange to us. Why would a wife willingly allow her husband to have an intimate relationship with another woman? This seems to be a recipe for disaster! But the logic of this practice, common at the time,
went something like this: “If my slave produces a child, that child will be mine, just like his mother is my property.” Sarah thought she could have a son by a secondary way, and thus please her husband. This plan "worked" (if we can use that word!), and Abraham and Hagar conceived the baby that was to become Ishmael. But the plan backfired on Sarah in two ways. First, becoming pregnant had an unanticipated effect on Hagar: she began to think that she was better than Sarah (Genesis 16:4). Hagar had been successful at becoming pregnant, something Sarah had failed in; this ruined the relationship between the two women and ensured that Ishmael would never be accepted by Sarah. Second, Ishmael himself displayed his own arrogance after Isaac was born. This is where today’s lesson begins.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isa. 55:8). Cain offered an unsuitable sacrifice (Gen. 4:3-5) and became angry when the Lord did not accept it. He thought his way was as good as God's. When Aaron gave in to the people and made the golden calf (Exod. 32), he probably thought it was a good idea at the time. Israel soon discovered that their way was not God's way but rather a "great sin" (vs. 31). When King Saul disregarded God's instructions about destroying the Amalekites (I Sam. 15), he thought he was doing the right thing so that he could offer sacrifices to God. But Samuel declared, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (vs. 22). When Naaman the leper sought healing from Elisha, at first he was unwilling to wash in the Jordan (II Kings 5:10). But once he obeyed God, his disease was cured (vs. 14). In the long years before Isaac came along, Abraham and Sarah thought that having a child by Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, was God's way. However, it was not! In this week's lesson we encounter a house divided. Because of Abraham's faithfulness, God blessed that home. We also learn that God loves all people without partiality and has a special plan for everyone. They need to acknowledge that plan. Staying faithful when everything goes well for us is easy. But staying faithful to God in turbulent times, as we find Abraham doing in our lesson this week, is hard. His wife and her handmaid were quarreling with each other. Abraham's heart was torn between the two sons he had, Ishmael and Isaac. Our lesson this week shows how God can use strife-ridden situations and turn them around for any chosen and faithful person. Abraham is that person in our lesson.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

**Conflict (Gen 21:9-11)**

9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.
10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac."
11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son.

**Conflict among children**

*Conflict among children starting with Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-8)*

4:1 Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." 8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.
Conflict among children like Esau and Jacob (Gen 27:41)

41 Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

Conflict among children over Jesus (Matt 10:34-39)

34 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— 36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household." 37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Conflict among adults

Conflict because of being foolish (1 Sam 25:23-34)

23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. 24 She fell at his feet and said: "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. 25 May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name — his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent. 26 "Now since the Lord has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. 27 And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. 28 Please forgive your servant's offense, for the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the Lord's battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. 29 Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. 30 When the Lord has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, 31 my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord has brought my master success, remember your servant." 32 David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. 33 May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. 34 Otherwise, as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has sent you today to meet me. 35 May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. 34 Otherwise, as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak."

Conflict because of evil desires (James 4:1)

4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

Conflict because of seeking power (Matt 20:20-24)

20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 21 "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." 22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. 23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." 24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.
Conflict because of following different people (1 Cor 1:10-12)

10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 11 My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

Conflict because of cheating (1 Cor 6:7-8)

7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

God's Intervention (Gen 21:12-13)

12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. 13 "Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed."

Intervention of encouragement

Encouragement during affliction (Ps 10:17-18)

17 You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, 18 defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.

Encouragement that leads to unity (Rom 15:5)

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,

Encouragement from being united with Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Phil 2:1)

2:1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,

Eternal encouragement (2 Thess 2:16)

16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,

Intervention of promises

God is faithful to His promises (Ps 145:13)

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.

Promises of peace (Ps 85:8)

8 I will listen to what God the Lord will say; he promises peace to his people, his saints — but let them not return to folly.

Promises that have been tested (Ps 119:140)

140 Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.
Promises made "Yes" in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20)

20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Promises that allow participation in the Divine Nature of God (2 Peter 1:3-4)

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Obedience (Gen 21:14-16)

14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. 15 And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. 16 Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept.

Obedience immediately

Obedience must not be delayed (Luke 9:61-62)

61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Many times immediate response is required to receive results (Acts 9:34)

34 "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up.

Consider each moment as an opportunity to be obedient to God (Ps 90:12)

12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Obedience from a willing heart (Matt 4:18-20)

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.

Obedient through trials

Trials are to influence obedience (Ps 119:67)

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

Obedience in trials aid in receiving God's inheritance (Heb 11:8)

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.
Obedience in trials to test what's in the heart (Deut 8:2)
2 Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

Obedience in trials to purify (Job 23:10)
10 But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

Obedience in trials proves faith genuine (1 Peter 1:7)
7 These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

God's Second Intervention (Gen 21:17-19)
17 And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.
18 "Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your 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 skin with water, and gave the lad a drink.

Intervention of heard prayers

Answered prayers because God's eyes are on the righteous (Ps 34:15)
15 The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry;

Answered prayers because God promises to answer even before speaking (Isa 65:24)
24 Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

Answered prayers because God promises to fulfill answers and seeking (Matt 7:7-8)
7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Answered prayers because of obedience (1 John 3:21-22)
21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Intervention of revelation

Revelation through Jesus (John 14:9-10)
9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?

Revelation of God's will (Eph 1:9)
9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,
Revelation through the prophets (Rom 16:25-26)
25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him

Revelation through the Church (Eph 3:10)
10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,

Revelation of righteousness through faith (Rom 3:21-22)
21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Revelation of God's wrath (Rom 1:18-20)
18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Blessings (Gen 21:14-16)
20 So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.
21 He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Blessings of maturity

Maturity through perseverance to forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead (Phil 3:9-14)
10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Maturity through relying on God to be my strength in my fight to keep the faith (2 Tim 4:7-8)
7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Maturity through throwing off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and fix my eyes on Jesus (Heb 12:1-2)
12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
**Maturity through seeking God's power to overcome the world (Rev 3:11-12)**

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

**Maturity through realizing that I am in a battle that is a test of my faith (James 1:12)**

12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

**Maturity through having as my goal to "run in such a way" that I may win an imperishable crown, an eternal reward from my Savior (1 Cor 3:12-14).**

12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

**Blessings of family**

**Blessings of a family that keeps the ways of God (Gen 18:18-19)**

18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19 For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

**Blessings of a family that serves God (Josh 24:15)**

15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

**Blessings of a family that is devout and God fearing (Acts 10:1-2)**

10:1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

**Blessings of a family through children (Prov 17:6)**

6 Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.

**Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

**Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The apostle Paul uses the life and person of Abraham to illustrate the truths of the gospel and its application to the people of the church. In Galatians 4, Paul employs the family troubles of the patriarch to explain our freedom in Christ. You must know the story of today’s lesson to make sense of his powerful argument. Paul’s primary agenda in Galatians is to refute the idea that Christians are required to keep the Jewish law. For Paul, this obligation would negate the freedom we have in Christ. One way Paul makes his point is to use a story from the first book of the law (Genesis) to illustrate the importance of freedom in God’s plan of redemption. Paul begins with a contrast of Hagar and Sarah (Galatians 4:22). Hagar is a “slave woman”; Sarah is a “free woman.” Paul points out that the child Abraham produced with Hagar was
“born in the ordinary way,” that is, through natural impregnation and birth. The child produced with Sarah was “as the result of a promise,” that is, through supernatural provision to allow the elderly woman to become pregnant (4:23). Paul goes on to equate the slave woman and her son with the bondage of the law as symbolized by the Jerusalem of his day (Galatians 4:25). This is his way of talking about the stifling, restrictive legalism that some Jewish Christians were trying to impose upon Paul’s Gentile converts. To force the law upon these non-Jews would be to bind them by the old covenant and ignore the blessings of the new covenant. Paul contrasts this with the free woman and her son, whom he equates with the heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:26). His final point in this section is “we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman” (4:31). In other words, why would you exchange the marvelous freedom from sin that is possible through faith in Christ for the bondage of the Jewish law? (See 5:1.) Paul’s foundational point here is not directly tied to the teaching points of the Hagar/Ishmael story as found in Genesis (today’s lesson), but that should not worry us. Our study of Genesis allows us to see this crucial doctrine of Christian freedom in a striking way. We are free in Christ! Not free to sin, but free to live our lives for the glory of God and in his service. There is a larger doctrinal point that lies behind both the Galatians illustration and the Genesis account, however. That is that God is a God of promises, and he always keeps his promises. He did not abandon his promise to Abraham when Abraham attempted to keep his line going by having a child with a slave woman. The Lord was still faithful to provide through both Isaac and Ishmael, despite Abraham’s foibles. Likewise, God will not abandon us, even when our families—either our physical family or our spiritual family—are in shambles. God’s love for us is proven through his gift of his only Son, Jesus. Even when the animosity among the members of a fractured family runs very high, God’s love is constant and unchangeable. In times of personal adversity, we are well reminded to “keep yourselves in God’s love” (Jude 21).

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator
Abraham's wife Sarah knew about God's promise to make Abraham into the father of many nations. She also knew that she was getting old and appeared unable to have children. She therefore took matters into her own hands and gave Abraham her maidservant Hagar. This, of course, eventually led to jealousy between the two women. Abraham and Sarah had taken matters into their own hands to try to bring about what God had promised. This created a lot of problems, but God was still able to take the situation and continue to reach His purpose. Sarah urged Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Abraham was torn, for Ishmael was his son just as Isaac was. Isaac was the rightful heir because he was the one who had been promised. However, Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn, so he might have had a claim to the inheritance. It was through Isaac that the promise of God—to make Abraham into a great nation—would be realized. God also promised blessings to Ishmael and to make his descendants into a nation as well, since he too was a son of Abraham. This was a good solution for all involved, but many believe they still see the results today in the conflicts between the Jews and Arabs. This account shows how trouble can result when we try to help God accomplish what He wants to accomplish. It also shows how God can use the mistakes we make and eventually turn them into good. The account is also an allegory of what would happen later when Christ came to usher in a new covenant. In Galatians 4:21-31, Paul used Ishmael and Isaac to illustrate how the new covenant did away with the old covenant. Ishmael was born in the normal way to the slave woman, but Isaac was born as the result of a promise. There was nothing supernatural about Ishmael's birth, but there was about Isaac's. Ishmael represents the bondage to the law, or to human effort. Isaac represents the promise of grace. Ishmael represents a righteousness based on following law and religion. Isaac represents the freedom of grace, which means righteousness comes from faith in God and not from our own efforts. Believers in Paul's day and now are coheirs with the promised seed by adoption through God's grace. Those who have been set free from sin are free from the bondage of the law and from trying to please God by following the law. The flesh and the spirit do not harmonize, just as Isaac and Ishmael did not get along. Paul told believers that they need to get rid of the slave woman, just as Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away. This is done by removing fleshly efforts and living by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). The allegory goes further when we consider that Hagar was the slave woman and that the law brings us into bondage. Paul further explained that Sarah represents the new covenant, because her child—Isaac—was the result of the promise. We then have a choice. Will we live as children of the slave or as children of the promise?
**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

1. God often uses even the wrong responses of men to accomplish His sovereign will (Gen. 21:9-10)
2. Serving God in obedience does not preclude the display of normal emotions (vs.11-13)
3. Obeying God is not always easy, but it is always wise (vs. 14)
4. Being under God's protection does not guarantee the absence of suffering (vs. 15-16)
5. God answers those who cry out to Him and rescues them in His time and way (vs. 17-18)
6. God remembers and keeps His promises even when men do not remember them (21:19-21; 16:11-12)

**Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

The focus of this week's lesson is on God's promises to Abraham concerning Ishmael. This was one of many promises that God had made to Abraham. Promises made by God are sure to be fulfilled.

**A tough decision (Gen. 21:9-11)**

How do you handle tough decisions? When Sarah could no longer bear having Hagar dwell with her and Abraham, she told her husband to put Hagar out of their home. That also meant putting out his son Ishmael. This decision greatly troubled Abraham. When we are faced with a tough decision, we can either try to handle the matter by ourselves or seek God's guidance. We have the privilege to acknowledge the Lord and allow Him to direct our path (Prov. 3:6). It is futile to handle difficult decisions alone. We can trust God to guide us in the right direction. There is nothing too hard for the Lord to handle.

**God's faithful comfort (Gen. 21:12-16)**

Abraham walked closely with the Lord. When he faced a difficult decision concerning his son Ishmael, God spoke to him and comforted him. God is omniscient. He knows all things. God knew when Abraham was grieved. He also knows when we are perplexed. God is omnipotent. He is full of power. God helped Abraham in his distress. He will help us just as He helped Abraham. God is still the same. He knows when to deliver His people, and He knows how to do so. We serve an awesome God. God promised to bless Ishmael and make a nation of him. Knowing that God is true to His word, Abraham was able to honor Sarah's request and be at peace. There was no need for him to fear. God was with Abraham. He trusted God to fulfill His promises. God wants us to fully trust Him. Those who trust in God also have a measure of peace. It is not necessary to worry or be afraid. God will take care of His people. He is our Provider.

**God's amazing covenant (Gen. 21:17-18)**

Hagar was afraid that her son, Ishmael, would die of thirst. The water she had received from Abraham was gone. God spoke to the Egyptian handmaid and opened her eyes. He told her what to do for her son. It is apparent that in her distress, Hagar had not seen the nearby water. God opened her eyes, and she saw it. God is amazing! God had told Abraham that Ishmael would be a nation, and He told Hagar that promise too. God is almighty! He is certainly able to fulfill all of His promises. He expects us to trust Him. Realizing the great things God has already done, we should be inspired to fully trust Him. He has never failed. There is no situation too difficult for God to handle. We ought to acknowledge His great abilities and patiently wait for His promises to be fulfilled.

**God's wonderful blessing (Gen. 21:19-21)**

God promised to bless Ishmael to be fruitful and multiply. Ishmael had twelve sons. His sons were leaders of tribes (25:13-16). God blessed him because he was Abraham's offspring (21:13). God is mindful of His people. God created a people to worship Him because of His worthiness. Honor and glory are due the Lord, our God. We should express our adoration to Him for His works. God was with Ishmael. He is omnipotent. It is comforting to know that God is always with us.
The Jewish Aspect from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

As we have seen, the Old Testament, especially the book of Genesis, is filled with captivating personalities and events that have tended to elicit colorful legends and traditions. In Jewish teaching, the extra-biblical writings are divided into two broad categories: authoritative and nonauthoritative. The authoritative writings are held to be of equal stature with Scripture. These include the Mishnah—the oral law, which tradition says was given to Moses and compiled in writing around A.D. 200; the Gemara—commentary on the Mishnah; and the Talmud—which contains the Mishnah and the Gemara along with other commentaries. Many books are available with collections of Jewish lore and legends. Although these books are not considered officially authoritative among the Jewish people, they contain much Hasidic lore and many Jewish folktales that are considered true, often collected from the authoritative books. One noted example is Louis Ginzberg's Legends of the Jews (The Jewish Publication Society of America), which was first published about one hundred years ago. One legend concerns Hagar, Sarah's handmaid who was given to Abraham and became the mother of Ishmael. According to the extra-biblical tradition, Abraham had "only one concubine, as Hagar and Keturah were one person" (Adier, ed., The Jewish Encyclopedia, Funk and Wagnalls). Keturah "is identified in the Midrash . . . and in the Palestinian Targurnim with Hagar." Ginzberg wrote that "Rebekah first saw Isaac as he was coming from the way of Beerlahairoi, the dwelling-place of Hagar, whither he had gone after the death of his mother, for the purpose of reuniting his father with Hagar, or, as she is also called, Keturah." The Zohar, a prime text for Cabalistic Jews, states that "when Hagar parted from Abraham, she worshiped the idols of her father's house. Later she repented fully and bound herself to good deeds, for which her name was changed to Keturah. After this Abraham sent for and remarried her" (Zohar 1:133b). Other Jewish teachings hold the biblical view that Hagar and Keturah were two distinct people and that Abraham "married Keturah only after Hagar's death" (Adier). Rashi, a noted eleventh-century rabbi, "supposes that Keturah was one and the same with Hagar—so the Midrash, the Targum Yerushalmi, and that of Jonathan. The latter says, 'Keturah, she is Hagar, who had been bound to him from the beginning,' but Aben Ezra and most of the commentators contend that Keturah and Hagar are two distinct persons" (Harris, eds., Hebraic Literature, M. Walter Dunne). The ambiguousness of the two positions was expressed in a message by Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald: "While the true identity of Keturah is unclear, Abraham's purpose in marrying Keturah is definitive. Although none of Abraham's other children ever reached the spiritual heights of Isaac, all of them successfully inherited at least part of the legacy of Abrahamic values" ("Who Is Keturah?" www.njop.org/html/CHAYEISARAH57662005.html). Legends provide insight into a culture's thinking and give a people a sense of history and identity. There is a danger, however. When legends involve the understanding of Scripture, they can distract or mislead. Only the Word of God itself gives true knowledge of Him.