Blessings for Ishmael and Isaac
Gen 21:12-21; 26:2-5, 12-13
SS Lesson for 10/20/2013

Devotional Scripture: Gal 4:22-31

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- 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).

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**Concluding Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh**

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews the Blessings for Ishmael and Isaac. The study’s aim is to realize that God keeps His promises and fulfills His word no matter how impossible the circumstances may seem. The study’s application is to deepen our trust in and commitment to God and His Word.

Key Verse: 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."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

God provided the child of promise to Abraham and to Sarah... at the very time God had promised (cf. 18:10). They responded in faith by (a) naming him Isaac (21:3), (b) circumcising him according to the covenant (verse 4; cf. 17:9-14, and (c) praising God for this amazing fulfillment (21:6-7). The name Isaac ("he laughs") is cleverly explained in this passage. Sarah said that God gave her laughter (verse 6), that is, joy. Her laughter of unbelief (18:12) was now changed to rejoicing through the provision of her son. Everyone who would hear about this would laugh, that is rejoice, with her. But Ishmael turned her laughter into a ridiculing mockery of God’s work. God used this incident of Ishmael’s mocking Isaac to drive out the child Ishmael and Hagar (verse 10), for they would be a threat to the promised seed. The word “mocking” is mešāḥeq ("laughing or jesting"), from which comes “Isaac”(yišāq). Earlier Sarah had mistreated Hagar (16:6); now Hagar’s son was mistreating Sarah’s son. Earlier Sarah caused pregnant Hagar to flee (16:6); now she caused Hagar and her 16-or 17-year-old son to flee. (Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born [16:16], and 100 when Isaac was born [21:5], and Isaac was probably weaned [verse 8] at age 2 or 3.) When Abraham became distressed because of Sarah’s request to oust Hagar and Ishmael, God assured Abraham that Ishmael would have a future because he too was Abraham’s offspring (verses 11-13). The two emphases (verses 1-13) then are these: the birth of Isaac (in which the naming commemorated the fulfillment and the circumcision confirmed the covenant), and the expulsion of Ishmael as the removal of the threat. Once the promised child was received, Abraham and Sarah, rejoicing in God’s miraculous provision, had to avoid any possible threat to Isaac’s inheritance. Because God chose one son, His choice had to be protected. Abraham and Sarah had to expel Ishmael. The Angel of the Lord met Hagar in the desert (verses 17-18) as before (16:7), and provided water from a well (21:19) as before (16:14). God told Hagar, as He had told Abraham, that from Ishmael would come a great nation (21:18; cf. verse 13). Ishmael lived in the desert... became an archer (verse 20; cf. 16:12), and married an Egyptian (21:21). The Desert of Paran is in the northeast portion of the Sinai peninsula. Paul’s use of this account is marvelous (Gal. 4:21-31; see comments there). Ishmael was born by the flesh through “the slave woman” (Gal. 4:29-30). Isaac was born by the promise and was the heir. One represented bondage at Sinai, the other freedom when the promise finally came. When Christ, the seed, came, the old was done away. Now that the promise has come, believers are co-heirs with the promised Seed by adoption through God’s grace. To go back under the Law would be to undo the fulfillment of God’s promise. Those adopted by the Seed become seeds and are set free from the bondage of the Law (Gal. 5:1). Just as Ishmael and Isaac were in conflict (Gal. 4:29), so the flesh and the Spirit do not harmonize. The flesh struggles against the Spirit, often mocking it (Gal. 5:16-18). Therefore believers are to “get rid of the slave woman and her son” (Gal. 4:30), that is, to remove the threat of the flesh and “live by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16).

Commentary from Barnes Notes

The dismissal of Hagar and Ishmael. "The son of Hagar ... laughing." The birth of Isaac has made a great change in the position of Ishmael, now at the age of at least fifteen years. He was not now, as formerly, the
chief object of attention, and some bitterness of feeling may have arisen on this account. His laugh was therefore the laugh of derision. Rightly was the child of promise named Isaac, the one at whom all laugh with various feelings of incredulity, wonder, gladness, and scorn. Sarah cannot brook the insolence of Ishmael, and demands his dismissal. This was painful to Abraham. Nevertheless, God enjoins it as reasonable, on the ground that in Isaac was his seed to be called. This means not only that Isaac was to be called his seed, but in Isaac as the progenitor was included the seed of Abraham in the highest and utmost sense of the phrase. From him the holy seed was to spring that was to be the agent in eventually bringing the whole race again under the covenant of Noah, in that higher form which it assumes in the New Testament. Abraham is comforted in this separation with a renewal of the promise concerning Ishmael (Gen 17:20). He proceeds with all singleness of heart and denial of self to dismiss the mother and the son. This separation from the family of Abraham was, no doubt, distressing to the feelings of the parties concerned. But it involved no material hardship to those who departed, and conferred certain real advantages. Hagar obtained her freedom. Ishmael, though called a lad, was at an age when it is not unusual in the East to marry and provide for oneself. And their departure did not imply their exclusion from the privileges of communion with God, as they might still be under the covenant with Abraham, since Ishmael had been circumcised, and, at all events, were under the broader covenant of Noah. It was only their own voluntary rejection of God and his mercy, whether before or after their departure, that could cut them off from the promise of eternal life. It seems likely that Hagar and Ishmael had so behaved as to deserve their dismissal from the sacred home. "A bottle of water." This was probably a kid-skin bottle, as Hagar could not have carried a goat-skin. Its contents were precious in the wilderness, but soon exhausted. "And the lad." He took the lad and gave him to Hagar. The bread and water-skin were on her shoulder; the lad she held by the hand. "In the wilderness of Beer-sheba." It is possible that the departure of Hagar occurred after the league with Abimelek and the naming of Beer-sheba, though coming in here naturally as the sequel of the birth and weaning of Isaac. The wilderness in Scripture is simply the land not profitable for cultivation, though fit for pasture to a greater or less extent. The wilderness of Beer-sheba is that part of the wilderness which was adjacent to Beer-sheba, where probably at this time Abraham was residing. "Laid the lad." Ishmael was now, no doubt, thoroughly humbled as well as wearied, and therefore passive under his mother's guidance. She led him to a sheltering bush, and caused him to lie down in its shade, resigning herself to despair. The artless description here is deeply affecting.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The concept of the outline of the lesson was adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

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Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Mary Lard was the mother of six. Her husband had moved the family to western Missouri, but his death from smallpox in about 1829 left her to rear the children alone. In 1830, she made one of the most heart-wrenching decisions that a mother can make. Deciding that there was no way she could feed six children, she told the two oldest sons that they would have to leave. She gave each a small New Testament and bid her farewells with quivering lips. As the boys walked away, they heard their mother scream, a sound they never forgot. The boy named Moses never told what happened during the next few years. Did the two live off the land, steal, or work for others, perhaps living in barns or caves? Moses Lard had another problem: he could not read. He became an apprentice to a tailor and taught himself to read during that time. He would take letters from signs, put them together in different ways, and ask people about the sounds or the words that resulted. Moses Lard eventually began to preach, and he caught the attention of Alexander Doniphan, later to be a hero of the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). That man made arrangements for Lard to attend college. Lard graduated in 1849, age 30, as the valedictorian of the class, in spite of having to work to support his family. Lard's ministries included preaching, writing a commentary on the book of Romans, and being a debater and an editor. That's "not bad" for one who had to teach himself to read! Today's lesson offers certain parallels in that it involves a decision to break up a family because circumstances seemed to require it. Even so, troubling family circumstances can yield good outcomes (Genesis 17:20; 25:12-18).

The first part of the book of Genesis is general history (what we also called primeval history in lesson 5). As Moses introduces new people or nations throughout this section, the emphasis very quickly moves to the person or entity that he intends to feature at that point. For example, Genesis 1:1 refers to the heavens and earth, but the next verse focuses immediately on the earth. Genesis 2 sharpens the focus to the first humans. The accounts of the first sin and the first murder are set forth in Genesis 3 and 4, but the goal is to get to another son of Adam and Eve—namely, Seth. Notice the focus on him in Genesis 5:1-3. In Genesis 5:6-26, we see repeatedly that a certain descendant "had other sons and daughters," but the only one mentioned by name in each case is the one leading to Noah and the flood. After the flood, the biblical record gives information about the descendants of Noah's three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Genesis 9:18, 19). There are 70 founders of nations or people groups mentioned in the table of nations in Genesis 10. The incident of the Tower of Babel (lesson 5) provides an explanation for the presence of different languages among the peoples of the world. After that, the emphasis quickly returns to Shem and his descendants (Genesis 11:10-26). The plan seems to be to move as quickly as possible to Abram, a son of Terah. The second part of the book of Genesis could be called personal history. It is about people who have purpose in the plan of God to bring the Messiah into the world at just the right time (Galatians 4:4). This section of Genesis begins with Genesis 11:27. The focus is on the descendants of Abram that continue through Isaac, Jacob, and the latter's 12 sons. Others are mentioned as they take their places on the stage of history. In this light, the goal for Moses, the author, is to provide an explanation on how the nation of Israel came into existence.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)
**Blessings of Abraham (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."

**Blessings 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.

**Blessings 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.
Blessings Because of 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-bye 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.
Blessings of Hagar (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.

Blessings 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 any thing we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Blessings 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 of Ishmael (Gen 21:20-21)

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.

Promises to Isaac (Gen 26:2-5, 12-13)

2 Then the Lord appeared to him and said: "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. 4 And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 5 because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." 12 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. 13 The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous;

Promises to Isaac (2-3)

Promise of guidance because God has a plan for his life (Jer 29:11)

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Promise of land that belongs to God (Ps 24:1)

24 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

Promise confirmation through God's oath (Heb 6:16-18)

16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose
very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

Promises to Isaac’s descendants (4-5)

Promise of childrens are a reward from God (Ps 127:3-5)
3 Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. 4 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. 5 Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Promise of seeds blessed that results in blessing many nations (Rom 9:4-5)
4 the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Promises that obedience brings God's blessings (James 1:25)
25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

Promises realized (12-13)

Promises realized through persistence in doing good (Gal 6:9)
9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Promises realized through sowing righteousness (Hos 10:12)
12 Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.

Promises realized through righteousness (Ps 92:12-14)
12 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; 13 planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,

Promises realized through the fear of the Lord (Ps 128:1-2)
128 Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways. 2 You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh
From the series: Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs

Abraham’s lack of enthusiasm about his son Isaac may seem very conjectural, and we must admit this candidly, but the events of verses 8-21 certainly seem to strengthen this impression about Abraham and his attitude toward his son. On the day Isaac was weaned, Abraham prepared a great feast. This seems to have provided the occasion for celebration in those days. We should bear in mind that the weaning of a child often occurred much later than it would today. Isaac could easily have been three or four years old, or even older.
The sight of Hagar’s son at the feast robbed Sarah of all of the joy she should have had. By this time Ishmael would have entered his teens and would likely have reflected his mother’s disregard for Sarah and her son. Whether Ishmael was actually mocking Isaac or merely playing and having a good time is hard to determine in the context since the word employed in verse 9 could mean either. However, Paul’s commentary in Galatians 4:29 informs us that mockery was the meaning Moses intended to convey. Sarah determined that something was going to be done once and for all. Forcefully she gave Abraham an ultimatum (Genesis 21:10). How out of character Sarah seems at this moment. How different the description of her in Peter’s epistle is from that described by Moses (I Peter 3:3-6). Sarah is obviously not at her best in chapter 21, but then neither is Abraham. Some have tried to applaud Sarah for her depth of spiritual insight concerning the fact that Isaac would be the heir, not Ishmael. Personally, I think that her primary motive was that of jealousy and a protective instinct to see to it that her son got what was coming to him. Sarah, like every Christian I have ever known, had moments she would just as soon forget entirely. This is surely one of those times for her. Peter’s use of Sarah as an example of humility and submission overlooks this event as an exception to the normal rule. In a similar fashion the writer to the Hebrews spoke of Abraham and Sarah as those whose faith we should imitate. Their mistakes and sins were not mentioned because they were dealt with once and for all under the blood of Christ. Furthermore, their sins are not the point of the author’s purpose in Hebrews, but rather their faith. Men’s sins are recorded in Scripture in order to remind us that the men and women of old were no different than we are and to serve as a warning and instruction to us not to repeat their mistakes (cf. I Corinthians 10:11).

Abraham was deeply grieved by the decision that was being forced upon him (Genesis 21:11). From chapter 17 we know that he was very attached to his son Ishmael and that he would have been content for this child to be the heir through whom God’s promises were to be fulfilled. This, however, was impossible because Ishmael was the result of human effort, devoid of faith (cf. Galatians 4:21ff). The attachment of Abraham to this son, Ishmael, was so great that a crisis had to be reached before he would come to grips with the situation. While we cannot justify the motivation of Sarah for her ultimatum, I personally believe that such a move had to occur in order to force Abraham’s hand in setting aside his aspirations for this son. God reassured Abraham that as painful and unpleasant as the situation might be, putting Ishmael away was the right thing to do. In this instance he should listen to his wife (Genesis 21:12). We should notice that it is both Hagar and the boy who are close to Abraham’s heart. Heretofore Hagar has been referred to as Sarah’s maid, but here she is called “your maid” by God. Sarah, we recall, was intensely jealous of Hagar and of her son (cf. Genesis 16:5). It is impossible for a man to enter into an intimate relationship such as the one Abraham had with Hagar and then to simply walk away. Sarah knew this, and so did God. In more than just a physical way Abraham had become one with Hagar, and Ishmael was the evidence of this union. In chapter 17 God had refused to accept Ishmael as the heir of Abraham. Isaac, He had insisted, would be the heir of promise (17:19). It was therefore necessary for Ishmael to be sent away and forever eliminated from the status of an heir. For this reason Sarah’s demands were to be met, and Ishmael was to be sent away. Yet the promises God had made to Hagar (16:10-12) and to Abraham (17:20) concerning Ishmael would be honored: “And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant” (Genesis 21:13). The sending away of the son of a concubine was not without precedent in that day. In the Code of Hammurabi, Law 146, the children of slaves who were not made heirs must be set free as compensation for this. Abraham’s sending away of Ishmael fits very nicely into this practice. By giving him his freedom, he indicated that Ishmael had no part in his inheritance, which was kept exclusively for Isaac. Abraham arose early to send off Hagar and Ishmael. This may evidence his resolve to carry out an unpleasant task, as Kidner suggests. While it sounds far less spiritual, I wonder if Abraham did not do so for other reasons. Surely an early start would be wise in the desert, since travel should be done in the cool of the day. Also, an early departure would make it easier to say their good-byes without the interference of Sarah. I think that Abraham wanted to express his deep-rooted love for both Hagar and Ishmael without a hostile audience. Some have suggested that Hagar lost her way in the desert and that this explains why she “wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba” (verse 14). Why did she not return to Egypt, as she seemed to be heading there when she first escaped from Sarai (16:7ff)? Later, she would take a wife for Ishmael from Egypt (verse 21). I believe that Hagar did not return to Egypt because she believed that God would fulfill His promises concerning Ishmael in the place where she chose to wander. In that sense she sojourned in the wilderness, much like Abraham, trusting God to bless them there.
Eventually the provisions Abraham gave them ran out and death appeared to be at hand. The boy was no infant here, as we might suppose, but a teenager, for he was nearly fourteen years older than Isaac (cf. 17:25). Not wanting to see him die, Hagar left Ishmael some distance from her under what little shade the bushes would afford. She then lifted up her voice and wept. It was not Hagar’s cries that arrested God’s attention, but the boy’s. As a descendant of Abraham, Ishmael was the object of God’s special care. His cries brought divine intervention (Genesis 21:17-18). The solution to Hagar’s problem was already present. Through her tears she could not see the well close by. More than likely, it was not a distinct structure but simply a small source of water hidden among the bushes. God thus enabled her to see things as they really were, and she and the boy were refreshed and revived. God’s working in Hagar’s life may seem harsh to us, but I understand His dealings to be such that His promises were accomplished. You remember that Ishmael was to be a “wild ass” of a man, hostile toward his brothers, and a free spirit. This kind of man could not be raised in the city with all of its conveniences and advantages. Learning to survive in the desert, to prevail over hostile elements was just what it took to make such a man out of Ishmael. As boot camp makes a good Marine, so desert survival made a man of Ishmael.

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**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

1. God's plan to bless one does not preclude His ability to bless another (Gen. 21:12-13)
2. God’s will often requires doing the hard thing and leaving the results to Him (vs. 14)
3. God answers the cries of His children at just the right time (Gen. 21:17-19; cf. 16:1-16)
4. You can depend on God to keep His promises every time (21:20-21; cf. 16:1-16; 17:20; 21:13)
5. Obedience brings God's blessings both to us and to our loved ones (26:2-5)
6. Personal obedience leads to God's richest blessings (vs. 12-13)