

Injustice and Hope

Genesis 21:8-20

SS Lesson for 01/09/2022

Devotional Scripture: Gal 4:22-31

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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 Abraham who continue through Isaac, Jacob, and the latter's 12 sons. When God called Abraham and Sarah (then Abram and Sarai) to leave Ur, he promised to bring them to the land he would give them and to make Abraham's family a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham entered Canaan at age 75, and he was told that this was the land that God planned to give to Abraham's descendants (12:7). After Abraham and his nephew Lot went their separate ways, Abraham was again told that all the land he could see would be given to his descendants (13:15). Yet Sarah was unable to conceive a child (Genesis 11:30). She sought to overcome her barrenness by asking Abraham to impregnate one of her slaves (16:2-3). 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 in this secondary way and thus please her husband. One of their slaves was an Egyptian named Hagar (Genesis 16:3). She presumably came into their household when the family sojourned in Egypt (12:16). Hagar was Sarah's personal attendant. When Abraham and Sarah's attempts to produce a child were unsuccessful, Sarah offered Hagar to Abraham (never asking the slave's consent), hoping this union would yield a child. This attempt to run ahead of God turned out to be a bad idea, as Genesis 16:4b-6 shows. When Hagar conceived, it created a rift between the two women. Hagar looked down on Sarah (Genesis 16:4), and Sarah retaliated with harsh treatment. When Hagar fled, God comforted her and encouraged her to return to Abraham and Sarah, with the promise that God would bless her offspring (16:9-12). The baby born to Abraham and Hagar was named Ishmael. Eventually God made it clear to Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son (Genesis 18:1-15). Isaac, the child of this miraculous conception, would become the heir to God's promise to Abraham. Yet with Ishmael still in the mix as Abraham's firstborn son, the situation was ripe for more conflict—which brings us to today's passage.

Key Verse: Genesis 21:17-18

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."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

21:1-7. 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 (v. 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** (v. 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 (see comment on 21:9) of God’s work.

21:8-13. God used this incident of Ishmael’s **mocking** Isaac to drive out the child Ishmael and **Hagar** (v. 10), for they would be a threat to the promised seed. The word “mocking” is *meṣahēq* (“laughing or jesting”), from which comes “Isaac” (*yiṣhāq*). 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** [v. 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** (vv. 11-13). The two emphases (vv. 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.

21:14-21. The **Angel of the Lord** met **Hagar in the desert** (vv. 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. v. 13). 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. 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).

Major Theme Analysis

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

Injustice through Conflict (Gen 21:8-11)

8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

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 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.

Hope through 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.

Hope through 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.

Hope through God's Deliverance and Plans (Gen 21:17-20)

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.

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

Deliverance through 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.

Deliverance through 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.

Plans of maturity

Maturity through perseverance (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 (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 (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 the testing of our 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 a goal to win an imperishable crown (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.

Plans for family blessings

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

Commentary Thoughts from Allen Ross

Ishmael Is Put Away (21:8-21)

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:

Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of the maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac (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:

And let not your adornment be external only—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, and putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear (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 submissiveness 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:

Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named (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:

And God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand; for I will make a great nation of him" (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.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/what-happens-when-christians-mess-genesis-211-34>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Hagar had a difficult life. But as Ishmael's name reminds us, God hears! Abraham's God, who loved both Isaac and Ishmael, is the Lord of all creation. He cares for all people, and he keeps his promises. He hears all cries of injustice, and he responds with a message of hope. That message must be preached, taught, and lived by his people before the watching world, which is desperate for a better story than the divisions that so often define our lives. When we hear, the world might begin to believe that God also hears.

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?

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Mistreated - God promised Abraham and Sarah a child, the start of a mighty nation, blessing the whole earth. But as the years passed, Sarah grew old and the possibilities of conceiving a child grew slim. So, she came up with a plan to give her maid servant, Hagar, to Abraham. After he slept with Hagar, she conceived and gave birth to a son, Ishmael. When Ishmael became a teenager, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and Sarah and they had a son who they named Isaac. That made the relationship between Sarah and Hagar very strained. On the day Sarah weaned Isaac, she observed Ishmael making fun of her son. Sarah demanded Abraham put Hagar and her son out of the house. Distressed at the thought of Ishmael leaving, Abraham sought God's counsel. God instructed him to obey his wife. So, Abraham supplied Hagar with as much food and water as she could carry and set them off in an unknown direction. Hagar wandered in the desert. Before long, she and her son ran out of food and water. Devastated and fearing Ishmael's death, she placed Ishmael under a bush while she sat and sobbed. God heard the boy crying, and interrupted Hagar's negative thought by asking her from heaven, "What's the matter? Do not be afraid!" He reminded her of His earlier promise to make her son into a great nation.

Rescued - God open Hagar's eyes to His provision: a well of water. Imagine the joy as she filled her bottle and served it to her thirsty son. As Ishmael grew, God stayed by his side. He became an archer, lived in the desert, and had a family. Jehovah had a plan for Ishmael, just as He promised.

Hope - It is easy to think incorrect thoughts concerning ourselves and God. We yell at Him, saying, "You've abandoned me," or "Why did You put me in this situation?" or "How can you let that happen?" Yet God will come to the side of His children in times of crisis and even rebellion. He's committed to always offering a future and a hope.