

FPFWC Christian Development



God The Source of Justice

January 2022

Winter Quarter

January 8, 2022

Lesson #1 –Injustice and Hope

Scripture Focus – Genesis 21:8-20

ICE BREAKER –

1. Why is it important that the believer walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh?
2. How do you deal with the consequences of bad decisions you have made in the past?

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

LESSON BACKGROUND

The second part of the book of Genesis could be called personal history (see Lesson Context from lesson 5). 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 (see 21:17b, below).

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.

LESSON COMMENTARY

God’s Sovereignty in Blessing Abraham and Sarah (21:1–8)

21:1–8. Despite the relative absence of any merit on Abraham’s part, God **did for Sarah as He had promised** (v. 1; see 17:16, 21; 18:10, 14) and miraculously (since she was postmenopausal; see 18:11) enabled her to conceive and bear a **son**. As God had commanded him in 17:19, Abraham named his son **Isaac** (*yitschaq*), meaning “he laughs/will laugh,” thus serving as a continual reminder to his parents of *their faithless reaction* to God’s (ultimately) faithfully fulfilled promise (see 17:17; 18:12). At the same time—illustrating how God is able to “turn to good account” anything that sin or doubt has corrupted (cf. Rom 8:28)—Sarah highlighted the newly realized significance of Isaac’s name as direct testimony to the experience of God’s blessing by declaring, in a clearly intentional play on the name “Isaac” (*yitschaq*), **everyone who hears will laugh [yitschaq] with me** (v. 6), that is, they will laugh out of joy with her at the miracle of Isaac’s birth.

b. God’s Sovereignty in Blessing Hagar and Sarah (21:9–21)

21:9–14. Following Isaac’s weaning (v. 8), when he would have begun to “step out” from under the direct supervision of his mother, the enmity that God had declared would exist between the promised son and Ishmael (see 16:12) inevitably began to materialize. Thus Ishmael would have been around 16 or 17 years old at this point. He was 13 a year before Isaac’s birth (17:21, 27), with the weaning lasting for two or three years (1Sm 1:22–24; 2:11; 2 Macc 7:27; and in the Talmud in *b. Ketub.* 60b; *b. Yebam.* 43a). Ishmael acted in a **mocking** manner toward his younger brother. The word **mocking** is a deliberate example of wordplay, being identical to the name Isaac (“laughter”) but used here in the negative sense of mockery. Furthermore, some ancient rabbis noted something more sinister than mere sibling teasing, rather identifying a variety of evil actions. The ancient Jewish commentary, called the Midrash (cf. Gen. Rab. 53:11) notes that in addition to mockery (Pr 22:18), the word was associated with sexual immorality (Gn 39:17), idolatry (Ex 32:6), and attempted murder (2Sm 2:14). Although no conclusive meaning is offered, the Midrash does accurately demonstrate that Ishmael was likely not engaged in innocent play. The strife between brothers in this passage reflects a common theme in Genesis (see comments on 4:8).

The matter, once known, brought distress to everyone in the family (another reminder of the consequences of sin and not waiting on God): to Isaac, as the object of Ishmael’s mocking; to Sarah, who observed and fretted over Isaac’s

maltreatment; to Abraham, in whose eyes **the matter distressed** him **greatly**; and to Hagar and Ishmael, who were ultimately **sent ... away** from Abraham's household for good and **wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba** (v. 14). The expulsion of Ishmael distressed Abraham in particular because he loved Ishmael as was evident in his desire for him to be the heir of the promise (Gn 18:18) and his continuing desire to protect Ishmael as his son (21:11). Thus, it is a true act of sacrifice for Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael. Nevertheless, in comforting Abraham God assured him that He would act according to His own sovereignty—in determining that Isaac would be the heir to the Abrahamic promise and that Ishmael would become the father of a great nation (21:12–13).

21:15–21. When **the water** of Hagar and her son was **used up** and they resigned themselves to death in the desert, God sovereignly and graciously (being under no covenant obligation to them) attended to their needs by providing **a well of water** and reiterating His unconditional blessing to **make a great nation of** Ishmael (vv. 15–19; see 16:10). There is no textual indication as to whether **the angel of God who called to Hagar** was a theophany (as in 18:1–8). Significantly, the word for **God** is *Elohim*, reflecting His power but not His covenantal, relational name *Yahweh*. As with Isaac in the previous section, God's blessing in this instance is also underscored by a play on the son's name. The Hebrew for Ishmael is *yishma'el*, which introduces God's active involvement in v. 17, that is, **And God heard** (*vayishma' 'elohim*)—while at the same time hearkening back to God's earlier, identical provision for Hagar and Ishmael in 16:7–11.

LESSON NUGGET – There are always those who live after the flesh. There are always those who walk after the Spirit. But, know this, those who are after the flesh will not inherit with those who are after the Spirit. We are to live after the Spirit. We are to walk after the Spirit. It is by the Spirit that we become heirs of God; and the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the child of faith, the child of the Spirit.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary and The Word for Today Bible.