

## Life of Faith, Part 14: A Tale of 2 Sons and 2 Covenants (Genesis 21)

Please turn to Genesis 21. Sometimes when we read these stories that happened 4,000 years ago, we might be tempted to think they're not too relevant to us. I don't make military treaties like Abimelech does in this chapter. You're not living in tents like Abraham (except at Family camp), moms don't arrange marriages like Hagar does (though some moms may want to), and we don't own servants like Sarah does (even if we wanted).

But in other ways, this chapter is very relevant to our times and the world we live in, as sin hasn't changed much the last 4,000 years. Do we ever see older brothers today who mess with, or mock, or tease, or torment siblings today (even on the way to church sometimes?) Have you ever heard of people throwing a party for a special event but one of the family members starts some drama that drives another family member crazy angry? Does our world have blended families? Any family feuds between a father's kids who have different mothers? Is there ever tension in our day between a man's legal wife and another woman he has kids with, especially when they're not excited with each other? Do wives sometimes view the other woman as a threat? Do we ever hear in the news about corrupt businessmen or have a need to make legal contracts to protect business interests today? Do we ever hear of a single mom in a very desperate situation, or of her teenage boy in trouble without a father in his life? Do families break up today? Do we ever get fearful or feel like there's no hope or God doesn't hear us in our distress?

All those things happen in Genesis 21, a chapter very relevant to us as we read about Abraham's family, with application to all the families of earth:

<sup>8</sup> *The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.* <sup>9</sup> *Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking.* <sup>10</sup> *Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac."* <sup>11</sup> *The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son.* <sup>12</sup> *But God said to Abraham, "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."* <sup>13</sup> *"And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant."* <sup>14</sup> *So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.*

<sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup> Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." <sup>19</sup> Then 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. <sup>20</sup> God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer. <sup>21</sup> He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. <sup>22</sup> Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do; <sup>23</sup> now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned." <sup>24</sup> Abraham said, "I swear it." <sup>25</sup> But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. <sup>26</sup> And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor did I hear of it until today." <sup>27</sup> Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. [Literally they "cut a covenant" or formal treaty] <sup>28</sup> Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. <sup>29</sup> Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?" <sup>30</sup> He said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well." <sup>31</sup> Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath. <sup>32</sup> So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines. <sup>33</sup> Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. <sup>34</sup> And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.

Today's Title: A Tale of 2 Sons and 2 Covenants (which do you follow?)

The 2 sons, of course, are Isaac and Ishmael. The 2 covenants are a covenant of man in v. 22-31 and the covenant of God in v. 12 for the descendants of Abraham, including covenant grace for believers today. Let's start with man's covenant here between Abraham and Abimelech:

- In v. 22 Abimelech is the King of Gerar where Abraham's been living
- It's been 3-4 years since chapter 20 when they first met, based on chapter 21, v. 8 that says this happened after Isaac was *weaned* (usually age 3ish)
- In v. 22 this ungodly king can see that God is with Abraham and in v. 23 he wants to stay on Abraham's good side and also his God's (remember that Abraham's God spoke to the king in chapter 20, telling him Abraham was a prophet who could pray as mediator for him, and Abraham did intercede)
- In v. 23 Abimelech with the commander of his army asks Abraham to swear him covenant kindness, a permanent non-aggression pact or peace treaty in the shared land, wanting to be blessed with him (fulfilling 12:2-3)
- In v. 24 Abraham agrees, and then in v. 27 to ratify their oath, he gives sheep and oxen, and together the 2 parties literally in Heb. *cut the covenant*.
- In OT times this often is cutting the animals in 2 and then both of the men would walk hand in hand between the cut bodies and both would be saying 'if I don't keep my covenant, let my body be torn and killed like the animals'
- This is significant in light of Genesis 15 where God promised Gerar's land and much more from Northeast Africa to much of the middle East, to the Euphrates river that runs from Iraq to Turkey today. In Gen 13:15 He gives all the land Abraham can see to his seed forever. The land is said to be an "everlasting possession" in chapter 17:8, and chapter 15 is where Abraham asks how he can know for sure he will possess it. So God cuts the covenant and walks through the animals alone to say basically if you and your seed don't possess all the land promised forever, then God will be ripped into pieces just like those animals. If that promise breaks, God must break in two

That doesn't mean present Jesus-rejecting Israel has divine rights to kick out the rest of the middle East and NE Africa - full covenant blessings are never for those who reject Messiah - but Messiah is coming again with His saints. Abraham and His believing descendants will be among them, not just Jews, as Gal. 3:26-29 says all Christians are Abraham's sons/seed. The Scriptures say Jesus the ultimate seed of Abraham will stand in His land again, He will possess it forever, with an inheritance of nations, His enemies defeated, and *forever Abraham and His descendants* (including Christian Palestinians and Arabs) receive Christ's promises as joint-heirs forever on a renewed earth. I think the new heaven and new earth is a renewed world (transformation not annihilation/replacement), with a continuity of the present world and world of Genesis 1-2 (which end of Revelation sounds very much like), continuity between the earth of Rev 19-20 and Rev 21-22 (eternal state of the planet). But the important point is when God makes a covenant (unlike these 2 men in Gen 21 or any pledging peace in the Middle East) God keeps His promise

If God wants to give a bigger land than Genesis 15 or a better land than Gen 1-2, He can, and He does keep His promise (whatever our millennial views)

- As I shared before when I taught on chapter 17, Jonathan Edwards, postmillennial writer argued similarly for national Israel's future in the land.
- Other amillennial theologians like Anthony Hoekema, Sam Storms, Vern Poythress, and others, argue that literal promises to the nation of Israel will be fulfilled after Jesus returns, after the resurrection, on the renewed earth.<sup>1</sup>

They understand Rev 20 differently than I do, but agree much on Rev 21-22

You can study that more online in part 8 of this series or the Gen 15 sermon (Whose Land is it? Jews? Arab Christians? Jesus?). The answer in a sense is yes, all of the above. I think limiting all covenant promises to Christ's 1st coming, or to limit fulfillment to Jews living in the land at His 2nd coming, or to leave Israel and all land out of the equation, or to leave Gentiles out of the equation, would miss the complete picture of Scripture. We can't forget Gentiles believers also always shared Abraham's blessings, not just in a NT church, but in the early OT (as we'll see again today). We'll see this in Gen 21 and that man's 2-sided covenants fail (Abraham's descendants would not always be at peace with these people in the land) but 1-sided covenants by God like Gen 15 never fail. So let's move from man's covenant to God's:

- In v. 27 is the cutting of the covenant (OT covenants cut in blood).
- In v. 30 are covenant witnesses as 7 lambs are given (7=perfect).
- In v. 31 both parties make covenant promises to this commitment.

Those 3 elements of the covenant are also part of the covenant Jesus makes with all Christians in the NT. Jesus inaugurated a New Covenant in His own blood with His disciples as He went from the 'last supper' to the cross. It's a part of the Scripture I read before communion. The disciples were covenant witnesses as the truly perfect Lamb of God was given to make a peace far greater than Gen 21, not between men like in Gen 21, but between men and God. Jesus also made promises to those who covenant with Him in faith.

Hebrews 10 lists the very same 3 elements of covenant from Gen 21 even in the same order, for what Jesus did. For those who are covenant-breakers of God's Law (which is all of us), all who repent and trust Jesus as the perfect Lamb of God as their substitute, Jesus takes the punishment we deserve for breaking the Mosaic covenant (ex: the Ten Commandments). Covenant law would require us to be killed like an animal, but Jesus dies as a lamb for us. Jesus cuts the covenant in His blood (Heb 10:1-14), the covenant witness is the Spirit (10:15-16) and the covenant promise is forgiveness (10:17-18).

Same 3 elements of covenant, same order as Gen 21. 'Abraham's covenant with Abimelech only guaranteed possession of a well that provided water to sustain life. God's covenant with His people guarantees that we have the living water that gives everlasting life to all who will trust the Savior!'<sup>2</sup>

For Your covenant is sure And on this I am secure  
I can stand on ev'ry promise from Your word  
... Grace sufficient grace for me, Grace for all who will believe  
We will stand on every promise of Your word<sup>3</sup>

Gen 21:33 says Abraham planted a tree (which you do to remain awhile and maybe a reminder here as well). Then he "*called on the name of the LORD*" - the covenant name of the LORD, possibly pronounced Yahweh, sometimes English writers and hymns pronounce it "Jehovah." To call on the covenant name of the LORD was OT language for worship, usually building an altar and offering sacrifices. It was public worship, prayer, and also proclaiming the Lord's name (character, attributes), end of v. 33 as '*the Everlasting God.*'

Warren Wiersbe writes what we should proclaim: 'What an encouragement to know "the Everlasting God"! Wells would disappear, trees would be cut down, ewe lambs would grow up and die, altars would crumble, and treaties would perish; but the Everlasting God would remain. This *Everlasting God* had made an *everlasting covenant* with Abraham and his descendants (17:7, 13, 19), and ... given them the land ... as an *everlasting possession* (17:8; 48:4). As Abraham faced the coming years, he knew that God would not change and that "underneath [were] *the everlasting arms*" (Deut. 33:27).'<sup>4</sup>

[cf. hymn "O God our help in ages past...and our eternal home"]

We can't end looking at man's temporary covenant in the end of this chapter - let's look now God's never-ending covenant grace and eternal faithfulness in the rest of the chapter. Gen 21:1-2 begin this story with God fulfilling His covenant promise to give Abraham and Sarah a son. Abraham gives him the sign of the covenant God gave Abraham in v. 4, the sign of circumcision. In the end of v. 12 God makes clear Isaac's line is the line of covenant promise

But there's another son in v. 9, Abraham's firstborn son through an Egyptian servant Hagar (who in chapter 16 Sarah suggested he take as a concubine to conceive a child with her to be their heir). Bad move, and bad blood now between brothers. Abraham in v. 8 throws a party for Isaac and big-brother Ishmael decides to be a party crasher and party pooper in v. 9, mocking his half-pint half-brother Isaac. Paul in Gal 4:29 says Ishmael '*persecuted*' Isaac

Sarah wants to get Ishmael out in v. 10, and to her credit, her instincts as a mother may have sensed real danger with teenage Ishmael and her toddler. God Himself had prophesied of Ishmael in 16:12 *"He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone ... and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers"* (NIV). Sarah's now in mother-bear mode, doing the Sarah-bear stare in v. 10, and wants to make sure Ishmael won't be the heir.

The NIV reads a little harsh-sounding: *"Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."* Abraham thought it sounded harsh in v. 11, and he's distressed or displeased, or it could be translated "grieved" (NASB footnote). He loved Ishmael and had raised him as his son to adulthood, but God tells Abraham in v. 12 to listen to Sarah because what she's saying *is* God's revealed plan.

Go back to Gen 17 where God reveals the covenant heir will be Sarah's son: Gen 17:4 *"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you ... <sup>6</sup> I have made you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you ... <sup>15</sup> Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup> "I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son **by her**. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; **kings of peoples will come from her.**"*

There is a kingly line, a covenant seed, that God promised through Sarah. <sup>18</sup> *And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!" <sup>19</sup> But God said, "No, **but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.** <sup>20</sup> As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him ... <sup>21</sup> **But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you ..."***

Sarah is actually speaking God's truth in chapter 21, and God affirms that her instinct is right, and that it's time for the grown son Ishmael to move on. God tells Abraham here he needs to listen to his wife. Like Peter later said, husbands must live with their wives in an understanding way, in a sensitive way, as spiritual equals often sensitive to things men often aren't (1 Pet 3:7). Right before that in 1 Peter 3, Sarah is held up as the classic example of one submitted to her husband, but Sarah's submission wasn't being a doormat or inferior soldier saluting silently or a child responding to Captain Von Trap's whistle. God gave her a mind and woman's perspective that is sometimes a better one or a balance to his, and God tells Abraham 'Sarah's right on this.'

A wife should share concerns with her husband. Biblical submission doesn't mean keeping quiet and keeping a wallflower position, seen but not heard. It *does* mean she must ultimately submit to his decision after her feedback, but it doesn't mean the only thing she can ever say is "yes, dear, whatever you say, dear." Sarah did call him "lord" in Gen 18 (an OT term of respect) but it's been pointed out that Sarah was also 'able and willing to confront Abraham when necessary. In this instance, the Lord supported not only her right to question Abraham, but also her view of what needed to be done.<sup>15</sup>

[I'm thankful my wife has been like Sarah at times, even this week :]

In 21:12 God assured Abraham it was ok to send them off. Ishmael wouldn't die; God promised in 21:13 people to come from Ishmael as he's also a son of Abraham. And keep in mind, Ishmael is about 17 years old at the time, so he is considered a man by ancient cultures ready to find a wife and start his own life. They have food and water in v. 14 but as they wander around in the desert, they become lost, the water is gone, and they're in need of grace. Maybe he kept insisting his mom drink the water, he'd be ok, but now it's all gone, and in v. 15 he's dehydrated, and in v. 16 his single mom fears dying. Hagar is a Gentile God's covenant lovingkindness and compassion comes to

<sup>16</sup> *Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept.* <sup>17</sup> *God heard the lad crying* [He hears Ishmael cry, too; He doesn't just care for Isaac]; *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.* <sup>18</sup> *"Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him."* <sup>19</sup> *Then 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.* <sup>20</sup> *God was with the lad...*

Notice that it says God was with the lad. God had promised to bless Ishmael in Gen 17:20, and here He fulfills His promise to Ishmael. In v. 17 here God hears Ishmael crying and sends an angel to Hagar to tell her God has heard the voice of her son. If you want to know God's heart for the single mom and the fatherless, here it is. A single mom on her own without protection is in a dangerous place, and God Himself shows His care and concern for her. He does it with an angel here, but usually cares for them through His people

Remember the Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) was 1 scroll or book written to Israel in the same wilderness and in the rest of it God commands His people to care for foreigners, fatherless, husband-less, oppressed (Jas 1:27).

True religion cares for people like that in distress for Christ's sake (Mt 25). As a church, we can't do that for the whole world but we should especially for the church, our family in Christ (Gal. 6:10), even the least of these, as to Christ (and Christ said we're really doing it to Him when we care for His family). In our church you can give to a benevolence fund our deacons use to help needs of families, or you can just help your brother or sister when you see a need or as the Holy Spirit leads. If you were at VBS you know Eli and Eli-zee were the offering that kids brought money for to help out those 2 fatherless boys in the church in Congo to be able to go to Christian school and I still get goosebumps and am still moved to know our kids gave about \$1000 to their brothers in Christ (who are also brothers *of* Christ, Mt 25:40).

Allan Ross writes: 'God desires to be the God of the outcast, the rejected, the abused, the dying. The plight of Hagar should draw sympathy from the reader, for she was an unfortunate woman caught in the web of Abraham and Sarah and their faltering efforts to achieve their destiny, and she was the abused and rejected woman who, with the birth of Isaac, was suddenly very much in the way. The deliverance of Hagar and Ishmael should evoke hope in the reader, for God did not let them die in the wilderness but gave them a new life and a great future [remember some of the original readers of Genesis were Israelites lost in the wilderness who feared they might die. If God cared for this Gentile and her son who was not a covenant heir, God's grace was certainly available to the covenant heirs of Israel in the desert].'<sup>6</sup>

This Gentile woman Hagar hears God's voice from an angel directly. Most Israelites later had to hear God's voice through a prophet (Hagar's unusually graced). Today we hear God's voice through the Bible. Today we sang:

When I'm faced with anguished choice [v. 16] I will listen for Your voice  
 And I'll stand on every promise of Your word  
 Through this dark and troubled land [like v. 14] You will guide me with Your hand  
 As I stand on every promise of Your word  
 And You've promised to complete Every work begun in me [v. 18b *great nation*]  
 So I'll stand on every promise of Your word  
 Hope that lifts me from despair [v. 18 *Arise, lift up the lad, hold him by the hand*]  
 Love that casts out every fear [middle of v. 17 *do not fear...God hears*]  
 As I stand on every promise of Your word  
 Not forsaken not alone [v. 17] For the Comforter has come [v. 19]  
 And I stand on every promise of Your word<sup>7</sup>

The Comforter had come to Hagar before and He comes again to remind her of what His word had promised. In v. 19 He opens her eyes to His provision

This isn't the first time He gave grace to Hagar and her son (see Gen 16-17). We need to remember God's grace and blessing was never just for the Jews. God also blesses Ishmael in 17:20 though covenant *promises* are thru Isaac's line and the covenant *people* Israel would be through Abraham-Isaac-Jacob. Kings of Israel would come through Isaac's line, through Jacob and Judah to David and ultimately Jesus, but other kings are promised from Ishmael, 17:20. Gen 17 doesn't teach covenant grace was only for Isaac's family tree.

Right in Genesis 17, in v. 23, Ishmael and Gentile foreigners received the covenant sign as God instructed and were part of the covenant community with Abraham. Circumcision itself didn't save men eternally automatically, but grace was offered to any who called on Yahweh. A number of Gentiles received saving grace and married into the family tree of Messiah (Matt 1). God in covenant lovingkindness extends His care to Hagar and Ishmael, too.

The promised line was Isaac's, the promised land was Israel's not Ishmael's inheritance, but that didn't mean Gentiles couldn't be grafted into blessing. In fact, Gen 12:3 promised blessing through Abraham to all earth's families (and it doesn't say all families except Ishmael's and his Arab descendants). The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob chose Israel as His covenant nation to be a light to all nations. God gave grace *to* His covenant people so they could share covenant grace *with all* people. Yes, Isaac would be heir, but his descendant Jesus shares His inheritance with His joint-heirs (Rom. 8), and that includes a whole lot of Arab Christians and even some Americans. In being friends of Israel let's also be friends of Ishmael's descendants, too.

A Palestinian Christian wrote a recent blog "I am not Abraham's Mistake." He talked about how as a teenager in American after 9/11 he received much prejudice at his high school (calling him "dune-coon," "Taliban," "Osama," to name a few). But anti-Arabism from Christians was most disheartening as he heard many evangelicals basically bemoaning the existence of Ishmael and Arabs as a problem rather than part of God's plan of grace for all people

'If only Hagar didn't bear Ishmael to Abraham in their sin, if only the Arabs had never existed'...that's not good theology of our sovereign gracious God. The writer of the blog said 'God was no more caught off-guard by Ishmael's birth than by Isaac's. Isaac is the child of the promise, but Ishmael was no accident. Most pro-life evangelicals would object to thinking of any child as an accident, an unplanned mistake. In God's ordering of history, no child should be considered an accident—how much less an entire people group?

[Anti-Palestinian] sentiment also betrays a weak view of God's intention to bless all peoples through Abraham...God's intention in the election of Israel had always been the blessing of the nations and the salvation of the world. The Arabs, descended from Ishmael or not [not all are], compose part of that broader crowd of "all the families of the earth" that God intended to bless through Christ [as Gen 12:3 says]. "All" really means "all" here. If, by faith, Arabs or Palestinians are united to Christ, then in the body of Christ they "are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29) ...

Viewing an entire group of people—one of the "families of the earth"—primarily as an obstacle to peace instead of as an object of God's reconciling love in Christ is a sub-Christian view of God's purposes for the nations in the drama of redemption. The tangle of ethnicity, Middle East politics, and eschatology in American evangelicalism won't be easily solved. But what concerns me—and ought to concern you—is whether we in the church have the proper zeal to carry the gospel, in word and deed, to all nations and peoples. Do we see all people as Abraham's potential heirs? Even Ishmael's alleged descendants? In generations past and in different parts of the globe, the church has forgotten, excluded, or considered differing ethnic or cultural groups to be beyond the gospel's reach ... as a Palestinian Christian, I am not Abraham's mistake. I am God's choice ...<sup>8</sup>

Genesis 10 mentions several nations that became largely Arab and Muslim and God then promises to bless all those nations with the gospel (that's how Gal 3:8 applies Gen 12:3). And He did bless many of them in Bible times:

- Don't forget Abraham was born and raised in the land we call Iraq today. The father of future Israelis was originally an Iraqi God saved
- His covenant son Isaac marries a believer in God from the land of modern Syria (the term for Syrian was Aramean in early Genesis)
- A great believer lived at the same time in Arabia. Who's from Uz? Not the wizard, not Oz. Job lived in the land of Uz and God called him the greatest of all the men of the east (we'd call Arabs today)
- Moses meets and marries into the family of an Arab priest of God
- David employed many God-fearing middle-easterners and non-Jews in his service and army and entrusted some to build the holy temple
- The Queen of Sheba, in SW Arabia, 1,200 miles from Jerusalem, comes all the way across the desert to visit Solomon with massive gold and gifts and it says she came concerning the name of Yahweh
- In the prophets, God reveals care for widows of Arabian Dedan
- One of the prophets, sees the greatest revival in biblical history in the heart of Assyria, Nineveh, as Jonah preaches biblical repentance

- Elijah goes to a widow in the land we call Lebanon today and she is a believer in Yahweh at a time that many ethnic Israelites were not
- Jesus highlights that and the Syrian Naaman as examples of grace to non-Jews in His first sermon in Luke and in another sermon Jesus said the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba would rise up on judgment day to condemn the Jews of Jesus' day who rejected Jesus
- The NT begins with magi, men from the East, who come to worship
- When the church begins in Acts 2, it mentions Arab converts there
- There's a lot of Arab robes and clothes bowing at our Lord's throne!
- I could preach a whole sermon on God's heart for Arabs (and I did)<sup>9</sup>

It's right here in Genesis, God's heart for Hagar, Ishmael, and descendants to come, and if we don't love Middle-Easterners, Palestinians, and Arabs, we need to repent and ask our Middle-Eastern Messiah to give us His love. Jesus probably looked more like them than us physically, but He can make us look more like Him spiritually. Jesus loved and saved even Simon the Zealot (Zealots were terrorist-like radicals and assassins of Romans). Do we love and long for even radicals and terrorists in those lands to know Christ?

I believe Hagar the mother of Ishmael (and many Middle-Easterner peoples) is with Christ in heaven, and I think she sees Christ in Genesis 16. Look at Genesis 16, where Hagar is harshly treated in v. 6 and flees into the desert, and God meets her and speaks to her through a heavenly messenger, v. 10: <sup>10</sup> *Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count."* <sup>11</sup> *The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, And you will bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction [the name "Ishmael" means in Hebrew "God hears/cares"]*

When we see or meet a descendant of Ishmael today, we should think "God cares, God hears, and God has a heart for these people so often afflicted." In this chapter, the Lord meets a non-Jewish woman at a well (v. 14) and she realizes she is speaking not to a mere man but a God who sees right through her (v. 13) and sees everything. She says in v. 13 "You are a God who sees" (I think it's God the Son, John 1:18). Not only does Hagar call Him God in v. 13, the inspired writer says the Lord spoke to her. Another non-Jewish woman at a well later in John 4 also realizes she is speaking to a Lord who sees everything about her (even her live-in lover) but who offers her grace. God appearing to a woman (through angel or Christ) is very rare, maybe the only other time there's a promise directly to one like v. 11 is Mary in the NT

Hagar is asked in v. 9 to submit to go back and submit to her authority as a bond-slave and she obeys, and Mary in the NT also submits to God's will. In Luke 1:38 *Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done..."* [in v. 48 she adds that God has regarded her His lowly bondslave]

One of my favorite TMS professors Dr. Jim Rossup writes of Hagar in v. 13: 'As she thinks about the significance of God seeing and knowing her so particularly, she is baffled by His mercy ... in tender wonderment that God has spared her in the confrontation. "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?" ... God who hears can work even at the back side of a remote desert that seems to be at the end of nowhere. Second, God can give new, wise direction in an interchange of prayer ... Third, even a lowly servant in a home turns out to have high value for a compassionate God to pursue in a venue of prayer. Fourth, God not only listens to prayer, but displays ability in the ways He can look after one who turns to do what He says.'<sup>10</sup>

The point of Ishmael's name is "God hears" and the point of the name Hagar gives to God in v. 13: 'God is seeing...God oversees and directs everything, and those who follow Him never have any reason to doubt His plan.'<sup>11</sup>

Paul in Gal. 4 applies by analogy Hagar and Sarah and this tale of 2 sons as a contrast of 2 covenants and 2 religions (law/works-based vs. gospel/grace-based, slavery vs. freedom in Christ, etc.). But it's not a Jew/Gentile contrast of physical descendants of the 2 sons, it's a contrast of Christians/Judaizers, a contrast of legalists trying to go back to Sinai not the heavenly Jerusalem. There's another tale of 2 sons in the NT in Luke 15 that I want to close with, a story where like Gen 21 a son isn't happy with the grace party of the other

In Luke 15:11 Jesus tells a tale, a parable: "*A man had two sons..."* One was a prodigal son wasted his life, lived a sinful life, but then by grace repented: Luke 15:18 *'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."* <sup>20</sup> *"So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him*

...

The other son, though isn't happy with the party dad throws for his brother. The beginning of Luke 15 is key: Jewish legalists were grumbling that Jesus received sinners, so Jesus tells them this story. They thought they deserved the inheritance, but it's only by grace. Jesus offers that grace to you as well.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?sid=429131255318>

<sup>2</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Obedient*, p. 92-93.

<sup>3</sup> Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, "Every Promise," 2005, Thankyou Music.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Iain Duguid, *Living in the Gap Between Promise and Reality*, p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> Allen Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, p. 381.

<sup>7</sup> Getty and Townend, *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2013/04/16/i-am-not-abrahams-mistake/>

<sup>9</sup> "God's Multi-Ethnic Family Plan, Part 2 - His Heart for Arabs and Muslim Nations,"

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=615111346205>

<sup>10</sup> James E. Rosscup, *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our Communication With God* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 44.

<sup>11</sup> Michael R. Grigoni, Miles Custis, Douglas Mangum and Matthew M. Whitehead, *Abraham: Following God's Promise* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012).