

God of Our Fathers: Genesis

Lesson 11: Hagar and Ishmael

Lesson Introduction

- Describe a situation in which tension existed between members of a blended family.
- What did family members do to keep the peace?

Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, learners will:

- Discuss the importance of the Hagar and Ishmael story
- Describe God's relationship with Hagar
- Explain how God intervened for Hagar and Ishmael in the desert
- Discuss resilience as demonstrated the story
- Express understanding of who God is

Background for the Scripture

When Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah was 65, the couple first arrived in Canaan. Ten years prior to their arrival, they had received the promise of parenthood. Because God's promise had not yet been fulfilled as expected, Sarah decided to solve the problem on her own. She urged Abraham to resort to a custom of the time. Sarah gave her personal handmade, Hagar, to Abraham as a concubine. A son was born to Hagar and Abraham. They named the child Ishmael.

In a commentary about this passage of scripture, Kathryn Schifferdecker (2015) noted that Abraham eventually had two sons, one of whom was born of a slave woman and "the second, a miracle child, is born to them in their old age against all odds." She indicated that after Isaac was old enough to be weaned, Abraham threw a party to celebrate the occasion. But Sarah was not happy about the arrangement (Genesis 21:9-10):

Sarah does not want to see this son of a slave woman, this reminder of her own long sorrow, to inherit along with her son. Her disdain for Hagar and Ishmael are apparent in the way she refers to them: "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." (21:10). Schifferdecker (2015)

God had directed Abraham to do whatever Sarah wanted and reassured Abraham that both Isaac and Ishmael would be the fathers of great nations. So Hagar was banished to the wilderness. However, that was not the end of the story for this slave woman and her son.

Genesis 21:8-21 (KJV)

21 And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

² For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

³ And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

⁵ And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

⁶ And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

⁷ And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.

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

⁹ And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

¹⁰ Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

¹¹ And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

¹² And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

¹³ And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

¹⁴ And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

¹⁵ And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

¹⁶ And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow shot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

¹⁷ And 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.

¹⁸ Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine 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 bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

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

²¹ And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

Examining the Scripture

1. What evidence is given that tension existed between Sarah and Hagar?
2. What does scripture imply about God's relationship with Hagar?
3. How did God intervene for Hagar and Ishmael in the desert?

Applying the Scripture

1. What does this story teach us about resilience and hope for people who have been abandoned in a proverbial "wilderness"?
2. In what ways, if any, might Hagar be considered a victim of domestic violence?

Quest to Know God Activity

1. What does this scriptural account reveal about God?
2. List two or three characteristics you discerned about God as you went through this lesson.
3. What statement can you make about the God of our fathers that you can pass down to future generations?