

## Wednesday Home Study, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**Pray:** that the Holy Spirit will enlighten your mind and give you understanding as you study God's word. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to discern and hear any special message that God has for you this day.

### **Read: Genesis 21:8-21 - Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away**

8 The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. 10 So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." 11 The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. 13 As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.



15 When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. 18 Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." 19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

20 God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. 21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (NRSV)

**Reflect:** Are there any past actions that you regret or wish you had handled differently?

The story of Isaac and Ishmael resounds through human history down to today. According to Genesis, tensions between the descendants of Isaac and the descendants of Ishmael go back to the lifetime of Abraham himself. These are complex issues, and we are wise to understand them theologically, not just politically.

A great moment in biblical history gone sour. Abraham and Sarah have received a powerful, joyful promise that they will have many descendants.

But what do you do when a promise from God does not seem to be fulfilled? Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands. Sarah sent her maid, Hagar, to Abraham. Hagar subsequently gave birth to a son, Ishmael.

1. The importance to the Hebrews of having a son who would inherit and carry on the name of the father cannot be overstated. Gen 15:3 indicates that a servant could become the heir to a childless man. But do you think that Sarah's action was a good solution?

It seemed to be a good solution for a while, but when Sarah conceives and gives birth to Isaac, the relationships grow strained. Sarah perceives a rivalry between the two boys and demands the first son of Abraham, Hagar's son, be sent away.

2. Why do you think rivalry would have developed between the two half-brothers? (v.10 provides one answer.)
3. What was Abraham's first reaction to Sarah's demand? (v.11)

But God intervened and gave Abraham assurance that his promises to Abraham would be kept. (read vv.12-13)

*Read* Genesis 15:4-5 regarding Isaac’s descendants and Genesis 25:12-18 regarding Ishmael’s descendants. Ishmael’s 12 sons are regarded as the ancestors of the Arab nations.

*Read* Romans 9:6-9 for Paul’s explanation on this.

Verse 12b in the NRSV translation reads, ‘... *through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you.*’ The Hebrew word translated ‘named’ is from a primitive root having the idea of accosting a person met; to call out to by name. (Strong’s Greek/Hebrew Definitions) A translation of ‘named’ is more accurate in terms of the original Hebrew, but the NIV bible translates this word as ‘reckoned’.

4. Why do you think the NIV translates this word in this way?  
(Consider the Christian understanding of ‘reckoning’ through Christ.)

Abraham’s response, to send Hagar and Ishmael into the desert with very little supplies, seems rushed and cruel. The story carries a certain parallel to the story of how Abraham almost sacrificed his other son, Isaac.

These stories raise questions about how we fix the messes we make?

5. Is repentance only a feeling of being sorry for a mistake, or should it involve action, reparations and amends?

I remember the last clergy retreat leader encouraging us to engage in a daily spiritual practice referred to as an ‘examen’. It is a practice that helps us ask questions about where we go wrong and how we can move ahead in the knowledge of God’s mercy. A simple examen reviews each day and asks, “Where did I see God at work today?” and “Where did I turn from the way of grace today?”

Engaging in a daily examen can help us to identify those places that need prayer, an apology, a shift in perspective, or a renewed commitment. Perhaps you may like to adopt this daily spiritual discipline.

Genesis 21:8-21 is included in the Hebrew scriptures as part of the story from the history of Israel about the formation of a covenant family. Melissa Tidwell, author and pastor of a church, suggest that it can be read as a story about spiritual formation. Reread vv. 14b-19, focussing on the words of the senses of sight and hearing.

Tidwell writes, ‘Seeing and hearing are essential to survival. Hagar places her son under a bush so she does not have to see him die. She weeps, the child weeps, and God hears. God speaks to Hagar and opens her eyes. Once she knows she has been heard, she sees a well of water. Water, a symbol of life, often prompts a reflection on our spiritual journey and how the seeing of God’s providential action opens up a reservoir of hope.’

6. Do you think that being heard in our grief or pain can help us to recognise God nearby?
7. How do you feel when you are not heard, when you cannot bear to see what is happening before you?
8. Can exclusion or being ignored close us down, as it did Hagar?
9. Does isolation or discrimination create a kind of tunnel vision where we don’t see the wells that are there for our refreshment?
10. What kind of waiting and calling on the Lord feels faithful and healthy in the place where you are socially distancing?

***Finish by praying this prayer:***

Examine my heart, God of mercy. Assure me of your promise of presence and compassion, send me your capability to hear and to respond and enable me to amend my ways and to mend broken hearts. Amen.

Grace & Peace  
Rev Clyde