

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL ARE BANISHED (vv. 14-21)

¹⁴ Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there, she began to sob.

¹⁷ God heard the boy crying, and the Angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”

¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰ God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. ²¹ While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

1. Later in Israel’s story, God would encourage his people to be generous with their slaves.

If any of your people... sell themselves to you and serve you six years, in the seventh year you must let them go free. ¹³ And when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed. ¹⁴ Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you. ¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today (Deuteronomy. 15:12-15)

What is striking about Abraham’s provision for Hagar and Ishmael?

2. How does Hagar respond to their plight?
3. How does God respond to their plight?
4. Ishmael’s name is conspicuously absent from the narrative. He is referred to as the “son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham,” “that woman’s son,” “the son of a slave,” “your offspring,” and “the boy.” The words “God heard” however, form a play on Ishmael’s name, which means, “God hears?” What should have Hagar remembered from her earlier encounter with God?
5. What comfort should we draw from Hagar’s story?



It is remarkable that Hagar finds her way into our Bibles. She was an Egyptian slave—someone bought and sold in the service of others. Hagar may have been a gift from Pharaoh to Abraham as part of the enormous bridal price he paid for Sarah. We are not really sure how Hagar came into Abraham and Sarah’s possession, but we do know that somewhere along the way, she became Sarah’s handmaid. Sarah offered her to Abraham. Hagar became pregnant, and a bitter rivalry is born.

In a passage that should celebrate God’s faithfulness to Abraham and Sarah, the biblical writer devotes more time and energy to the rivalry between Hagar and Sarah. It is not a pretty story, but it is, nevertheless, a story of God’s faithfulness.

Hagar captures our imagination early in Abraham’s story when she flees into the wilderness to escape Sarah’s cruelty. She has an encounter with the Angel of the Lord, who reassures her that God has heard her cry. She does not know the Lord by name, but she calls him, “The God who sees.”

When we come to Genesis 21, we find Hagar once again in the wilderness. This time she has very little say in the matter. God meets her in the moment and reassures her that he sees, hears, and cares for those whom the world has forgotten.

ISAAC IS BORN (vv. 1-7)

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

³ Abraham gave the name Isaac ⁹ to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

⁶ Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." ⁷ And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

1. Triple repetition is an important literary device in ancient writings. Notice the repetition of "as he had said," "what he had promised," and "at the very time God had promised." What do you think the biblical writer is emphasizing in this passage? Why is this important for Abraham and Sarah? Why is it important for us?
2. That final phrase, "at the very time God had promised," draws our attention to God's timing. Why do you think God waited until this moment to fulfill his promise to Abraham and Sarah? Why do you think Abraham and Sarah found it difficult to wait on the Lord? Why do we find it difficult to wait on the Lord? Why is God's timing always preferable to ours?
3. The biblical writer is careful to record Abraham's obedience. He names the child "Isaac" as the Lord had directed, and he circumcises the child on the eighth day as a sign of his covenant loyalty to God. What role does Abraham's obedience play in his story? Why is obedience always an appropriate response to God's faithfulness? Why is obedience essential for us?
4. Isaac's name means laughter. Both Abraham and Sarah laughed at the prospect of having a son in their old age. Sarah's cynical laugh is now joyous and will be a cause of joy for others as well. What essential truths do we learn about God in Sarah's celebration of his faithfulness?

ISHMAEL MOCKS ISAAC (vv. 8-13)

⁸ The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹ But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰ and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

¹¹ The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹² But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. ¹³ I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

1. Feasts like this were thrown when a child turned three. In the ancient world, infant mortality was a very real possibility. Simply having a child was no guarantee the child would survive. Why did Abraham and Sarah have more cause to celebrate than your average Ancient Near Eastern couple?
2. In verse 9, we find yet another play on Isaac's name. Abraham and Sarah's incredulous laughter has given way to joyous laughter. Esau also laughs. His laugh is a cruel laugh. Why do you think Ishmael mocks Isaac?
3. Why do you think Sarah responds so strongly?
4. What is Abraham's initial response to Sarah's demands? Why is Abraham distressed?
5. Why do you think God instructs Abraham to "listen to Sarah?"
6. What in God's promise must have been a comfort to Abraham as he followed through on Sarah's demands?