

## Genesis 21:10-34

Isaac had been a healthy baby, and now at about three years of age, he had reached a new milestone in his life.

So it was with much joy that Abraham **"made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned."**

On that special day, Abraham and Sarah were so happy, and it seemed everyone was sharing their joy.

Or maybe I should say *almost* everyone, for Hagar was definitely not happy, and Ishmael was downright angry about this stupid party.

And in a way, I suppose you couldn't blame him.

After all, before his little brother had arrived, he had been the only son. Yes, Ishmael's birth had removed any possibility that Eliezer, Abraham's chief steward, would ever inherit his father's fortune.

And even though Isaac had finally arrived, Ishmael was still the eldest son, so according to local custom, he would still be the legal heir.

So, in spite of God's blessings that had been promised to Isaac, I don't think Ishmael was at all ready to move over. Why should his little brother, who after all was about 14 years younger than he was, be allowed to supplant him?

Yes, just as Hagar had despised Sarah when she thought she had the upper hand, so Isaac despised his little brother.

And I'm sure this great celebration had deepened their conviction that Abraham's inheritance was slipping away from them.

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So no doubt all these thoughts were churning around in Ishmael's mind when his little brother came scampering into the room.

And as he looked at Isaac, his animosity just boiled over.

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

We don't really know what Ishmael said to his brother, but we do know that Sarah saw the whole thing.

V 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."**

Yes, Sarah was also thinking about the inheritance, and she was not about to share it with Ishmael.

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Hagar had been Sarah's maid for over 20 years now, and yet in this stressful situation, Sarah simply calls her maid, **"this bondwoman."**

Now I know Sarah was very upset with Ishmael's actions, however, her caustic remarks make it very clear that past differences had never been healed.

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So who was to blame for this ongoing stressful situation?

Was it Hagar's fault?

She had obeyed God's command to be subject to Sarah, but was she only giving eye service, while continuing to undermine her mistress?

Or was it Sarah's fault?

Was she simply a hard mistress who was unwilling to forgive her maid?

Well, we don't really know who was at fault, and I don't suppose that is the real issue.

No, the real problem was Abraham and Sarah had created an impossible situation which brought out the worst in everyone.

But even this domestic upheaval, as bad as it was, was by no means the most devastating result of their lack of faith.

What was far worse was the fact that this situation was hindering God's promises. And if God's promises to Abraham were being hindered, then so was God's plan of redemption.

Clearly it was time for God to intervene.

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V 11-13 **"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."**

Had not the Lord spoken directly to Abraham when He did, I don't think he would have ever given in to Sarah's demands.

After all, he could clearly see that she was upset and overreacting.

On the other hand, Sarah was convinced that Abraham was dragging his feet.

As the head of the house, he needed to take action!

So this situation could have very easily driven a wedge between them if the Lord hadn't intervened.

Sarah was determined, but Abraham had many good reasons for not giving in.

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First and foremost, he *loved* the boy.

As a godly father, he had prayed so earnestly for his son's spiritual welfare.

**"O that Ishmael might live before thee!"**

Yes, Ishmael was his very own son, but of course he was not Sarah's son.

Also, Ishmael was getting to the age where he could be a real help to his father. Apart from this problem with his half-brother, Ishmael was probably quite an obedient son.

And I'm sure that Abraham had big plans for the boy.

After all, by this time Abraham was about 103 years old, so no doubt he was looking forward to the day when Ishmael could take over the business.

Already he was in his late teens, so before long he could take more responsibility,



and Abraham could begin to take things  
a little easier.

So the very idea of sending Hagar and  
Ishmael away was unthinkable!

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But in all his plans, Abraham could not  
predict the future.

He thought his son was reliable and  
indispensable, but God knew that there  
would be trouble ahead if Ishmael  
stayed at home.

Yes, Ishmael would grow up to be a man of  
the world, with no interest in  
spiritual things, and an intense hatred  
for his brother.

Already He was becoming hostile towards him.  
And if the truth were known, this mockery of  
his brother was only the outworkings of

his rebellion against God and against  
God's promises.

Yes, Ishmael's mockery was only the  
beginning.

If Abraham had let him stay at home, his  
animosity would have gotten completely  
out of control.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if there  
was another Cain-and-Abel situation  
developing.

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So it was time for God to step in and  
protect the Abrahamic covenant.

V 12-13 **"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."**

Under the circumstances--and, by the way,  
Abraham had created these  
circumstances--God couldn't have acted  
in a more kindly way.

Even though the break had to be made, God  
did the best He could for Ishmael.  
He would give him material greatness, which,  
after all, was what the boy had his  
heart set on.

However, in spite of God's kindness, the  
fact still remained that Abraham must  
face the facts.

His plans had never been God's plans, so in  
the end, he must take steps to correct  
the situation.

His original lack of faith had caused a great deal of pain in his family. He knew that now.

And he also knew that his obedience to God's command would cause more pain.

But there was no other alternative. He must obey God.

V 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 Beer-sheba."**

Considering Abraham's great wealth, one might wonder why the supplies for Hagar's journey were so meagre.

Yes, he didn't give her a great deal, but I believe Abraham's provisions were

well calculated for that particular situation.

Archaeologists tell us that in Abraham's day, there were numerous settlements in his vicinity.

So Abraham's supplies would have been sufficient to reach civilization again.

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Also, both Abraham and Hagar had God's assurance that He would take care of these travellers.

He had promised Hagar in Genesis 16:10, "--  
**I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude."**

And in Genesis 17:20, God had assured Abraham --"**Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve**

**princes shall he beget, and I will make  
him a great nation."**

So they both knew that God's plans did not  
include an untimely death in the  
wilderness.

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Therefore Abraham confidently gave Hagar  
sufficient supplies to enable her to  
reach civilization again, and also an  
amount she could easily carry.

But there was another and more compelling  
reason for this limited provision.

From that point on, Hagar must rely upon  
others for her needs.

Yes, it must be strongly impressed upon her  
that this break was final.

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And everything would have gone just fine if  
that lady, who had previously travelled

all the way from Mamre to the border of Egypt with no problem, had not gotten herself completely lost in the wilderness.

V 14-16 "--- and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

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 bowshot: 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."

When "the water was spent in the bottle,"

Hagar was convinced that all hope was gone.

So she put her son in the shade of a shrub,  
and left him there.

Her own situation was as desperate as her  
son's, but all her grief was for him.

Yes, her mother's heart could not bear to  
see him suffer, so **"she went, and sat  
her down over against him a good way  
off, as it were a bowshot: for she  
said, Let me not see the death of the  
child."**

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God had no intention of abandoning them, but  
He also had no desire that they reach  
the next settlement.

No, He had other plans for Hagar and  
Ishmael, plans that could only be  
accomplished right here in the desert.

V 17-19 **"And God heard the voice of the lad;  
and the angel of God called 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."

V 16 tells us that Hagar "**lift up her voice, and wept,**" and in V 17 we read that "**God heard the voice of the lad.**"

We don't know whether he was praying or simply crying out in anguish, but heaven's ear was attentive to their voice.

V 19 says **"And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water."**

Did God simply give her the ability to see a well that was already there, or did He create this supply of water especially for their needs?

I think He created it.

After all, if there had always been a good source of water in that area, there would surely be a settlement there also.

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So, with this basic need supplied, they probably went no further, but made this desert area their new home.

V 20-21 **"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."**

Hagar went back to her own idolatrous people to obtain a wife for her son.

And no doubt this choice was also agreeable to Ishmael.

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The descendants of Ishmael became the mighty Arab nations.

They would not trust in JEHOVAH, and they would always be the enemies of God's chosen people, but at least they would not interfere with the Abrahamic Covenant.

At this point in our lesson, we are going to leave Abraham's family and travel forward in time.

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There was a serious problem in the New Testament church at Galatia.

Judaizing teachers had been insisting that believers in Christ must also be circumcised in order to be saved.

This false doctrine completely ignored God's grace, and substituted the works of the Law.

So Paul used Abraham's family as an allegory to teach the early church that they must stand upon the grace of God alone.

In case the meaning of the word *allegory* does not come to mind, let me give you its definition.

The dictionary defines allegory "as story or narrative, as a fable, in which a moral principle or abstract truth is presented by means of fictional characters, events, etc."

However, Paul's allegory is one step ahead of the average allegory.

He uses real live characters and actual events to illustrate his moral principle.

We find this allegory in Galatians 4:21 to Galatians 5:1. **"Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?**

**22: For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.**

**23: But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.**

**24: Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.**

25: For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

26: But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

27: For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

28: Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

29: But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

30: Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman

shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

31: So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

So in Paul's allegory, the bondwoman represents the Old Testament Law.

Her son represents all those who are under that Law.

Yes, those that are born of the bondwoman, and so bound under the law, can never be free men.

On the other hand, Sarah is the mother of all free men, that is all those who are

free from the law because they are under the covenant of grace.

As John 8:36 says, **"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."**

So Paul's allegory teaches us that we are saved by grace alone.

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Also, Abraham's family situation has been used to teach us another basic Christian doctrine.

When Isaac was born into the family, a new form of rivalry surfaced in Abraham's home.

We have already learned that Isaac is a type of Christ.

Now we find that the son of promise is also a picture of the new nature that God creates in every believer.



So upon conversion, the believer has two natures dwelling within him.

Isaac is now living in the house, but so is his elder brother Ishmael.

And Ishmael is a picture of the old man, the old nature, who is always hostile to the new man.

If the believer allows the new man and the old man to live side by side, there will be continual conflict, and also the absence of any spiritual victory in his life.

Paul describes that unhappy condition in Romans 7:15--"**For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do.**"

So sooner or later, the Christian must face the same painful fact that Abraham faced.

If peace and victory are to characterize his life, by God's grace he must take decisive action against the old man.

No, we cannot reform Ishmael. He is born of the flesh.

Ishmael is Ishmael, and Isaac is Isaac, and there can be no compromise.

As John 3:6 says, **"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."**

So until the old man is put down, there will always be conflict.

Galatians 5:17 tells us, **"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other."**

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Religion completely ignores the new birth  
and the new nature.

It thinks that Christianity is only a  
positive change in the old man.

It believes that religious activities can  
gradually improve the old man to the  
point that he is acceptable to God.

But our old nature will never be acceptable  
to God.

In fact Romans 8:7 tells us that "**---the  
carnal mind is enmity against God: for  
it is not subject to the law of God,  
neither indeed can be.**"

Yes, all of man's efforts to make himself  
acceptable to God are fruitless.

Conversion is not Ishmael changed, but Isaac  
*born*, and God can only bless Isaac.

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However, this new birth brings a new problem of its own.

The believer now has two natures, **"and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."**

So what is the answer?

The answer is found in Ephesians 4:22-24

**"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;**

**23: And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;**

**24: And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."**

Yes, we must do what Abraham did, even though it is **"very grievous"** to us.

Oh, we will still have conflict in our world, for Jesus has said "**In the world ye shall have tribulation,**" but at least we will have peace in our home.

And if the inner battle has been won, we will have the spiritual strength for the outer battle.

Now I think we should leave these New Testament lessons and get back to Genesis 21.

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In spite of nature's ties, Abraham had done the right thing.

And because things were right at home, Abraham could now deal properly with the challenges around him.

Genesis 21:22 **"And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto**

**Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest."**

On the surface, at least, things looked pretty good this time.

And certainly they were much better than the last time that Abraham met Abimelech. Previously Abraham had failed the Lord badly, but now he was walking by faith.

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During that first encounter, Abimelech had been very generous to Abraham: **"Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee."**

And as time went on, Abimelech became very impressed with Abraham's ability to prosper, and he was convinced that it wasn't just good luck.

Genesis 21:22-24 **"And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol**

the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest:

23: Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.

24: And Abraham said, I will swear."

Although I don't think Abimelech had any real liking for Abraham, he was anxious to make a covenant with him.

Once again, I think his real motivation was fear.

Abraham had become a powerful man, and it seemed that God was always on his side.

So it was better to have him as a friend  
than an enemy.

After all, if Abraham joined any of  
Abimelech's enemies, he could be in  
real trouble.

And possibly Abimelech had heard about  
Abraham's victory over the four kings.

That kind of new travels fast, you know.

Yes, it certainly seemed that God had helped  
Abraham as much in battle as He had  
helped him financially.

So Abimelech took steps to ensure peace for  
himself and his descendants after him.

And just to clinch the bargain, Abimelech  
reminded him of "**the kindness**" he had  
shown him in the past.

Now that would seem fair enough if Abimelech  
had really been sincere in his gift,



but Abraham's recent experiences seemed to indicate otherwise.

In fact, Abimelech's servants had taken a very valuable well from Abraham by force.

So Abraham wisely took this opportunity to set things right before the covenant was finalized.

V 25 **"And Abraham reproveth Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away."**

This time it was Abraham reproving Abimelech, and it was Abimelech who was making the excuses.

Kind of a nice switch, don't you think?

V 26-32 **"And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day."**

27: And Abraham took sheep and oxen,  
and gave them unto Abimelech; and both  
of them made a covenant.

28: And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of  
the flock by themselves.

29: And Abimelech said unto Abraham,  
What mean these seven ewe lambs which  
thou hast set by themselves?

30: And he said, For these seven ewe  
lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that  
they may be a witness unto me, that I  
have digged this well.

31: Wherefore he called that place  
Beer-sheba; because there they sware  
both of them.

32: Thus they made a covenant at Beer-  
sheba: then Abimelech rose up, and  
Phichol the chief captain of his host,

**and they returned into the land of the Philistines."**

Abraham's obedience concerning Hagar and Ishmael had brought peace to his home, and now it had brought peace into his world.

As Proverbs 16:7 promises--"**When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.**"

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V 33-34 **"And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God. 34: And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days."**