

On the Beginning

20. Ishmael Is Born

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 16:1-16

Ishmael, the son of Abraham, is the forefather of the Arabic nations, according to history, Arabian tradition, and the Bible. Yes, the nation Israel descended from Abraham through his son Isaac, but Isaac (the promised seed) was not the patriarch's only son. Ishmael was born as a result of unbelief and carnal thinking. We all have lessons to learn from the story of his birth.

1. A Bad Idea.

In Genesis 16:1-3 records a suggestion Sarai made to Abram as a solution to their dilemma. We remember that all of their hopes, and the very meaning of their lives, rested on God fulfilling His promise to give Abram a son. But "*the LORD*" had "*restrained*" Sarai "*from bearing*." So Sarai had an idea about a way to get around God's supposed unwillingness to keep His promise. There are at least four things wrong with her idea.

- A. God will always fulfill His promises, although He often delays fulfillment in order to try and purify our faith (See Galatians 6:9, Hebrews 10:35-36, and I Peter 1:7).
- B. God is all-powerful, and does not need our help to accomplish what He says He will do (See Ephesians 3:20-21).
- C. Impatience with God leads to wrong action that gets us out of God's perfect will (See Hebrews 6:11-12).
- D. This was a carnal solution to a problem that called for a miracle to fulfill the divine promise (Read Galatians 4:22-23, 28-31).

2. Some Bad Results.

See some of the consequences of Abram's choice to take Hagar as a secondary wife in verses 4-6. Bad ideas lead to bad actions which always produce bad results (Note James 1:15). The word "*despised*" in verse 4 means "belittled." The word for "*hardly*" in verse 6 may imply physical abuse. When Hagar saw that she was going to have Abram's child, she looked down on Sarai, who was her superior. This provoked Sarai to mistreat her terribly and complain to Abram. The situation was a mess. When we follow a plan that is contrary to God's plan, we always make a mess!

3. A Strange Solution.

So what did Hagar do? "*She fled*" (v. 6)—she ran away. The Angel of the LORD (Who in the Old Testament often was really God manifesting Himself) came to her "*in the way to Shur*"—(a place familiar to Moses' readers—Exodus 15:22). Notice in verses 7 through 9 what He told her to do. Verse 9 records that He said she should go back and submit to her mistress. That's the last thing most of us would want to do or would advise somebody else to do. But it was God's solution to the problem.

Often the answer to a problem is to go back to the place from which we fled (See I Kings 19:16-18). It is a rare thing for God to want His servant to run away. Usually the Lord's will is for us to stay and face a problem Biblically. Especially it is true that we should stay under the authority God has put over us, even if the one in authority is nasty (See I Peter 2:18-20). Problems often

won't be solved until we go back.

4. God's **Goodness**.

The rest of the chapter (vs. 10-16) tells how God promised to bless her son Ishmael. It also tells how Hagar learned that God *sees* and *hears* us! Ishmael means "God shall hear" and Beer-lahai-roi means "The well of Him Who lives and sees me." No matter how bad our situation has become, God is still there for us.