

Hagar and Ishmael Not Forgotten

“What is your pastor’s name?” asked Iris.

“Reverend Eugene Washington,” the two girls said in unison.

Rev. Washington’s church of 1,500 members was on its way to becoming a mega church. And Iris Patterson didn’t like it one bit. She remembered a very young Minister Washington at True Jerusalem, Sister Patterson’s home church.

Rev. Washington was charismatic and good looking. He took the church for thousands of dollars and was eventually found out. He left town for years. Then about 20 years ago, Sister Patterson heard Rev. Washington had returned to Florida and started a church.

Sister Patterson wondered, Who would sit under him? Wasn’t the word still out as to what kind of preacher he had been?

“You all are young and not from around here,” said Sister Patterson. “But I knew your pastor when he first started out.”

“I’ve heard Rev. Washington talk about the lure of sin when he was practicing ministry as a means to an end, and not as God’s holy call on his life,” said Asia, one of the young women. “But pastor said no matter how far he ran, the Lord found him and picked him up.”

“Yes, I love our pastor,” chimed in the other girl, Kiara. “He tells us, especially the young people, that despite our sins, God will always be there for us. Always.”

1. Do you believe you are unworthy of God’s love? Explain your answer.

2. What does it say about God that He still loves us despite our failings?

3. In what ways does the Lord show His love for you?

LESSON FOCUS: Despite our sins, God will not abandon those He loves.

Strained Relations

Genesis 21:8-13, KJV

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.

Genesis 21:8-13, NIV

⁸The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰and 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."

¹¹The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹²But 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. ¹³I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

The Lord promised Abraham a son and many descendants through Sarah when the patriarch was 75 years old (Gen. 12:2, 4, 7). But when the son did not come soon, Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands. Sarah directed Abraham to be intimate with an Egyptian slave girl named Hagar. This not only resulted in the birth of Ishmael, but also brought unanticipated

sorrow to the family (chap. 16). Yet, even then, the Lord remained faithful to His covenantal promise to Abraham.

The patriarch was 99 years old when God declared that within a year, Sarah would give birth to a son. When Abraham turned 100, his son was born, given the assigned name, and circumcised (21:1-7).

Abraham prepared a large “feast” (vs. 9) to celebrate the weaning of Isaac. The festive occasion was shattered, though, when Sarah noticed Ishmael “mocking” Isaac.

As a mother concerned for the welfare of her son, Sarah demanded that Abraham banish Hagar and Ishmael. Sarah’s contempt was so great that she refused to address the Egyptian servant and her son by name. Moreover, Sarah was determined to prevent Ishmael from being a coheir with Isaac in the family inheritance (vs. 10; see Gal. 4:30).

According to the social conventions of the day, a mistress could not arbitrarily expel a female slave and her children. Perhaps this was one reason the matter involving Hagar and Ishmael displeased Abraham so much. It’s also likely that he was anguished by the possibility that Hagar and Ishmael might not survive on their own in the harsh wilderness. And this was Abraham’s own son that the patriarch was sending into the desert.

God told Abraham not to be upset about the situation involving his “slave” (vs. 12) wife and her son. Abraham should do what Sarah demanded, even though it seemed harsh and inconsiderate. The Lord explained that His covenantal promises would be fulfilled through Isaac, not Ishmael, because Isaac was the real heir of the covenant. Yet, God would make a nation out of the descendants of Hagar’s son, for he too was one of Abraham’s offspring.

4. *What took place during the huge “feast” (Gen. 21:8) Abraham hosted?*

5. *How did Sarah react to Ishmael’s mistreatment of Isaac?*

6. *How did God alleviate Abraham’s distress?*

Sovereign Intervention

Genesis 21:14-20, KJV

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;

Genesis 21:14-20, NIV

¹⁴Early 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.

¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes.

¹⁶Then 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.

¹⁷God 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. ¹⁸Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

¹⁹Then 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.

²⁰God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.

and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

²¹While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

Abraham, having been reassured by God, arose “early” (Gen. 21:14) the following morning and prepared some food. He gave this to Hagar, as well as strapped an animal “skin” filled with water (containing about three gallons) on her shoulders. Then the patriarch sent her away with her son to the wilderness of Beersheba.

Eventually the container of water ran out. Hagar, being filled with despair over the dire situation facing her and her son, placed the adolescent under one of the nearby shrubs. By this time both were weak from dehydration and facing death. Hagar decided to abandon Ishmael, for she could not bear to see him expire. As Hagar sat across from her son about a “bowshot” (vs. 16; that is, around 100 yards) away, she, along with her son, began to sob.

God, being fully aware of the circumstance, had His “angel” (vs. 17) from heaven call to Hagar and ask what was upsetting her. The Lord’s messenger then told her not to be afraid any longer; God had heard Ishmael’s crying. The mother was directed to stand up, help the boy to his feet, and grasp his hand (vs. 18). For God intended Hagar’s son to live and become a “great nation.” At that moment, God enabled the mother to see a well (vs. 19) filled with water. In turn, Hagar went over to it, filled her container, and gave a drink to Ishmael.

God’s favor rested on Ishmael, who lived in the wilderness and became an “archer” (vs. 20). Ishmael eventually settled in the “Desert of Paran,” an arid region located in the east central part of the Sinai peninsula. According to the custom of the day, Ishmael’s mother found a wife for him from her native land of Egypt (vs. 21).

7. *What did Abraham do for Hagar and Ishmael?*

8. *What prompted Hagar’s weeping?*

9. *How did God respond to Hagar’s anguish?*

Chester's Unabandoned Dedication

Several years ago, a local news report appeared on the evening news in the Midwest. The story was about a man and his faithful dog. It began with a tragic car accident in which a drunk driver killed his wife and two young children. Ron sank into a deep depression during which he tried to escape from his pain through alcohol, and as time passed, liquor became his nightly ritual. When he was sober, he was still kind and attentive to his dog, Chester, but when he was drunk, he was mean and neglectful. Nevertheless, Chester remained devoted and affectionate to Ron.

One evening when Ron was drunk, he was in such a rage that he kicked Chester, breaking the ribs of the poor dog. Ron then lost consciousness and fell, striking his head against the kitchen table. While he bled, Chester dashed out through the dog door, and despite the pain in his chest, got a neighbor to come to Ron's aid. Ron was saved from otherwise certain death, but the blow in Chester's chest was too severe, and the poor pup expired that same night. Because of Chester's sacrifice, Ron committed himself to sobriety, slowly getting his life back together again and recounting his story to a TV news reporter.

The devotion of Chester to Ron is quite similar to Christ's devotion to us. As rotten as we can be and as awful as we can behave toward God, Jesus still died for us and has never abandoned us. His love for us is like a mountain stream that never ceases to flow and always quenches the thirst of those who seek its living waters.

10. *Despite your faults and because God still loves you, what are some things He expects from you?*

11. *How does God's faithfulness to you shape your future?*

12. *How does God's great purpose for your life help you through the dark periods of your life?*

A Letter of Love

After Hagar and her son, Ishmael, were expelled from the security of Abraham's camp, they wandered in the wilderness, desolate and dying of hunger and thirst. Hagar, who had been taken from her homeland of Egypt and compelled to bear a child from a foreigner, now expressed her misery to God. The Lord, however, did not abandon her, for she was shown a well and given a promise. And as with Hagar and Ishmael, God does not abandon us but loves us despite our many failings.

► *Take a few minutes to write a letter to God. Begin by thanking Him for never abandoning you despite your shortcomings. Next, ask Him to deepen your faith in Christ and help you exemplify the love of Jesus toward others. Finally, promise to trust in His guardianship over your life.*

KEY VERSE

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. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.
—Genesis 21:17-18, KJV

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. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."
—Genesis 21:17-18. NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of January 10 through January 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Exodus 23:13-19—Serve God Alone.
- Tue.** Exodus 23:20-33—Blessings for the Obedient.
- Wed.** James 2:1-13—Mercy Triumphs over Judgment.
- Thu.** James 2:14-26—Faith Without Works Is Dead.
- Fri.** 1 Corinthians 10:23-33—Seek the Advantage of Others.
- Sat.** Psalm 85—Steadfast Love and Faithfulness.
- Sun.** Exodus 23:1-12—Treat Others Justly.