God Cares for Hagar and Ishmael

Genesis 21:8-21

BIBLE BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Ishmael Mocks Isaac

It was typical in Abraham's culture to have a celebration when a child was weaned, which was usually when the child was around 2 or 3 years of age. The celebration for Isaac was probably even bigger than most because he was something of a miracle child.

Unfortunately the joyous occasion soon turned bitter. We don't know if Ishmael's mocking of Isaac happened on the day of the celebration, but it must have occurred soon afterward. Ishmael had been born to Abraham through Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, after Sarah had decided to take things into her own hands and had Abraham sleep with Hagar to "build a family" (Genesis 16:2). By the time Isaac was 2, Ishmael was about 16 (Genesis 16:16; 21:5).

Sarah and Hagar had been at odds ever since Hagar was pregnant with Ishmael (Genesis 16:4-10). Abraham's decision to send Hagar and Ishmael away had probably been a long time in coming.

Abraham Casts Out Hagar and Ishmael

Abraham didn't want to send Hagar and Ishmael away. He knew it was wrong according to his culture and according to anyone's standards of fatherhood. When God told Abraham to do what Sarah wanted, God didn't say it was right. But God did promise to take care of Ishmael, eventually making a great nation of his descendants as well as Isaac's.

The area where Abraham lived was desert, and the skin of water and the food Abraham gave them was probably as much as they could comfortably carry, but it wouldn't have lasted very long.

God Responds to Hagar and Ishmael's Suffering

Remember that Ishmael was at least 16 by this time. If Hagar had to put him under a bush, he must have been terribly weakened by fluid deprivation. He likely wasn't far from death, as Hagar estimated (Genesis 21:16).

It seems odd that God responded to Ishmael's cry but sent an angel to speak to Hagar. It may be that Ishmael was simply too weak to even get water for himself. It also is likely that the well had been there all the time but Hagar didn't see it until God "opened her eyes"—God was actually there taking care of them and providing the water they needed, but they couldn't see it until they acknowledged their need for God.

The Jesus Connection

Pray about a challenge you're facing right now. You can cry out to God. Because of Jesus, we can trust that God always hears us. You can write your prayer here.