

**Coming Out the Other Side**  
The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael  
Genesis 21:14-21

**Introduction**

This is the second time Hagar and Ishmael found themselves out in the wilderness because of Sarai. According to Genesis 16:4-7, the first time Hagar ran away on her own...

Now we come to Hagar's SECOND wilderness experience in Genesis 21.

The story is presented in two stages: (1) Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion (vv. 14-19); and Ishmael's desert settlement (vv. 20-21). Verses 14-19 recount their destitute condition in the wilderness (vv. 14-16) and the appearance of the "angel of God," who revealed a well of water (vv. 17-19). Notice the three references to the "skin of water" in verses 14, 15 and 19? Whenever you see a repeated element in a text you need to pay close attention to it. It likely holds an important truth.

**Remez:** Here the water is a useful metaphor for signifying the sustaining provision of God. So the lesson to which we are drawn is that the water Abraham supplied for their sojourn was depleted, and the boy was dying; but God revealed a well, and Hagar refilled the skin and revived her son.

By the movement from Abraham's care to the supervision of God, we witness the "weaning" of Ishmael to his new life apart from his father. Then the final verse captures the completed transition to Ishmael's autonomy in the desert, where he establishes the home of a new nation (vv. 20-21).

**21:14** Let's look at verse 14

Abraham dismissed Hagar and Ishmael only after the Lord confirmed Sarah's plan (vv. 12-13). However, once Abraham knew the Lord's stamp of approval was on the situation, he responded immediately. Verse 14 says "the next morning".

Compare that to:

- **Genesis 22:3 HCSB** So early in the morning Abraham got up, saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He split wood for a burnt offering and set out to go to the place God had told him about.

**Remez:** One thing can definitely be said about father Abraham! Once he was definite as to what the Lord wanted, he did not procrastinate, no matter how emotionally difficult it was!

The picture is sadly poignant as the father sends away his elder son. Twice the passage tells that he is "distressed".

- **Genesis 21:11-12 HCSB** Now this was a very difficult thing for Abraham because of his son. (12) But God said to Abraham, "Do not be concerned about the boy and your slave. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her, because your offspring will be traced through Isaac.

At one time Abraham hoped that Ishmael would be his heir.<sup>1</sup> I doubt he was indifferent to the plight of the mother and son any more than he was at offering his younger son Isaac at Moriah. In both cases Moses depicted Abraham as dutifully carrying out the Lord's directions and relying on God to fulfill his promises.

We look at the phrase "sent...away" and it may have a negative, harsh connotation for us but in Hebrew it has the idea of "seeing them off" and again implies compassion. We can see the same phrase used in other contexts to get an idea of what was meant.

- **Genesis 18:16 HCSB** The men got up from there and looked out over Sodom, and Abraham was walking with them to see them off.

---

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 17:18

- [Genesis 24:56 HCSB](#) But he responded to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has made my journey a success. Send me away so that I may go to my master."
- [Genesis 24:59 HCSB](#) So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men.
- [Genesis 25:6 HCSB](#) And Abraham gave gifts to the sons of his concubines, but while he was still alive he sent them eastward, away from his son Isaac, to the land of the East.
- [Deuteronomy 15:13 HCSB](#) When you set him free, do not send him away empty-handed.

Though the English may connote a harsh and dismissive feeling, we see that that is not the case here. It is certainly not as harsh as Sarah's demand "drive out (*gārēš*) this slave".<sup>2</sup> Abraham was simply doing what he could; his hands tied by the will of God.

**Remez:** He was learning the unpleasant but necessary lesson that every mistake has consequences. Had he patiently waited for the Lord's provision of a son instead of running ahead with his wife's humanistic plans,<sup>3</sup> he would not be in the position he was presently in.

As a slave, Hagar had no choice but to leave. With the tribal prince and matriarch sending her away, there was no higher court to which she could appeal. The text says that she "wandered" in the Wilderness of Beer-sheba.

- Whereas in her first wilderness experience she left on her own volition and apparently with a plan, this time she leaves against her will and apparently unprepared.
- Whereas the first time she was on her way to Shur and was discovered by the Lord by a spring, here she is aimless and waterless.
- Whereas she was found at an oasis the first time, this time she was isolated and without refuge from the maddening heat of the sun.



<sup>4</sup>To give you an idea of the area and to help you empathize with her, take a look at this picture that was taken by a modern tourist in the same area.

**vv. 15-16** Now turn your attention to verses 15-16.

As you can see, once Hagar and Ishmael's water was gone, their end was certain. When it says in verse 15 that she "left" the boy, the Hebrew there carries the connotation of "put". It seems to indicate that at some point the young man had collapsed and she had either carried or dragged him to that bush. Then she distanced herself from his misery, as it says "about a bowshot away."

She didn't want to witness the death of her own son but she was weeping loudly, so perhaps she also didn't want him to see her despair. One thing is certain, Ishmael was crying also for it says in verse 17 that "God heard the voice of the boy" not the mother.

**v. 17** Now look at verse 17.

Whereas in her first wilderness experience she has a direct, visible encounter with the Angel of the Lord, here he contents Himself with speaking to her from heaven. On both occasions the Lord asks her about her condition. In the first one He asks "Where have you come from, and where are you going?"<sup>5</sup> Here He asks "What's wrong?"

The Lord asked similar and seemingly silly questions in other places:

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 21:10

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 16:14

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dodsonlumber.com/acts242/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/imgp2710.jpg>

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 16:8

- [Genesis 3:9 HCSB](#) So the LORD God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"
- [Mark 10:51 HCSB](#) Then Jesus answered him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" "Rabbouni," the blind man told Him, "I want to see!"

**Remez:** God's questions in these cases are rhetorical. He is aware of the smallest detail in our lives, even the very number of hairs on our heads! He is trying to get us to acknowledge our need. We must recognize that we have exhausted our personal energies and strategies and are completely reliant on Him before we can be helped.

**vv.18-19** Let's move on to verses 18-19.

God was once again ready to offer Hagar comfort and practical aid. Though Hagar may have not been able to hear her son, God was fully able to. In the first session He told her to go back to her persecuting mistress. Because she obeyed, this time He sends her to freedom with a son who is destined for worldly greatness.

**Remez:** By the way, the Lord hearing the child in the wilderness once again points up the fact that His grace extends to outsiders.

Hagar is promised that her son will become a great "nation" (*gôy*). On the surface it sounds similar to the grand promises made to Abraham about Isaac. Nevertheless it falls short because the *chosen* line will enjoy an eternal relationship with God, will inherit the land of Canaan, and ultimately be a blessing for all peoples.<sup>6</sup> This sheds some clarifying light on Abraham's cry "Oh that the boy might live in your presence."<sup>7</sup>

**vv. 20-21** Let's wrap this up by examining verses 20-21.

As the Lord promised, Ishmael reached adulthood, settled on a vocation, and sired a tribal confederation. The phrase "God was with the boy" is not intended to imply an ongoing blessing but simply that the Lord is the one who enabled the boy to survive his near demise in the wilderness and reach adulthood.

Ishmael's adoption of the bow as his trade was a practical necessity since killing game in the wild required a skilled archer.

- [Genesis 25:27 HCSB](#) When the boys grew up, Esau became an expert hunter, an outdoorsman, but Jacob was a quiet man who stayed at home.
- [Genesis 27:3 HCSB](#) Take your *hunting* gear, your quiver and bow, and go out in the field to hunt some game for me.

It was also needed as a weapon against hostilities, as the Lord had prophesied and as Ishmael would soon personally and practically discover.

- [Genesis 16:12 HCSB](#) This man will be *like* a wild ass. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; he will live at odds with all his brothers.

Ishmael's travels included the broad region of "Paran" which was the territory later traveled by the Israelite refugees.<sup>8</sup> Hagar's earlier flight into the desert was toward Shur,<sup>9</sup> the same location of Abraham's travels,<sup>10</sup> and it is the area settled by Ishmael's descendants as we see in:

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 2:2–3; 17:7–8; 18:18; 22:16–18

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 17:18

<sup>8</sup> Numbers 12:12, 16; 13:3, 26; Deuteronomy 1:1

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 16:7

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 20:1

- **Genesis 25:18 HCSB** And they (*Ishmael's people*) settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt as you go toward Asshur. He lived in opposition to all his brothers.

**Remez:** For an odd insight with which to occupy your minds, note the association of Paran in this passage with an appearance of the angel and recall the theophany of God before Israel from Paran.

- **Deuteronomy 33:2 HCSB** He said: The LORD came from Sinai and appeared to them from Seir; He shone *on them* from Mount Paran and came with ten thousand holy ones, with lightning from His right hand for them.
- **Habakkuk 3:3 HCSB** God comes from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise.

Anyway, as the passage concludes we see that Hagar found a nice Egyptian girl for her son. Since Paran is located between the southern boundary of Canaan and north of Sinai, its proximity to Egypt made an Egyptian wife easily available for Ishmael. Perhaps Hagar obtained an Egyptian slave from traveling merchants, the same as Joseph's brothers took advantage of a passing caravan in Genesis 37:28.

However, as happy as the procurement of a wife may have made Ishmael, his portrayal as the rejected son is complete: he was the son of a slave woman, separated from the blessed presence of the Abrahamic covenant, married to an Egyptian, living outside normal social bounds, and has been remembered for thousands of years for his hostilities.

### Derashot

1. As Abraham's provision was insufficient but the Lord's was lasting, so we grasp that all human efforts fall short. We need Yahweh Yireh's help.
2. We must learn Abraham's life lesson well: Obey the Lord fully and immediately, regardless of the personal cost. The cost of disobedience; of running ahead or dragging behind the Lord's will is simply too high.
3. Even if we don't see the consequence immediately, we can rest assured that every sin has one. It took fourteen years before Abraham fully realized the pain his impatience and lack of faith cost.
4. Again – YOU NEVER SIN ALONE! The consequences of Abraham's sin spilled over onto his eldest son and on to multiple generations.
5. Whether we feel we are in control and have a plan or are merely wandering in the wildernesses of our lives, the need is the same. We need an encounter with the Son of God to set us straight and truly succeed.
6. Even if we are not able to protect our children; even if we are not in contact with our children – God still is and He can hear their cries for help.
7. The quickest way to help is to humble ourselves and acknowledge our need for the Living God's intervention in our lives.
8. God can reach all humans, in all the "wildernesses" of the world, whether we understand how He does it or not.
9. Worldly greatness, wealth and military prowess fails to compare to the blessings of being one of God's chosen people.
10. To be attached to the Abrahamic covenant is to live in the presence of God. We must do everything we can to ensure that we are indeed grafted to the root of Israel.