

## Improbable Hope

General Topic: The Source of Justice

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### Lesson Text: Genesis 21:8-20

Background Scripture: Genesis 21

*(Gen 21:8) And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. (Gen 21:9) And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.*

*(Gen 21:10) 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. (Gen 21:11) And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. (Gen 21:12) 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. (Gen 21:13) And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. (Gen 21:14) 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. (Gen 21:15) And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. (Gen 21:16) 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. (Gen 21:17) 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. (Gen 21:18) Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. (Gen 21:19) 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. (Gen 21:20) And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.*

#### Lesson Aim:

Sometimes it appears as though God is turning a deaf ear to the injustices in the world. I am reminded of a song that says 'I hope it won't be this way always.' Believer's look forward to the time when all of life will change and social injustice will cease. Trust, it's coming!

#### Questions to Ponder:

1. What does Sarah's issue with Ishmael and Hagar say about her own personality?

2. How do you think Abraham felt when Sarah requested their dismissal?
3. What happens when people return disagreement for disagreement, as in the case of Sarah and Hagar?
4. How might your life be different if you would simply listen to the Lord and move at His commands?
5. Do you believe the world will ever be rid of social injustices? Why/Why not?

#### Teaching Tools:

Word puzzles may be developed from the following site: [www.puzzlemaker.com](http://www.puzzlemaker.com). Also, [www.dtlk.com](http://www.dtlk.com) has several visual aids that may be beneficial, as well as [www.kidssundayschool.com](http://www.kidssundayschool.com) which provide other helps for teaching.

Bible Journaling may be an interesting way to involve older teens in self-expression of the lessons they are taught. Visit [www.lifeway.com/Articles/how-to-start-bible-journaling-in-six-easy-steps](http://www.lifeway.com/Articles/how-to-start-bible-journaling-in-six-easy-steps) to find ways to use this valuable tool to learn and reinforce Scripture.

Movie Clips are a wonderful teaching tool to further explain or create topics of discussion for a variety of age groups; [www.wingclips.com](http://www.wingclips.com) provides clips divided by movie title, category, scripture, or theme. Clips may be accessed on any electronic device.

#### The Lesson:

When Hagar was initially dismissed by Sarah, the Angel of the Lord (pre-carnate Christ-Genesis 16) came to her, told her to return to her mistress, submit to her, and promised that her seed would be multiplied (16:9, 10). He also promised He would be a wild man and every man's hand would be against him (16:12). The word 'wild' is reminiscent of a wild donkey that is untamable, creating ruckus in the animal kingdom. Ishmael would live in contention with others but would maintain his independence. There was obvious contention that existed between Sarah and Hagar, as well as Ishmael and Isaac that might have been avoided had Sarah stayed in her lane and waited on God to bring His promise to fruition. Trust in God and His promises are imperative for

believers. It may take a while, but His plan is the only one that matters. When I study the story of Abraham, I consider how long he waited for a son. Many of us cannot wait one minute, let alone 100 years. Sarah's inability to wait on God to bring His promise to fruition caused much strife for the family; unfortunately, everybody suffered.

When Isaac was born, Ishmael was between thirteen and fifteen years old. He had participated in the same ritual of circumcision that Abraham's entire household became participant. This activity sealed the covenantal agreement between his father and God. Quite naturally, Ishmael had grown accustomed to receiving certain benefits of being the only son of Abraham. I would imagine they enjoyed a close relationship; however, he was not the child of Promise, for God promised Abraham his very own heir born of *he and his wife*. We must conduct our lives according to God's principles and follow them; they need no embellishment from us.

Isaac was the special child; he was the promised child. When he was born, Abraham was so excited that he had a feast in honor of his son. Now, Scripture does not record a celebration during the birth of Ishmael, therefore, the animosity he felt toward Isaac would have been tremendous. During this great dinner, he mocked (made sport of) Isaac. After watching this display of jealousy, Sarah was furious and thus sought to protect her son. She demanded that Abraham get rid of him and his mother. It is interesting to me that we feel we can treat people with disdain. When it is returned, we become angry, get mad, and take all our toys out of the sand box! She failed to remember her part in this confusion by insisting that her husband impregnate her handmaid to perform the surrogate birth that she did not believe God would provide. Sometimes, we just lack the faith of belief.

Consider the difficulty of her request to Abraham. The Bible records that he labored over his wife's decision. He must have loved both his boys; the circumstance surrounding their birth was of no consequence to him. Sarah burdened him further by iterating that Isaac was his rightful heir. While it was true, it didn't make his decision less cumbersome. God spoke a word of assurance/peace as He knew how His servant grieved over this issue. He told him to listen to his wife, as his seed, his prize, was in his son, Isaac. He also made certain promises to him regarding the outcome for his son (Genesis 21:13, 14). Hagar's family was blessed because of her relationship to Abraham. It may not appear to be all good, but since *all things work together for good for those who love God*, this situation would result in an even better ending at an appointed time.

Abraham sent them off with a bottle of water (probably in a sheep skin) and bread. He placed the items on her shoulder and sent them on their way, without knowing what would happen. I believe he trusted God for the outcome. One might find this an odd combination, but it was sufficient for their journey, as one can survive about six months on bread and water. They wandered in the wilderness. She was thrust into a condition not of her own negligence or doing. We must be careful of the burden that we place on others when we make them the ire of our decisions, while disregarding God's command.

She placed Ishmael under a shrub, possibly to cool off in the shade, while she wandered some distance away from him, could keep her eye on him. She was distraught, lost, and without family. She was without a land line or a cell phone. She could shout out loud, but no one would hear her in the middle of nowhere. Realizing her condition, she began to cry. In her distress, God noticed her. I think this is pretty significant, as people often feel unnoticed. Even though she had committed a grievous sin, He noticed her and listened to the heart of her son. He gave her words of comfort. She had already been told the kind of child that he would be, but most importantly, God reminded her that he would raise for him a great nation. Suddenly, she opened her eyes (mind) to notice the well of water that was probably there all along; however, she was unable to see it in her grief. Sometimes, we are so overwrought by the injustice of others that we miss what God has already placed in our lives to bring peace and understanding for the moment. The text records they dwelt in the wilderness (of Paran). Ishmael grew, became an archer and God stayed with him. Although this situation had a rocky beginning, the ending was quite beautiful.

We can read about Ismael's generations in Genesis 25:12-18.

There are a couple of take-home applications from this lesson:

1. We must let God be God! Sarah's impetuosity caused more than a few problems and created havoc and chaos in Abraham's family.
2. It is unfair for Christians to operate unjustly and then anticipate justice for themselves. Based on the concept of reaping and sowing, if we want to reap benefits, we must behave in a manner that insures its receipts.
3. We can stand in protest against injustice, but the Bible dictates the attitude that we should possess in the process.
4. I am a firm believer that all things work together for good. We must trust God for the outcome.
5. Lastly, God is the Source of all justice. He sees your struggle and will rescue you, even when

you are in the wilderness. He will never forsake  
His children.

***Be Salt! Be Light! Be Blessed!***