

8 Uplifting Lessons from the Life of Ishmael

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Abraham is one of the most important figures in the Old Testament. He had a profound [faith](#) and a vibrant relationship with God. Though not perfect, Abraham had a heart for God that can be seen in how he interacted with God and trusted that God would fulfill mighty promises in his life. God's promise to Abraham that he would have descendants was a radical promise made to Abraham and his wife, who were old in age. Despite that, Abraham went on to have two sons: Ishmael, whom he had with Hagar, and Isaac, whom he had with Sarah.

Due to escalating tension between Sarah and Hagar, Abraham sent Ishmael and his mother away. God, however, had not forgotten about Ishmael and Hagar. He assured Abraham that though his son Ishmael would be sent away, He would also build a nation through Ishmael to fulfill His promise (see [Genesis 21:12-13](#)).

Ishmael's story is one of sorrow and pain, yet when we consider the life of Ishmael, there is much we as believers can learn. Here are eight lessons we can learn from the life of Ishmael.

Who Was Ishmael?

“So, Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael” ([Genesis 15:16](#)).

Ishmael was the firstborn son of Abraham. He was born to Abraham by his slave, Hagar. Sarah, Abraham's wife, believed that since she was old and barren, God's promise of children to Abraham could only be fulfilled through Hagar.

The story of Ishmael can be found in the book of Genesis, which is the first book of the [Bible](#). Specifically, Ishmael's story is found within Genesis chapters 16-21. Ishmael is also mentioned briefly in [Genesis 25](#) as having attended Abraham's burial, and there we find the names of Ishmael's twelve sons. Ishmael is another biblical figure that had a difficult life, but the Bible makes it clear that God remained with Ishmael even after he was sent away by his father.

What Happened to Ishmael?

"God was with the boy as he grew up" ([Genesis 21:20](#)).

When tensions rose between Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael, Abraham obeyed God by sending Ishmael and Hagar away. This was a very painful and difficult decision for Abraham (see [Genesis 21:11](#)), but Abraham had God's word that Ishmael would be cared for. When Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, were sent away, they nearly perished in the desert. But God heard their cries and saved them. God promised Hagar that he would save them and make Ishmael into a great nation, fulfilling his promise to Abraham (see [Genesis 21:18](#)). This is a powerful moment where we see God watching over Hagar and Ishmael. What we learn about Ishmael is that he lived in the desert, became an archer, and was married. In [Genesis 25](#), the record is given that Ishmael had twelve sons.

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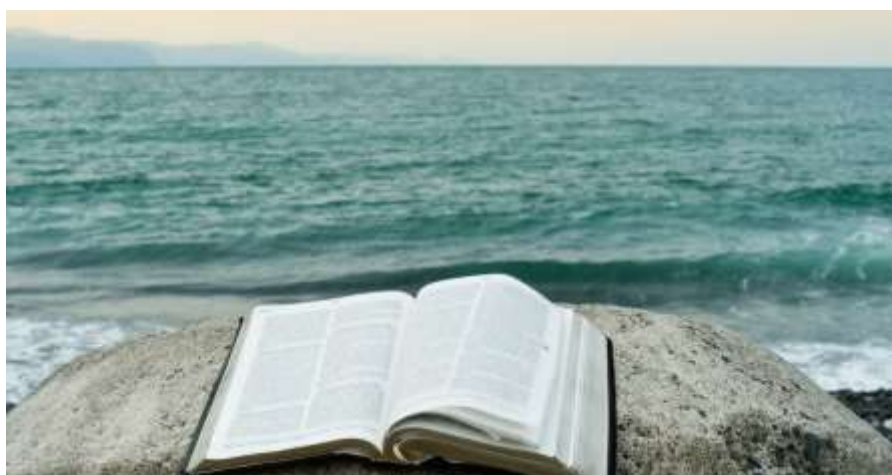


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1. God Takes Care of Us

"God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer" ([Genesis 21:20](#)).

When Ishmael and Hagar were sent away, it broke Abraham's heart and he was naturally concerned about them. Scripture relays that God met them in the desert after they left and remained with Ishmael, taking care of him and Hagar. We can have confidence that God takes care of his children. He will be with those who call upon him no matter what our circumstances are.

2. God Hears Our Cries

"Then 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" ([Genesis 21:16](#)).

Fearing Ishmael would perish in the desert after being sent away, his mother begins to weep. But God heard the cries of Hagar. We find this common theme throughout Scripture, that God hears the cries of those who call out to him. When we face hardships, God hears our cries, and will not leave us nor forsake us. He is not a distant God, nor does he lack compassion. God is with us when we are going through distressing situations and facing challenges.

3. God Loves the Rejected

"But 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. I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring'" ([Genesis 21:12-13](#)).

Though Sarah desired and asked Abraham to send Ishmael and Hagar away, God still loved them. Even when others may betray you, dislike you, or leave you out – God will never do that. God loves his creation and we can rest in his unconditional love and the assurance that we are dearly loved by our Savior.

4. God Fulfills His Promises

"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](#)).

God made a promise to Abraham to make him a great nation with many descendants, and even though Ishmael was sent away, God still upheld that promise and fulfilled it through Ishmael, too. Even when life takes unexpected turns, or we face the unknown, or things

don't seem to be going as planned, God will always remain faithful to His promises. What we find in Scripture to be God's truth will not change and we can be certain that the promises we find in God's word will always come to pass.



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5. Good Can Come out of Difficult Situations

“While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt” ([Genesis 21:21](#)).

Ishmael's life was not easy. He was sent away by his father, raised by his mother, and had to deal with the results of being part of a broken family. But God made good in Ishmael's life. We learn from Ishmael's life that no life is perfect, no person is perfect, but God will still be able to make things good and righteous for those who put their hope and trust in Him.

6. Nothing Can Deter God's Plan

Even though Ishmael was sent away, God still accomplished his perfect plan through Abraham's life. Even though Abraham and Sarah tried to force what God had promised, God's good plan still triumphed. What God lays in motion cannot be thwarted. We learn from Ishmael's life that we can be confident that God's good and loving plans will come to pass.

7. Following God Doesn't Mean We Will Be Perfect

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going” ([Hebrews 11:8](#)).

Abraham and Sarah, who was barren, tried to make God's promise of bearing a child come to pass by Abraham having a child with Hagar. They made monumental mistakes that

caused a lot of unnecessary pain. However, they also had a great faith and lived their lives for God. We as followers of Christ will not be perfect – we will make mistakes and fall short of righteousness. Rather it is Christ in us who redeems us and saves us from our sin and death. We only have to follow God and trust him with our lives.

8. God Is Involved in Our Lives

What the entire story of Ishmael teaches us is that God is concerned with all matters in our lives. God has plans for each of us, and a will that he has set to accomplish in all of humanity. God did not create the world and leave us on our own. Scripture tells of God who loves humanity and is actively involved in our lives. We can know that He cares about us and loves us.

The life of Ishmael is tragic and confusing in some ways, but we find that God took care of Ishmael and his mother, Hagar. In Ishmael's life, we see evidence of a loving God who is faithful and good. As we read the life of Ishmael, key lessons emerge that believers today can benefit from. These lessons teach us who God is, and the life of Ishmael inspires readers to put their faith in God and his perfect will rather than relying on themselves and hasty solutions that will do more damage than good. May we find ways to live out and trust these valuable lessons from the life of Ishmael.

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