

Isaac and Ishmael

Israel, Arabs and the Middle East

Part 3

In approximately 1800 B.C., God spoke to Abraham, a man from Ur of Chaldea, and gave him and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob the land of Canaan (Israel) as a heritage forever. Much of the conflict in our world is over that little piece of real estate. The antagonist in the historic land battle is also a descendant of Abraham and makes a rival claim of ownership. In this third installment of an eight-part series, we will examine the prophetic writings about this antagonist, his descendants, and his antagonism.

Ishmael, from the Hebrew word meaning *God hears*, was the son of Abraham and Hagar, the Egyptian maid of his wife Sarah. When Sarah found herself not having a son as God had promised, she became impatient and arranged to have a child with Abraham by Hagar acting as a surrogate mother. (Genesis 16:1-4) The result was bitter conflict between Ishmael and Isaac and their descendants that continues to today.

Ishmael was born at Mamre, when Abraham was 86, 11 years after Abraham's arrival in what would become the land of Israel. (Genesis 16:3) He grew up to be a man of the desert wilderness, with a wild and hostile attitude toward people, exactly as God described him to his mother before he was born:

And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you are with child,

And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man;

His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him.

And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." Genesis 16:11-12

When a feast was held to celebrate the weaning of Isaac, who was born 13 years later, Ishmael caused trouble by insulting and mocking his little brother. (Genesis 21:8-9)

After Sarah, who by then had come to dislike both Hagar and Ishmael, saw what he was doing, she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this

bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac." (Genesis 21:10)

Abraham at first resisted Sarah's demand — despite Ishmael's difficult personality, Abraham loved him and did not want to see him go. God however settled the matter:

But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed." Genesis 21:12-13

Hagar and Ishmael were sent away, but they were not abandoned. God promised that He would make Ishmael fruitful and would multiply his descendants exceedingly, making of him a "great nation". (Genesis 17:20) He also gave Ishmael's descendants the land to the east of Canaan. (Genesis 16:12)

Ishmael took an Egyptian wife (Genesis 21:21) and became the father of 12 tribes which are listed in Genesis 25:12-16. These tribes were to become the nucleus of the Arab peoples, a people with a mixture of Semitic and Egyptian blood.

God has been faithful to the promises that He made to Ishmael. Today there are 21 Arab nations with a combined population of 175 million people. The Arabs occupy a total area of 5.3 million square miles of oil rich land. By contrast, there is only one Jewish state with a population of 4 million people who are squeezed into only 8,000 square miles of space. That's a population ratio of 43 to 1 and a land ratio of 662 to 1. The Arabs have truly been blessed.

In spite of God's blessing on Ishmael and his descendants, antagonism against Israel still rages on. The Arab nations continue to attack not only the people of Israel but the very idea of their right to be a nation. In a real and deadly sense, Ishmael continues to threaten and harass Isaac.

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