



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

Talk Genesis 21:8-21: Hagar and Ishmael Separate from Abraham and Sarah

Lesson 45

"So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. 9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. 10 Therefore 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." 11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son. 12 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. 13 Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. 15 And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. 16 Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18 Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation." 19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. 20 So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. 21 He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt."

Background Notes

In Genesis 16 we read that Sarah gave her Egyptian maid, Hagar, to Abraham as a concubine. The purpose was to obtain an heir for Abraham. That was the wrong way to go about getting an heir, because it was sin, and the ends never justify the means. When Hagar became pregnant, she despised Sarah. Then Sarah treated Hagar harshly, so much so that Hagar ran away and was on her way back to Egypt. But the Lord stopped Hagar in the wilderness and told her to return and submit to Sarah, and to have the child and name him Ishmael. Hagar obeyed the Lord, and everything went reasonably well -- until Isaac was born.

Now once again, here in Genesis 21, friction had developed between Hagar and Sarah. Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned (v8). How old do you think Isaac was when he was weaned? According to the customs of that day, it would be anywhere between two and five years of age. So you can see the magnitude of the miracle, right? When God rejuvenated Sarah's ninety-year-old body, not only to bear Isaac, but also to nurse him for a few years, that was quite a miracle!

How old would Ishmael be at this point? He was at least sixteen, because he was fourteen when Isaac was born. It was during the weaning feast that Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac, probably belittling him and ridiculing Isaac. Maybe he said something like, "Look at this little kid, and he's the heir? Why my father Abraham loves me just as much, if not more, than this little kid!" This was more than sibling rivalry. Ishmael was mocking Isaac, the child of promise. It was at this point that Sarah couldn't take it any longer, and 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."* And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son (v10-11).

Abraham was reluctant to do such a thing as sending away Hagar and his son, Ishmael. After all, he loved his son! Furthermore, Abraham had an obligation toward Hagar as his concubine and the mother of his child. But God spoke to Abraham and assured him that at this time separation was the right course of action. One of the reasons for this, of course, was that Sarah and Hagar illustrate a great doctrinal truth! Do you know what it is? Well you will find out shortly because we're moving now to our doctrinal points.

Doctrinal Points

1. Hagar and Sarah picture the great contrast between law and grace.

I'm sure most of you are aware that the apostle Paul drew on the account of Sarah and Hagar when he wrote the letter to the Galatians. Turn to Galatians 4:21. *"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic."*

The false teachers of Galatia were distorting the pure gospel of God's grace. They said that you also had to do the works of the Mosaic Law in order to be saved. Paul refuted that false teaching, and used Abraham, Sarah and Hagar as an illustration. The whole affair between Abraham and Hagar, and their attempt to produce an heir in their own strength, and not in God's ways, was like trying to please God in our own strength by trying to do the works of the law. This is not God's way! God's way is by grace through faith, and that right way is represented by Sarah and the child of promise. Remember Hebrews 11:11, *"By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised."*

What a great contrast between law and grace! Trying to please God by keeping the Ten Commandments in your own strength will never work, because it can't be done. All you end up with by keeping the Law are the works of the flesh, as in the case of Hagar and Ishmael.

In contrast, coming to the Lord in simple faith and trusting His promises (as Sarah did) brings about a far different result! Faith recognizes God as a God of grace, and this pleases God. Faith and trust in what God has done for us results in something brand new; the new birth, as represented by Sarah and Isaac. Hagar and Sarah picture the great contrast between law and grace.

2. Ishmael and Isaac picture the great contrast between the flesh and the spirit.

Galatians 4:29 says, *"But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now."* Ishmael was born according to the flesh, and Isaac was born according to the Spirit. Thus they picture the great contrast between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh is the sinful human nature that we all have, that we are born with. The flesh is never reformed, and it is always at enmity with God. As Ishmael was in conflict with Isaac, so is the flesh in conflict with the Spirit. Look at Galatians 5:17, *"For the flesh lusts against [desires what is contrary to] the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."*

So then how do we deal with the flesh? We have the flesh, or the sinful nature, and we will have it until we get to heaven and get our resurrected bodies. How do we deal with it? The key is right here in Galatians 4, and is pictured in Genesis 21:10, *"Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son."* Look at Galatians 4:30 once again: *"What does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.'"*

How do we practice this principle of "casting out the bondwoman and her son"? We do it by continually separating from the desires and works of the flesh, and by walking in the Spirit! Let's read Galatians 5:16: *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."*

2 Timothy 2:22 tells us to **flee** the flesh! Don't feed the flesh! *"Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."* In other words, don't watch trash on TV, or in movies, or on the internet. Be careful where you go and what you do. Don't put yourself in situations where it is easy for the flesh to be tempted! Instead, walk in the Spirit by reading and watching and doing things that help you mature in Christ.

Now this is not always easy. It is a lot easier to just let "Ishmael" stay around, but if we do, we'll never get control of the flesh. We must deal with the flesh ruthlessly and decisively. This is it means in Ephesians and Colossians when the Apostle Paul discusses "putting off the old man" and "putting on the new man." All this is taught in the New Testament, and is illustrated by Genesis 21. Ishmael and Isaac picture the great contrast between the flesh and the spirit.

Practical Applications

1. It isn't always easy for us to do the right thing.

It wasn't easy for Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, but it was God's will. Did you ever have to do something very unpleasant, but you knew it was the right thing to do, because it was God's will, declared in His Word?

Tough love is not always pleasant, but sometimes it is the right thing. Sometimes we have to ask a student to leave Emmaus Bible College because of bad behavior. This is not pleasant, especially when that student is likeable and shows academic promise -- but it is the right thing to do, and often brings about good results in the student's life.

Tough love in the discipline of your children is not easy, but it is the right thing to do. Discipline in the local church is not easy, but it is the right thing to do. Remember, it isn't always easy for us to do the right thing.

2. When in need, remember Hagar.

If ever there was a person in need, physically and emotionally, it was Hagar. Lost in the wilderness with no water, her teenage son and only hope for the future about to die. But God saw Hagar's situation and heard Ishmael's cries, and God opened Hagar's eyes! He showed her water and renewed her strength, and then He gave her promises concerning Ishmael. God met Hagar's need.

Do you have serious needs? Like Hagar, you may not realize that God knows your situation and God hears your cries of grief and helplessness. God cares! God can open your eyes and begin to meet your needs as He did for Hagar. When in need, remember Hagar!

3. Husbands, listen to your wives!

Look at verse 12 once again. *"Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called."* In the authority structure that God has ordained for the home, the husband is to be the head of the household, but the wife is given as a helper for the husband. When God saw that it wasn't good for a man to be alone, He provided a woman to complement and be a help to the man (Genesis 2:18.) Part of being a helper is communication and counsel. Husband should listen to what their wives have to say. Many times God speaks to the husband and directs him through the good counsel of his wife. I can assure you that this is the case in my own life!

But what if Sarah had given the wrong advice about Hagar to Abraham in Genesis 21? Husbands must make sure the counsel of their wives is in line with God's Word. They can ask the Lord in prayer for His confirmation. But God has definitely given wives as helpers to their husbands, and that includes advice and counsel. So husbands, listen to your wives!