

Genesis Bible Study 12

Only One Woman in the House

taken from

***Salvation for the Social Order: For Those Who Haven't Read the Bible
and for Those Who Think Religion is Merely a Private Matter***

by Philip E. Friesen

Reading: Genesis 21:8-21

Principal Question: What holds a family together? Is it the power of the man to rule his wives and children, or is it the power of a relationship between a man and woman? Can a divided house survive?

Discussion

1. Read the story. What questions do you have about this story?
2. Do you believe Abraham did the right thing?
3. Can you think of any better options for Abraham, other than what he did?
4. How would you describe the relationship between Abraham and Sarah as a couple at this time in their life together?
5. Do you think Hagar was happy about getting her freedom from slavery or not?
6. How do you suppose Ishmael felt about this situation?
7. Is there anything in the story to show how God felt about Ishmael?
8. Which of the following reasons do you think best explains why God chose Isaac instead of Ishmael?
 - God disliked Ishmael? If so, why?
 - God disliked Ishmael's mother? If so, why?
 - God wanted to build a healthy relationship between one man and one woman as the foundation of the family.
 - Other reasons?

Cultural and Historical Notes

The Bible has many mother and son stories. This one is probably the saddest. Although he was born a slave, his father and Sarah gave Ishmael the rights of inheritance at birth. Then when Isaac was born, two mothers and their sons became competitors. The way for Sarah to get rid of Hagar and her son was to give her freedom from her slave status. According to the law, Hagar's son would lose his inheritance rights when she was set free.

When he went to pray, Abraham realized that this quarrel would destroy his family. Once he died, there would be war between the sons, because only one of them could become

chief of the clan. That is why he agreed to Sarah's demand that he send the other woman and her son away by giving her freedom.

Hagar was an Egyptian. After being set free from her slavery, she traveled on the road to Egypt, but became lost in the desert. Had she returned to Egypt, her son would have become an Egyptian; however he had been brought up as a nomad, and certainly was better suited to desert life than to city life in Egypt. Review the prophecy of the angel about Ishmael in Genesis 16:11-12.

Today the descendants of both Ishmael and Isaac live side by side in the Middle East. Clearly this family quarrel is still not resolved. The way to forgiveness for resolving the quarrel will appear much later in the Bible, but there will be hints as you read. Look for them.

Content Questions for English Comprehension

9. How did Ishmael make Sarah angry?
10. Why did Abraham become distressed?
11. What did Abraham give to Hagar when he sent her away?
12. How did Hagar find water for Ishmael to keep him alive?
13. What did God promise for Ishmael?