

# The Story of Joseph

## Trading the Promise

Part 6 – February 19, 2012

As children, we learn heavily *censored* Bible stories, presented as bite-size examples to imitate. But as adults, God wants us to dive into the *uncensored* unpleasantness so that *we* can relate, and *He* can speak. In Dothan, Joseph (#11 son) was pleading for his life, and #1 son, Reuben, was attempting a rescue, #s 2-10 sold Joseph to Ishmaelite merchants from Midian traveling from Gilead to Egypt.



Ishmaelites descended from Ishmael, Father-Abraham's first son, through Hagar, his wife Sarah's *Egyptian* slave. Ishmael married an *Egyptian*, (Gen 21:21) producing sons who *loved* their eyeliner! *Midian* was *also* Abraham's son, by a wife after Sarah died. (Gen 25:1-2) *Ishmaelites* married *Midianites* and the tribes combine. (Jud 8:22-24)

[Now back to the brothers ...] As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of **ISHMAELITES** coming from Gilead. [Caravan camels often wore melodic bells, and the drivers sang as they traveled] Their camels were loaded with *spices, balm and myrrh*, [Huge in Egypt for perfume, cosmetics, incense, medicine, tea, and embalming ... "I'll pass on the tea"] and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. [#s 2-10 knew, just by the cargo] Judah [#4] said to his brothers, "What will we *gain* if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's *sell him* to the **ISHMAELITES** and not lay our hands on him; after all, *he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.*" His brothers agreed. ["He wants to rule over us? Let's make him a slave!"] – Genesis 37:25-27 NIV

You ever see how God delivers a letter? flashback 181 years; Sarah mistreats Hagar, Hagar runs away, and the Lord speaks to Hagar.

You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, ["Ishmael" means "God Hears"] for the Lord has heard of your misery. – Genesis 16:11b NIV

Flash-forward 181 years: Joseph is about to be murdered. He's in the pit, pleading for his life, and praying for a miracle. Then, the brothers come and pull him out: "Will it be by sword or strangulation?!"

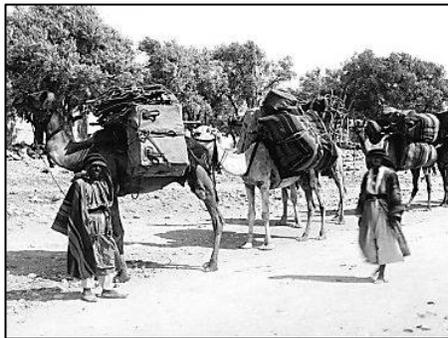
So when the *Midianite* merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern ["We changed our mind. We're *not* gonna murder ya. An *opportunity* just appeared!"] and [they] sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the [God-hears-your-misery-ites ... a.k.a.] *Ishmaelites*, who took him to Egypt. – Genesis 37:28 NIV

His deliverance from death is accompanied by a simple, profound message of reassurance, unwittingly delivered at the moment most needed ... 181 years after God put it in the Ish-mail. The fact that God is watching over Joseph doesn't stop his brothers from betraying or the traders from abducting. And he's *going to be* sold into slavery ... *all* under God's watchful eye!

Flash-forward about 900 years and look at what the Psalmist adds ...

Joseph [was] sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons ... – *Psalm 105:17b-18 NIV*

We can have a stunted, Sunday school mindset that if we follow the rules and “color within the lines”, we'll get a gold star from God, and everything in life will fall neatly into place. Well, Joseph is plucked out of the pit only to find himself more deeply enslaved. But, God whispers, “I hear. I know. I'm here. I care. And I'm in control. It isn't the pit you're in, that I'm rescuing you from, it's the pit that's in you.” I wonder how many unopened letters are waiting for *you* in His Word at this *very moment*, to encourage and strengthen and exhort.



Now, those Midianite-Ishmaelite merchants are hauling spices and balm and myrrh ... *but*, did you notice what they're *not* hauling? Slaves! They're not slave traders they're *spice* traders! So, *why'd* they take Joseph? Maybe they just do what makes the quickest cash or biggest buck. Except ... if His Place is Hebron, then Dothan is Vancouver (70 miles north) and Egypt is the Oregon border (230 miles south). They'll pass within 30-40 miles of Joseph's home. That's about 90 minutes by camel (they average 25 mph).

And Joseph will plead with them as he did with his brothers, “My father's tent is just over that hill! My grandfather, Isaac, is Ishmael and Midian's *brother*! My father, Jacob, your own cousin, is the *wealthiest* man in this land! I can *guarantee* he'll reward you *100 times* whatever you can get in Egypt! You have *nothing* to lose and *everything* to gain! Just send a servant to see!”

*But they didn't. Why?* Even more significant, how did the brothers *know* they wouldn't?! They wouldn't risk it for *two shekels* each! If they had the *slightest doubt* about the traders cashing in with Jacob, they would've just killed Joseph. But they are 100% sure that these guys have a motive that goes *far beyond* mere money! Who in the world *are* these guys?!

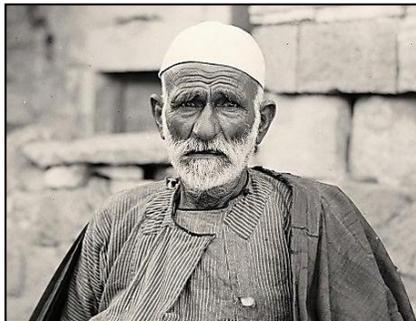


God promised Abraham, that more descendants than he could count would come through his barren, 65-year-old wife, Sarah. God wants to turn Abraham into a great nation and bless *all* the people of the world through him! All Abraham has to do is to ... wait for it ... wait for it ... is to wait for it! And have faith. Then ten years pass by. And Sarah is now 75. And man is she tired of waiting! She's downright indignant. How could God get her hopes up, with a promise like that, and then just do ... *nothing*. We need to flashback those 181 years again ...

Now Sarai [SEHR-eye], [Her name before God changed it] Abram's [His name before God changed it] wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." [Abram said, "Yeah, right ... seriously?!" I'm sure he argued, "Now don't fret mother, we can try again." "Not tonight. I've got a Hagar!" It was culturally acceptable and justifiable ... except they knew it violated the promise] Abram agreed to what Sarai said. [Well there's a surprise! Way to take one for the team, Abram] – Genesis 16:1-2 NIV

Faith and patience always go hand in hand. It's not enough to trust God's Word; we have to trust His timing. That doesn't mean you sit on your hands and wait; it means you don't sleep with the maid! You do everything within *your* power, short of violating His Word, His will, and His ways. Faith is living without looking for loopholes. It's refusing to trade God's promises for man's shortcuts. Those ol' love-birds should'a been stirrin' it up! What an *assignment!* They're not *rebellious* as much as reckless, but sadly, the consequences are pretty much the same.

When [Hagar] knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. [What regrettable thing did Abram say while wooing Hagar? "You will be the mother of a great nation! Greater even than the woman you serve." Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering." [And you just know he was] – Genesis 16:4b-5a NIV



This is what happens when we fall into the trap of trying to meet godly needs in ungodly ways with manmade shortcuts. It *always* sounds good on the front side, and then bites you on the back side! I want to provide a good life for my wife and kids ... so I'll toil away at the expense of time with my wife and kids. Or, I want a sense of wellbeing ... so I'll sacrifice that which builds lasting joy for that which brings fleeting fun. It isn't like it's rocket science, you know. If it violates His Word, it's not His will! You can take it or leave it, but don't be reckless and foolishly trade the promises.

"Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; ["I want her to respect me ... so I'll lash out if I feel disrespected; *that* should do the trick!" ... It *isn't* rocket science] so [Hagar] fled from her. [Into the desert and certain death. And *this* is when the angel of the Lord appears; first time that happens in the Bible!] ... And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. ["I don't want problems in my life ... so I run away from them instead of confronting them." Manmade shortcuts! It *really* isn't rocket science] Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I *will* so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." [How gracious can God get?! He even makes good on Abraham's bad word because Hagar was a victim of his recklessness] ... The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." [God makes it clear to Hagar that Ishmael is *not* the child of the promise through whom all people will be blessed. Isaac's legacy will be tranquility and peace; but Ishmael's will be hostility and war] She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." – Genesis 16:6, 8-10, 11-13 NIV

... which is interesting, because God told Moses, “No one may see me and live.” (Ex 33:20) And Paul wrote, “No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will.” (1 Tim 6:16) So, who’d she see? He’s called an “angel of the Lord” but he says things like, “I will increase your descendants.” Hmm. He talks like God (meaning He’s equal with God) but He *isn’t* God. Hagar is the first person to see Jesus! You didn’t think He just sat on his hands waiting for the manger did you?!

When Ishmael is 13, God announces that the time for Sarah’s miracle has come. A 65-year-old woman giving birth? *Could happen*. 75? *Impressive*. But, 90?! *That* is a jaw-dropper! And it’s what He intended all along, a blessing so big it couldn’t be comprehended. And the *only* thing He asked her to do, the only thing He asks us to do is ... wait for it ... wait for it ...

Abraham fell facedown; [Total shock] he laughed [Sheer joy] and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” [It’s outrageously astonishing! What an incredible moment! All he wants to do is sing and dance and ... and ... *what about Ishmael?! “Do I have to trade the son I love, the son I’ve cherished for 13 years, for a son yet unborn?!”* And this moment sheer joy is spoiled by the heartbreaking consequences of manmade shortcuts!] And Abraham said to God, “If only *Ishmael* might live under your blessing!” Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah *will* bear you a son, and you *will* call him *Isaac*. I *will* establish my covenant with *him* as an everlasting covenant for *his descendants* after him. [God is saying, “I made a promise, I have a purpose, and I alone will bring it to pass. I am building a nation on faith and grace not the flesh and works.”] And as for *Ishmael*, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; [None of this is *Ishmael’s* fault! And God doesn’t hold it against him or love him less than *Isaac* because of it] I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, [Like the 12 tribes of Israel!] and I will make him into a great nation. [Again, like Israel!] But my covenant I will establish with *Isaac*, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.” – *Genesis 17:17-21 NIV*



And the history of the Middle East will be forever shaped by what happens next. 4000 years of hostility and counting. It’s on every news station, and in every newspaper, every day. And Joseph is caught right in the middle! When his brothers heard those bells and looked up and saw the *Ishmaelites*, they could not believe their good fortune; and for that matter, *neither* could the *Ishmaelites*! Most O.T. nations have ceased to exist. Only two claim to have survived intact: Israel and *Ishmael*.

Or to be more specific, the *Midianite-Ishmaelites*!

Do you know what’s in the land of Midian today? Mecca! And do you have any idea what the centerpiece of Mecca is?! It’s unbelievable. It is none other than ... wait for it ... wait for it ... I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to wait for it.

This is where we have to close God’s story for today.