

The Story of Joseph

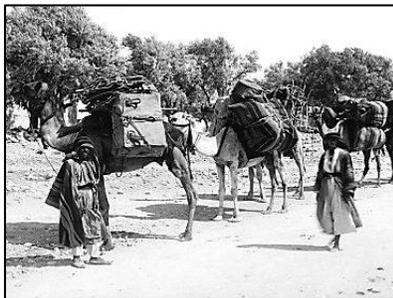
Cut Off

Part 7 – March 4, 2012

Let's see ... Israelites, Ishmaelites, 4000 years of hostility, in the news *every day*, Median, Mecca ... oh-yeah: "Wait for it ... wait for it ..." You've waited two weeks, what's another 20 minutes?



Two questions *beg* to be answered when Joseph is sold to Midianite-Ishmaelite spice traders (who take him from Dothan, past Hebron, to Egypt). Why would *spice* traders want to illegally transport and resell an obviously abducted, injured, educated, wealthy, *protesting* Hebrew? If they're just crooked men who'll do whatever it takes to make some quick cash, why wouldn't they return Joseph to Jacob (in Hebron) for a *way bigger* reward? It's both quicker and cashy'er!



But the *better* question, the smoking-gun, is why the brothers are confident, no, *positive* that these wicked traders *won't!* We're reverse-engineering and reconstructing their negotiation – something Moses' audience would've inferred from the word "Ishmaelite".

It's like if Joseph was black and the word was Ku Klux Klan; *we'd* infer peril, cruelty, and a *zero chance* of being returned.

191 years earlier, God promised a childless, 75-year-old Abraham a son, through whom the *whole world* would be blessed. But ten years later, when Sarah is 75, she gives up on God, and gives Abraham her Egyptian servant, Hagar who gives birth to Ishmael.



However, when Ishmael is thirteen, God tells Abraham that the time has come for the child of promise. His barren, 89-year-old wife will miraculously conceive and give birth in one year! Abraham *pleads* for Ishmael; but God had made it clear while Hagar was pregnant that Ishmael could *never* be the promised son.

[The Lord had told her] "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." – Genesis 16:12 NIV

This is a *prophecy*, not a curse. God loves Ishmael, and plans to bless his offspring as He will Israel.

“He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, [i.e. “laughter”] whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.” – Genesis 17:20b-21 NIV

Ishmael is a product of impatience and presumption and therefore represents *man’s performance*. Isaac, being the first forerunner of Christ must vividly represent *God’s provision*.



That’s why God waited till Sarah was 90. Sarah is a portrait of our *utter* helplessness and hopelessness apart from God’s grace. Whereas, the miraculous birth of the final Child of Promise, through a *young, virgin* mother, is a portrait of purity and virtue, and the power of God to *deliver* His grace. Abraham is called the Father of Faith, and Sarah the Mother of Grace. So, Isaac (i.e. laughter) came by faith, through grace; the same way the final Child of Promise offers *eternal joy* to us!

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah *as he had said*, [You can trust His grace] and the Lord did for Sarah *what he had promised*. [You can trust His grace] Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, *at the very time God had promised him*. [TRUST HIS GRACE! It’s one year later and Ishmael is 14] ... Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.” The child grew and was weaned, [which happens about age three; so Ishmael is 17] and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking [His hostility is already revealing itself. And I think he’s speaking to Hagar or like Hagar, who despised Sarah, because of Sarah’s reaction] and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, [And this next statement might be a clue to the content of the mocking] for that slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.” [Maybe he’s ridiculing the idea of Abraham giving away his birthright, “You won’t get it all. I’m the firstborn. He loves me more. And he *always* will.” And it might’ve been true] The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son [Ishmael]. But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, [God validates her discernment and her plan of action, and He reminds Abraham yet again] because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. [Apparently Abraham is holding out hope for Ishmael to share what God is bringing through Isaac. So, God again promises to bless Ishmael separately] I will make the *son of the maidservant* into a nation also, because he is your offspring.” Early the next morning [Before it gets too hot] Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. – Genesis 21:1-14a NIV



Ishmael is 17 and living in a culture that *relies* upon the hospitality of strangers. And it was customary for Arab chiefs to send their sons out into the world at this age and in this manner.

Abraham *cherished* Ishmael. So he most likely laid out a plan to get them somewhere safe soon.

[But they get lost] She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” [She seems to have more strength than Ishmael. I wonder if he deprived himself of water for his mother’s sake] And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob. God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven [Remember the angel of God who sounded just like Jesus? Same One. This time He’s seeking and saving the lost!] and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. [See, He speaks on behalf of God] Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” [And He speaks as though He’s God. I love this OT Jesus-Angel!] Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy as he grew up. [I wish we knew all the ways God spoke and worked with other nations that didn’t respond or record it] He lived in the desert and became an archer. While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his [Egyptian] mother got a wife for him from Egypt. – Genesis 21:11-21 NIV

Flash-forward 72 years ...

Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east. – Genesis 25:5-6 NIV

These seven sons settled along the Red Sea in places like Midian and Mecca, and throughout what is now Saudi Arabia.



Flash-forward 51 years ...

Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died ... His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. *And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.* – Genesis 25:17-18 NIV

Jacob is 63 years old when his Uncle Ishmael dies.

Flash-forward 13 more years, to just after a 76-year-old Jacob (Joseph’s dad) tricks his brother, Esau out of his birthright and flees to Uncle Laban’s to find a Hebrew wife.

Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; so he went to [Wait for it ...] Ishmael [The Midianite-Ishmaelites!] and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham ... – Genesis 28:8-9a NIV

I’m guessing those Ish-Mid-kids heard a lot of stories about how Isaac stole Ishmael’s birthright (because he was half-Egyptian and his mother was a slave), and how Jacob swindled Esau out of his birthright for a bowl of stew. Flash-forward 31 years to the opening of our story ...

Joseph, a young man of *seventeen* ... – Genesis 37:2b NIV

[Now jump to just after they put him in the pit] As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of **ISHMAELITES** coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. – *Genesis 37:23-28 NIV*

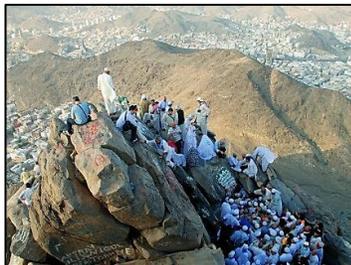
The brothers would've approached their cousins very cautiously.

“We know you hate our grandpa Isaac for taking Ishmael's birthright; and we know you hate our father, Jacob for taking Esau's birthright. But just look at this coat – it represents the birthright that was stolen from us by the 2nd youngest of 12 who said we will bow to him! So what do you say we sheath those scimitars and have a little chat? He's 17, just like Ishmael was when he was forced out. How would you like to tell your tribe that you forced out Isaac and Jacob's birthright, at the age of 17, and sold *him* as a *servant* to the *Egyptians*?”

Flash-forward 1,900 years: the final Child of Promise dies on a cross and conquers death, fulfilling the law on behalf of the world, and freely offering salvation by grace through faith.

Flash-forward 25 years: grace is being perverted.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we *or an angel from heaven* should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! – *Galatians 1:6-8 NIV*



Now, Flash-forward 545 years (610^{AD}) to a mountain cave in Mecca where an angel from heaven, named Gabriel, recites the words of Allah (i.e. God) to a 40-year-old, illiterate man named Muhammad, and reveals a new gospel of strict and holy laws. Allah's chosen prophet of Islam, Muhammad, traces his lineage to Abraham through Ishmael, and declares the Arab people to be the great nation that God had promised to Ishmael.

For 23 years (until his death) Muhammad has visions and dreams (recorded in the Koran) relating from Allah, among other things, a new and true history of Ishmael, who was illegally and illegitimately deprived of his birthright by his brother Isaac.

Muhammad also receives a new and true version of the history of Mecca, its water source, and its sacred place where hundreds of gods and a well-known, pagan, black stone were worshipped around a cube-like structure called the Kaaba (i.e. the cube)

Islam teaches that Abraham, under God's command, left Hagar and baby Ishmael in the desert. Hagar went back and forth between two hills, Sufwa and Murwa, seven times looking for water, before an angel showed her that a miraculous spring had formed where the baby was kicking in the sand. She called it Zamzam. On one of Abraham's visits, he was shown the Zamzam and he and Ishmael built the Kaaba/cube as the first house of worship to Allah. This happened on the very site where God had shown Adam and Eve where to build the first altar (by casting a white stone from heaven which turned black due to man's misdeeds).

The spring never quit, Mecca sprang up around it, and the people turned from God. And with these new and true histories from God, Muhammad rallied 10,000 followers in 632^{AD} and conquered Mecca! A few months later, the 63-year-old Muhammad fell ill and died.

Flash-forward 1,380 years to today. The largest mosque in the world, the holiest Islamic site, still houses the Kaaba [CAW-buh]. Muslims turn toward the Kaaba whenever and wherever they pray.



The reward for praying in the Sacred Mosque is 100,000 times greater than praying elsewhere. Those who make the pilgrimage, as Allah has commanded, circle the Kaaba seven times as they pray. They begin at the black stone on the eastern corner, and kiss it, touch it, or gesture toward it each time they pass.

Then they walk back and forth seven times, about two miles, through incredible corridors that connect the hills of Sufwa and Murwa where the angel revealed to Muhammad that Hagar walked. And they drink the Zamzam water from Hagar's well in the Mosque.

Critics point out that the Kaaba, the stone, and the spring were generating enormous amounts of money when the angel told Muhammad to take it by force and embellish it with legends.

After Paul's warning about perverting the Gospel of Christ, do you know how he goes on to explain grace to the Galatians?

[He says] For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai [Where the Law was given] and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. [Two covenants: law and grace, slave and free. The law serves grace by revealing and condemning our sin; but, rules and rituals are powerless to remove sin and redeem us. The law is only the mirror we use when we wash our face, but the grace of Jesus is the soap and water that we embrace] ... But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman. [There's no room for legalism in the house of grace. You can't earn God's favor. You can only choose to receive it, and walk in humble gratitude for it. It's all about god's provision not my performance] – Galatians 4:22-31 NIV

Which will it be: the God of grace or Allah of the law?