

OVERCOMING THE DYSFUNCTIONS OF ISRAEL'S PATRIARCHS

X. Adjusting To Our Past Failures

(Genesis 21:1-21)

I. Introduction

- A. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Israel's patriarchs and their respective wives and families, though blessed of God, were imperfect people who at times made huge mistakes that led to serious marital and family dysfunction.
- B. Thankfully, Romans 15:4 states that we can learn from whatsoever things were written in the Old Testament for our edification, and that includes our learning how to overcome the dysfunctions of Israel's patriarchs.
- C. We view Genesis 21:1-21 on adjusting to our past failures for our insight, application and blessing:

II. Adjusting To Our Past Failures, Genesis 21:1-21.

- A. Abraham and Sarah had failed to align with God's initial plan for marriage by using Hagar as a second wife:
 - 1. Though God had initially made one woman for one man at creation so that the two became one flesh (Genesis 2:20-24), Abraham had heeded his barren wife Sarah's advice to use a practice of their time by seeking to raise up a child by Sarah's giving her maid Hagar to Abraham as a second wife, Gen. 16:1-4a.
 - 2. However, this arrangement backfired when Hagar became pregnant with Abraham's son, for she despised Sarah, what led to Sarah's mistreating Hagar so that she fled from Sarah into the wilderness, Gen. 16:4b-7.
 - 3. The Angel of the Lord, the Preincarnate Christ, came to Hagar and convinced her to return to her mistress Sarah with the promise that He would bless Hagar's son since he was a son of Abraham, Genesis 16:8-16.
- B. However, when God caused Sarah to bear Isaac, the son of God's promise, the day that Abraham made a great feast celebrating Isaac's weaning, Hagar's son Ishmael mocked Isaac because all his hopes for an inheritance were destroyed with the arrival of Isaac, Genesis 21:1-9 (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Genesis 21:9).
- C. Sarah could not tolerate having Ishmael compete against her young son Isaac, so she urged Abraham to cast Hagar and her son Ishmael out since Ishmael would not be heir along with Sarah's son Isaac, Genesis 21:10.
- D. God then called on Abraham to make a difficult decision in facing up to his past failure of faith in this matter:
 - 1. Abraham was deeply grieved at Sarah's urging, but the Lord supported her advice to Abraham, stating that in Isaac would his seed be called and blessed of the Lord, Genesis 21:11-12. God said that He would greatly bless Ishmael's descendants as well because the Abrahamic Covenant extended to blessing Abraham's seed, and Ishmael was also Abraham's son, Genesis 21:13.
 - 2. Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away, and when she ran out of water in the desert, she cast her son under a shrub, went a distance away to avoid seeing him die and there she sat down and wept, Genesis 21:14-16.
 - 3. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar the second time and informed her that God had heard her son's cry for help, Genesis 21:17. God promised to make of Ishmael a great nation, and Hagar then spotted a well of water that she used to give Ishmael a life-saving drink of water, Genesis 21:18-19.
 - 4. Accordingly, God blessed Ishmael, he grew up to be an archer, living in the Northeast section of the Sinai peninsula, and Hagar took a wife for him from her native land of Egypt, Genesis 21:20-21 with 16:1. Ishmael's descendants eventually inhabited the area of central Arabia north of modern Yemen as well as the northern part of the Sinai peninsula, Genesis 25:12-18; *Ibid.*, ftns. to 16:7 and 25:18.
- E. Though it was painful for Abraham to send Ishmael and Hagar away, in God's view, it fit His overall plan:
 - 1. God gave His Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12:1-3 that aimed to bless the world to counter the world apostasy of paganism that gripped the human race at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9.
 - 2. This covenant was designed to bring believers worldwide back to God through Abraham's seed (Genesis 12:3b), that seed ultimately being Jesus Christ and His atonement for the world's sins (Galatians 3:13-29).
 - 3. Thus, though Abraham and Sarah failed to heed God's initial plan to raise up the promised seed through them instead of using Hagar, God intended to reach and bless even Ishmael's descendants along with Isaac's descendants, so the grace of God was great enough to deal with the failure of Abraham and Sarah!

Lesson: When God directed Abraham painfully to face his initial failure of unbelief in using Hagar to produce a son by directing him to send his eldest son and his mother away, God's overall plan to disciple people worldwide away from the Tower of Babel apostasy included God's blessing all who believed in Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ, so that all the families of the earth, including Ishmael's descendants, might be blessed through Jesus Christ.

Application: If God calls us to face and adjust to our past failures, as painful as that may be, may we trust that facing that failure and making the necessary adjustments involved fits the overall plan of God to His great glory.