

Bible Essentials

Scripture Passage: Genesis 21:1-21

As a group, share something about your past week. For example, share prayer requests and answers to prayer. Share the best and worst moments of your week (highs and lows). Write prayer requests here. Open with prayer for these requests and for God to open your hearts to this week's study.

If you have siblings, did/do you get along well with them? Or did/do you always have conflict? Are things different now as adults compared to when you were kids?

Read today's passage. Discuss your initial impressions of the passage. Write any major points here.

Here is some context for Genesis 21:1-21.

When Abraham was 99 years old, God once again confirmed his covenant with Abraham that Abraham and Sarah would have a son by that time next year (Genesis 18). What happened in that year? Last week, we read about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). God heard the outcries against these cities for their evil actions, and he could tolerate it no longer. So he destroyed them with fire from heaven. But he saved Lot and Lot's two daughters. The two sons-in-law refused to believe the warning, so they were lost. And Lot's wife looked back at the burning city, so she turned into a pillar of salt. Then we read that Lot's daughters were worried that they had no children and no men to bear children with, so they tricked Lot into getting them pregnant. They each had a son, who were the fathers of the Moabites and Ammonites, two nations that would later be enemies of the Israelites.

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham continued to move around (Genesis 20). This time, he moved into the region of the Negev, between Kadesh and Shur. Then he moved to Gerar. In Gerar, Abraham once again tried to pass Sarah off as his sister, so Abimelek, king of Gerar, took her for himself. After a warning from God, Abimelek knew that Sarah was Abraham's wife, so he didn't touch her and instead returned her to Abraham. Not only that, but Abimelek gave Abraham sheep, cattle, slaves, and silver. Ironically, the story ends with the note that when Abimelek took Sarah, God closed all the wombs of all the women in Abimelek's household. And when Abimelek released Sarah, God opened all their wombs again. It is in this context that Sarah also gets pregnant. (Note that it is unclear the exact timing of Sarah's pregnancy, whether she conceived before or after this story. But the Scripture is clear that Sarah's son is from Abraham.)

What are your thoughts about the context? Discuss the context as a group. Write some key points here.

Read the passage again. Use a different Bible version if you have one available. Have someone summarize the passage in their own words, and use this space to record that summary.

Look closely at the passage and answer the following questions as a group. Write notes in the space provided.

What does the passage say about God?

What does the passage say about people?

What does the passage say about God's plan?

What else strikes you about this passage?

Understanding how a passage fits into the overarching story of the Bible is important.

This passage shows God's protection and preference for his divine plan. This plan would be fulfilled through Isaac, not Ishmael. So although God still worked to provide for Ishmael, his primary concern was for Isaac. God's plan was that Abraham's offspring would be reckoned through Isaac. We discussed this a little bit above, but what does this really mean? To be reckoned or reconciled implies that at some point, there has been a break in the relationship, and this relationship needs to be repaired. In this case, the relationship is between God and humans, and what caused the break was human sin.

As we read the rest of the Bible, we see God's plan for this reconciliation playing out. He did build Abraham's descendants into a great nation. Through that great nation would be born a Son, God's Son, born as a human. God's Son, Jesus, would live a perfect life, be a witness for God through teaching and miracles, and then die a horrific death to pay the penalty for sin. That's God's requirement—the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Only through paying this penalty can the relationship between God and humans be restored. As humans, we cannot pay that penalty because we are not

sinless. But Jesus lived a perfect life, so he was able to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. And God's plan for this path to redemption and reconciliation started with Abraham and his chosen son, Isaac.

What are your thoughts on how this passage fits into the overarching story of the Bible? Discuss as a group. What questions do you have individually or as a group? Discuss potential answers.

As a group, use the following questions to apply today's Scripture passage to your life. How does this passage affect how you view God?

How does this passage affect how you view yourself?

How does this passage affect how you will live your life?

Close in prayer, asking God to help you apply what you learned today.