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THE ISHMAEL STORY WITHIN THE STRUCTURE OF GENESIS AND EXODUS: ISHMAEL AND HAGAR AS TYPES FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Paulo Bechara

The story of Ishmael within the structure of the Book of Genesis and Exodus seems to carry a more relevant role than the same story would if read by itself. In the unfolding of God's plan to save Israel and humanity as a whole, God used symbols and types. In this sense, one could explore Ishmael and Hagar as types for Israel's slavery in Egypt, redemption, and the journey to the Promised Land. The story and meaning of Ishmael's name seems to communicate a paradigm of how God consistently acts and responds in favor of his people and all who are oppressed by sin, misery, and affliction.

This article will briefly examine literary elements like chiasmic structures, word plays, character interactions, and parallelism in the books of Genesis and Exodus which might provide relevant information for a better understanding of the Ishmael story.

Views on Ishmael

Through the centuries Jews and Christians have influenced each other in the interpretation of the Ishmael story and have greatly differed in their assessment of Ishmael and his mother Hagar. Carol Bakhos examined how rabbinic sources dealt with the figure of Ishmael and came to the conclusion that “the portrayal of Ishmael before the rise of Islam can be neutral, positive, or negative; after the emergence of Islam, however he is consistently portrayed more negatively” (Bakhos 2006:2). Augustine, Jerome, and Calvin seemed to have gone that direction in their writings. However, Origen, Theodore, and Luther were more sympathetic. Two seemingly extreme cases in point are Calvin and Luther. Calvin at times would take extreme positions almost to the point of hating Hagar and her son. Luther would defend Hagar even where there was no need to do so (see Thompson 2001:17-99). In light of today’s events there is often a polarization of views in the Christian as well as in Adventist circles. Genesis, however, does not place a negative mark on Ishmael.

The Biblical View of Ishmael

In Genesis, Ishmael is the treasured son of Abraham (Gen 17:18). He receives all the promises given to his father Abraham, except the one to be the son of promise. He is blessed of God (17:20; 21:12, 30; 21:17) and “God was with the lad” (Gen 21:20, NKJV) as God was with Jacob and Joseph (Gen 28:15; 39:2, 3, 21). The annunciation story puts Ishmael “in a surprising company of others similarly chosen by God”: Isaac (Gen 18:10), Samson (Judg 13), Jeremiah (Jer 1:5), John the Baptist (Luke 1:13), Immanuel (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:31) (Hamlin 1990:137). “Only those whom God calls to some special service does he ‘call by name’” (Nichol 2002:1:661). Noteworthy is the similarity of the annunciations of Ishmael and Jesus:

<p>“And the Angel of the LORD said to her: Behold, you <i>are</i> with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael” (Gen 16:11).“You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the Lord has heard your affliction” (Gen 16:11, NKJV).</p>	<p>“Then the angel said to her ... And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS” (Luke 1:30, 31), “And you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21, NKJV).</p>
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The hearing motif within Ishmael's name, "God hears," became a source of comfort and strength to not only Hagar, but to Abraham, Ishmael himself, as well as the people of Israel when they experienced God's liberation from bondage in Egypt (Exod 2:23-25). There are indications that this hearing motif continued to be found in the history of Israel. Thomas Neumann makes mention of studies that confirm that Ishmael was the thirteenth most beloved Jewish name given to boys from 330 BC to AD 200 among the people of Israel. By the second Century BC, 2 percent of Jewish men carried the name Ishmael in Palestine. This is unusual because by this time the negative image of Ishmael as Isaac's enemy and rival was espoused in early rabbinic literature. Apparently the hearing motif of Ishmael's name was still powerful enough for those families and childless mothers who had experienced God's miraculous intervention in their lives as a result of prayer and supplication. Simeon (God has heard) is a variant of the same root as Ishmael. The deep appreciation for the name Ishmael and its meaning is echoed in Jewish saying: "He who sees Ishmael in a dream will have his prayer answered by God" (Naumann 2008:23, 24, 36).

The Promises Concerning Ishmael in Genesis 16

The promises concerning Ishmael in Genesis 16 which at first might seem negative and odd to the Western mind are to be understood in the light of the angel's command to Hagar: "return to your mistress and submit to her" (Gen 16:9). God's plan to bless Ishmael required him to be educated and prepared by his father Abraham. Ishmael was to live under the shadow of Abraham's tent.

The command to "return to your mistress and submit to her" is followed by the promises, which in turn would give strength to fulfill such a difficult command. The naming of Ishmael brought strength and comfort to Hagar as well as the assurance of God's presence.

The phrase, "He shall be a wild donkey of a man" (Gen 16:12, NIV) requires the reader to look more closely at the biblical context to better understand the expression, for the phrase does not sound very positive for the 21st century reader. In Job 39:5 (NIV) it says, "Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes? I gave him the wasteland as his home, the salt flats as his habitat. He laughs at the commotion in the town; he does not hear a driver's shout. He ranges the hills for his pasture and searches for any green thing." One could say that the wild donkey was the king of the desert in biblical times. Genesis 16:12 describes Ishmael's future destiny: he would

enjoy a free-roaming, Bedouin-like existence. The freedom his mother sought would also be his one day (Wenham 2002:10). “In contrast with the oppression which she had endured and still would endure, she received the promise that her son would endure no such oppression” (Keil 2002:1:141).

The phrase, “His hand shall be against every man, and every man’s hand against him” (Gen 16:12b, NKJV) is connected with the first prediction and indicates that in the context of defending his freedom, Ishmael would be fierce. “The syntactical structure of this verse with no connective particle between the first two clauses governed by the Hebrew verb “to be” implies that the second is a direct implication of the first.” The first prophecy guarantees his freedom; the second is the “qualifier” of the first one (Maalouf 2003:71): it as the price Ishmael would pay for his freedom. “His hand” and “every man’s hand against him” should also be understood in light of Abraham’s expression and Sarah’s action: “So Abram said to Sarai, ‘Indeed your maid *is in your hand*; do to her as you please’” (Gen 16:6, NKJV).

The above promises, however, revolve around the main promise: “I will multiply your descendants exceedingly” (Gen 16:10; see also 17:20). This promise was first given to Abraham, but now it is given Hagar and her son Ishmael. It is also reminiscent of the command given to Adam and Noah. But here, along with the command is the guarantee that God will himself fulfill it.

A Word on Paul’s Reading of Genesis 21

In his letter to the Galatian believers, Paul faced the challenge of the judaizers who claimed that obeying the mosaic ordinances and precepts was essential to salvation. He chooses an allegory (4:24) to rebut the judaizers. Paul uses Hagar and Sarah as types (Gal 4:21-31) of respectively two covenants: “Mount Sinai” and “Jerusalem above.” Paul’s reading of Hagar and her son has significantly informed the understanding of Ishmael for many Christians through the centuries. “Paul uses Sarah and Hagar typologically. Paul’s line of reasoning, though, uses a different paradigm in relation to the one used in the Genesis story. ‘However, Hagar and Ishmael certainly have a typological function in the Torah, especially in Genesis 16’” (Römer 2008:10).

It is important to discuss aspects of the typological functions of Ishmael and Hagar in Gen 16, 17, and 21. Both Ishmael and Hagar seem to be types for the people of Israel in their experience of slavery in Egypt as well as their redemption by God.

Janzen, in his commentary on Genesis argues that “the final form of the text is greater than the mere sum of its sources, and that the theological vision which it presents is greater and more profound—more ripe or mature—than can be gained from studies of the historical events and social situations out of which the text arose” (Janzen 1993:1).

I would like to focus this study in a similar way that Janzen has contemplated Genesis in his commentary. In this line of thought I have chosen to focus mainly on Genesis as well as the first part of Exodus to examine the context of Ishmael’s story in both of these books. In the next section I will consider the literary elements salient to the text.

Hagar in Genesis 16: From Marginal to Central

Genesis 16 takes place in the context of the covenant of God with Abraham (Gen 12, 15, 17) and the fulfillment of God’s promises. God promises to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, and make his name great (Gen 12:2) in contrast to the people of the Tower of Babel, who were attempting to make a name for themselves (11:4). Furthermore, Abraham would be a bridge to bless or curse people depending on how people would treat him. Abraham would *be* a blessing and “all families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:3). In Genesis 15, God reaffirms this promise: a son will be given to him. Sarah, however, is only mentioned by name in Genesis 17, when Ishmael is already thirteen years old.

At first sight, the story of Genesis 16 seems to be an interruption to the Abraham narrative (Gen 12-22). It is as if the reader is caught by surprise and at the outset, God does not intervene and allows choices to follow their course. Humanly speaking Gen 16 seems to be a quagmire, as a result of a series of wrong choices by each human character. But by noting the structure of the story and its context in the narrative one can begin to discover aspects that would not be perceivable otherwise. Parallelism, word plays, chiasmic structures, and other literary elements can also add meaning to this story.

The pericope begins with Sarah as the one who takes the initiative and acts; it ends with Abraham accepting Hagar’s vision of God and naming his son Ishmael. It seems at first that Sarah will be the central character throughout the story. “Just as Abram gives Sarai to Pharaoh (Gen. 15:8), now Sarai takes Hagar and gives her to Abraham. Abraham the donor becomes the receiver, and Sarai the pawn becomes Sarai the initiator” (Hamilton 1990:446). The idea to build one’s family through a surrogate wife because of infertility was culturally appropriate. Sarah easily convinces Abraham to be

part of the project, and so she “takes” Hagar (*ger*: possibly meaning pilgrim or foreigner) her Egyptian servant and “gives” her to Abraham. As soon as Hagar becomes pregnant, Sarah’s plan backfires. Hagar looks down to her mistress (or so it appears in Sarah’s eyes). In Gen 12 Pharaoh gives Sarah back to Abraham; in Gen 16:6 Abraham seems to give Hagar back to Sarah. By now none of the characters—Abraham, Sarah, or Hagar—seems to be blameless. Hagar, however, was the only one who had no choice in accepting the plan. Abraham and Sarah do not call her by name but by her label: the maidservant or simply as “her” (Hamilton 1990:447-8). Ironically, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid” (Gen 16:8) and her son will soon become central to the story.

The way Sarah treated her maidservant seems to point forward to the oppression the people of Israel suffered in Egypt. “So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites” (Exod 1:11, 12, NIV). “The Lord said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering’” (Exod 3:7, NIV).

“In Gen. 16 the roles of oppressor and oppressed are just the opposite from Exodus. Here it is a matriarch of Israel oppressing an Egyptian” (Hamilton 1990:448). Ironically, Sarah comes to symbolize the Egyptian oppressive power and Hagar, the Egyptian servant, represents the people of Israel, and their pilgrimage to the desert. Sarah “dealt harshly with her” (Gen 16:6, NKJV), “abused her so much” (NAB), “oppressed her” (Darby 1890:15), “afflicted her” (Young 1953:9). This very same word (*ʾanâ*) is also included in God’s prophecy to Abraham concerning his descendants (Gen 15:13) and it is used to describe the Egyptians oppressing and afflicting the people of Israel in bondage (Exod 1:11, 12; 3:7).

<p>“Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years” (Gen 15:13, NKJV, emphasis mine)</p>	<p>“And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence” (Gen 16:6) “... and Sarai afflicted her ...” (Gen 16:6, <i>Young’s Literal Translation</i>, emphasis mine).</p>
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God Intervenes

Hagar fled (*barah*, Gen 16:6, 8) from Sarah, Israel fled from Egypt (Exod 14:5, 13-15) and God intervened in both instances.

This is also the very first instance in Scripture where an Angel of the Lord meets a human being, and Hagar, the Egyptian servant is the chosen one. “Now the Angel of the Lord found her” (Gen 16:7).

In spite of the grandeur of this story, it is still puzzling to many how God acts in mercy and compassion toward the “marginal” character of the story.

It is one thing to acknowledge the centrality of Abraham and his descendants in the overall plot of the book of Genesis, but there is something amiss when the center is allowed to fill or erase the margins, especially when some of these apparently marginal characters may fairly claim to be the focus of God’s benevolent concern in ways that parallel or even rival the divine attention paid to other, seemingly more central characters. (Thompson 2001:18)

In this specific context the “reading for the center” would lead one to choose Isaac and reject Ishmael while the Genesis text does not require this. Isaac is indeed the son of promise (Gen 17:19) through whom the covenant will be established. Ishmael, though, “is the oldest son of father Abraham. He is not adopted, not an intruder, but born to the man of promise” (Brueggemann 2001:183). From the very beginning God makes a special commitment to Ishmael and “cares for this outsider whom the tradition wants to abandon” (183). At times, as we will see, Ishmael “mysteriously” shares center stage with his brother Isaac.

God’s initiative to find Hagar is intentional and is a result of mercy. This has profound theological and missiological significance. This is the God of Genesis. As God found Abraham and called him out of his clan, culture, and city, so he also finds Hagar. He hears her cry and gives a command and promises. As God enabled Abraham for his journey, Hagar was also strengthened to obey through promises of God’s providence. As Abraham had a vision of God, so did Hagar. God’s choosing of Abraham for his covenant does not exclude the “other.” It seems as if God was rehearsing for his future stories used to describe his mercy.

Chiastic Structure of the Abraham Narrative

In his book *Bible Lives*, Jonathon Magonet proposes the following chiasmic structure for the Abraham narrative found in Genesis 12-22 (1992:25).

- 12a The Call (*‘Lech l’cha’*). Blessing promised
 12b Abraham in Egypt. Wife-Sister motif
 13-14 Lot in Danger. Sodom
 15 Covenant
 16 Hagar and Ishmael
 17 Covenant
 18-19 Lot in Danger. Sodom
 20 Abraham in Gerar. Wife-Sister motif
 21 Hagar and Ishmael
 22 The Call (*‘Lech l’cha’*). Blessing confirmed

The chiastic structure indicates a progression from the extremes to the center. Note that Genesis 12 and 22 correspond with each other for both contain the call of God to Abraham to go “to a land that I will show you” and “to offer his son as a sacrifice. The Hebrew expression ‘*Lech l’cha*’ (go for yourself) which is only found in these two chapters again links both chapters in a special sense. Magonet points out that the Rabbis considered the story of “Isaac’s binding” not as the only one but the tenth of a series of tests God gives to Abraham. There seems to be a progression in the intensity of the tests and the chiastic structure reinforces this.

Likewise, Genesis 12b and 20 describe stories containing the wife-sister motif in Egypt and Gerar. Genesis 13-14 and 18-19 describe different circumstances when Lot and his family are in danger. Genesis 15 and 17 describe the covenant that God initiates and fulfills with Abraham.

For Magonet, the center of the chiastic structure is the story of Genesis 16. Not surprisingly, he struggles with this conclusion, though, and calls it a “false climax” (1992:29). Goldingay, however, contends it is the actual center of the narrative. “Rhetorically or dramatically it is simply not the case in Genesis 12-22 that ‘the center stage belongs to Isaac.’ . . . Isaac shares it with Ishmael. Centre stage was Isaac’s destiny, but before his birth his father gave it away” (Goldingay 1998:147).

If the chiastic structure of Genesis 12-22 (chapters 23-25 are left out) has Genesis 16 as its center there are at least two short chiastic structures in Genesis 17 which point to Ishmael. The following chiastic structure focuses once more on the centrality of Ishmael (Wenham 1994:26).

- 19a Sarah will bear a son for you, Isaac
 19b I will establish my covenant with him
 20 **But I will bless and multiply Ishmael**
 21a I will establish my covenant with Isaac
 21b Sarah will bear him for you.

The God Who Seeks and Finds

There are several unique features in this story which help confirm it as a center. This is the first time God reveals himself to a woman, an Egyptian servant. This is the first time that God announces in advance the birth and the name of a child to be blessed. This is the first time when someone is granted the privilege of giving a name to God. This is the first time that the Angel of the Lord appears to a human being.

Perhaps the most important point to strengthen the centrality of Genesis 16 within the narrative is that this story portrays who God is in unique ways. God is Savior and Redeemer. He is merciful and compassionate. He seeks and finds the lost. This chapter also seems to set the pattern of how God consistently acts toward his people throughout Israel's history, in spite of Israel's waywardness and deviation from following God's instructions: God seeks and finds because of who He is; He sees and hears; He knows the situation of his people; He rescues them and educates them for mission. The God who sought and found and rescued Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is also the one who found and rescued Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian servant, and her son Ishmael. Mother and son, then, seem to become types that point to Israel's experience and history, slavery, and redemption.

Although Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar are far from flawless, God is able to transform the whole situation and even make this story a "preview" of what will eventually take place in the story of Abraham's descendants.

The story seems also to communicate a warning: even people called by God can deviate from his plan and choose to act independently, treating other human beings with harshness.

The story of Genesis 16 captures in unique ways how unpredictable God is in his loyal and faithful love (*hesed*). It sets the tone for the story of redemption in Exodus. The God who saved Hagar and her son is the LORD who seeks, finds, and hears Hagar's afflictions. He is "the living One who sees me" (Gen 16:7, 11, 14). "Ishmael" (God still hears) became a perpetual sign of God's mercy (White 1890:146).

I suggest that the meaning to the name Ishmael carries much weight as it becomes a paradigm of how God will disclose himself to his people and humanity both in Scripture and through history. For God is the one who hears and sees, seeks and finds, the One compassionate and merciful God. This sign of God's mercy would continue on through the rest of Scripture.

It could have been the end of Hagar and Ishmael's story, but "the Angel of the Lord found her" (Gen 16:7). This finding is intentional and is initiated by God himself, signifying "divine intervention for a redemptive and elective purpose" (Culver 2001:53).

The God Who Hears

Three times in Genesis the name of Ishmael becomes a personal sign of God's intervention and response to prayer (Gen 16 to Hagar; Gen 17 to Abraham; Gen 21 to Ishmael himself).

Exodus seems to hint to the fact that "Ishmael" is a sign of God's mercy that would not be forgotten: "Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So *God heard* their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them" (Exod 2:23-25, emphasis mine).

Although Ishmael is not mentioned by name in the verses above, the memory of his name would certainly be clear as the Hebrews read the expression "God hears" in this text. Neither is Ishmael mentioned by name in Genesis 21:8-21, but he is referred to in four different ways: "son of Hagar," "son of the bondwoman," "the boy," and "the lad." The absence of Ishmael's name in Genesis 21 and Exodus 2 could point to the relevance of the name's meaning in conveying who God is and how he acts.

Indeed Ishmael's name is not mentioned in the whole of Exodus or in Genesis 21:8-21 but the remembrance of his name seems to be implied by the similarity in language. "I *have surely seen the oppression* of My people who are in Egypt, and *have heard their cry* because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows" (Exod 3:7, NKJV, emphasis mine).

"So the people believed; and *when they heard that the Lord had visited* the children of Israel and that *He had looked on their affliction*, then they bowed their heads and worshiped. (Exod 4:31, NKJV, emphasis mine)

And *I have also heard* the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and *I have remembered* My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. ⁷ I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians" (Exod 6:5-7, emphasis mine).

As Ishmael became a sign of God's responsiveness in time of need for Hagar (Gen 16), Abraham (Gen 17), and Ishmael himself (Gen 21), now

“Ishmael” becomes a sign of God’s mercy, compassion, and redemption to the people of Israel.

With this as a background of the story, Genesis 16 can be considered a climax of the Abraham narrative in the chiasitic structure because it pointedly portrays who God is, how he consistently acts in mercy and compassion, and how the name of Ishmael depicts these realities. In the next section I will briefly examine parallels between Hagar, Ishmael, and other Bible characters which can further elucidate this point.

Parallelism: Hagar and Moses

Back in Genesis 12 Sarah is “sold” into Egypt in order to save Abraham. When Pharaoh finds out the truth he frees Sarah along with slaves and gifts to guard her honor. It is possible that Hagar was received as a slave at this time. Whereas Pharaoh sets Sarah (and Abraham) free from Egypt along with gifts, in Genesis 16 Sarah oppresses her handmaid Hagar. In the context she seems to symbolize Egypt which in the future would oppress God’s people.

If Hagar, on one hand, is a type of the people of Israel’s later experience in Egypt and in the desert, on the other hand she prefigures in many ways Moses’ own experience in Egypt, in the desert, and back in Egypt.

Hagar and Moses both have a dual identity: she is an Egyptian slave and becomes the second wife of Abraham; Moses is the son of a slave in Egypt and becomes adopted into Pharaoh’s family. Moses and Hagar both received a revelation from the Angel of the Lord (Gen 16:7; Exod 3:2). Both received a message of liberation: to Moses the promise of freedom from Egyptian bondage; to Hagar the promise that her son would never be a slave for he would be like a “wild donkey.” In both verses the noun “affliction” or “oppression” is found.

Hagar and Moses share several similarities:

Hagar	Moses
The Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness (Gen 16:7)	The Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush (Exod 3:2)
Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees	

Hagar names God (Gen 16)	God reveals himself as JHW
I have heard the boy cry	I have heard the people's cry
Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation (Gen 21:18)	Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, "The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, 'I have surely visited you and <i>seen</i> what is done to you in Egypt; and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt'" (Exod 3:16, 17)

Several points in common stand out in these two revelations to Hagar and Moses. The presence of the Angel of Lord is at the beginning of each call. In both revelations there is an interaction between Egypt and Abraham's descendants. Ishmael and the people of Israel are guided and strengthened respectively by Hagar and Moses in the wilderness. God hears the cry of the boy but he does not know that God has heard. God tells Hagar "to lift up the boy and hold him by the hand"; similarly, God hears the cry of the enslaved people but they are not aware that he has heard their cry. God tells Moses to let the people know that I will deliver them out of the affliction of Egypt. As Moses looked back at these stories and its parallels with his own experience with God and that of the people's, it must have been a source of hope and encouragement to both Moses and the people. In this context, the Hagar and Ishmael typologies seem to be intentional and to point to God's plan to save his people.

Ishmael and the People of Israel

There are other interesting parallels in this study. The son of an Egyptian slave was received and educated by Abraham and Sarah, the son of an Israelite slave in Egypt was adopted into the Pharaoh's family. Both sons were sent to the desert.

Ishmael, not Isaac, seems to represent the people of Israel in these narratives. Just as Ishmael had to go in order to be blessed and for the promise to be fulfilled, so too the people of Israel had to leave Egypt in order to worship God. Just as Ishmael had to pass through the desert in order to grow and allow God's promises to be fulfilled, so Israel also had to pass through the experience in the wilderness before arriving in the Promised Land. Just as God heard the boy cry, he also heard his people's cry for help. Just as God commanded Hagar to "take the boy by the hand and lift him up," so too he commanded Moses to let the people know that he had heard them

(Ishmael). Both Ishmael and the people of Israel brought with them to the desert the trauma of their experience. But God was with them (Gen 21:20; Exod 25:8).

Ishmael and Joseph are also connected in that God was with them specifically in their time of distress and despair (Gen 21:20; 39:2, 21). Both were sent away from home. In so doing, both fulfilled God's purpose for them. Likewise, the people of Israel would also be connected with the descendants of Ishmael in their journeys. In Dotham, Joseph would be "saved" from the hands of his brothers and sold into Egypt. The Ishmaelites, unknowingly, would be instruments of salvation and rescue to Joseph. God's providence would transform that tragic situation so that Joseph would become God's instrument to preserve the remnant of Jacob.

In order to fulfill God's promises of blessings to Ishmael, he was to remain in the desert. He was to be as free as a "wild donkey" in the desert; his mother was a slave but he would never be a slave. He became an archer and he was to "dwell in the presence of all his brothers" (Gen 16:12), including Isaac. His mother chose an Egyptian wife for Ishmael and he had twelve sons who became princes. Isaac's son, Jacob, who later became Israel, also had twelve sons, so it seems that all of the promises given to Abraham and Isaac were also given to Ishmael, except the promise to be the son of the covenant.

Ishmael and Isaac

Since the beginning, Ishmael and Isaac seem to be connected, even in the way their birth is described:

<p>So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram <i>was</i> eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Gen 16:15, 16)</p>	<p>For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. (Gen 21:2, 3)</p>
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Except for the somewhat ambiguous text of Genesis 21:9, Ishmael and Isaac do not seem to have personal difficulties with each other. Their mothers are the ones who do not get along. In verse 9 there is a word play for the word "laughter" to describe Ishmael "laughing" (ESV), "playing" (NRSV) with Isaac or "mocking" (ASV), or "scoffing" (NKJV) him, depending on the translation. In the original language the expression sounds like Ishmael was "Isaacing" with Isaac. The original word for Ishmael's "laughing" (צחק)

actually points to the meaning of Isaac's name. The same word is used to describe the laughing of Abraham (Gen 17:17), Sarah (Gen 18:12, 13, 15), and Isaac himself (Gen 26:8).

In Genesis 21 Isaac and Ishmael are separated because of family conflict. However, their connection seems to continue on through the parallelism found in Scripture.

At a certain moment in his adult life, Isaac moves into the proximity of Beer-Laai-Roi (Gen 24:62), a well named by Hagar as gratitude for the vision of God and the promises given to her son Ishmael who is also Isaac's brother. The story says that Isaac had come from this well and was now meditating or praying. The well Beer-Laai-Roi is now connected with God's revelation to Hagar, the promises of God to his brother Ishmael, and above all points to the fact that God is one who hears, sees, and knows. The narrative seems to connect Isaac to this reality. As God heard Hagar by the well, so Isaac desires that God would hear and guide him in his future marriage. He, too, searches for the God who hears. He, too, will be comforted. Here there is a connection between Isaac and Ishmael's mother, Hagar.

Another event seems to cast light on Isaac's relationship with Ishmael. The blessing Esau had lost to Jacob, seemed to be connected with Isaac's command "not [to] take a wife from the daughters of Canaan" and Jacob's obedience to the command.

Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram. Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had. (Gen 28:6-9, NKJV, emphasis mine)

Isaac and Ishmael meet again when their father died. (In a similar way, Esau and Jacob meet for their father's funeral, which seems to confirm their reconciliation.) Their meeting is noteworthy. Only Ishmael and Isaac meet here. The other sons of Abraham are not mentioned. Only Isaac and Ishmael are called "sons" of Abraham in Genesis. The other sons are not called Abraham's but Keturah's sons (Gen 25:4; 28:9; 1 Chr 1:32). But there is yet another relevant parallelism which will be discussed next.

The Two Sacrifices of Abraham in Genesis 21 and 22

Rabbis have noted similarities between the two chapters and have seen the “sacrifice” of losing Ishmael as a preparation for the greatest test: the near-sacrifice of Isaac. The comparison of both “sacrifices” not only ties the two brothers closer together but can also bring new light and dimension to both stories. Notice some parallels between the two stories as listed in the appendix.

The number of parallelisms are too numerous and evident to be neglected. This seems to indicate that both pericopes must be read together for a more complete understanding. This comparison connects the two stories and its characters and brings new dimensions to both stories. The similar terms used to describe both stories (commands, verbs, and terms) confirm the same reality. The Angel of *Elohim* speaks and rescues in the Ishmael story (Gen 21). The Angel of *YHWH* calls and saves in the Isaac story (Gen 22), which calls attention to the covenant. In contrast, the Angel of *YHWH* appears to Hagar in Genesis 16.

Conclusion

Although circumstances are far from ideal in the story of Ishmael and his mother Hagar, and the characters in the story are not exempt from flaws, there are several noteworthy elements in the Ishmael story and in its Genesis context which make it relevant for mission and theology. There is the meaning of Ishmael’s name, the annunciation of his birth, the promises concerning Ishmael that are similar to promises made to Abraham, the manifestation, guidance, and protection offered by the angel of the Lord, and word plays as well as chiasmic structures—all these can contribute to a better understanding of the Ishmael story as well as the Abraham story.

The connections with other “main” characters in Genesis and Exodus also seem to indicate that Ishmael and Hagar are typological figures in Genesis who represent the people of Israel in their own journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Sarah and Hagar, “with the human roles reversed . . . anticipate the story in the book of Exodus” (Janzen 1993:46).

While reaching out to Muslims and other peoples of the globe, God’s people cannot afford to follow their own ways and devisings. They have no monopoly on God’s redemptive plan to save humanity. However, the way God’s people fulfill God’s mission counts. Showing love and forgiveness gives credibility to the gospel (John 3:35). As Genesis connects Ishmael and

Hagar with Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, and the people of Israel, the whole story takes on new meaning. In the same way the gospel story takes on new meaning as Jesus' disciples begin mingling with others desiring their good, ministering to their needs, winning their confidence, and communicating the gospel in winsome ways (White 1905:143).

The story of Ishmael in Genesis is not isolated or fragmented. It is more than an interruption to the Abraham story, It is the story of the Sovereign God and his salvation to humankind. Above all, the Ishmael/Hagar story point to the centrality of the God of Genesis and his unpredictable love. Ishmael's name becomes for Hagar—and for those who earnestly pray to God—a “perpetual sign of God's mercy.” In this sense Ishmael's name has become a paradigm of how God consistently acts in mercy in spite human failings.

If indeed Genesis 16 is the climax or the center of the chiasmic structure of the Abraham narrative (Gen 12-22), then the center of the center just might be the message that “the Angel of the Lord found her” (Gen 16:7), again indicating that God is a God who hears and who responds in ways that result in blessing.

Genesis 21:8-20 (NRSV)

Command:

“But God said to Abraham, ‘**Do not be distressed** because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, **do as she tells you**’” (21:12).

So Abraham rose early in the morning (21:14)

and **took** bread and a skin of water

and **gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder,**

And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba (21:14).

Crisis:

When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes.

Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept (21:16).

And God heard the voice of the boy (21:17)

and **the angel of God** called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him” (21:17, 18).

Then God **opened her eyes** and **she saw a well of water. She went,** and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink (21:19).

Genesis 22:1-19 (NRSV)

Command:

“He said, ‘**Take your son,** your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and **offer him** there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you’” (22:2).

So Abraham rose early in the morning (22:3).

Abraham **took** the wood of the burnt offering

and **laid it on his son Isaac** (22:6).

So the two of them walked on together (22:6). So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba (22:19).

Isaac speaks:

“Father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

Abraham responds: “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (22:8).

Crisis:

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood (22:9)

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son (22:10)

but the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”

And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham call that place “The Lord will provide” as it is said this day, On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided (22:13, 14).

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