

# GIVING GOD A HAND, STORY OF ISHMAEL

By Keith Greer

" ... But one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." (Genesis 15:4) After Abram was called out of his homeland, God promised him a son, despite the fact that he and Sarah were up in years. Some eleven years passed after he left Haran, (Genesis 12:4) and still no heir. Did God forget his promise to Abram?

Sarai, Abram's wife, thought she could "give God a little help". " ... See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." (Genesis 16:2) So Abram took the Egyptian maidservant Hagar, and she conceived. The plan was going just like Sarai wanted, but before the birth of the son, Sarai began to despise Hagar, and she fled from her presence!

Yet, while she was at a spring, an angel of the Lord found her, and Hagar was instructed to go back to Sarai, and submit herself to her hand. " ... And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction." (Genesis 16:11) So when Abram was eighty-six years of age, (fourteen years before the birth of Isaac) Ishmael was born. (Genesis 16:16)

It appeared that things worked out after all. Or did they? True, Abram had a son, but was this the son of promise?

" ... Oh, that Ishmael might live before you!" (Genesis 17:18) God then told Abraham, that Sarah would have a son, being ninety years old, and Abraham being one hundred, and his name would be Isaac. " ... I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant ... " (Genesis 17:19)

What of Ishmael? At the age of thirteen, Ishmael was circumcised. (Genesis 17:25) Some time later, when a feast was given for the weaning of Isaac, Sarah saw the son of Hagar mocking Isaac. and became overwhelmed with anger towards Ishmael and Hagar. "Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac." (Genesis 21:10) This was displeasing to Abraham, but God instructed him to follow Sarah's advice, and gave Abraham this promise, "Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed." (Genesis 21:13) This is also used to illustrate the "one seed" of Christ. (Galatians 4:22-31)

Did Sarai's "helping God out" work? NO! God's child of promise was Isaac, not Ishmael. Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, " ... Nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord ... So are my ways higher than your ways ... " (Isaiah 55:8-9) God always knows best and is well able to fulfill and complete what He has promised! (Hebrews 6:18) Today the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael are still at war with one another – Arabians and Jews.

Sadly, men have not learned this lesson in our own time. God needs no help to make plans and patterns better than He designed them. Examples?

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18,19) Christ determined to build HIS church. How many “churches” do we have today? Over 3,000 different kinds of churches in our country alone! Why? Men wanted to give man “a choice.”

How is it working? Today there is confusion all over the religious world concerning the teaching of the church in its work, worship, organization and which one belongs to the Lord! Unfortunately, man’s interference into God’s design has not made it better but worse! Yet, this will always be the outcome when men seek to “give God a hand!” Why not let God be God and we will be His children and do things His way instead of inventing our own. Try it—it will work I assure you! \*\*\*