

## Who Is Your Manager? Genesis 21:1-34

Since 1929 Reed-Union Corporation has been producing top rated car detailing products. In the early 1970's it created a more durable car polish called Nu-Finish, advertising it as the once-a-year polish that will restore the finish of junkyard cars to a glimmering showroom shine. It was so successful that it revolutionized the car care industry. A family friend of ours back in the 1970's bought a GMC motorhome and to test out the product before he applied it to his brand new motorhome bought a bottle and did a test on some old Corvairs he had under tarps in his back yard. The proof, as they say, was in the pudding and sure enough there was a luster those cars hadn't seen in years. His son and I were recruited to polish the motorhome.

As a believer in Christ you have, if you will, received a Nu-Finish, one that doesn't last for a year but for eternity. In our text today through what happens between Sarah and Hagar, we will see that as a new creation we are called to cast off or put out the old nature. Let's look at the passage and then draw some application for us.

Notice first in **verses 1-7** a promise that is fulfilled.

### I. A PROMISE THAT IS FULFILLED – vs. 1-7

In these opening verses we see that God is going to fulfill the promise He made to Abraham and give him an heir through Sarah, a promise He made abundantly clear on His visit just before He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. It was the promise that Sarah laughed at in doubt, but a promise in which God said that nothing was too hard for Him. In **verses 1-2** we see that a child is born according to the promise.

#### A. A Child Is Born – vs. 1-2

The very first thing we need to see is that God's grace and promises go together. Look at the opening of **verse 1**. **“Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did what He had promised.”**

Where God has made a promise, His grace sees that it's completed. Probably the best verse where this is clearly evident is in **Ephesians 2:8** where Paul explains that it is **“By grace that we are saved.”** The promise is salvation and God's grace is the means of fulfilling that promise to those who have faith. Always remember that grace is never contingent on anything we do otherwise it isn't grace but works, which Paul explains in **verse 9** when he says that salvation is a gift of God to those who believe otherwise we could brag about it.

Because God is unchanging, He always keeps His word based on the infinite measure of His grace. But bear in mind that the fulfillment of God's promises are always and only according to His ways and His timing. Being both all-knowing and all-powerful they will never be altered by any outside force nor are they dictated by the ever-changing circumstances that we find ourselves involved in.

Whether it was through the influence of Satan himself or by the desire of his own sinful human nature, God never had to change His plans when Abraham thought that the promise of an heir would come either through his nephew Lot or his servant Eliezer or even through Ishmael.

Back in **Genesis 18:10** God clearly told Abraham that in a year they would have a son. From when God called Abraham to leave his father's house and his country so that he could be made into a great and numerous nation, it had been 25 years of waiting for that promise. That they were both dead in the sense that they were both too old physically to have children makes what happened in **verses 1-2** a miracle. It was God's gracious act to keep His promise. And notice at the end of **verse 2** that it was **“at the time God had promised.”**

Never forget that when God makes a promise a) it will happen and b) it will happen in His time according to His will at the time He says.

**Galatians 4:4-5** **“But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”**

That promise was made by God to Eve back in **Genesis 3:15**. The time that had been set by God for Christ to appear “**had fully come**” or had finally arrived, a promise that was made some 4,000 years earlier. God doesn’t operate by our timetable. His timing is always perfect at just the right time.

The time for God’s promise to be fulfilled had finally arrived and Sarah bore a son. Because of their ages, his birth defied natural law.

On September 9 of this year, the USA Today had an article about a 74-year-old woman in southern India who had given birth to her first child, twin girls. The title indicated that she may be the oldest woman to give birth. Apparently they never read the Bible or don’t believe the account recorded for us here because Sarah was 90. Or we assume that if Noah was 502 when Japheth was born his wife must have been about the same age. But what’s different here is what we saw in **verse 1**, it was the grace of God that allowed for this miracle, a miracle that would fulfill the promise of a Redeemer through this lineage.

Warren Wiersbe points out something of importance here by saying that “in spite of occasional failures, Abraham and Sarah believed God; and God honored their faith.” **Hebrews 11:11-12**

After a child is born comes the duty of naming the child.

### B. A Name Is Given – v. 3

Once the woman knows she is expecting, some couples start researching names to come up with the perfect combination. They’ll pick out both boy and girl names, that is unless they find out beforehand what the gender will be.

You have to honestly wonder about some couples though, and how much effort they really spend on choosing a name.

There was a single guy at camp for a year or so whose name was Harry Legg. He went by his middle name David.

We’ve heard of people named William Williams or how about Barry Bush.

You just have to scratch your head and ask – why?

I read a short article this week about an interview with actress Jessica Biel, who said that there were numerous requests for her to name her baby Batmo, so that the child could be called Batmo Biel.

Some couples will use a family name or the name of a friend. Other couples want to wait until the child is born in order to get a look at the newborn as if some telling feature will automatically conger up a fitting name right there on the spot.

Abraham and Sarah didn’t have to wonder what to name their son. God had already given a name back in **17:9** where they were told to name him Isaac. We discovered that his name means laughter. Naming him Isaac was a response of faith in and obedience to God doing.

Also out of obedience, they keep the covenant that was made with Abraham. We see that in **verses 4-5**.

### C. A Covenant Is Kept – vs. 4-5

God made this covenant with Abraham back in **chapter 17**, and the seal of the covenant was circumcision.

#### **Genesis 17:9-14**

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between Abraham and God. While other nations also practiced circumcision, this was now to be done by Abraham and all his descendants as a way of showing the world that they were in a covenantal relationship with God and no one else. It would be a visible and perpetual reminder of their commitment to follow and obey God only and serve no other gods. It was an oath of commitment on their part to wholly surrender and serve God alone. So, in obedience Abraham circumcised Isaac on the eighth day.

We are also in a covenant relationship with God through the shed blood, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. It is a commitment we make to serve and obey Him.

And then in **verses 6-7** we note that a cheerfulness is evident.

#### D. A Cheerfulness Is Evident – vs. 6-7

Sarah's laughter here is different than her laughter expressed back in **chapter 18**. At different times and for different reasons both Abraham and Sarah had laughed at the thought of having a child past the time of having children naturally. Abraham's laugh was one of amazement and joy in celebration of God's promise and was an expression of his faith. Sarah's laughter in **chapter 18** was one of doubt, but here it was one of joy at the fulfillment of God's promise. Everyone would now rejoice at the news. Instead of laughing at her, they would laugh with her. There would be great celebration at the news.

God's promise is fulfilled and out of obedience they do as God had instructed. So it's hard to understand how anyone could express anything other than joy, how they could be threatened by an infant. But that's what we see in this next section where we see a problem that is faced.

## II. A PROBLEM THAT IS FACED – vs. 8-21

In **verses 8-10** there is a distressing mockery.

### A. There Is A Distressing Mockery – vs. 8-10

Some experts will tell you that sibling rivalry will, at times, begin even before the child is born. The firstborn child has had mom and dad all to themselves but now thinks he or she is getting pushed out of the picture in anticipation of this perceived troublemaker, and the sibling hasn't even been born yet.

It was customary in the ancient near eastern culture to wean a child between the ages of 2 and 3 and with that milestone came a big feast. Most scholars agree that Ishmael is around 16 or 17 years old instead of a child as many Bible story books seem to depict. As a teenager, it seems a little old to be jealous of an infant, but be it as it may, Ishmael is living up to the prophesy God made about him in a meeting with Hagar in the wilderness of Shur after she was summarily booted out of the Abrahamic

home because of her scornful treatment of Sarah. God told Hagar that her son would **“be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and...he will live in hostility toward all his brothers” (Genesis 16:12).**

The actions of Ishmael show us that spirituality is not hereditary, but the sin nature is. Mocking is an intensified meaning of the word laugh. It is cynical in nature. It is rooted in jealousy and envy and is the fuel of resentment, anger, and hatred.

**Proverbs 27:4 “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?”**

**NLT “Anger is cruel, and wrath is like a flood, but who can survive the destructiveness of jealousy?”**

**John Phillips writes that “Resentment, jealousy, and hostility to the plans of God which centered in Isaac, boiled in Ishmael's soul.”**

Maybe he thought that as the firstborn he deserved the inheritance rights. Phillips goes on to say that his mocking threw away any hope for his soul. By his actions he was really turning his back on God.

Mocking does not imply violence, but Sarah could see the warning signs of trouble if something was not done right away. And once again, she calls on Abraham to intervene in this potentially distressing situation. Now, tuck in the back of your noodle Sarah's statement here because we will come back to it in a moment. Notice what she says in **verse 10; “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”**

We'll see its importance in a moment. For now, it is a distressing mockery that leads to a distressing matter that involved Abraham.

### B. There Is A Distressing Matter – vs. 11-13

The NIV uses the word **“distressed”** while the KJV uses the word **“grieved”**. It means to shake violently. This was his son Sarah was talking about, someone he had spent years talking to out

under the stars or in the fields tending flocks. One author notes that Abraham's distress was over both his love for Ishmael and legal customs of the day.

The Lipit Ishtar Code was written about 150 years before the Code of Hammurabi which had some specific laws around the treatment of slaves. The Code stipulated that the offspring of the slave wife gave up all rights to any inheritance in return for their freedom. So Abraham is left in a proverbial pickle. He loved his son, but there was also this cultural code of the day not to mention that God had promised to he and Sarah a son who would receive the promised inheritance. If Ishmael was not to be an heir, he was to be set free.

**How many of you would agree that God is in the details?**

Griffith Thomas writes that "God was taking up the tangled threads of His servant's life, and weaving them together into His divine pattern, and overhauling everything."

God spoke with Abraham about the situation and told him to listen to Sarah in which he was to send Hagar and Ishmael on their way because a) the inheritance would be passed on to Isaac, not Ishmael and b) He reaffirms with Abraham that Ishmael would also become a great nation because he was Abraham's offspring. Putting the cultural code aside, Abraham had a choice to make: the choice of whether or not he would obey God. Did he love his son more than God? It was a distressing matter, one that led to a distressing meandering.

### **C. There Is A Distressing Meandering – vs. 14-21**

Our text tells us that early the next morning Abraham obeyed God and sent them on their way with some food and water. Some think that Abraham seems to be a bit cold in the meager provisions he gave them for their journey to wherever they were headed. Others highlight the fact that they were near a major trade route hoping to catch a ride by means of the many caravans that traveled that way. What we read though is that they

were wandering in the wilderness suggesting that they were lost. Eventually their provisions ran out and they were destitute. Hagar presumed they would die and left her son under a bush and walked away so she would not see him die in agony.

Apparently Hagar had forgotten the promise that God had made back in **chapter 16** when He assured her that her son would become a great nation. She had forgotten that she called the place Beer Lahai Roi or the God who sees me. She felt alone and abandoned. Even though she may have forgotten God, God had not forgotten her or His promise. God had once again seen and heard. This passage gives us several important truths about God that we would do well to remember ourselves.

**Verse 17** – God heard the boy

**Verse 17** – God called to Hagar

**Verse 18** – I will make the boy

**Verse 19** – God opened her eyes

**Verse 20** – God was with the boy

For us:

God hears our cries

God calls to us through His Word

God will make us according to His plan

God will open our eyes to see

God is with us

God extended to Hagar and Ishmael His grace. Let's remember something about God. His saving grace is extended to any and all who by faith come to Him for salvation, which is given to those who believe. There is not a general salvation as some suggest that over time everyone will eventually be saved and receive eternal life. Saving grace is only for the person who by faith believes Christ died for their sins, repents and trusts Christ for salvation.

But there is what we might call a supplying grace that God extends to everyone whether a believer or not. What I mean by that is that God provides for everyone things that will sustain them. **Matthew 5:45** says that He makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust alike meaning that regardless of whether a person is a believer or not, both the unbelieving and believing farmer alike will get rain.

God promised to take care of Ishmael and He wasn't going to go back on His word. His grace supplied for their need.

**Psalm 102:17 “He [God] will respond to the prayer of the destitute; He will not despise their plea.”**

**“He will pay attention to the prayer of the destitute and will not despise their prayer.”  
(Christian Standard Bible)**

Without provisions, Hagar was without hope. They were destitute. But Ishmael's cries were heard by God and He responded, once again intervening in order to fulfill His promise to Hagar.

Hagar may have forgotten about the promise of God, but God had not forgotten the promise to her. He opened her eyes and she saw the provision of God in a nearby well that would meet their needs. Unlike her first encounter with God we do not see here any indication of special gratitude on her part for God's provision.

We may at times feel like our situation is hopeless. We feel abandon, alone, destitute and God comes along and opens our eyes to see His provision. Trust Him in His promises.

The passage now shifts away from the joy and tension in the Abrahamic home to that of another meeting. Enter once again King Abimelech. He has had his eye on Abraham ever since he left after lying about his relationship with Sarah. We pick it up in **verse 22** where we see a proposal that is favorable.

### **III.A PROPOSAL THAT IS FAVORABLE – vs. 22-34**

In their earlier encounter Abraham said of the king and the culture that there was no fear of God in the land. Now it seems that there is at least some acknowledgment of God by the king. In **verses 22-23** there is a plea that is explained.

#### **A. A Plea Is Explained – vs. 22-23**

In their earlier encounter Abraham was told he

could live anywhere in the land. Based on **verse 33** it looks like he moved to Beersheba, which was the southernmost point of the land promised to him. Abimelech had rightly observed that God was with Abraham in everything he did. He was blessed by God. Because of that blessing Abimelech wanted in on the deal. Knowing how Abraham had treated him earlier he wanted an assurance that Abraham wouldn't deal with him as he had before. He wanted the same kindness extended to him by Abraham as he had shown Abraham. It sounds a lot like the Golden Rule principle – Do to others as you would have them do to you.

I treated you with kindness. Now you do the same in return.

The request, though, is more than just showing an act of kindness, it also speaks of extending friendship to the king. I think Abimelech wanted a bit of God's favor to come his way as well. Let's be friends so your God can bless me too.

Abraham must have learned his earlier lesson and in **verse 24** a pledge is exchanged.

#### **B. A Pledge Is Exchanged – v. 24**

He agreed to the king's request for friendship. After all, if Abraham had originally intended to have some business with the people in that region then it would make good sense to make a pledge by treating them with kindness for the purpose of friendship. But if there was going to be an agreement of kindness and friendship, there was a little problem, one small matter that needed to be addressed. It's noted for us in **verses 25-31**.

#### **C. A Predicament Is Exposed – vs. 25-31**

Abraham complained that a well he had dug had been seized by king's men. They ran Abraham's servants off the land and took control of the well. You want to be friends, but the actions of your servants don't agree with your request. What they did doesn't sound very friendly. You want to be friends and have me extend kindness to you, what about your actions? Abraham perhaps thought this to be a bit hypocritical coming from someone whose servants seized his well.

**Galatians 4:21-5:1**

The king claimed he didn't know anything about it, but would take care of the matter. Abraham then moved forward with the treaty and gave a gift to the king from his flocks. They may have even been some of the very animals the king had given him earlier. Abraham then gave seven additional lambs as a witness between the two of them that the well rightfully belonged to him. This act secured the legal right of Abraham to live in the land. They made the covenant that day and the place was called Beersheba which means well of the oath or well of the seven, referring to the seven lambs, after which they parted company.

The closing verses describe a prayer that is expressed.

**D. A Prayer Is Expressed – vs. 32-34**

There isn't anything significant about the type of tree or bush that Abraham planted. A tamarisk tree was small in size with leafy branches that provided good shade under which to get out of the sun. What is of significance is what Abraham did next. **“He called on the name of the Lord, the eternal God.”**

Planting the tamarisk tree may have been a way of saying that he was going to stay in the land. A further indication of his permanence there is in the name that he called on God. He referred to Him as the eternal God. It refers to God as the God of the eternal covenant. It was a time of worship. His faith is continuing to grow.

As we conclude this chapter, we see that Abraham both worshipped God and was content to wait for God. It took him a while to learn that lesson, that God's plans and timetable aren't ours. Now he will wait for God, a time period that will last about 14 or so years when he will once again face an important test of faith. But that's for next week.

To close out the message I want to come back to Sarah and Hagar for a moment. They are a picture in contrast and it is in this contrast that we find a personal foundation.

**IV. A PERSONAL FOUNDATION**

Sarah and Hagar show us the contrast between law and grace, between works and grace. The Galatian believers were being taught that salvation required not only faith but also adherence to the Law. Some were believing these false teachers. In his letter, Paul was showing them that adherence to the law was bondage but following grace through faith was freedom and he used the example of Sarah and Hagar to show the difference and persuade the Galatians not to go back to living by the law as a supposed means of salvation. He reminded his readers that Abraham had two sons by two women and to consider which son they were most like.

According to ancient law, the status of the mother affected the status of the son. Isaac was born to a free woman, Ishmael was born to a slave woman. Did the Galatians want to be like the free woman or the slave woman? In their commentary, Walvoord and Zuck write **“Ishmael was born in the ordinary way, that is, in the course of nature and required no miracle and no promise of God. Isaac, on the other hand, was born as the result of a promise.”**

Paul closed out the chapter by stating that just as Isaac had a supernatural birth so the Christian experiences a supernatural birth that can only come as a result of God's intervention. As a child of promise we should therefore not live as a child of bondage. As Christians we are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman.

What Sarah did to Hagar in having her cast out speaks to what we are to do when we become a Christian. **II Corinthians 5:17** explains it best. **“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away behold all things have become new.”**

The MESSAGE says **“Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it!”**

When Adam and Eve were created they were without sin, they had the factory new shine, but sin

tarnished them and all their descendants. We needed Christ to come and die for us so that we could apply the Nu Finish of His sacrificial blood to our sin stained lives and give us a new shine once again. As a new creation in Christ we are then to cast out the old nature just as Sarah cast out the bond woman. The new birth demands the expulsion of the flesh. Sarah represents the spiritual while Hagar represents the flesh. As a new creation we are under new management.

For Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael is, in a sense, the same as our need to die to the world and to the flesh, to put it out because we are made new. There is no room for both. It can be painful but if we are going to live as a new creation, we must cast off the old.

Years ago a very large man was saved at a Salvationist meeting. He came back home elated to share the good news with his wife. He went back again to the meetings and enjoyed his salvation, but one day, he returned home looking sad. His wife wanted to know what was wrong. "Well," he said, "everyone at the meeting has a red jersey except me." That was no problem to his wife. She knitted him one – a great, big, enormous jersey, as big as a tent. He put it on and went happily off to the meeting, but back he came again looking as downcast as ever. Again his wife wanted to know what was wrong. "Oh," he said, "everyone at the Salvationist meeting has nice white letters on his jersey. I don't have any on mine." "Well, I can't read or write," said the wife. "Neither can you, but leave your jersey with me and I'll see what I can do." Across the street, a man was painting a sign on a store window and the wife decided she could copy the letters the painter was making, and so she did. She copied everything onto his jersey. That night the fellow went off to the meeting proudly wearing his jersey with the new letters on it. He came home, his face wreathed in smiles. "You've done it, my dear," he exclaimed, "you've done it. Everyone said I had the best jersey of them all." She had written in big white letters all across the enormous front of his jersey, "This business is under new management."

The old business Abraham was under was under old management and he had to cast it out because with Isaac he was under new management and in the capable hands of the God who made it possible.

**Are you a new creation in Christ made possible only by grace through faith?** If not, trust Christ today and you will become a new creation, under new management. Any other way is no way. Let Him put a coat of Nu Finish on you so you can shine for Him.

**If you are in Christ, have you completely cast out the old nature?**

If you are in Christ the old has passed away.