The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:9-21)

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Abstract: The episode of Hagar and Ishmael’s expulsion is reevaluated within the framework of typical reactions of a scorned woman. If it is assumed that Abraham tried to resolve his marital problems by separating Hagar and Ishmael from his household and settling them with their kin Muzrimites, then most of the textual difficulties are naturally resolved. Even if we interpret the Masoretic Text as an identification of Hagar being an Egyptian, nothing in the text compels us to conclude that she intended to return to Egypt on foot. There is biblical evidence that the relations between Ishmael and Isaac (and, perhaps, Abraham) were not severed. The geography of the region supports continued contact between Abraham, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael.

Heav’n has no rage like love to hatred turn’d
Nor Hell a fury, like a woman scorn’d.

William Congreve (1670-1729)¹

INTRODUCTION

Hagar is mentioned in Genesis 16:1-16, 21:9-21, and 25:12. Of these texts the most problematic is Genesis 21:9-21, which deals with the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham’s household, their travails in the desert, salvation by a divine agent, and settlement in the wilderness of Paran.² This episode describes events so uncharacteristic to some of the actors that they did not fail to baffle the serious reader of the Masoretic Text since well in the past. Two decades ago Wiesel wrote “Abraham is synonymous with loyalty and absolute fidelity; his life a symbol of religious perfection. And yet a shadow hovers over one aspect of his life. In his exalted biography, we encounter a painful episode which puzzles us. This is a situation in which Abraham, the husband, is an agonizing enigma. We refer, of

¹ Closing line of act III of The Mourning Bride, first produced in 1697.
course, to his behavior toward his concubine Hagar and their son Ishmael."

A ‘reality check’ of the story in Genesis 21:9-21 raises some obvious questions. One naturally wonders about the following points.

1. Why a rich man as Abraham did not provide his wife and son with some more substantial means for sustenance and transportation when expelled from his house?
2. How could Abraham let his wife and son go into the desert without being concerned for their personal safety?
3. Why was it necessary to carry a teenage boy as Ishmael and how could Hagar do it for a long distance?
4. How could Hagar venture into the wilderness of Beer-sheba carrying a child and being so ill equipped? Why didn’t she retrace her steps back seeing that she is in unfamiliar terrain?
5. How could Hagar hope to cross an arid wilderness with a child on her way to Egypt, as many commentators assert?
6. In the described episode Ishmael is entirely passive. How is that possible or why is it so?

A closer analysis of the text reveals that much has been left unsaid and needs to be deciphered from the allusions, context, and logic of the narrative. The reader is naturally intrigued by such questions as the following:

1. What was the nature of Ishmael’s ‘playing’ (מצחק) that triggered such a forceful reaction from Sarah?
2. In what manner was Ishmael’s ‘playing’ related to the inheritance?
3. Did Ishmael’s status in Abraham’s household automatically assure him rights of inheritance?
4. Was Sarah’s demand for Hagar’s and Ishmael’s expulsion a consequence of the fact that Isaac survived the critical period of an infant’s life in antiquity, The child grew and was weaned (Gen 21:8)?
5. Sarah emphasized in her demand for Hagar and Ishmael’s expulsion that Hagar was a ‘slave-woman’ (אמה) and Ishmael is the son of a slave (אמו בן). What was the legal ground for Sarah’s demand?
6. What did Sarah really demand?
7. What were Abraham’s sentiments toward Hagar and Ishmael?
8. Did God validate Sarah’s claim that Hagar’s status was that of a ‘slave-woman’ (אמות), by stressing in His communication to Abraham that Hagar was his ‘slave-woman’ (אמותך)?
9. Why does God depersonalize Hagar and Ishmael by calling them ‘slave-woman’ and ‘lad’ rather than by their personal names?
10. How could God be party to what appears to be an act of inhumanity?
11. Why does God stress in Genesis 21:17 twice that God heard the lad crying, though the Bible does not mention him speak or cry, while the crying of Hagar is not noted by God though the Bible says And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept (Gen 21:16)?

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12. The phrase *where he is* (בֶּן הַיָּהָ שָׁב) appears superfluous in Genesis 21:17, why was it included?

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the issues raised by the presented questions and to provide a consistent explanation of the biblical text. In doing so each of the questions posed would, hopefully, be answered, though they would not be addressed specifically and seriatim. We shall present our approach under the headings TRIGGERING EVENT, RESOLUTION, EXECUTION, HAGAR’S REVENGE, DIVINE INTERVENTION, and ACCEPTANCE, which present the milestones in the logical and linear evolution of the Masoretic Text.

TRIGGERING EVENT

The Masoretic Text seems to imply that Sarah was compelled to act in a forceful and determined manner when she saw Ishmael *מצחק*. What does *מצחק* mean? The Septuagint felt that the verse is too abrupt and adds to *מצחק* “with Isaac her son” (µετὰ ὥσπερ Σαρὰς Ναμύνας ἀνήκει). Since the Samaritan Bible has the same text as the Masoretic Text it is likely that the Septuagint addition is intended to make the reading smoother and is not original. The Septuagint renders *מצחק* “sporting” (παίζοντα), Targum Onqelos has “laughs at” (Ṁךײך), Peshitta has “mocking,” and Vulgate has “mocks” (ludentem).4 Targum Jonathan also expands, saying “was obscene to idolatry and bowed to God” (נוכראה לפולחנא נווֹקך לײוֹגחין). Josephus (Ant. 1:214-215), purportedly presenting the episode “with great exactness,” does not refer to *מצחק*. In his account, Sarah at first loved Ishmael with affection not inferior to that of her own son. However, “when she herself had borne Isaac, she was not willing that Ishmael should be brought up with him, as being too old for him, and able to do him injuries when their father should be dead.” Ishmael’s age advantage would have put him in control of the property, in case of Abraham’s death, or might have prompted him to physically eliminate Isaac, as was the case in successions among royalty. Paul, in his allegorical treatment of Hagar’s expulsion, seems to have interpreted *מצחק* “persecuted” (Gal 4:29).

The term *מצחק*, attributed to Ishmael, also intrigued the Talmudic Sages. Some considered the act in which Ishmael was involved as being of a negative nature, others considered it positively. We find in Genesis Rabba 53:11:

Said R’ Shimon Bar Yochai: R’ Akiba says about it [מצחק] something derogatory and I say about it something positive. R’ Akiba explained that *מצחק* is nothing but incest even as you read in the Scriptures (בֶּן אֲלֵי הַעֲבָדָה אֲשֶׁר בָּא לְפָנֵי בַיָּהָ שָׁב, Gen 39:17). This teaches that Sarah our Matriarch used to see Ishmael copulating with women working in the field and ambushing other peoples’ wives and then raping them. Taught R’ Ishmael the term *מצחק* is nothing but idolatry, as the Scriptures say (וְיָשָׁה הַנָּעִיר נֶאֶקָם, Ex 32:6). This teaches that Sarah our Matriarch used to see Ishmael building altars and hunt grasshoppers and sacrifice upon them. R’ Elazar the son of R’ Yehuda the President says the term *מצחק* is nothing but murder even as you read in the Scriptures (וְיָשָׁה הַנָּעִיר נֶאֶקָם, 2Sam 2:14). R’ Azariah, quoting R’ Levi, said: Said to him Ishmael, “Let’s go and see our share in the field.” And Ishmael used to take a bow and arrows, shoot them at Isaac, and make appear as if he did it in jest. That is

4 The Vulgate divides the verses somewhat differently. It reads Gen 21:9 cumque vidisset Sarra filium Agar Aegyptiae ludentem dixit ad Abraham (And when Sara had seen the son of Agar the Egyptian playing she said to Abraham:).
what is written: אומר אלה מסתמכ אניภמהלולו ויהרה קוק וה, כ איבש רמה את רעה (Prov 26:18-19). But I consider it positively. The term מצחק is nothing but inheritance. When Isaac had been born, all were happy. Said to them Ishmael: “I am the firstborn and I take two shares.” From Sarah’s retort to Abraham, for the son of the woman-slave would not inherit with my son, you learn that he [Ishmael] would not inherit with my son even if he [the son] is not Isaac, and with Isaac even if he is not my son. So much so (כמאר) with my son with Isaac.

R’ Akiba’s opinion that מצחק refers to immoral behavior does not seem to have any relation to the issue of sharing in the inheritance of Abraham’s wealth. Similarly, one would be hard pressed to justify the exclusion of Ishmael from the inheritance on religious grounds as R’ Ishmael suggests. Certainly Abraham would have been aware of Ishmael’s behavior as much as Sarah and he clearly did not favor the expulsion of Ishmael, considering him his legitimate son (Gen 21:11). It is also hard to accept R’ Elazar’s view that מצחק refers to murder. How could Sarah, confined to the women tents be an eyewitness to such acts? For this same reason we have also to reject R’ Azariah’s suggestion. We find much merit in the opinion of R’ Shimon bar Yochai that מצחק is connected with the issue of inheritance. Ishmael was “chuckling” because he assumed that as the firstborn he would inherit the bulk of the property.

Of the Classical Jewish commentators Sa’adiah (882-942) translates מצחק “deceive, mock.” Rashi (1040-1105) uses Genesis Rabba 53:11 for his interpretation but manages to turn what R’ Shimon bar Yochai considered a positive understanding of מצחק (“chuckling”) into the negative “he quarrels with Isaac over the estate” (פְּרָרָב תָּא צִיוָּח קָלוֹר). Ibn Ezra considers being normal behavior of a boy the age of Ishmael. What was then the cause of Sarah’s displeasure? Ibn Ezra (1089-c. 1164) suggests that it was maternal jealousy, since Isaac was smaller than Ishmael at comparable age. However, experience with child growth must have taught mothers even in antiquity that a child’s development is not uniform and often comes in spurts. One can cast doubt on the validity of Ibn Ezra’s suggestion. Kimchi (1160-1235) senses some sneering in מצחק. He says, מַכְּלֶס מִקְּלֶס מִלְּכַט עַל צִיוָּח שֵׁנִי (as if he derided Isaac for being born of an old couple). This explanation fails, however, to make any link with the inheritance, which is Sarah’s expressed worry. Moreover, Abraham was no youngster when he fathered Ishmael. Nachmanides (1194-1270) assumes that Sarah’s observation occurred on the day of the weaning feast. Sarah saw that Ishmael mocks Isaac or the feast. She reasoned that a slave who mocks his Lord deserves a lashing or death. Instead she demanded expulsion and forfeit of any inheritance rights. Since Ishmael could not survive at his age by himself also Hagar was to be expelled. One is surprised that Nachmanides who is so sensitive to proper conduct in the Hagar episodes would accept such a legalistic approach with respect to two small children.

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5 J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, Midrash Bereshit Rabba (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1965), 567-569. All the references to Midrash Rabba are to this critical edition. In Tosefta Sotah 6:6 it is R’ Shimon Ben Elazar. Note also that in the Tosefta there are other variations in this Midrash.

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7 Nachmanides ad loc observes that R’ Azariah’s suggestion, quoted in part by Rashi, cannot be correct. For Ishmael to argue with Isaac about the inheritance or venture into the fields on the pretext of surveying their lot would require assuming that Isaac was a big boy up to these activities. This would, however, make Ishmael much older than 17 and too heavy to be carried by Hagar.
Sarah realized Ishmael has grown up to be able to play some challenging games, and she did not want him to compete with Isaac for the inheritance. Abarbanel (1437-1508) considers מצחק as “enjoying” the prerogatives of a firstborn in the household (ירושתו באית). Sarah felt that this status should belong to Isaac, and if continued would firm Ishmael’s claim on the inheritance. Sforno (1475-1550) says, מלעיג המלעיג מהאבות לשנת עברנה באומרו,

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Among Christian commentators in the 16th century, Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, understood that Ishmael “mocked” Isaac and encouraged other boys to do likewise. This in his opinion did not warrant so harsh a punishment as exile. Indeed, it would not. The difference of age between Isaac and Ishmael makes this proposition altogether unrealistic. What kind of a social relation could there have been between a child just weaned and a teenager? Calvin believed that Ishmael’s offense was verbal abuse consisting of malignant derision, contempt, impious mockery, canine and profane laughter, and petulance. Doing so Ishmael insulted God’s grace and God’s word, as well as the faith of his father. Luther, though very sympathetic to Hagar, thinks that she sinned through pride, incited Ishmael to covet the primogeniture, and Ishmael’s mockery was a serious effrontery.

Speiser, who accepts the Septuagint version, says, “Ishmael would now be at least fifteen years old. But his ‘playing’ with Isaac need mean no more than that the older boy was trying to amuse his little brother. There is nothing in the text to suggest that he was abusing him, a motive deduced by many troubled readers in their effort to account for Sarah’s anger.” Similarly, Wiesel suggests that like any older brother, Ishmael tried to play tricks on Isaac, play with his younger brother, laugh with Isaac or make him laugh. While this might be correct, it would leave the cause of Sarah’s anger unexplained. Indeed, it seems that the Bible intended the link between التמרות והתרומד (Gen 21:9-10) to be viewed in a causative sense (cf. Vulgate). Skinner also accepts the Septuagint version and finds the source for Sarah’s maternal jealousy in the very spectacle “of two young children playing together, innocent of social distinctions.” Trible considers מצחק as having the sexual sense of “masturbating.” Reis understands מצחק as referring to drunkenness. She says, “We do not have to wonder why Ishmael is to be disinherited. He has become tipsy at the feast. He is of the right age to be curious, to experiment and to make a spectacle of himself.” One wonders if such one time behavior was cause enough for banishment of mother and son from the household.

The Piel participle of צחק occurs only in Genesis 19:14, 21:19, and 26:8, seems to

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9 Thompson, 221.
10 Thompson, 225.
11 E. A. Speiser, Genesis, AB 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 155. Speiser does not explain what enraged Sarah so much that she demanded expulsion. Perhaps he thought that Sarah sensed danger in the close relation between the brothers, which might lead to sharing the inheritance.
12 Wiesel, 236, 239, 245.
15 P.T. Reis, “Hagar Requited,” Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 87 (2000) 95-96. Reis notes that this sense would be proper in Genesis 19:14 and 26:8, the only other places in the Pentateuch where מצחק is used.

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imply “jest” and “playfulness.” In Genesis 21:9, the context probably admit for מצחק “sardonic chuckling,” in line with a number of commentators. Certainly, the birth of Isaac was an upset for the expectations and designs that Hagar and Ishmael had with respect to the aging Abraham’s wealth. When Isaac survived the critical first years of an infant’s life, the reality of a viable and preferred competitor must have been a bitter pill to swallow. It would not surprise, if at the weaning party the desperate Ishmael made some comments of the nature suggested by R’ Shimon bar Yochai, or might have even called into question the legitimacy of Isaac being Abraham’s son, as suggested by Sforno. Perhaps the verse should be read against the cantillation signs thus: לאברהם, ילדה אשר המצרית הגר בן את שרה ותרא מצחק (Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian that she bore, mocking Abraham). Sarah could have heard and seen Ishmael making these remarks since only a flimsy separation was usually in place between the men and women on such occasions. In this context Sarah’s sharp reaction and specific words that she uses would make eminent sense. What Sarah hears triggers in her mind potential battles over the inheritance, her son’s legitimacy, and her own good name. Similarly, Westermann understands מצחק in the sense of Sarah looking into the future and seeing Ishmael becoming a source of trouble for Isaac.

RESOLUTION

What was going on in Sarah’s mind is epitomized by the single word גרש. This word encapsulated Sarah’s problem and solution. Hagar, with whom Abraham dwells in her household, wants to inherit, thus she must be expelled. While consciously Sarah is very careful not to deign Hagar with a name, but rather denigrates her and her son as slaves, in her subconscience Hagar looms large, she has a name, cohabitates with Abraham (?), and is out to replace Sarah. Her son Ishmael מצחק would orally echo מצחק אם, רשת, קדש, ושאינו פי על עיניה (if he sardonically chuckles). C. Westermann, Genesis 12-36: A Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 339.

According to the laws of Lipit-Ishtar (c. 1864 – c. 1854 BCE) the offsprings of a

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16 R’ Nissim of Gerona (c.1290-c.1375) wrote that the weaning feast was made when it was clear that the child is healthy and strong, no more at risk of child diseases.

17 The usual construct would have been מצחק. However, the reverse construct is also attested (Deut 33:12, Gen 12:16, 25:6, 45:22, 1Sam 24:14, 1Kgs 2:26, 21:23, Job 32:12, Jer 51:49, Hos 11:2, etc.), mostly in poetic texts.

18 Note that in Gen 21:10 the seemingly superfluous יצחק עם would orally echo אם מצחק אמש (‘if he sardonically chuckles”).


20 Note that Rashi interprets יצחק somewhat differently than I do. It seems from Judges 11:2 that even if Hagar were not a slave, expulsion from the household would have denied Ishmael a share in Abraham’s estate. See, however, S. Loewenstamm, “ירושה,” in Encyclopaedia Biblica, III (Jerusalem: Bialik Inst., 1958), 791.
slave-wife relinquish their inheritance rights in return for their freedom.21 The relevant paragraphs in the Code of Hammurabi (1728-1686 BCE) are §144-§147 and §170-§171. These paragraphs are usually assumed to say,

§144: If a man take a wife and this woman give her husband a maid-servant, and she bear him children, but this man wishes to take another wife, this shall not be permitted to him; he shall not take a second wife.

§145: If a man take a wife, and she bear him no children, and he intend to take another wife: if he take this second wife, and bring her into the house, this second wife shall not be allowed equality with his wife.

§146: If a man take a wife and she give this man a maid-servant as wife and she bear him children, and then this maid assume equality with the wife: because she has borne him children her master shall not sell her for money, but he may keep her as a slave, reckoning her among the maid-servants.

§147: If she have not borne him children, then her mistress may sell her for money.

§170: If his wife bear sons to a man, or his maid-servant have borne sons, and the father while still living says to the children whom his maid-servant has borne: “My sons,” and he count them with the sons of his wife; if then the father die, then the sons of the wife and of the maid-servant shall divide the paternal property in common. The son of the wife is to partition and choose.

§171: If, however, the father while still living did not say to the sons of the maid-servant: “My sons,” and then the father dies, then the sons of the maid-servant shall not share with the sons of the wife, but the freedom of the maid and her sons shall be granted. The sons of the wife shall have no right to enslave the sons of the maid; the wife shall take her dowry (from her father), and the gift that her husband gave her and deeded to her (separate from dowry, or the purchase-money paid her father), and live in the home of her husband: so long as she lives she shall use it, it shall not be sold for money. Whatever she leaves shall belong to her children.

As we see, these laws prescribe that the sons of a slave-wife share the inheritance equally with the sons of the free woman, provided the father, at his own discretion, legitimizes them. Should he not recognize them as his sons, the slave and her children are given their freedom.22 It is not clear whether the husband has to legitimize his sons from a slave in case when she was provided by his own wife for the purpose of bearing a heir.23 However, according to a Nuzi tablet the expulsion of a concubine’s children is forbidden.24 Greenspahn notes “Although the story of Hagar’s and Ishmael’s expulsion is frequently compared with provisions in several ancient Near Eastern law codes, none is entirely analogous.”25 Indeed, as de Vaux notes, paragraphs §144-§147 of the Code of Hammurabi do not speak in general terms but refer to a nadîtu and šugîtu, which are apparently priestesses of different rank.26 While this may be technically true, it is not clear to what degree these codes served

22 Pritchard, 173, § 171. The Code of Hammurabi was based on earlier legislation that Hammurabi codified and organized into regulations for his extended territories.

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as a paradigm for proper behavior and as underpinnings of a legalistic argument. Abraham and Sarah, who came from Ur of the Chaldees, were apparently aware of these laws and seem to use them to justify their arguments.27

Abarbanel considers another aspect of this domestic problem. He says, “Being a concubine of Abraham it was improper for Hagar to stay in his house together with his main wife. Rather she should stay by herself in a different house and the man should visit her secretly. For if she stays in the same house [as the main wife] and Sarah dies or Abraham dies, then she becomes the main wife and her sons would inherit the estate.” Abarbanel reiterates, “A woman that gives birth to a child in a man’s house and continues to stay with him in that house, which is his residence, is his legal wife and her children are entitled to inherit after the man’s death.” Abarbanel deduces that Sarah’s main concern was Hagar’s presence in the house from the fact that the Bible says Drive out this maid and her son (Gen 21:10) rather than Drive out that son of the maid and his mother. Expulsion of Ishmael only would not have obviated his claim to the estate.

It seems that we would not be wrong in conceiving the entire Hagar episode evolving according to the social customs and legal procedures of its time. According to the Code of Hammurabi a barren woman could give her maid to the husband to bear him children. Sarah did that. Since the Bible does not outright say anything about a legitimization process for Ishmael of the kind referred to in the Code of Hammurabi, perhaps Abraham never officially did it. The Code of Hammurabi also prescribes that in case the woman chosen by a wife and given to her husband becomes arrogant, she would lose her new status and become a slave again. Sarah implies that. Thus Sarah could legally demand that Hagar and her son who are slaves (האמה and האמה בן in Gen 21:10 rather than הגר בן) be given their freedom (גרש)28, thereby renouncing all claim to a share of the family estate.29 The ancient law was on Sarah’s side, but family dynamics were stacked against her.

While the relationship between Abraham and Hagar is presented as being somewhat distant, there is no doubt that Abraham developed over more than a decade a close relation

Vaux says, “On a comparé cette coutume aux dispositions du Code de Hammurabi, §§144-147: la comparaison est valable, mais elle doit être précisée. Dans le Code, il s’agit du mariage entre un homme libre et un nadîtu. Si la nadîtu a donné une servante (amta) à son mari et lui a fait ainsi avoir des enfants, le mari n’a pas le droit de prendre comme femme une šugîtu (§144); si la nadîtu ne lui a pas ainsi fait avoir des enfants, le mari peut prendre une šugîtu mais celle-ci n’a pas le même rang que la nadîtu (§145); si la servante ainsi épousée (§144) veut s’égaler à la nadîtu, sa maîtresse peut la vendre (§146); si elle u’a pass eu des enfants, sa maîtresse peut la vendre (§147). D’après l’opinion la plus probable, la nadîtu est une prêtresse, qui peut se marier mais qui ne peut pas avoir d’enfants, la šugîtu est une prêtresse d’un moindre rang, qui peut se marier et avoir des enfants.”27 Ur of the Chaldees is now identified with Ur, a major city in Southern Mesopotamia, 160 miles from the present head of the Persian Gulf and 220 miles south south-east of Baghdad.

28 Trible, Texts of Terror, 22. This understanding of הָגֵר would not fit the scenario presented by Trible in which Hagar is the victim and God sides with the oppressor.

29 Hepner, G. “The Affliction and Divorce of Hagar Involves Violations of the Covenant and Deuteronomic Codes,” Zeitchrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte 8 (2002) 192. Hepner claims that “the key to Sarah’s demand ostensibly lies in a clause in Lipit-Ishtar where it is stipulated that if the father grants freedom to a slave woman and the children she has borne him they forfeit their share of the paternal property (Jud 11:1-3). Sarah asks Abraham to exercise that legal right in the same way that he does in the case of the sons of his concubine Keturah (Gen 25:6).” However, the two cases are not the same. Hagar is not a concubine, she is a wife, an extension of Sarah. Ishmael does not receive any “presents” as the sons of the concubine do. Note that Rashi’s manuscript apparently had in Gen 25:6 the defective 결льцמ (as did that of R’ Yehudah (Genesis Rabba 61:4)). I suggest instead of (גֶּרֶשׁ נַפְלִים נַפְלִים יַאֲדוֹת אֲדוֹת לְנָפְלִים אֲדוֹת אֲדוֹת הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם H) read וְחַלְקָת הָאָרָם הָאָרָם הָאָרָם H, resolving the difficulties with having the plural הָאָרָם H.
with Ishmael, considering him in word and act his son. Numerous references to Ishmael as the son of Abraham (Gen 16:15, 17:23, 25, 26, 21:11, 25:9, 12, 28:9) and the status of Hagar as Abraham’s wife (Gen 16:2-3) make it clear that his status was at least de-facto that of a legitimized son.30 Greenspahn says, “the patriarchal blessing passed through Abraham’s second son Isaac, even though the birth of Ishmael, his older brother, is presented in a way that should have ensured his complete legitimacy.”31 This, naturally frightened Sarah. Thus, at the first opportunity she demanded expulsion of mother and son. Typically, Abraham’s reaction to Sarah’s demand is one of deep displeasure, in particular because it concerned his son (Gen 21:11). Though Abraham appears indifferent to the fate of the pregnant Hagar (Gen 16:6) and to her expulsion (Gen 21:11) he is completely shaken by Sarah’s demand regarding Ishmael.

Divine intervention sides completely and unequivocally with Sarah. Hagar is a slave and only through Isaac will Abraham’s genealogy continue (בראשית יְהַוֵּיהוּ לָךְ לְדֹנִי, but undeniably Ishmael is an offspring of Abraham (בראשית יְהַוֵּיהוּ). Abraham is commanded by God “Whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says” (Gen 21:12). God’s communication to Abraham reveals also something that Abraham gallantly tried to conceal and Sarah with her womanly intuition sensed. Abraham was becoming comfortable with Hagar.32 She is young, dynamic, proud, a free spirit. She is also the mother of his oldest son. Hagar may have learned her lesson after the first escape and became a true wife for Abraham. God’s communication underscores this fact by saying, Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid (לְךָ רָאשׁ וּלְעַל הָנֵר). In Sarah’s eyes the slave and her boy became family breakers. In Hagar’s eyes she had found a comfortable niche with solid prospects for her son. From this perspective Sarah’s resolution and Hagar’s subsequent acts obtain their logical framework.

EXECUTION

The send away of Hagar has baffled many. Josephus (Ant. 1:215) understood the situation in Genesis 21:11 as one in which Sarah “persuaded Abraham to send him [Ishmael] and his mother to another country.” This would not have, obviously, resolved the inheritance issue, nor is it clear that such a solution was realistic in those days. Josephus, however, indicates some unease with the expulsion. Targum Jonathan seems to be bothered by the fact that Abraham did not execute Sarah’s demand and did not ויגרשה but rather ויסלחה. So Targum Jonathan explains “and he divorced her with a letter of divorce” (וַיַּפְרֹץ וַיִּרְסֶה). Yet, Abraham had no grounds for divorcing Hagar nor would such an act have de-

30 Though a concubine can be called a wife (Keturah in Gen 25:1 and 1Chr 1:32; Bilhah in Gen 30:4 and 35:22), Hagar is never called a concubine.
31 Greenspahn, 13.
32 C. Gordon, “Hagar: A Throw-Away Character among the Matriarchs?” in Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers Anaheim, CA, 1985, ed. H. K. Richards (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 274. Gordon suggests that Abraham is detached from Hagar, and that she remains a non-person in Abraham’s ethical and emotional life. This perception seems to be erroneous, as Gen 21:12 indicates. Reis (98) says, “God who reads his heart, chides him for his insensibility to Hagar’s welfare by pointedly telling him not to be upset over the lad and over his slave.” If Abraham needed chiding in this case he certainly needed it in Gen 16. Yet, we find no trace of chiding in Gen 17 where God appears to Abraham. In the context, it makes good sense that Abraham expressed his displeasure regarding the expulsion of his son but kept quiet about his feelings toward Hagar. Cf. Kimchi on Gen 21:12 and Abarbanel ad loc.
nied Ishmael his share in the inheritance (cf. Keli Yakar ad loc). The Midrash finds Abraham and his household magnanimous in providing Hagar and Ishmael with water and bread though he was not ordered to do so (Genesis Rabba 53:13). Such a position can only be understood as an indication of the Midrash not being able to find anything magnanimous in Abraham’s actions.

Abraham’s lack of magnanimity bothered also later commentators. Classical Jewish commentators, accepting the divine dictum of expulsion, found it strange that a rich man as Abraham provided Hagar and her son with so little. Rashi, relying on the Midrash says on Genesis 21:14 that in short while, after the rage will leave Sarah, he will bring them back into the household (Maharsha, R’ Sh. Luria 1510-1573).

The super-commentary on Rashi (Rashi’s midrashic interpretation. He says, (הרוגז Abraham give Ishmael silver and gold? We have to say that Abraham thought that in a short while, after the rage will leave Sarah, he will bring them back into the household (Maharsha, R’ Sh. Luria 1510-1573)).

Ibn Ezra puts the blame on Sarah saying, (The simple explanation is that Ishmael did not adopt bad practices. Why did not Abraham give Ishmael silver and gold? We have to say that Abraham thought that in a short while, after the rage will leave Sarah, he will bring them back into the household (Maharsha, R’ Sh. Luria 1510-1573)).

Ibn Ezra’s explanation is rather weak, for the Bible does not mention Sarah forbidding Abraham to properly supply Hagar and Ishmael. What Abraham did later is really no proof regarding Sarah’s stinginess or open-handedness. It seems that Ibn Ezra understood the weakness of his first explanation so he also raises the possibility that Abraham gave Hagar and Ishmael silver and gold but it was not mentioned. This seems very unlikely.

Kimchi takes it as a matter of course that Abraham provided Hagar and Ishmael with silver and gold. He says, (He gave her food for a day or two, because she could not carry more, and he gave her water because her way was through desert, to return to Egypt, or near Egypt to her family, for she was Egyptian. Also silver and gold he

33 Chizkuni notes (Gen 21:14) that according to Talmudic opinion Abraham was not obligated to inherit Ishmael anything, because Abraham and Ishmael were converts. In b. Kidushin 17b it is stated: (A gentile the convert, and the convert the convert, do not inherit according to the Torah or the Scribes. Because it is taught, one who borrows money from a convert, whose sons converted with him, and he died, should not return the loan to his [biological] sons. And if he returned, the Sages are not pleased by his act.).

34 Some versions of Rashi have (לוכל دمشנתא תור: לע תור). See Nachmanides and Chizkuni ad loc.
gave her, though the Scriptures do not tell, because he would not send her and the boy empty handed.). One is somewhat surprised that a logical commentator as Kimchi would so naively assume that a woman with a child could in a day or two get across a desert from Beer-sheba to Egypt. More logical is Rashbam’s view that the provisions were enough to get to an inn. They ran out of water because she lost her way.

Nachmanides fully accepts Ibn Ezra’s first opinion and strengthens it. Abraham was caught in this predicament because he was ordered to do what Sarah says, and she ordered to cast them out right away. It was because of her orders that he did not give them silver and gold, and did not supply them with slaves and camels to attend and carry them. Abarbanel finds in Abraham’s behavior an expression of complete fidelity to God. He sent off Hagar and Ishmael with water and bread only as slaves are sent off. Giving them silver and gold would mean that they were given their inheritance, which he did not want to imply. Sforno finds in the Midrash (Genesis Rabba 53:15) support for his view that Abraham provided Hagar and Ishmael with donkeys, camels, and laborers. R’ Akiba deduces from the ש in Gen 21:20 that God blessed not only Ishmael but also his donkeys, camels, and household, apparently those given to him by Abraham.

Cardinal Cajetan, facing similar dilemmas as Jewish commentators, argued that the Masoretic Text must be supplemented with logical inferences since otherwise it makes no sense. He says, “How it was fitting that Abraham, who was so wealthy, provided for his wife and son so sparingly (exigue)-or rather miserably (misere)!-that he should give his wife only as much bread and water as she could carry on her shoulder. The solution is that by ‘bread’ and ‘water’ is to be understood all kinds of provision (omnia victualia), and that Abraham provided copiously and quite prudently so that he would have even provided a jar to keep the water fresh (providerit de vase servativo aquae) along the way. This indeed was fitting for a well-to-do father unwillingly having to send his son away. Also, he gave neither the provisions nor his son to Hagar to be carried; rather, to carry the supplies and his son and Hagar herself, he provided asses or other pack animals, as well as attendants. ... Truly, it is impious (nefas est) to believe that he would have sent his wife and his young son out on foot and without provisions.”

Calvin seems to have considered why Abraham did not do what he seemingly should have done. He too is baffled “with how slender a provision (tenui ... viatico) does he [Abraham] endow his wife and son? He places a flagon of water and bread upon her shoulder. Why does he not load an ass, at least, with a moderate supply of food? Why does he not add one of his servants, of which his house contained plenty, as a companion?” In Calvin’s view the answer is because the treatment of Hagar and Ishmael is the reward for pride and ingratitude. He says, “God willed that the banishment of Ishmael should be so harsh and sorrowful (tam dura et tristis), so that his example might strike terror into the proud, who ... trample under foot the very grace to which they are indebted for all things. Therefore, he led them both to a miserable end.” Calvin does not consider the episode as purposely instruc-

35 Thompson, 219. Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides might have influenced Cajetan.
36 Thompson, 223. Thompson finds the reference to “asses” peculiar. However, Calvin might be referring to Genesis Rabba 53:15.
37 Ibid.
tional -- the harsh and severe treatment is a direct consequence of improper behavior.

In Luther’s opinion the purpose of the expulsion is instructional, to teach Ishmael an important lesson about right and grace. Luther believes that Hagar’s sin was excessive pride and presumption, that she incited Ishmael to covet Abraham’s wealth, and that Ishmael’s mockery was a serious offense. All these rested on the presumption that giving birth to the firstborn and being the firstborn entitled them to what God promised Abraham. The purpose of Hagar and Ishmael’s expulsion “is to let him know that the kingdom of God is not owed to him by reason of a natural right but comes out of pure grace. ... Ishmael and his mother must learn this lesson, since both wanted to proceed against Isaac on the strength of a right.” However, all these do not obviate the tragedy of a family caught between its natural feelings and God’s design and purpose. Luther surmises that in this tragic circumstances Sarah joined Abraham in counseling Hagar and Ishmael “to bear this expulsion patiently; for, as they said, it was God’s will expressed by a definite word that Ishmael should leave home and ... and wait for God’s blessing in another place.”

Modern scholarship is not any clearer of Abraham’s behavior than previous generations, finding escape in customs and mores of ancient times. Attempts to see in Abraham’s behavior an expression of his total faith in God’s promise are too naive and simplistic. Because Ishmael was promised divine protection does not mean that he should be sent into wilderness without provisions and protection. Incomprehension of Abraham’s behavior in the expulsion has also been tainted by the treatment of women and slaves in the society described by the biblical narrative and the outrage magnified by current or still remembered experiences. Recently Reis stated “Hagar seems to leave Abraham’s house with nothing but her son and the bread and water she can carry on her shoulder. This meager disbursement is greatly to Abraham’s discredit.” Many commentators routinely expand the Masoretic Text to make it appear crueler to Hagar. Thus, Hagar is not “sent off” but “driven away,” and they know that she was driven away into the “wilderness” or “desert,” though the Bible does not supply this information.

Commentators were also puzzled by Hagar’s physical capability to carry food, wa-

38 Thompson, 227.
39 J. M. Cohen, “Was Abraham Heartless?” Jewish Bible Quarterly 23,3 (1995) 180-181. Cohen says, “Convinced that God had great, though awesome, plans for Ishmael, Abraham was in no way callous in sending the young Ishmael off into desert with only his mother to protect him. As far as Abraham was concerned, his son had a far greater Protector than his mother to secure his safety.” Similarly, Levenson (103) says, “Perhaps we are to think that Abraham trusts so much in the promise of nationhood through Ishmael (21:13) that he obeys Sarah and God’s directive with complete serenity, never doubting that Hagar and Ishmael would reach their unspecified destination.” This kind of an attitude, in my opinion, would cross the line between ‘faith’ and ‘testing God’ (cf. Deut 6:16).
40 Reis, 99.
41 For instance, Luther: “But does it not seem to be cruelty for a mother who is burdened with a child to be sent away so wretchedly, and to an unfamiliar place at that—yes, into a vast and arid desert?”; Thompson (215): “it is God who sanctions the plan to send Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness”; Nikaido (224): “The meager supply of provisions (contrast Gen. xxv 6) given to Hagar and her infant son for a grueling trek through the desert (cf. Exod. xv 22f.)”; Cohen (181): “Abraham was in no way callous in sending the young Ishmael off into desert with only his mother to protect him”; Dozeman (28): “The threat of Ishmael results in the expulsion of Hagar, who at this time does not flee but is driven into the wilderness with limited provisions on her back”; Wiesel (238): “Abraham drives them away, yet he is famous for his hospitality. Does he sacrifice his son for love of his wife? Sacrifice is what we are talking about! He sends them into the desert, where death awaits the parched wanderer”; etc.
ter, and Ishmael into the desert. Ishmael, though 16 years old, is called "child, infant" three times, and Hagar is capable of carrying him (Gen 21:14, 15, 18). Moreover, the text clearly indicates that it was Ishmael who was in danger but not Hagar, suggesting his greater vulnerability. Josephus describes Ishmael in this episode as being "a young child" and "not being able to go by himself." The Septuagint seems to read שכם על יד ילד, supporting the view that Ishmael was small, but the Samaritan Bible, Onqelos, Targum Jonathan, Peshitta, and Vulgate (tradiditque puerum) follow the Masoretic Text, which leaves the issue undecided.

Some Classical Jewish commentators tried to circumvent the difficulty by saying that Abraham put the food and water on Hagar but not Ishmael, and Ishmael walked by himself. For instance, Sa’adiah explains that food and water Abraham put on Hagar’s shoulder, gave her the child, and released her. Ibn Ezra, Kimchi, Nachmanides, and later Sforno hold a similar position. Rashi, however, says that Abraham put also Ishmael on Hagar’s shoulder. Rashi, though presenting the view of a minority of commentators, may be right. The Masoretic Text gives strong indication that Hagar could easily handle Ishmael. Moreover, Ishmael’s passivity during the episode is further proof that he was in a state in which he had to be manipulated, perhaps even sick as suggested by the Midrash (Genesis Rabba 53:13). Finally, the text says ויאכלו השם not ויאכלו not indicating that we do not have two individual units but one unit (Hagar) of which Ishmael is a part.

Speiser notes that “The various emendations that have been proposed merely substitute one set of problems for another. An acceptable solution has yet to be discovered.” Modern scholarship usually explains the inconsistencies between the textual descriptions and Ishmael’s age as P’s superimposition of its chronology (Gen 16:16, 17:25, 21:5) on the E text. Levenson finds this approach being the best resolution of the problem. He says, “The simplest solution is the documentary one: the teenaged Ishmael is a product of P, a later source than the one reporting the episode of his near-death, which is almost universally attributed to E. Once one discounts for the moment the Priestly material that is Genesis 17, all one knows about Ishmael’s age is that it is greater by an indeterminable figure than that of

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42 According to Gen 17:24 (see 16:16) Abraham was 99 and Ishmael 13 when they were circumcised. A year later Isaac was born (Gen 18:5). Since the expulsion of Ishmael took place after the birth of Isaac he must have been at least 14 years old. However, there may be some imprecision in the stated ages of Abraham and Ishmael and the MT order of event that would make Ishmael several years younger at the expulsion.

43 S. Ben-Reuven, "במקרא ונער ילד לעומת בן," Beth Mikra 93 (1983) 147-9. Ben-Reuven suggests that  or ﺪ are terms that reflect psychological distancing, while ﻳ is a term of emotional nearness. Cognizant of the potential loss of Ishmael both Abraham and Hagar refer to him as ﻳ. In support of this thesis see the use of the terms ﻳ, ﻳ, and ﻳ by Elisha in 2Kgs 4:32-37, and that of ﻳ by the Shunamite woman. Both Hagar and Abraham certainly employ psychological distancing. It is also possible that such an attitude was reasonable because Ishmael’s physical attributes were conducive to such a perception, and they are indisputably apparent in Hagar’s handling of him. See also M. S. Cohen, “Ishmael at sixteen,” Conservative Judaism 53,4 (2001) 36-43. Reis’ (100) position that ‘child’ is the more tender term used by Hagar and Abraham, while in reality he is already a ‘lad’ as God calls him, does not resolve the textual difficulties.

44 Behaie ben Asher Hilavah, Commentary on the Pentateuch, Genesis, Vol. 1 (Benei Braq: Mishor, 1990), 114. Behaie notes that according to the order of MT Ishmael was 16 (or, 15 according to Kimchi and 14 according to Bechor Shor) at the expulsion from Abraham’s house. He finds the textual references to Ishmael as a child incongruous with his age. Several Midrashic sources assume an age of 25. Genesis Rabba (53:13) cites the age of 27 and Rashi there corrects it to 25.


Isaac, who has just been weaned. This is true whether we are to envision the first-born son riding on his mother’s shoulder or walking on his own.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, the E text (Gen 21:8-21) portrays Ishmael as a child, perhaps even an infant\textsuperscript{48}, since Hagar can carry him for long stretches, cast him (see Ex 1:22) and lift him.\textsuperscript{49}

Separation of the two sources does not, however, remove the inconsistency. It is hard to imagine that the redactor who merged the two sources was unaware of the incongruity between Ishmael’s chronological age in P and his physical depictions in E, or was insensitive to inner-textual consistency.\textsuperscript{50} Also, while P’s chronology may not have been exact, the true chronology could not have been substantially different.\textsuperscript{51} Certainly, Sarah would not have expelled Ishmael before it was absolutely clear to her that Isaac is viable.\textsuperscript{52} God refers to Ishmael, in contrast to Hagar, as נער ("youth, adolescent").\textsuperscript{53} Ishmael, perhaps, was not sixteen but he was not a child either. What exactly was his age is not clear, but there is obviously a certain discrepancy between reality and chronology.\textsuperscript{54} The text can, however, be

\bibitem{48} E. I. Fripp, “Note on Gen. XX. 6. 8-21,” \textit{Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft} 12 (1892) 164-166.
\bibitem{52} S.P. Jeansonne, The Women of Genesis (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 51. Jeansonne tries to retain the chronological integrity of the MT by stipulating that ‘child’ is used when Ishmael’s life is in danger and ‘lad’ is used when his life is not threatened. However, in 21:14 Ishmael is called a ‘child’ when Abraham gives him over to Hagar’s care, but he is not yet in danger. Hamilton suggests that Abraham and Hagar’s use of ‘child’ indicates a biological relationship, whereas God’s use of ‘lad’ shows that he aligns himself with Sarah in downplaying Abraham’s paternity (V. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 81). Reis feels that ‘lad’ and ‘child’ are aptly employed to illustrate different points of view. God calls Ishmael a lad because that is what he is. When the perspective is Abraham’s or Hagar’s Ishmael is a child, the more tender term, for, to them, he is their child whatever his age (P.T. Reis, “Hagar requited,” \textit{Journal for the Study of the Old Testament} 87 (2000) 100). Whatever the relationships or intents of the personalities in the narrative may be the facts are that Hagar could not physically do with a lad what the MT attributes to her (even if 21:14 is read that Abraham places bread and water on Hagar’s shoulder and gives the child to her).
\bibitem{53} It is not clear when Isaac was weaned. In Egypt and Assyria a child was breast-fed to the age of three years. In 2 Macc 7:27 a mother says that she nursed her child for three years. One Talmudic authority limits breast-feeding to two years, but another rabbi mentions a period of 4-5 years (b. Ketubot 60a). Philo seems to suggest that Isaac had been weaned at an age of seven (\textit{De Sobiertate}, 8.). Cf. 1 Sam 1:23f.
\bibitem{54} There is an extensive literature on the concept נער in the Hebrew Bible. The two comprehensive works are: H.-P. Stähli, Knabe, Jüngling, Knecht: Untersuchungen Zum Begriff נער im Alten Testament (Frankfurt am Main: BBET, 1978); and, C.S. Leeb, Away from the Father’s House: The Social Location of na‘ar and na‘arah in Ancient Israel (Sheffield: JSOTSup 301, 2000). Both works conclude that the primary meaning of נער is not “youth” or “youngness.” The term is rather imprecise. While a chronological understanding of נער is possible it is not always a chronological indicator. This reflects not only the imprecision of age terms in the Hebrew Bible, but is also evidenced in the use of the terms on discovered seals.
sensibly reconciled if it is assumed that Ishmael was of short stature and of slight build. He
was physically closer to a normal child, but chronologically he was already a lad (נער).

Apparently a tradition existed that Isaac, Ishmael’s paternal brother, was short. The
Midrash tells: “They said to Og, ‘Didn’t you say Abraham is a barren mule and would not
sire?’ He answered: ‘so, what is his gift? Is it not puny? If I put my finger on him wouldn’t I
flatten him?’” This Midrash is followed by a quote of R’ Levi who said, “A crib was rocked
for the first time in the house of Abraham” (Genesis Rabba 53:10). This was necessary be-
cause Isaac was born very small (see Matnot Kehuna ad loc). Accepting the likelihood that
Ishmael was also of short stature, and perhaps lost some weight because of his illness,
Masoretic Text becomes realistic if Hagar did not have to walk too far.

How far did Hagar have to walk? Many felt that she would have to cross a desert to
reach her homeland Egypt. However, it is quite possible that Hagar was not an Egyptian.
Gunkel mentions an opinion by Winckler that Mizraim (Egypt) and the North Arabian tribe
of the Muzrim, to whom Gerar belonged, have been confused. In this process, Hagar, who
was a Muzrim woman, became a woman of Mizraim. Also, though the meaning of the
name Hagar is still unclear, it does not seem to be of Egyptian origin. It was, perhaps, de-
derived from the gentilic Hagrim or Hagri’im (Ps 8:7, 1 Chr 5:10, 19-20; compare 2 Sam
23:36 with 1 Chr 11:38), which appears in Minean, Nabatean, Sabean, Palmyrene, and Hel-
lenistic inscriptions.

If Muzrim was confused with Mizrim, or intentionally changed to Miṣrim, then Ha-
gar would have kinship with the people of Gerar, and Gerar would be a natural destination
for her. Abraham and his household lived in Gerar, so Gerar was familiar to her. It makes
sense to assume that after the incident with Abimelech Abraham would want to move out of
Gerar. If Abraham moved out of Gerar but lived nearby then Hagar did not have much to

the text. For instance, Terah is 205 years old when he dies in Haran (Gen 11:32) but was 70 when Abram was
born (Gen 11:27). Thus, Abram was at least 135 years old when he leaves Haran. Yet, in Gen 12:4 we are spe-
cifically told that Abram is 75 years old when he left Haran. See Rashi on Gen 21:34 and 25:20. Jacob at the
age of about 120 seems to have the vitality of a young man. Moses at the age of 80 is described as a father of
babies.

55 S. Nikaido, “Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Intertextual Study,” Vetus Testamentum 51,2 (2001)
224. For instance, Nikaido, states as a fact that “The meager supply of provisions (contrast Gen. xxv 6) given to
Hagar and her infant son for a grueling trek through the desert (cf. Exod. xv 22f.) conveys a clear message:
Ishmael is not to be an heir—not anyone’s heir.” Yet nowhere in the text does it say that Abraham sent Hagar
and Ishmael into the desert.

very convenient when confronted with the tantalizing question: “Why had the Israelite to endure 400 years of
slavery in Egypt?” Obviously, because Sarah oppressed an Egyptian (see U. Cassuto, La questione della Genesi
(Florence: Univ. of Florence, 1934), 315). Indeed, the verb עגג (“afflict”) appears first in Gen 15:13 where it
describes the future slavery in Egypt and then in Gen 16:6. Reis (106) says, “Because of their faith, Abraham
and Sarah merit a peaceful old age, but their descendants will pay for their forebears’ maltreatment of Hagar.
They will slave under Egyptian affliction as Hagar the Egyptian slaved under affliction.” Duguid finds in the
references to Egypt an implicit effort to undermine the Egyptian ‘option’ versus the weaker promised Canaan
‘option’ (I. Duguid, “Hagar the Egyptian: A Note on the Allure of Egypt in the Abraham Cycle,” Westminster

57 The Midrash (Genesis Rabba 45:1) finds in Hagar the meaning “this is your reward” (אגריך). Some derive
the name Hagar from the Arabic hajar (“to flee”), thus “the fugitive.”

58 Some saw in the fact that Hagar and Ishmael were sent off without an ass, while Abraham going to the bind-
ing of Isaac took an ass, a glaring example of inhumane treatment of Hagar and Ishmael. We view this fact an
indication that Hagar was not meant to have to walk too far.
walk to get to Gerar, perhaps less than five miles. She would not need an ass as Abraham
did on his way to the far destination of the Land of Moriah and unknown mountain for
the binding of Isaac (Gen 22:2). The ass would have been an encumbrance for her in Gerar.
Indeed, in a relatively large city as Gerar, Abraham could have found proper accommoda-
tions for his wife and son; he might have had even continued to maintain his former resi-
dence there. Moreover, Hagar would then have been comfortably provided by Abraham and
protected, being with her kin and being recognized as Abraham’s wife. Even if we interpret
the Masoretic Text as an identification of Hagar being an Egyptian, nothing in the text com-
pels us to conclude that she intended to return to Egypt on foot. Hagar could find a place in
Gaza, Grar, or Beer-sheba.

Was Abraham plan to settle Hagar and Ishmael in Gerar? The Bible does not tell us
about Abraham’s intents but actions, and it is biased by its theological message. The human
story of a man caught between rival wives and loyalties needs to be pieced together by in-
ference from the actions and fragments of clues. One of such fragments is the use of
גָּרַשׁ (“drive away”) and שלך (“to send”). Hapner associates the words
גָּרַשׁ and שלך with divorce, claiming that Sarah demanded that Abraham divorce Hagar, and Abraham did so. While
the two terms have been used in the Hebrew Bible to indicate divorce, it is doubtful that they
are used in this episode with that sense. In a text as meticulously crafted as that of Hagar and
Ishmael’s expulsion it stands to reason that the terms גָּרַשׁ and שלך have been used
intentionally to indicate a difference. The primary difference between גָּרַשׁ and שלך stems from the fact that explicitly or implicitly גָּרַשׁ indicates the “departure from” and שלך
“departure to.” Consequently, גָּרַשׁ implies severance of subsequent contacts and relations, while שלך implies extension of reach and therefore continuation of links. Moreover, the jux-
taposition of שלך in Gen 21:14 and the homopone שלך in Genesis 21:15 are intended to convey subtly the difference between the two acts. While Hagar’s שלך was an aggressive act, Abraham’s שלך was a gentle send off.

That the send-off was not intended to be a complete severance of relations between
Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael is also indicated by a curious addition that Targum Jonathan
makes. Targum Jonathan adds in Genesis 21:14, between שָׁךָ and הָלָדָה, the words
יָדָה, שָׁךָּה שָׁךָּה, שָׁךָּוָה (and he tied at her waist [a band, rope, scarf?] to make it
known that she is a slave). This is strange, since Sarah demanded that Hagar be Cast out
(גרש), freed of slavery and any ties to Abraham, and Targum Jonathan itself continues to
expound on ויהי (and he divorced her with a letter of divorce) in accord
with Deuteronomy 21:14. Targum Jonathan seems to suggest, or reflect a tradition, that
there was separation and even divorce, but there was a cord that at that time still tied Hagar

59 Hapner, 193. Hapner claims that the Torah alludes to “a matter of nakedness” (Deut 24:1) in
דברי חרב תער ראה (Gen 21:11), but Abraham is reluctant to divorce Hagar because he can find no evidence of
תער ראה on account of his son. This homiletic reasoning does not fit the context.
Melamed points to the parallelism in Gen 21:10
כִּי לֹא יִשָּׁרֵב יִשָּׁרֵב/Yורש זָרַשׁ לעב
where (1) the Piel of גָּרַשׁ and Hiphil of שלך are synonymous; (2) for better parallelism יִשָּׁרֵב יִשָּׁרֵב is used
rather than יִשָּׁר יִשָּׁר עַל יִשָּׁרֵב; and, (3) יִשָּׁר is added to stress the lesser status of Ishmael who is a
הָלָדָה and is not named in the verse.
61 This Midrash was composed by the school of R’ Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (c. 100).
to Abraham, at least from Abraham’s perspective.

The Midrash could not see the situation any differently. We find in Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 30 another reference to the tie at Hagar’s waist.62 The Midrash says, לקה את הצרכיים של ברח, כדי שהיה אחד ראורא. והשותה האורא לא נהיה על ראורא (Abraham tied a barrel of wood to Hagar’s waist, so that it will drag on the ground behind her. When Abraham would want to see Ishmael his son he would see [by the track] the road they took).63 This Midrash also tells that Abraham visits Ishmael in the wilderness of Paran. In these visits ‘bread and water’ serves as a test of good-heartedness, underscoring Abraham’s proper behavior when he sent away Hagar. Ishmael’s first wife, the Moabite ‘Aisa, is bad because she does not offer Abraham ‘bread and water,’ and Ishmael divorces her. His second wife, Egyptian (Muzrimite?) Fatima, offers Abraham ‘bread and water,’ and consequently Abraham prays on behalf of Ishmael filling Ishmael’s house with all the best. The Midrash ends telling when Ishmael found out about his father’s visit and Ishmael knew that to that time his father continued to care for him).64

The Midrash did not find it strange that after being expelled from Abraham’s home he would accompany Abraham and Isaac to the Binding of Isaac, probably the most traumatic and difficult event in Abraham’s life. When God commands Abraham to sacrifice your only son, whom you love he seems to have some difficulties to understand who is meant since both Ishmael and Isaac were his sons and he loved both of them (Genesis Rabba 55:7). This Midrash underscores the perception of Abraham’s continued love for both of his sons, Ishmael’s ready availability, and Abraham’s reliance on his older son at critical times in his life.65

The Midrash also finds it reasonable that after Sarah’s death Abraham remarried Hagar. We find in Genesis Rabba 61:4 ושמה קוטורה: ר’ יהודה אומר זWARDS (and her name was Keturah: R’ Yehudah says, this was Hagar). Indeed, from the use of the name R’ Yehudah deduces that Abraham did remarry Hagar by a divine edict. Hagar’s new name reflects her being “perfumed with godly deeds and good works” (שמпотребתله בחומש טובים ומשהמה). Finally, the plural written defectiva indicates that there was only one concubine, though her remarrying makes it appear as though there were two. It seems the Midrash felt that Hagar matured into a worthy person and Abraham cared for Hagar as he did for Ishmael. Actually, according to the Midrash (Genesis Rabba 60:14) it was Isaac who went to Hagar and asked her to marry his father. Such a closure would indeed fit the ancient sentiment that Abraham never severed his relations with Hagar and Ishmael. Luther says, “for the opinion of the Jews that Keturah is Hagar pleases me.”66

Classical Jewish commentators paid relatively little attention to the difference between גרש and שלחה, perhaps because they did not want to highlight the fact that Abraham did not exactly follow the divine dictum. Sa’adiah by translating וישלחה “and he released her” harmonizes between this here and Deuteronomy 21:14, and so does Chizkuni (13th century). Kimchi and Sforno, taking קוטרה = וישלחה, as in Genesis 18:16, stress a significant difference between the harsh רָכָב and the more gentle שלחה.

62 This Midrash was composed by the school of R’ Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (c. 100).
63 Ch.N. Bialik and Y.Ch. Ravnitzky, Sefer Ha’aggada (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1987), 30.
64 Ibid.
66 J. Pelikan (ed.), Luther’s Works 1-8; Lectures on Genesis (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958-66), 43, 166.
Midrashic sources would obviously at best echo an oral tradition that was not included in the Bible. There is, however, also biblical evidence that the relations between Ishmael and Isaac were not severed. Both brothers bury their father Abraham without any discord (Gen 25:9). We could even conjecture that their relation was amicable from the fact that Isaac precedes Ishmael in Gen 25:9 and Isaac’s uncontested use of זָרַי לְחִיו בָּאֵר (Gen 25:11). Furthermore, to please Isaac, Esau marries his cousin מִלְחָט, the daughter of Ishmael (Gen 28:9). Moreover, Keturah gave birth to six sons yet neither of them participated in the burial of Abraham, but Ishmael did. Finally, one notes that the geography of the region supports continued contact between Abraham, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael.

Ibn Ezra thinks that Abraham lived in Gerar at the time of Hagar’s expulsion and he sent her off to Beer-sheba. That would make for a more than twelve miles walk (see map), which would be too onerous for a woman carrying a child and also unsafe. It seems more reasonable to assume that following the incident with Abimelech it was prudent for Abraham to somewhat distance himself from Gerar and perhaps dwell outside the city (Gen 20:15). This situation appears attractive because the distance that Hagar would have had to walk in this case would be quite reasonable, Abraham probably had accommodations there, and Gerar belonged to the Muzrim to whom Hagar was related. Such an arrangement would

Based on Aharoni’s map in Encyclopaedia Biblica.67

have allowed Abraham convenient access to Hagar and Ishmael, yet keep them out of Sarah’s sight and reach. When eventually Hagar and Ishmael decided to settle in the Desert of Paran they still were in the triangle Gerar-Beer-sheba-Paran where Abraham’s cattle apparently roamed. Abraham would have had plenty of opportunity to be in contact with them. Thus, when Abraham dies Isaac does not have to send anyone to Ishmael, and Ishmael arrives in time to properly bury his father, as any son would do.

HAGAR’S REVENGE

Implicit in our discussion of Hagar and Ishmael’s expulsion was the notion that Abraham had an arrangement in his mind to satisfy Sarah’s demand, yet keep Hagar and Ishmael nearby. Whether this notion is correct or not, it clearly did not work. Hagar apparently did not go where she was supposed to go, instead she wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba (Gen 21:14). That doing so was not an error on her part but a conscious decision is made clear by the use of the root תעה in Genesis 20:13.68 God made Abraham leave home and wander (Gen 20:13). Hagar was also made to leave home, but she was not forced to wander, and wandering is a directed activity, it is not a consequence of error. What made Hagar venture into the wilderness of Beer-sheba so ill equipped and laden with a weak child? Was she not concerned about personal safety? Was she oblivious to her reputation? What did she expect to find there?

It seems that blinded by the fury of a scorned woman Hagar has lost her moral compass. About fifteen years passed since a divine directive and promise were given to her. During this time she had but one son though she was promised by an angel that I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude (Gen 16:10). She may have found mutual concerns with Sarah, better understood Sarah’s disappointments, and learned to live with her. She probably developed a sense of belonging to Abraham’s clan and felt that she found a place in his heart. When after so many years she finds herself on the threshold expelled with her son, her disappointment, frustration, fear of the future, injured self-dignity, combine into a feeling of deep injustice and contempt toward her self. Suddenly her entire life has become one big lie, her moorings unhinged, and her soul afloat. Though Abraham has worked out a reasonable solution for an admittedly difficult domestic problem, Hagar cannot find satisfaction in it. Hate and a need to take revenge now drive her.

Hate is born from disappointment in fulfilling one’s desires and wishes. Hagar was certainly a disappointed woman. Reenkola finds that “A woman expresses her hate either indirectly or by directing it at herself. She often remains mute and silent about her hate. Criticizing people behind their backs, bad-mouthing and undermining others, as well as spreading rumors, might be expressions of hate women find it easier to resort to.”69
was a woman consumed by hate. Her hate surfaced indirectly through disrespect and innuendoes (Gen 16:4-5, 21:9). Typically in the expulsion episode Hagar is silent, according to the Masoretic Text she only weeps loudly (Gen 21:16), the only voice mentioned is that of Ishmael (Gen 21:17). In the Septuagint version Hagar does not utter a sound. We read there: and she departed and sat down opposite to him at a distance, as it were a bow-shot, for she said, Surely I cannot see him, and the child cried about and wept.

Though direct attacks through some action or direct verbal expression of hate are not characteristic of women, this fact by no means implies that women are not aggressive. Hagar’s aggression emerged by taking the wrong turn on the road, by heading into the wild desert and certain death. Since Abraham, the obvious target of Hagar’s revenge was not available, psychological transference occurred. This psychological transference causes Hagar to see Ishmael and her self as targets of her revenge. She would injure Abraham by destroying what is dear to him. Abarbanel seems to have captured some of the thoughts that swirled in Hagar’s mind. He says, “When Hagar saw that her son was expelled from the house of Abraham with contempt and indignity she almost became cruel to him in her despair. Perhaps in a great rage she cast him under one of the bushes, thinking “If he was abandoned by his father why should she have any greater feelings for him?” Abarbanel wisely sensed that Hagar debased her relationship to Ishmael. She has been just a surrogate mother, Ishmael was more important to Abraham than to her. Killing Ishmael would hurt Abraham more than her.

When the fusion of the life instinct and the death instinct is minimal aggression turns destructive. Also, when fusing between love and hate is minimal destructive tendencies increase. Hagar does not put down her weak son, but she “threw, flung” (השליך Gen 21:15) him, as if trying with this aggressive act destroy him. She is distancing herself from the...
child with the selfish excuse Do not let me see the boy die (Gen 21:16) unconcerned about the child’s need of maternal warmth in the last moments of his life. The Bible then implies Hagar’s true sentiment to her son by using twice the word מַנְגָּד connoting “opposite to” rather than the neutral מומל “off.” Hagar is her own son’s enemy. She de-mеans Ishmael’s value by referring to him by the diminutive ילד and raises the sound of her weeping above the child’s voice to defeat him even in the battle of anguish.

Reenkola writes, “Vindictive thoughts arise from humiliation and injustice. After suffering unjust treatment, the woman would dearly like to turn her feelings of suffering and helplessness into their opposites, feelings of power and triumph. Cloaked in the guise of good conscience and righteousness, the humiliated and abused woman can avenge her experiences on others by humiliating and maltreating them. She can justify vindictive treatment of others on the basis of her own suffering.” Hagar, a scorned woman, vents her fury at Abraham by trying to kill Ishmael, as Medea did in Euripides’ tragedy. This might be the reason why God hears the voice of the lad, but is not impressed by the “crocodile tears” of his mother. For Ishmael’s agony of perishing from thirst in the desert and Hagar’s sad prospects was of her own making.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

As in the first divine intervention so in the second the intent seems to be restoration of the social order quo ante. God responds to Ishmael thereby indicating not only that sincerity is valued but also that Ishmael’s social status is higher than that of Hagar. Moreover, Hagar’s denigration of Ishmael is undone. Ishmael is not an insubstantial child (אני) but a young lad (נער Gen 21:17). Hagar presumptuously assumed a position in the social scheme to which she was not entitled. She abandoned her station leaving Ishmael alone somewhere (שם הוא באשר Gen 21:17). She has to return to her normal duty of taking care of Ishmael, because it is he who is the “man of promise.” Hagar has been told in the first divine intervention and it is made clear to her again that she has been assigned a subservient supportive role.

The third verse that Cogan mentions is Ps 71:9 in which he takes והשליך as being parallel to עזב “forsake.” This choice is not, however, compelling. It is possible to consider והשליך as mere consecutive actions. The first, והשליך (“cast away”), refers to severing the close contact with the object, and the second, עזב (“leave”), refers to subsequent distancing, just as it was in the case of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:15-16). That “abandon” cannot apply to Gen 21:15-16 is clear from the text, Hagar never left and went on her way, she stayed at a distance. This is neither abandoning nor leaving. The translation adopted in this paper is also the standard translation given in the lexicons (Gesenius, BDB, etc.). Hoftijzer and Jongeling mention two roots šlk₁ = “to save” and šlk₂ = “to assault,” both having aggressive connotation (J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions, II (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) 1144). The standard meaning for והשליך “she threw, flung, cast” would reflect behavior of scorned women. How Hagar should have behaved can be found in 2 Kgs 4:20, in the lectionary for the weekly reading in which Hagar’s expulsion is narrated.

75 It is possible that Gen 21:16 is a conflation of two versions:

A: והשליך את מנהג ילד, והשליך את נער
B: והשליך את קשות ילד, והשליך את נער

In version A Hagar is completely silent. Note that both versions contain the damning מנהג. The meanings “afar” (NJPS), “at a distance” (JB), “across from him” (NKJV), “nearby” (NIV), etc., do not capture the nuance of opposition and animosity expressed in והשליך. See F. Zimmermann, “The perpetuation of variants in the Masoretic Text,” Jewish Quarterly Review 34 (1943/44) 459-474.

76 Ben-Reuven, 147-9.

77 Reenkola, 75-76.
role in God’s designs for her son.

As in the first divine intervention so in the second Hagar is asked a question: “What is the matter with you, Hagar?” (Gen 21:17). She is asked by the divine agent to confront the enormity of her actions. For Hagar is taking revenge not only upon Abraham but also upon God. Her intent to kill Ishmael would not only hurt Abraham but would abort God’s plan for Ishmael (Gen 16:10, 12). Realizing the consequence of her intent vis-à-vis the divine design completely transforms Hagar from a scorned woman that is hell-bent into a frightened one. At this point Hagar is a devastated woman that needs to be saved, and the divine intervention proceeds to do so effectively.

God could have been angry with Hagar for acting against his wishes, which were clearly communicated to her in the past and were partly realized. Yet, God’s messenger first tries to ease her fear saying Do not fear (Gen 21:17). Hagar has first to see a chance of life. That does not mean that she is being absolved of her vengeful act. One can certainly feel divine displeasure with Hagar. God responded to the lad because of his sincerity and centrality in this drama. Hagar has to understand that she plays only a supportive role. To that purpose, the rift between her and her son must be bridged. Abarbanel says, אברבanel the angel came to make Ishmael liked by Hagar. Hagar is asked to get up (Gen 21:18), to regain her human stature. She is told to carry the lad (Gen 21:18), to accept the burden of her assigned role. Finally, she is directed to reestablish the ‘human contact’ with her son (Gen 21:18). All these steps are necessary for the grand purpose of making Ishmael into a great nation. In a single verse divine intervention sets up a process that rectifies a tragically deteriorating situation and sets it on course.

ACCEPTANCE

It has been noted that Hagar is portrayed differently in the two episodes (Gen 16 and 21). In the first episode she is proud to the point of arrogance, when she achieves what her mistress could not. In the second episode Hagar is no longer arrogant because her advantage disappeared when Isaac was born. Still we would submit that Hagar in the second episode is not bereft of advantages. Over some fifteen years this young woman, the mother of Abraham’s only son, must have curved out a place in Abraham’s heart. This niche and Ishmael’s life were her trump cards and the basis for her defiance.

While in principle it is true that Hagar is portrayed differently in the two episodes, this perception requires some elaboration, since Hagar’s behavior in the second episode is not uniform. It is possible to identify three stages in Hagar’s behavior: defiance, realization,

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78 We find in Genesis Rabba 53:14: [מָתֵן] בְּכֵן אָמְרָה ר’ בֶּרַכְחָא מְסַתְּתָה שְׁלָשׁי מֵעַל מֵעַל. אָמְרָה אֶת-מֵעַל אֶת-מֵעַל כַּעֲבָדִית אֶת-מֵעַל אֶת-מֵעַל (Said R’ Berachiah as if she plastered things toward heaven. She said, yesterday you said, “I will multiply your seed,” etc. now he dies of thirst).


80 Alexander, 132-133. The change in Hagar’s character led Speiser to the conjecture that the two episodes are doublets. He says, “So complete a dichotomy would be inconceivable in the work of the same author or in a fixed written tradition” (156).
and acceptance. The stage of defiance, in which she intentionally ventures into the desert, has much in common with her behavior in the first episode, though it is driven by hate. The question from heaven brings her into the second stage. It makes her realize the futility of her act and that she is only a facilitating element in a much bigger design.

Hagar does not open her eyes (Gen 21:19) by her own volition. Keeping her eyes closed and shutting out the outside world is her last act of defiance. She is made by the divine to face reality Then God opened her eyes (Gen 21:19). With open eyes she fully accepts her role, and as a dutiful slave she goes to the well and brings water for Ishmael. What happened after the divine intervention and how mother and son ended settling in the desert of Paran is skipped in the Bible. It seems that the northern part of the Negev was under the domain of the Muzrim, a tribe to which Hagar belonged and with which Abraham had dealings. Ishmael, related to both Abraham and the Muzrim, had an obvious advantage, which enabled him to prosper. Later, Hagar apparently finds a wife for Ishmael from her own tribe, similar to the fashion in which the trusted slave of Abraham found a wife for Isaac from the native tribe of his father (Gen 24).

CONCLUSION

The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham’s household evoked and continues to evoke strong reactions. It is a story that happens on earth but is designed and orchestrated in heaven. It is also played out according to the laws and mores of an ancient society that are alien to the modern reader. We naturally empathize with all the individuals caught in this tragic web of domestic loyalties, loves, and hates.

The story itself is sparse. It seems to assume that logic and common sense would supplement the obvious. We cannot go against the Masoretic Text and argue that obviously Abraham provided Hagar and Ishmael with all the necessities for a trip across the desert. Were it the case the Bible would have said so. But we can logically deduce from the fact that only meager provisions were given that the intended walk was short. That the intended short walk became a perilous venture into the desert was of Hagar’s making. What prompted Hagar to do so would obviously remain unknown. However, the context suggests that she acted on an impulse generated by the typical state of mind of a scorned woman.

Much outrage is generated toward Abraham and Sarah when the textually unsupported position is taken that they drove Hagar and Ishmael into the desert without the bare necessities to certain death. For instance, Wiesel says, “Abraham drives them away, yet he is famous for his hospitality. Does he sacrifice his son for love of his wife? Sacrifice is what we are talking about! He sends them into the desert, where death awaits the parched wanderer. How can he be so cruel toward a woman who has loved him—be it for one night only—and toward a child—his own child at that! Sarah doesn’t like them—why doesn’t Abraham suggest they stay at a neighbor’s, or let them go and live with some distant tribe? Why condemn them by thirst and disease? How are we to explain these flaws in Abraham’s character, and to what shall we attribute them? Is this the same Abraham whose faith and goodness remain models for all time? Did he commit such acts of weakness?” However, if the situation is understood as presented here, Wiesel’s outrage is completely misplaced. Indeed, Hagar was expected to do what Wiesel naturally assumes Abraham should have done. The natural course for the resolution of the domestic conflict was unfortunately subverted by

81 Wiesel, 238.
the fury of a scorned woman with a suicidal bent. While faith drove Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on mount Moriah, it was hate of a scorned woman that urged Hagar to kill Ishmael in the Wilderness of Beer-sheba.

One may well question the contention of Trible that “All we who are heirs of Sarah and Abraham, by flesh and spirit, must answer for the terror in Hagar’s story. To neglect the theological challenge she presents is to falsify faith.” Certainly, no group of people in the present should carry a burden of guilt for the terror experienced by a woman (and child) because of misguided rage against her husband. Some consider Hagar, for various reasons, a heroic figure. However, when viewed in the context of Abraham’s household she is a tragic woman, caught in a triangle of strong forces. Physics teaches that the three-body problem has no neat solution.

Finally, we may ask whether Sarah achieved her expressed goal in the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael? The Bible tells that Abraham gave away his assets while still alive (Gen 25:5-6). Most of them went to Isaac. Nothing is said about Ishmael. Thus, in a practical sense Sarah achieved her purpose. However, Abraham’s act leaves open the question whether Isaac would have been the sole heir had Abraham died without having disposed of his assets first.

When abstracted, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael is a conflict of continued interest. Its biblical resolution by heavenly dictum only stresses that no good solutions are really available.

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82 Note that in God’s first intervention He asks Hagar two questions. Hagar answers the first but not the second, because she escaped into the desert to die not to be free.
84 Trible, “The Other Woman: ....,” 239.
85 Trible, Texts of Terror, 14-18. Hagar’s biblical distinction is found in being the first person visited by an angel (Gen 16:7); first that received an annunciation (Gen 16:11-12); the only woman that received a promise of innumerable descendants (Gen 16:10); and, one the only person that bestowed a name on God (Gen 16:13).
86 Greenspahn, 50. Greenspahn says, “The Book of Genesis records that towards the end of his life Abraham gave Isaac everything that was his (י נ י ד ו, Gen 25:5, cf. 24:36). Although this statement does include exclusivity, the phrasing ‘he gave’ (נ י ד ו) and the fact that the transaction took place while Abraham was still alive suggest that it has to do with a gift rather than inheritance of any kind, much less one governed by automatic principles. ... It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that Isaac’s good fortune was a sign of his father’s favor rather than the inescapable conclusion of ancient law. Supporting this conclusion is the fact that all this is said to have taken place at the same time that Abraham’s other sons were being sent away (Gen 25:6).” We should also note that י י might not be all inclusive in some cases. It does not seem to so in Genesis 25:5-6 or in 24:10.
87 I am thankful to Professors Steven Shnider and Lawrence Zaleman of Bar Ilan University, Israel, for their thorough reading of this paper and insightful comments.