

Lesson Three

The Birth of Ishmael

Scriptures to Study: Genesis 15-16

Lesson Aim for Unsaved Children: That they would understand the Gospel and respond in saving faith. Gospel truths for unsaved children are included in this lesson. Symbols are placed in the text and outline to show where the following truths can be taught:



Sin—you and I are sinners that deserve to be punished
The person and work of Jesus Christ; He died for your sins
Invitation for the children to believe on the Lord Jesus

Lesson Aim for the Saved Children: That they would realize the importance of submission to the authorities God has placed over them, even when they are being treated unfairly. They will be encouraged to have a bigger view of the God who sees (El Roi), and begin understanding how He can use these authorities and even sufferings that they may cause for our spiritual growth and good.

To emphasize this truth, a *main truth statement* has been included in the text for you to repeat, explain, and apply at appropriate places in the lesson. The main truth statement for this lesson is, “**God**

➔ **commands you to submit to the authorities He has placed over you.”**

This statement, along with suggested explanations and applications, can be found in paragraphs next to an arrow. The applications given in the text are there to guide you in making applications that are simple and yet specific for the children in your class. They may need to be adapted or changed, according to the ages, background, and living situations of your students. The **challenge** at the end of the lesson is your final opportunity to encourage and motivate them to put this main truth into practice. Make sure that you have given enough suggested applications for your main truth so that each child will have at least one specific way of living this truth by the time you end your class. This is key to seeing these young lives change for the glory of God.

Memory Verse: Hebrews 13:17

Review Game Questions:

1. Where were Abram and his family living in today’s lesson? (*Hebron*)
2. Why did Abram think his servant, Eliezar, might be his heir? (*A law at that time said he could adopt his servant as his son*)
3. Why did Sarai give Hagar to be his second (lesser) wife? (*Sarai was too old to have children herself. Any children Hagar had would be considered Sarai’s by law*)
4. Why did Sarai start treating Hagar very harshly? (*Because Hagar now despised [looked down] on Sarai because she was going to have Abram’s child. She stopped doing her servant work too*)
5. How should Hagar have responded to Sarai’s harsh treatment? (*She should have submitted—obeyed with a good attitude. She then could ask Abram and/or God to help her*)
6. Who can say Hebrews 13:17 from memory?
7. Why are we to obey our authorities? (*Because God commanded it, and because He will work all things out for our good—even hard things*)
8. Besides these reasons, why else did God want Hagar to return to Sarai and Abram? (*He wanted Ishmael to be raised under the teaching and faith of Abram—not under idol-worshippers in Egypt*)
9. What does the name Ishmael mean? (*God hears*)
10. Why would it have been comforting to Hagar to know that her son Ishmael would be like a wild

desert donkey? (*This animal was free, strong, and independent. No one could make it his slave, as she was a slave. He would be like a free, strong, wild stallion of the desert*)

11. What name did Hagar give God, and what does it mean? (*She called Him “El Roi,” which means “The God who sees”*)

The Birth of Ishmael—Lesson Three

Introduction: David had a teacher that seemed extra mean to him. Miss Thompson was always complaining or finding faults with him. Have you ever had someone over you that seemed like this? What should you do when this happens? Our lesson today will help show us.

Scene 1: Abram Waits on God’s Promise for a Son (Genesis 15:2-7; 16:1)

- A. Abram had been following God by faith for many years
- B. Abram asked God if Eliezar would be his heir (adopted son)

Scene 2: Sarai Gives Hagar to Abram as a Wife (Genesis 16:1-4)

- A. Sarai was still without a child
- B. Sarai gives Hagar (Egyptian maid) as a secondary wife

Scene 3: Sarai Persecutes Hagar (Genesis 16:4-6a)

- A. Hagar now despises Sarai
- B. Sarai complains to Abram
-  C. Sarai treats Hagar very harshly

Scene 4: Hagar Runs Away (Genesis 16:6b-9)

-  A. Hagar flees toward her home in Egypt
-  B. The Angel of the Lord appears to Hagar
- C. The Angel of the Lord tells Hagar to go back to Sarai

Scene 5: The Angel of the Lord Comforts Hagar (Genesis 16:10-12)

- A. Hagar was to have many descendants from Ishmael
- B. God prophecies what Ishmael was to be like

Scene 6: Hagar Bears Abram’s Firstborn Son (Genesis 16:15-16)

- A. Hagar worships and obeys the Lord
- B. Hagar gives birth to Abram’s firstborn son

Climax: At 86 years of age, Abram finally had his firstborn son.

Conclusion: He named the boy Ishmael, just as the Angel of the Lord had said. Hagar had learned to submit to her authorities

 **Challenge:** Submit to those in authority over you (Heb. 13:17)

 **Invitation:** Acts 17:30

The Birth of Ishmael Genesis 15,16

Introduction: When David was in the fifth grade, he loved school because he really liked his teacher, Mrs. Smith. She always complimented his work and asked him to do things he liked to do. But now Mrs. Thompson, his sixth grade teacher, was the opposite. It seemed she was always picking on him for something. She kept telling him his papers were messy, he didn't complete his homework, or he talked too much in class. Now he didn't want to obey her, and when he did do what she said, he let everyone see his bad attitude toward her.

Have you ever had someone over you that you didn't think liked you, or was too hard with you? Maybe it was a parent or teacher. As a Believer, what should you do when this happens? Our lesson today will help show us what to do.

Scene 1: Abram Waits on God's Promise for a Son (Gen. 15:2-7; 16:1)

A. Abram had been following God by faith for many years

Abram was a great man of faith. This means that he trusted in God and all the wonderful promises God had made to him. By faith, he had left his home in Ur and moved to Harran. Then after ten years, God told him to move on into the land called Canaan. Again Abram trusted in God and moved there. Although he had failed to have faith during the time of famine, he was now settled back into the land of Canaan after returning from Egypt. This is where God wanted him to be because this was the land God had promised to give him and his descendants.

B. Abram asked God if Eliezar was to be his heir (adopted son)

He was now living with Sarai and their servants near a grove of trees by the city of Hebron [*have a student locate it on the map*].¹ He had built an altar to Jehovah here and was faithfully showing others who he worshipped. His nephew, Lot, no longer lived with him. He had moved to another area with his family and flocks. Both Abram and Sarai were getting older, and they still didn't have any children of their own to help take care of them, or to give of all their possessions to when they died. One custom of the people at that time was to choose (adopt) a boy or young man to be their legal son.² Many times a trusted servant was adopted since he already knew the people and all about the possessions they had. Abram asked God if he should put his faith in his servant, Eliezar, to be the heir to all of the promises that God had given him. But God clearly answered, "no." Abram himself would be the father of the son who would inherit all of God's promises. In fact, God said Abram's descendants would be as impossible to count as the stars in the sky are.

Scene 2: Sarai gives Hagar to Abram as a Wife (Gen. 16:1-4)

A. Sarai was still childless

The Bible says that Sarai had not been able to give any children to her husband (Gen. 11:30; 16:1). This must have made her very sad. And yet, she did realize that it was the Lord, the God that they had been following for at least twenty years, who had kept her from having any children (Gen. 16:2). She had seen that He was powerful enough to let her have children if He wanted to. But for some reason, He had not given her children.

Even after living in the land God promised for ten years, they still didn't have any children. She knew God had promised Abram a son and that the nation of people this would start would contain so many

people that it would be impossible to count them all. Yet they still didn't have even one son. To make things even worse, she knew that she was now too old to have any children. She was 75 years old. Most women stop having babies when they are less than 50 years old. This must have all been a bit confusing to her. She believed God would not lie, but she didn't know what to do.

B. Sarai gives Hagar to Abram as a secondary wife

In all their travels, both Abram and Sarai learned a lot about the customs and laws of the different places that they traveled through. Somehow she knew about a law written for wives in her situation. This law said that Sarai, as the wife who had no children, could give a servant girl to her husband as a second, lesser wife. If this servant girl had any children, according to the law, they would be thought of as the children of Sarai.³ As she thought about this custom, she decided that this must be the way God intended Abram to have a son. After all, God had promised him a son. Now she was 75 years old, which meant her body was too old to have children. (God had not yet told them that she was to have the son herself.)

She came to Abram and insisted that he take Hagar as his lesser wife. Hagar was one of the maids they had gotten from their time in Egypt.⁴ Sarai would still be the main wife, and any children Hagar would have would, by law, belong to Sarai. That's why she pleaded with Abram to do this, saying, "Perhaps I shall obtain children through her" (16:2). Abram obeyed Sarai's suggestions and took Hagar as a wife.⁵ Before long the news came that Hagar would be having a baby for Abram. That was very exciting news for everyone! Soon the long awaited child would come. Everyone in Abram's camp was happy and excited . . . for a while.

Scene 3: Sarah Persecutes Hagar

A. Hagar now despises Sarai (Genesis 16:4-6a)

Then something happened to turn this joy into bitterness, anger, and arguments. The Bible says that when Hagar knew she would have Abram's child, she started "despising" or looking down at Sarai. This means she did not consider herself as a servant anymore. She probably stopped doing her servant work for Sarai and wanted others to take care of her since she was going to have a baby. Perhaps she began thinking she should be the chief wife since she was the one who was going to give Abram a child. She thought she was better than Sarai since she could have Abram's child and Sarai could not.

B. Sarai complains to Abram

It didn't take long for Sarai to realize Hagar had changed her attitude toward her. She didn't like this change at all. She may have felt that Hagar was trying to take her place so she decided to talk to Abram about this immediately.

Sarai blamed Abram for what was happening. She said something like, "Now look what's happened. Since Hagar has known she is having your child, she has started looking down at me—thinking of me as if I was the servant and she was the master. What are you going to do about this? May God be the judge between which of us has done the greater wrong--me, by giving her to you as a wife, or you as a husband who is not stopping her wrong attitude (a paraphrase of Genesis 16:5).

Abram reminded Sarai that it was her right by the laws of that day to do with Hagar as she pleased, since she was the head wife.⁶

C. Sarai treats Hagar very harshly

Sarai quickly reduced Hagar to the position of a slave and started making life very difficult for her. The Bible actually says Sarai “afflicted” or persecuted her.⁷ This means she was very, very harsh toward Hagar. She probably ordered her around: “Clean this!” “Move that over there.” “I want you to cook the big meal.” “Don’t rest now, you still have more work to do!” “When you finish this job, I’ll have more for you to do!” “I’ll show you who is the number one woman around here!”

 We can see that Sarai was jealous of Hagar. Did you know that jealousy is sin? Jealousy is when you want what someone else has. You want it so badly that you start thinking bad thoughts about the person who has what you want. Or you start treating him/her badly. That’s why jealousy leads to many other sins. When you are jealous, you sin. When you treat others badly, you sin. When you try to get even with others as Sarai was doing, you are sinning. God says all have done sins like this (Read Ecclesiastes 7:20). He will punish you for your sins, just as some day He would judge Sarai for her sin of being jealous of and treating Hagar harshly.

I’m sure there was a lot of screaming in Abram’s tents as Hagar was pushed back down to the lowest of slaves. From the words that are used of how Sarai treated Hagar, we know there must have been a lot of crying too. Hagar felt helpless and very mistreated.

Scene 4: Hagar Runs Away (Gen. 16:6b-9)

A. Hagar flees toward her home in Egypt

We can be assured that everyone living with Abram had come to know the true and living God that Abram followed. Abram had been faithful in telling others about Jehovah, the God of Glory. That’s why he was able to bring Believers with him from Harran. That’s why he built altars and preached to others that were living with him and around him. We can also be assured that Hagar must have also come to faith in Jehovah. Otherwise Abram would never have taken her as a wife.⁸ As a Believer in the true God, Hagar was to submit to authorities over her, even though Sarai was making her life very miserable.

➔ Those of you here today who have also placed your faith in the God of Abram need to know that **God commands you to submit to the authorities in your life.** To submit means to put yourself under the ones who are your authorities. This means you are to listen to them and do what they say. It also means that you show them respect. Who are your authorities? God, your parents, your teachers, the government in your city and country. You, as a Believer, need to submit to their rules and obey them—just as Hagar was supposed to submit to Sarai.

Hagar was finding out just how miserable life could be. She had never been treated this badly. Finally, she decided she couldn’t take any more. When no one was looking, she slipped out of the tent and started running back toward her homeland of Egypt. It was a long, difficult journey from Hebron to Egypt, especially for a woman who was going to have a baby.

B. The Angel of the Lord appears to Hagar

When Hagar reached a spring of water in the wilderness of Shur [*have a student point out Shur on the map*] something very strange and wonderful happened to her. As she rested by the spring and drank from its cool fresh water, she heard someone calling her name. The voice said, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from and where are you going?” (Genesis 16:8a). Wow! Who could possibly know her name way out here in the desert? She was 60 miles from Hebron. This was puzzling. But she answered, saying she was running away from Sarai, her owner.

Who was it that was talking to Hagar? The Bible tells us it was “The Angel of the Lord” (Genesis 16:7,8). This was no ordinary angel from heaven. This was a very special messenger⁹ from the Lord. This is the first of eight times that He appeared in the whole Bible. Because this special messenger was also called God, and at times, He talked of doing things that only God could do, and because He never appeared again after the birth of Jesus, many people who study the Bible believe that this special “Angel of the Lord” was really Jesus before He came to earth as a baby. Now, He sometimes came to earth to give special messages from God the Father. He came in the appearance of a man, even though he did not yet have a real human body like He would have when He came as a baby.



Phil. 2:8

We know from the Bible that Jesus is truly God the Son. He is eternal, never having a beginning nor will He have an end. He is equal with the God of Glory. He too is holy (perfect) and loving. That’s why many years later He would leave heaven and come to earth as a baby boy. He would take on a human body just like yours and mine so he could do something for you that no one else could do. The Bible says that “Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). He took on a human body so that He could die in the place of human beings—in your place and mine. Death is the punishment that you and I deserve for our sins. But Jesus obeyed the Father’s plan and died as your substitute and mine. He paid the price for your sins so He can now save you from punishment if you’ll believe in Him.

Before He came to earth as a baby He lived in heaven as a Spirit. At times, He did come to earth to give special messages to people who had a part in God’s special plans on earth. When He came to earth, He looked like a man, but He said and did things that only God could do. That’s why He was often called the “Angel (Messenger) of Jehovah.” The people He talked with soon realized that He was more than an angel from heaven. They saw that He was God! Even Hagar began realizing that He was God.

C. The Angel of the Lord tells Hagar to go back to Sarai

Just what did the Angel of the Lord want to tell Hagar? The first part of His message sounded very difficult. It was not what Hagar wanted to hear. He said, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand” (Genesis 16:9).

[Active learners will enjoy being asked to read this verse from their Bible or yours]

As God, this Angel of the Lord already knew that Sarai was not treating Hagar very nicely. And yet He still said go back to your owner. Why? Because God expects His followers to submit to the authorities He has put over them. The same is true today. If you are a true child of God, **God commands you to submit to the authorities in your life.** What did our memory verse say? Who can say it from memory? *[Have Hebrews 13:17 read or quoted]*. Yes, we are to obey all who God has placed over us. Who are your authorities?

- *The elders and teachers in your church (as our memory verse says)
- *Your parents (Eph. 6:1)
- *Government leaders (Rom. 13:1)
- *Your teachers at school (Luke 6:40a)

Why are you to submit to their authority? Because God commanded it, and to disobey this command is sin. To not obey your authorities is to rebel against the ones God has allowed to be over you. Romans 13:1 says He is the one who has put them over you. Rebellion is as serious to God as witchcraft, which is listening to, worshipping, and being controlled by evil spirits from Satan (1 Sam. 15:23). Even when our parents, teachers, or other leaders are making us do difficult things, or when they are being unkind to us,

we are to submit to them and obey what they tell us to do. The only time when God allows us to disobey is if they ask us to do something that is sin (against what God’s Word tells us). [See Acts 5:27-29]

God has promised to work all these difficulties and sufferings out for our good (Romans 8:28). One of the ways He uses such difficulties is to build in us the right kind of character. He uses trials to make us more patient . . . more thoughtful of others who suffer . . . stronger . . . and more dependent on God to help us through the difficulties. God commands you to submit to your authorities. That’s why He told Hagar to go back and submit herself to Sarai. He had special lessons that He wanted her to learn. He also wanted the baby she was going to have to grow up under Abram’s teaching and leadership where he would learn about and place faith in Abram’s God—not in Egypt where everyone worshipped idols.

Scene 5: The Angel of the Lord Comforts Hagar (Genesis 16:10-12)

A. Hagar was to have many descendants from her son

Now the Angel of the Lord wanted to bring comfort to Hagar by telling her about some special blessings that she and her child would have. These would encourage her later whenever Sarai was not treating her fairly. The first words of comfort were that God was going to give her many descendants. This is just like the promise God gave to Abram (and she is the only woman in the Bible to receive such a promise). Her child would live and have many children and grandchildren.

Secondly, He told her that she was going to have a son. That was very happy news for people in that part of the world. The firstborn son of any family was considered very special. He even told her that the child was to be named Ishmael. He is one of the few people in the Bible who was given a name by God Himself. His name means “God hears.” This is a message that God wanted Hagar to never forget. Every time Hagar called her son by name, she could be reminded that her God did hear her cry of affliction. He is always listening and willing to help those who believe in and follow Him. What comfort this would give in the days ahead as she went back to being Sarai’s slave.

B. God predicts what Ishmael will be like

The next thing the Angel of the Lord said may sound a little strange to us today. He said that the boy would grow up to be like a “wild donkey of a man.” This is the kind of donkey found in the desert. To us who live in the city and only think of the donkey as an animal that carries heavy loads, this may not sound like a nice thing to call someone. But to the people living in that desert area, the wild donkey was highly valued.¹⁰ It meant that though Hagar was a slave, her son would be free, strong, and able to go and do whatever he wanted when he grew up. Maybe to us it would be like calling him a wild stallion--a strong, fast horse that others could not catch or tame.

Ishmael was also predicted to have his hand upon everyone and everyone’s hand upon him. This too would be related to the Bedouin lifestyle that he and his descendants would have. It is not saying that he would always be fighting others, but rather that his life would be challenging. As nomadic people, his tribes would at times experience fear, threats, and struggles for the land and water needed to feed their families and flocks of animals. But no one would make Ishmael and his descendants their slaves (as Hagar was). They would be people on the move, learning how to live off the land that is open and free to roam on. At times they might have to fight to keep that freedom, but God was assuring Hagar that they would keep it.

The last thing the angel said was that Ishmael would “dwell in the presence of his brethren.”¹¹ This means that God would give Ishmael and his descendants a place to dwell in, next to, or to the east of Canaan in the area known as Arabian desert today [*point out this area on the map*].

Scene 6: Hagar Bears Abram's firstborn Son (Gen. 16:15-16)

A. Hagar worships and obeys the Lord

What was Hagar's response to all this good news? First, she gave God a name to remind her of His special attention to her, a lowly slave woman. She called Jehovah, "El Roi" which means: "You are the God who sees." She was thrilled that she had been visited by the God who always sees her. So she named that spring of water that she was near, "Beer Lahai Roi," which means "The well of the living One who sees."¹² This was her way of praising and worshipping the God of Abram that she too believed in with all her heart. She was now comforted by the fact that God had seen and heard her when she was in trouble. He had comforted her with this message concerning her son.

B. Hagar gives birth to Abram's firstborn son

Hagar returned and submitted herself to Sarai. Her attitude and behavior never again caused a problem. She had learned a valuable lesson from her affliction. And in time, Hagar did have a child.

Climax: At 86 years of age, Abram became the father of a healthy baby boy.

Conclusion: He named the baby Ishmael, just as the Angel of the Lord had instructed Hagar. Hagar's story today has a happy ending because she learned to submit to God and those He placed over her. It seems like she never again caused problems for Sarai or Abram.

Challenge: What about you here today who are believers in the God of Abram? Are you willing to learn the same lesson? Don't forget. **God commands you to submit to those He has placed in authority over you.** Can we say our memory verse together? [*Repeat Hebrews 13:17 together.*] To submit means you are to submit in your actions and attitudes. It means you do what your authorities tell you to do, and you do it with a good attitude.

- *When your teacher gives you homework to do, you should do it with your best effort—without complaining.
- *When your parents tell you to help your brother or sister with their homework or chores, you should do it without grumbling.
- *When your Sunday School teacher asks you to sit still and listen carefully to the lesson, you should obey (without making faces).
- *If the babysitter tells you to put your toys away and get ready for bed, you need to obey because she is your authority while your parents are away.

God expects you to submit to all your authorities unless they tell you to do something sinful. When you submit to them, you are really submitting to God because He is the one who put that person over you. When you do not submit to them, you are not submitting to God. Will you begin submitting to those who are your boss at home, at school, in the church, or in your city? If so, will you memorize our memory verse and repeat it at each meal every day this week? Also pray for at least one authority at that meal so God will help them have you do the right kind of things. Next week you can tell me who you prayed for and how you submitted to him/her.

♥ **Invitation:** If you are here today and have not yet believed in the God of Abram and accepted His Son, Jesus Christ, then God wants you to submit yourself to His plan of salvation. He now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). This means He wants you to realize that you have sinned and deserve to be punished. He also wants you to realize who Jesus is—that He is the Son who died for your sin. This is what repentance means. Instead of trusting in yourself and your efforts, you must trust in

Jesus. Ask Him for salvation. “He who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” If you want to repent and be saved today, stay after class and talk to me about it.

¹ Hebron is about 20 miles between Beersheba and Jerusalem. It has an elevation of over 3,000 feet. See Merrill Unger, “Hebron” in The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary, R.K. Harrison, editor (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), p. 549.

² Hoerth describes one of the many Nuzi tablets found in Mesopotamia as saying that “This adopted son was obligated to serve his parents as long as they lived and then bury and mourn for them when they died.” See Hoerth, p. 103.

³ There are several examples of this common practice. One comes from the now famous Nuzi tablets found in Mesopotamia, dating to within a few hundred years of Abram’s time. These clay tablets stated specifically that “If Gilimninu fails to bear children, Gilimninu shall get for Shennima (the husband) a woman from Lullu country (i.e., a slave girl) as a concubine (secondary wife status). In that case, Gilimninu herself (wife) shall have authority over the offspring. . . .” Cited in John Davis, Paradise to Prison (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 188.

These “Nuzi Tablets” are some 15,000 clay cuneiform texts found in the early 1920’s in the northeast area of modern-day Iraq. The general time period of these documents are believed to be around 1600-1400 B.C. This predates Abram by a few hundred years, but reflects laws and practices that had been in existence long before they were written on these tablets.

⁴ The Bible does say she is Egyptian, but the name “Hagar” is a Hebrew, not Egyptian name. It means “flight” and thus she may have been named this for being part of Abram’s clan in their “flight” from Egypt. In all probability, she was one of the servants given to Abram by Pharaoh (Gen. 12:16).

⁵ According to the age and curiosity of your class, you may need to explain about Abram taking a second wife. We know from God’s own words from the Garden of Eden that His plan was for a man to have only one wife (see Gen. 2:24; cf. Mt. 19:4-5). However, we also must realize that Genesis was not yet written in Abram’s time. Though it was not best for man to have more than one wife, he did allow it in Old Testament times. We should also know that the New Testament very clearly forbids having more than one wife (Mt. 19:4-6; 1 Tim. 3:2; Rom. 7:2-3).

⁶ Another famous and widespread code of law during the late patriarchal period was the “code of Hammurabi,” a great Mesopotamian king. One of his laws stated that when a seignior (bridegroom) married a hierodule (bride) and she gave a female slave to her husband and she has then borne children, if later that female slave has claimed equality with her mistress because she bore children, her mistress may not sell her; she may mark her with the slave mark and commit her among the slaves.” See Theophile J. Meek, “The Code of Hammurabi,” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts, edited by James Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 172.

⁷ The Hebrew word used here to describe Sarai’s abuse of Hagar is the same word used by God to describe the terrible afflictions the Hebrews would later suffer under Pharaoh when they were his slaves (Ex. 1:11). This shows Sarai made Hagar’s life extremely miserable. The form of the verb used here suggests the idea of bringing someone under control and dominating by means of harsh treatment that may involve physical and psychological abuse. See the discussion on this word in Tony Malouf, “Ishmael in Biblical History,” unpublished dissertation, 1998), p. 48.

⁸ There are several evidences that everyone in the household of Abram became people of faith, even though that evidence may come later in the narrative or even in the New Testament. One of the first evidences is God’s statement about His knowing that Abram would “command his children and his household, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice” (Genesis 18:19). We know Abram would never have considered either Eliezar (15:2) or later Ishmael (17: 18-19) to be possible heirs of his covenant from God if they were non-believers. We also know of his standards for marrying only those of like faith by his instructions to the servant he sent to find a bride for Isaac (Gen. 24:1-9). All of this strongly argues for Hagar too being a woman of faith.

⁹ The word “angel” (mal’ak) actually means “messenger.” Richards states that the “mission of a mal’ak is to 1) carry a message, 2) fulfill a special, specific mission, and/or 3) represent the one sending him. It is a word used both of human and supernatural messengers.” Concerning the identity of the “Angel of the Lord,” Richards writes: “Many suggest that he is actually the second person of the Trinity, appearing before the incarnation (in Bethlehem). This interpretation is supported by the fact that the Angel of the Lord not only serves as an agent of revelation . . . he also speaks as the God of the Covenant (Judges 2:1-4). He is often viewed as God by those to whom he appears (Gen. 16:9-13; Ex. 3:2,6; Judges 13:20-22).” See Larry Richards, New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), pp. 43-44.

¹⁰ We need to remember that all of these statements made about Ishmael were given to comfort an abused woman greatly in distress over her circumstances. They were meant to encourage her to go back under the yoke of Sarai and faithfully serve the one who had been mistreating her. The sense of the original Hebrew words and phrases are somewhat obscure and not always easy to understand (as can be seen by the various ways they have been translated). But this theme of “comfort” that the Angel of Jehovah was seeking to give Hagar will help the careful student see the positive elements in each of the three predictions given concerning Ishmael. This first phrase “a wild donkey of a man” to people in that part of the world would have been taken as a compliment. Tony Malouf cites several sources showing the wild donkey to be an “admired animal in the ancient Near East.” It is even used as a by-name for tribal chiefs in Bedouin poetry. See the discussion in Malouf’s dissertation, pp. 61-62.

¹¹ Some have translated this phrase as “he will live in hostility toward all his brethren” (NIV, NRSV). But even the NIV notes that it could be translated “or live to the east of, or in presence of” as the KJV, NKJV, and NASB translates it. The literal meaning is “before the face of” or “in front of.” It should be understood as a geographical reference of lands Ishmael’s descendants will live in, since the same phrase is used as a geographical reference later in Gen. 25:18 in reference to the descendants of Ishmael. The meaning of “hostility” or being “against” his brethren does not come from the text or context, but has to be read back into the text from more modern day hostilities between Arabs and Jews. This is not proper Bible interpretation (or translation).

¹² Ross, p. 323.