

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Forgiven Sin . . . Lingering Consequences

Genesis 21:8–21



LET'S BEGIN HERE

God's forgiveness runs through the dry desert of our sin, quenching our souls where thirst is deserved, cleansing our faces from grime of our own making, soothing our prodigal feet that are sore from running. What a relief to know that God "forgives all my sins" (Psalm 103:3)!

Through faith in Christ's atonement for our sins, we enter a secure sanctuary of grace. "We have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us" (Romans 5:1). Our sins are forgiven and our souls are secure . . . and yet the consequences of our sins can linger on.

Case in point: *David*. God washed his guilty stain "whiter than snow" after he committed adultery with Bathsheba (Psalm 51:7), *and yet* the child she bore still died. *And yet* Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, still lay cold in the grave. *And yet* aftershocks from David's sin rocked the foundations of his family for years to come.

Consequences of sin hang around like a recovering alcoholic's cravings or an abuse victim's night terrors. God removes repentant criminals' sins "as far as the east is from the west" (103:12), but the concrete walls that imprison them remain. The lesson we learn is this: *though every act of sin is forgivable, the effects of some are not erasable.*

Years earlier, Abraham sinned by running ahead of God and impregnating Sarah's Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, to produce an heir (Genesis 16:1–6). Although Abraham's sin was forgiven, Hagar's son, Ishmael, lived on as Abraham's sole heir . . . until Isaac was born, and the rivalry for the inheritance began.

In this study, we'll see how Abraham handled the rivalry between Ishmael and Isaac, and we'll marvel at God's compassion for victims who, through no fault of their own, must suffer the lingering consequences of sin.

Quotable

Though every act of sin is forgivable, the effects of some are not erasable.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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STUDY



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As you begin, take a moment to prayerfully read the following verses:

The LORD is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. . . .
He does not punish us for all our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. (Psalm 103:8, 10)

Thank the Lord that, because of His great, unfailing love, He does not leave us to wallow in our sin and its consequences. “He knows how weak we are” (103:14). Invite the Lord to come near you. Thank Him for forgiving your sin, and ask Him to restore you and help you pick up the pieces caused by your sin—just as He did for Abraham and for each member of his family in their crisis.



Observation: A Case of Sin and Consequences

By following the *Searching the Scriptures* method, we feed ourselves on the Word of God. Then as we live out what we've learned from the Bible, the Spirit of God empowers and changes us. With this goal in mind, let's follow the steps of Bible study: observation, interpretation, correlation, and the all-important final step of application.

Read Genesis 21:8–21. In the space below, summarize what happened. Don't focus on the dialogue for now, just the action.



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In the following chart, compare this scene with a similar episode that occurred years earlier soon after Hagar discovered she was pregnant with Abraham's son.

	First Conflict between Sarah and Hagar Genesis 16:1–16	Second Conflict between Sarah and Hagar Genesis 21:8–21
What incited Sarah's anger?		
What did Sarah say to Abraham?		
What happened to Hagar?		
How did God show compassion to Hagar?		
What blessing did God give Ishmael?		
What does "water" symbolize in each story?		

As you reflect on these two accounts, you can see the ripple effects Abraham's sin created. Write down a list of consequences that spread in ever-widening circles from having a son through Hagar.



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Ishmael hindered the covenant from passing to Isaac. Sarah was right—Ishmael and Hagar had to go (Genesis 21:10). And yet, Sarah was *wrong* to allow her emotions to rage out of control. What characteristics of unrestrained anger do you see in Sarah's words (16:5; 21:10)?

Compare Abraham's response in Genesis 16:6 and Genesis 21:11–14. How are they different? How does Abraham show more wisdom in the second episode than the first in responding to Sarah and handling this heartbreaking choice between his two sons?

When Abraham released Hagar from servitude, he cut off Ishmael from his inheritance with no hope for return. Although Abraham loved Ishmael and desired God's blessing for him (17:16), he had no choice but to swallow the bitter fruit of his sin and banish Hagar and his beloved son.

God, however, was moving behind the scenes. Through each hurtful event—Abraham's sin, Hagar's contempt, Sarah's rage, and the boys' rivalry—God was working His will. It's just like God to take tragedy and turn it around for His purposes (Romans 8:28)! What thread of hope do you see woven into the story?



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Word Study: From Laughter to Making Fun

Sarah saw Ishmael “making fun of her son, Isaac” (Genesis 21:9). The Hebrew word for “making fun” is an intensive form of the same root as Isaac’s name, which means “laughter.” In his recounting of this story in Galatians 4:29, the apostle Paul used which severe word to describe Ishmael’s actions?

Ishmael was half Egyptian (Genesis 16:1). How might the original readers of Genesis, who had recently fled Egypt, have understood Ishmael’s persecution of Isaac?

The play on words indicates that Ishmael was doing more than teasing his little brother; he was challenging Isaac’s role. Ishmael, who was about age 17, chose the feast to make his move for the inheritance. By mocking Isaac in front of the crowd, Ishmael was asserting his claim as the eldest—a foolish action that sealed his fate.

Despite the consequences of Abraham’s sin and our sin, God’s work is not hindered. He reshapes broken spirits and weaves torn threads into a beautiful tapestry of His design. He has a special place in His heart for sin’s victims, those who are desperate and alone, like single-parent Hagar and her son.



Interpretation: God’s Compassion for Single Parents

Previously, when Hagar ran away, “The angel of the LORD found Hagar” (Genesis 16:7), and Hagar remarked, “You are the God who sees me” (16:13). God found her and saw her, and then in this scene, “God heard the boy crying” (21:17). Notice the progression: God finds, God sees, and God hears.



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What meaning do you perceive in God's compassion toward single-parent Hagar and her son?

God showed Hagar a well full of water (Genesis 21:19). What meaning can you draw from this example of God's provision?



Correlation: God's Promises to Single Parents

When Hagar left Abraham's secure home, she faced a vast, sun-scorched wasteland with nothing but a bit of food, a bag of water, and a promise from God (Genesis 16:10). Single parents and domestic abuse victims stumble through their own deserted wastelands, with finances stretched thin, resources run dry, and little hope of relief. What comfort do the following passages offer?

Psalm 54:5

Psalm 68:5–6



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It didn't matter that Hagar was Egyptian, a race that would later enslave the Hebrews. God's compassion for the abused transcends all ethnic borders, even reaching our enemies—just as Christ taught, "I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44–45). It's a powerful lesson for us to learn.

Application: Lessons to Be Learned

God's compassion shines in this story, and there's more! Each character has a lesson to teach.

Sarah: *Sinful consequences may stalk us, but they won't conquer us unless we let them.* Sarah had to learn to live above Hagar's contempt and focus on God's purposes.

Abraham: *Marital disagreements will trouble us, but they can be great teachers if we're willing to learn.* Abraham learned to listen to Sarah. Really listen. Not react to her anger but genuinely seek to understand.

Hagar: *Personal regrets can discourage you, but they can't cripple you if you choose to press on.* God will point the way to the wells full of water, but we must ask for help, listen to His words, and follow His way.

Which of these applications hit closest to home for you? How can you put these lessons into action?

Some of sin's consequences may dog your steps, but that's not the end of the story. God is writing all the experiences of your life into a new chapter for you. Don't get stuck in the past or bogged down in the consequences. Let God help you turn the page, leave the past, pick a new heading, and move on.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, what a mess of things I've made at times! Thank You for Your patience and willingness to help me pick up the pieces and deal with the consequences of my sin. How good You are to give me a future—a well full of water in the desert. Please give me a reason to go on, and help me stand tall once again and move forward in Your strength. Amen.



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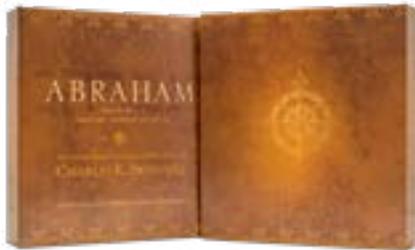
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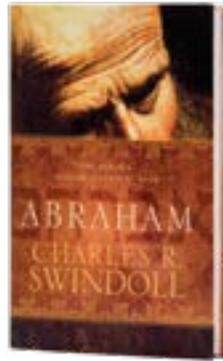
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For the 2017–2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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