



The Sermon

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Genesis 21:1-21

"Seven Important Truths About God"

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TRANSCRIPT

Well, we continue through our journey in the book of Genesis and we find ourselves now in Genesis chapter 21. So if you would take your Bible and turn with me to Genesis chapter 21, I want to begin by reading what will be our passage for today. The title of this message is "Seven Important Truths About God." I posted it on social media yesterday, it was five important truths, but I kept studying. It's the same pie, just more slices, okay. So, "Seven Important Truths About God."

Genesis chapter 21, beginning in verse 1, "Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' And she said, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.' The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. Therefore she said to Abraham, 'Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.' The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever

Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant.' So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.

"When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, 'Do not let me see the boy die.' And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept. God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him.' Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink.

"God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer. He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt." This is the reading of God's inspired, inerrant, and infallible word that is profitable for our daily lives today. Let us go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Father in heaven, it is good for us to hear the word of God read to our ears. It is good for us to have this historical account set back before us again, because there are many truths here that You want us to know and to incorporate into our own Christian lives. We thank You that You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. From everlasting to everlasting You are God. You are the God who was and who is and who shall be forever. And as we study what You did so long ago, You are the same God today. And what You were to Abraham and Sarah, You are to us; and what You were to Hagar and to Ishmael and to Isaac, You remain to us, because You are unchanging in Your person, unchanging in Your ways. You are immutable.

And so, Father, though this is an ancient passage some four thousand years ago, yet it is as relevant today for us as though You had this recorded this morning. So open our eyes, that we may behold the relevance of this for our walk with You, and use this to undergird our faith and to bolster our confidence in You. Father we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

At first glance, as I have read through these verses, they seem to be about the promised birth of Isaac and the expulsion of Ishmael. And these verses certainly are all about Isaac and Ishmael. In fact, the heading in my New American Standard Bible that sits atop Genesis 21 - I'm looking at it right now - it just simply says, "Isaac is Born." And then sitting on top of verse 9, the heading that the translator has supplied, it reads, "Sarah Turns Against Hagar." And that's a very accurate summary of what we call the big idea of a passage, the dominant theme. It's all about the birth of Isaac, and it's all about Sarah and Hagar and the jealousy there.

If you have a MacArthur Study Bible there are two headings in those verses. It reads, "Isaac is Born" and "Sarah Turns Against Hagar." If you have an ESV, it's probably because you couldn't find a New American Standard; it reads - sorry, I couldn't resist that - it reads, "The Birth of Isaac" and "God Protects Hagar and Ishmael." And these are very fair and correct and accurate summaries of what I just read for you. We always want to find the big idea of the passage.

But I want us to look at this a second time, because upon further investigation, the key figure is not Abraham, the key figure is not Sarah, and this is not all about Hagar and Ishmael and Isaac. The most prominent figure in these verses is none other than God. This is one of those passages in which the veil is pulled back and we're allowed to see into the invisible world of God. Normally when we look at a historical narrative we see only what is physical, what the naked eye can see. But this is one of those rare passages where we are enabled to see the invisible, the invisible hand of God at work. And I just want to walk us through this one more time very quickly at the beginning of this message, and I want you to see the fingerprints of God all over this passage. And this is a very important lesson for us to learn, and I'll tell you why in just a moment.

But look at verse 1 again. It says, "The Lord took note," and it says, "the Lord had said, and then the Lord did for Sarah," three times in the first verse. And then in verse 2, it says, "God spoke." And in verse 4, it says, "God commanded." In verse 6, it reads, "God made laughter for Sarah." And in verse 12, it says, "God said to Abraham." And in verse 17, three times, "God heard, God called, God heard." And verse 19, it says, "God opened her eyes." In verse 20, it says, "God was with the lad." That's a total of twelve times in these verses we read about the invisible hand of God at work in this narrative. And we should not be surprised by this, because the most prominent figure in any passage is always God.

The chief purpose of the word of God – learn this – the chief purpose of the word of God is to reveal the God of the Word. I mean, this entire book of Genesis began this way. Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God." God is always at work. And sometimes in the narratives God is not directly mentioned like He is here; but nevertheless, God is the one who is ordering the affairs of providence behind the scene, and it is God who is ushering history; for it has been well said that history is His story; and it is loud and clear in this passage.

And so still just by way of introduction, to help you with your Bible study and your Bible reading, whenever you read a passage of scripture, first and foremost, look for God. God is more important than anyone. Look for the attributes of God. Look for the names of God. Look for the activity of God. Look for the triunity of God. Look for the salvation of God, the grace of God. Look for the judgment of God. Look for the will of God, the kingdom of God. From cover to cover we must read our Bible through the lens of who God is. And when we say God, we mean God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We will be reading our Bible in such a limited way if we are just looking for men and women, if we are just looking for something that resembles ourselves.

The chief purpose of the Word of God is to reveal the God of the Word. And this is so important for us, even as we live our Christian lives, because as we look at the world around us and everything that is unfolding and everything that is unraveling, we must have a Christian worldview; and in order to understand the world around us, we must look at the world through the lens of who God is. And as we consider our own lives, we must be always thinking of how God is at work in my life, how God is ordering my steps, how God is going before me, how God is opening doors, how God is closing other doors, how God is directing me in this different direction, how God is providing for me, how God is strengthening me, how God is encouraging me. As we live our Christian lives we must always have a God-centered orientation. And so this passage I believe is so very helpful to us because it's one of the rare passages in which God is so on display verse after verse after verse.

As we will proceed through the book of Genesis, it will not always be so evident. God will be behind the veil, and we will not directly see the evidence of God. But we know that God is always there and always bringing things about. So as we look at this passage, the easiest way for me to have

outlined this passage would have been for me to go, "Well, the birth of Isaac, the obedience of Abraham, the response of Sarah, the departure of Hagar." I could have done that in 30 seconds. But I want us to look at this in a totally different way. I want us to see this unfolding story, this narrative, through the lens of God, because God is so featured in this text.

So, I have seven headings to set before you; and just to encourage you, it's still the same pie, okay. Seven headings, but they all revolve around God. And I trust that even this outline will reinforce for each one of us how God-centered, how God-focused we must be in our Christian lives. God is the cornerstone. God is the anchor. God is the foundation. God is the pillars, who is upholding everything in our lives.

So, the first truth I want you to see is in verses 1 and 2, "God gives life." That's what we see. In verse 1 we read, "Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said." You'll note that "Lord" is mentioned in verse 1, but the shift then is to God in verse 2. "Lord God," same person, two different names. And Lord is "Yahweh" or "Jehovah," and what that means is "the self-existent One," "the One who is not dependent upon anyone or anything for any need in Himself," because He has no needs within Himself. And we all are filled and flooded with needs, and we find all of our needs, in one way or another, met in this God. He is independent and autonomous from us, and it is in Him that we live and move and have our being. He is the source of all that we need, and He is the source of all that Sarah needed and Abraham needed.

And so that's reflected even in the name that is given by Moses as he writes this: "Then the self-existent Lord, Yahweh, took notice of Sarah." Of course He took notice there, He paid special attention to Sarah. "The eyes of the Lord roam to and fro throughout the whole earth, looking to strengthen the one whose heart is completely His." The Bible represents God as having, in the book of Revelation, seven eyes, that He sees everything in every direction; He is omniscient. There is nothing that God does not know. There is nothing that God has ever learned. God knows everything immediately, comprehensively, eternally. Even when we pray to God, we are not telling God anything that He does not already know. So of course, "the Lord took note," and the idea there is it is a narrowed focus, because He is about to work. "God took note of Sarah as He had said," and what God had said is that she would bear a son within a year. God's eye was upon Sarah.

And I want you to know God's eye is upon you this morning, that God sees from heaven. In fact, one of the names for God is "the God who sees." And God sees you even in the midst of this crowd, and He knows all about you. He knows what you're going to say before you even say it. He has marked your path and He knows the direction that you will take.

So, "The Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised." God is a promise-keeping God, and all of His promises are yea and amen, 2 Corinthians 1 tells us. God has never left a promise unfulfilled. And the promise that He had made to Sarah, as we well know now, is that she would bear a son in her older age with her older husband.

In verse 2, "So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age." And it was God who created the life in the womb of Sarah. There is no explanation for this other than God. There is no explanation for any conception in the creation of life other than God. God is life, God is the creator of all life, God is the giver of all life; there is no life apart from the life-giving God of heaven. Every conception in every child in the womb is made in God's image, and it is the gift of God, it is the fruit of the womb that has been created by God. And this is why abortion is such a grisly, murderous offense against God. It is the putting to death in a mother's womb that which God has created. And that is why for us as Christians with a heightened conscience that we understand the revolt of abortion against God.

"So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham and his old age." Abraham is one hundred years old. Now note this at the end of verse 2, "at the appointed time of which God had spoken." Everything was according to plan. God had said in Genesis 18:10, "I will surely return to you at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." Not only did God say what He would do, God said when He would do it. There is nothing random in the unfolding purposes of God. And here we learn that God's timing is always perfect. God is never late, God is never early, God is always on time. And not only does God do the right thing, but He does the right thing at the right time. He is ordering the affairs of providence with perfect precision.

And God's timing in your life is perfect as well. His time is perfect for those of you who are young couples for you to conceive and to have a child. His time is perfect for you to find a job. His time is perfect for you to meet

your future spouse, for those of you who are single. His timing is perfect for you not only to be born, but to die. "He has numbered our days when as yet there was not one of them," Psalm 139:16. And so, God is carrying out His perfect will according to His perfect time in Sarah's life, but what He has done with Sarah is what He is doing in your life as well.

The second thing I want you to note is, "God gives commands." Not only does God give life, but God gives commands, and we see this in verses 3 through 5: "Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him," - who Sarah bore to him - "Isaac." And the reason that Abraham named him Isaac is because God told him to name him Isaac. And this is in full obedience to the revealed word of God to Abraham. And God has the right to command Abraham's life. God has the right to command every area and every aspect of Abraham's life. There is no part of Abraham's life that is to be lived off limits to God. There can be no secret closet in Abraham's life in which God is not ruler and Lord over that area.

And so, verse 4, "Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac." Why did he do that? Because God had commanded him to do that. Earlier we read in Genesis 17:11-12 - we don't need to revisit that - but God commanded that a Jewish-born son on the eighth day would be circumcised. And I don't need to go back through all that surgical procedure, but just to remind you that it was to be a sign of the covenant people of Israel. It was to be a distinguishing mark in the foreskin of the male organ that this one is set apart from the nations and set apart from the world unto God to be a part of His chosen people. That was the purpose of circumcision.

But it also had a far greater meaning which was "there must be a heart circumcision in the future in this child," which is a metaphor for the new birth, that there must come a time in Isaac's life when the sharp, two-edged sword of the word of God would pierce the soul and heart of Isaac, and lay him bare before God to see his need for saving grace .

And so Abraham carried out what God had ordered him and commanded him to do. In fact, at the end of verse 4, it reads, "as God had commanded." God is the one who is in control over Abraham's life, as He is in control over your life. There is no area of your life that is off limits to God. God has the right to govern your life. He made you, He created you in His own image, and we are His workmanship.

Verse 5, "Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him." And Moses records this in verse 5 just to underscore again how miraculous and how impossible this conception was apart from divine intervention from God. And so before we move on to the next verse, let me just pause for a moment and reinforce this for each one of us, that there is no area of our lives over which God does not exercise His lordship, and He has the right to command us how to live, and how to work, and how to worship, and how to walk, and everything else in our lives.

Beginning in verse 6, I want you to note, "God gives laughter." Not only does God give life, verses 1 and 2, and not only does God give commands, verses 3 through 5, but He gives laughter, in verses 6 through 8. And before I even read these verses, this should tell us that there is joy in our lives when we obey the commands of God. Every command of God is leading us into the abundant life that He has for us, and every step of disobedience is leading us away from the blessings of God and really leaving us on our own and reaping what we have sown. And so we're not surprised, beginning in verse 6, that we see the laughter that follows obedience and the laughter that follows God's activity in our lives.

Let me just say this: the happiest Christian is the obedient Christian when that obedience is from the heart. Obviously you can be a Pharisee and just go through empty motions on the outside; it's not from the heart, it's just a performance. But when it is generated by love for God, it leads into the fullness of joy and gladness.

So we read in verse 6, "Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me.'" This laughter is God-generated. This laughter is God-created. It is God at work in the depth of the heart and the soul, and it is God who creates laughter. Sarah acknowledges this. And the reason for the laughter for Sarah is in total amazement at what God has done, that God has poured out a blessing upon her that is like pouring out the Atlantic Ocean into a coffee mug. I mean, what God has done cannot even be contained within her own tiny little heart, and it is bubbling up and overflowing now with gladness and with joy because of what God has done.

And not only for her, her laughter and her joy was so contagious that everyone else around her began to be filled with laughter. That's one thing about laughing, it makes other people laugh. But here it wasn't just a superficial laughter, it is a laughter in the depth of the soul knowing what

God has done in Sarah and Abraham's life. And so we read at the end of verse 6, "and everyone who hears will laugh with me."

Laughter is contagious. Laughter is good for the soul. Proverbs says in Proverbs 17:22, "A joyful heart is good medicine." Life is serious enough as it is. If it's not mingled with laughter along with it, then that same proverb says, "A broken spirit dries up the bones." And so there must be the recognition of what God has done, and it should bring joy to our hearts, as it does here with Sarah.

And verse 7, "And she" – Sarah – "said, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah will nurse children?'" I mean, this is so unbelievable what God has done. God has done the unexpected, God has done the impossible, and this has brought Sarah to a point of bewilderment and astonishment and amazement; and the more she thinks about it, the more she just almost giggles, because, "How can this be but that God has done this for me?"

And then at the end of verse 7, "Yet I" – Sarah – "have borne him a son in his old age." And it just reminds us that it wasn't just Sarah who was past the age of bearing children, but it was also Abraham who had passed the age of procreating.

So let's just pick this back up. So in verse 8, "The child grew and was weaned," which means was taken off of Sarah's breast, which would have taken place at either age two or three in that day and time. And Abraham was also filled with excitement. And Abraham, it doesn't say here that he was laughing, but we do know that he is filled with celebration because of what we see here at the end of verse 8: "Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned." He threw a party, he celebrated, "Come rejoice with me. My son has been born, and my son is healthy, and my son is developing, and my son is growing."

I trust that you know joy in your Christian life, it is one of the distinguishing marks of a true believer, is that there is joy in the heart. Jesus said in John 15:11, "These things I have spoken unto you, that My joy might be in you, and that your joy might be made full," which tells us that the very joy that we enjoy is the joy of Jesus Christ Himself that is deposited down within our heart and soul. It's not dependent upon

circumstances, it doesn't come from this world, it's not the result of what is taking place around me. That true joy comes down from the throne of grace, and it fills and floods our own heart. That's true joy. And it is only God who can give such joy.

In fact, Galatians 5:22 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy," - it's number two on the list - "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control," et cetera. So joy is one of the most prominent features of the Christian life. Being saved is not like taking bad medicine just so you can get well and enduring religion, it is the greatest thing that would ever happen to anyone's life, and it brings abundant joy.

But there's more that we see here. Beginning in verse 9, there's more that we see of God, there's more that we see of God's activity in the lives of Sarah and Abraham. And so beginning in verse 9, I want you to see, "God gives direction." In verse 9, "Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar" - that would be Ishmael who is now about 13 years old - "the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking." The one who is mocking is Ishmael. He's ridiculing, he's belittling, he's scoffing at this newborn child because he's the older son from a different mother, and he has the place of prominence and preeminence; and so he's mocking. And Sarah saw it: "Mocking my son."

Verse 10, "Therefore she" - Sarah - "said to Abraham, 'Drive out this maid and her son. Get them out of the house, send them away; we are not going to live together with this. I'm not going to stand for this. I'm not going to listen to this. Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac. They're not going to be joint heirs. And the elder will not have a larger portion of that legacy, it's all going to come to my son Isaac. Send them away.'"

Verse 11, "The matter distressed Abraham greatly." This word "distressed" means it injured him, it hurt him very deeply, because Ishmael is also his son. And the word "greatly" means "exceedingly," "to a great degree." I mean, this crushed the heart and the bones of Abraham. It's like a sledgehammer coming down upon his heart. "The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son." And the reference there "because of his son" refers to Ishmael. I mean, his heart is bonded to his own flesh and blood Ishmael.

Verse 12, "But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the lad' - Ishmael - 'and your maid.' - Hagar - 'Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her.'" It's amazing how God uses wives. I say it's amazing. It is amazing how God uses wives to provide inside counsel for their husbands, and how God uses that. It's not to say that wives are infallible and inerrant like the Bible; and they make misjudgments, just like the husband makes misjudgments. But in this case, God said to Abraham, "You listen to her, because that's My will." In essence, God was directing through Sarah what Abraham was to do. And Proverbs speaks of there's victory in the multitude of counselors.

And so at the end of verse 12, "for through Isaac your descendants shall be named." And so God confirms to Abraham that although Ishmael is older and the birthright would go to the older son, that nevertheless what God will do, God will do through the younger son. And again it is an evidence of the sovereign choice of God to work according to His own discretion and according to His own will. God has this all planned out; and Abraham must walk by faith now and obey God, and trust God, and follow this direction that God is making known to Abraham; and just like you and I have to walk by faith, just like we too must turn a deaf ear to the world and listen in the word of God for the direction that God would provide for us.

Verse 13, "And of the son of the maid" - referring to Ishmael - "I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant." Those two words "I will" speak of divine determination, the irrevocable sovereign will and purpose of God that cannot be changed or thwarted. And God says, "I will make a nation of him."

In my mind I can recall reading a sermon by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. It says, "Let a man say, 'I will,' and what is it good for? He says, 'I will do this,' and he never does it. But when God says, 'I will,' He will. And there is a divine certainty about the will of God." And here He says, "I will make a nation" - Arabic nations - "because he is your descendant."

So how does Abraham respond to this? He responds the only way he could rightly respond. He must obey God, right? And so, verse 14, we read, "So Abraham rose early in the morning." I love this. This is immediate obedience. This is prompt obedience. Abraham doesn't even need to pray about this; if he prays, it's only that God would enable him to do what he knows he must do. God has spoken. There must be no procrastination.

Delayed obedience is no obedience. Delayed obedience is disobedience.
"And so Abraham rose early in the morning." There is a promptness in his response to the revealed will of God.

"So Abraham rose early in the morning." And I don't know what there is in your life that God has already made known to you through His word, that you have been hesitant, that you have procrastinated. Delayed obedience is disobedience. There must be this prompt response to God.

"So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water." That's referring to an animal skin that could have water poured into it that would be so necessary, as they are departing out into the wilderness to make this journey, because finding water would be extremely hard. Water was so scarce, unlike today where you can just find water in a gas station, in a restaurant, wherever. No, you had to take your water with you and take your food with you for such a journey as this.

"And so Abraham" - in obedience to God, and in love for Hagar and Ishmael - "gives them bread and water, and gave them to Hagar," - verse 14 - "and put them on her on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away," as per Sarah's request, as per God's confirmation. And so we read at the end of verse 14, "And she" - Hagar - "departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba," which is a wide extensive desert in the middle of nowhere on the southern border of Palestine. It is dry, it is arid, it is dirt. I've been there; it's where hardly anything grows.

And so, think about this from Abraham's perspective. How heart-searching, how heart-crushing this moment was to send away his own son born through Hagar. This was painful for Abraham to follow God's will. And sometimes we think that to follow God's will it's always accompanied with peace; and there is an element of peace in following God's will. But there may be times when it is agonizing to make a difficult decision, especially as it involves family, to pursue the will of God.

Obedience so often costs. It could be painful to break off a relationship that is not healthy. It may be painful for you to move to another part of the country. It might be painful for you to quit your job, because you know you can't continue to work here. Pursuing the will of God at times can be a painful thing. We don't just skip through life; at times, we walk with a limp

as we move forward in the will of God. And this just sucked the life out of Abraham.

In verse 15, I want you to see that, "God gives attention," and by that I mean God gives us His undivided attention. And so in verse 15, we read, "When the water in the skin was used up," - meaning there's no more water left for them; and they're out in this desert-like wilderness, which leaves them in life-threatening situation - "she" - Hagar - "left the boy" - Ishmael - "under one of the bushes." And the reason for that is to provide some shade in this part of the world where this hot desert sun is beaming down with blazing heat and baking them, and making them even more dehydrated and in greater need of water. She left the boy under the shade of a bush so that she can try to find water somewhere, so that she can come up with some kind of a plan of survival at this point.

And so, verse 16, "Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bow shot away," - giving us some idea she can still see him, keep her eye on him, though she is removed - "for she said, 'Do not let me see the boy die.'" She's talking to God: "Try to keep him alive. This is my son." And having lived with Abraham as his maid, she, no doubt, heard of Yahweh, the God of heaven and earth; and she, no doubt, heard the testimony of Abraham, how God had been at work in his life, calling him out of Ur of Chaldees and bringing him into the Promised Land and bringing him back from Egypt, and how God has directed his steps.

And so Hagar begins to call on the Lord and pleading with God, "Do not let my son die." Notice verse 17, I love this, you love this: "God heard the lad crying." God, no doubt, heard Hagar's prayers; but God also is near to the brokenhearted. In fact, God collects all of our tears in a bottle, and He forgets not a one of them. He is afflicted with our affliction.

"And God heard Ishmael, the lad, crying," who's crying out of anguish and panic and fear for his own life that he's going to die. And we read, "And the angel of God called to Hagar." Now, we don't have time to go back through this theophany; but in previous studies we have noted that the angel of God is a strange appearance of God Himself, taking the form of a messenger. That's what the word "angel" means.

And so the angel of God is God. It could be another person within the Trinity. It could be both the Father, "God heard the lad crying," and then God the Son, "the angel of God called out." We don't know, and we don't need to know; we just know it's God. "And the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven," because God heard the crying of this little 13-year-old boy, and God was attentive, and God responded.

"And God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter with you, Hagar?' In other words, 'I haven't led you this far to just drop you and abandon you.'" Verse 17, "Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is." Well, God continues to be the speaker, and so this may be an inter-trinitarian type of conversation that is being spoken to Hagar. But what must be communicated from God to Hagar is, "God knows exactly where you are, God knows exactly what your needs are, and God has heard your crying, and God has heard your prayer."

Verse 18, "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, and I will make a great nation of him." Again, "I will," divine determination, divine sovereignty. This is what God has purposed and what God will do. And what we simply need to know at this point is that God is a prayer-hearing God, that no prayer you will ever offer to God will fall on a deaf ear. God may not answer it in the way that you would like for it to be answered. Every prayer you ever offer to God will be answered: either yes, either no, or wait. But He hears every prayer you will ever offer. You have His undivided attention. He pays attention to you, and He answers with inscrutable, perfect wisdom. He answers exactly as you would answer your own prayers if you were only as wise as God.

So this takes us to verse 19, "God gives provision." And so in response to the prayers, God provides; for God guides, God provides, right? So, verse 19, "Then God," here's God again, who's so dominant in this whole scene. "Then God opened her eyes." What does He open her eyes for? So that she can see the answer to her prayer. What's amazing is, it's right before her. It's right under her nose, she just couldn't see it. This isn't a miracle that God just creates water out of nothing; no, the water was there the whole time.

So, verse 19, "Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water," – this is exactly what she needed; not a cup of water, not a bucket of water, a whole well of water, more water than she could ever drink – "and she went

and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink," which spared his life and spared her life. It is amazing how God does the same in our lives as well. So many times we're looking for some miraculous answer or something to be parachuted out of heaven and just fall into our lap. So many times it is right in front of us, we just couldn't see it. And I think about us as a church, as we're just busting out the walls, "And how's this going to work out?" It's right before Kent's eyes. He's got it worked out. That's how God operates. He's not going to create new real estate. Whatever the solution is, God just opens the eyes to see what's there.

So finally, in verse 20, "God gives growth." Again, this is all God, God, God, God, God. That's why we ought to just love this story, because it's so much about God. So, look at verse 20. Starts off, "God." That's how the book of Hebrews starts: "God."

Verse 20, "God was with the lad," - God was with him to protect him, to sustain his life; God was with him to develop him and to mature him; God was with him to prepare him for manhood; and look at the result - "and he grew." Of course he did. You want to know why? God was with him. He grew physically; he grew mentally; he grew emotionally. This is like Luke 2:52 where Jesus grew in wisdom of stature with God and men.

It's a natural development. There's nothing unusual going on here, it is simply meant to convey to us that God was ushering Ishmael along in the development of his life from early teenage years to a fuller adulthood, and God was keeping him alive. And it really shows how dependent we are upon God for everything, even just to grow up. "And he lived in the wilderness and became an archer." He was a rugged outdoorsman, and he was an archer so that he could hunt animals for food and for their skins.

And verse 21, "He lived in the wilderness of Paran," which is, again, it's the middle of nowhere. It's the northeast section of the Sinai peninsula. Today it's Arabia.

"And his mother took a wife for him." The mother had to do this because there's no father; that was Abraham, he's elsewhere. And so a single mom, those of you who are a single mom, there ought to be some encouragement. God uses you to do even what a husband would do, to provide guidance and wisdom, and to provide provision. And God was with the lad, even without

a father; and God was with Hagar to help her in this very difficult time of isolation away from Abraham, away from a breadwinner, with this relationship with her bow-shooting son Ishmael. "And his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt." That's her native land.

So, what do we learn from this? And I just I'm going to wrap this up very quickly. Each and every one of us needs to have a God-centered worldview. The lens through which you see everything needs to be the person and character of God. You don't need to see the world through the lens of the media. You don't need to see **the lens through the world** of secular humanism. You don't need to see the world around you through your own perspective. If you are to see the world correctly, there's only one prism that can be put in front of you, only one lens, one template, and that is who God is.

I remember years ago before he passed away R. C. Sproul telling me, "Steve, the most important area of theology is theology proper, which is the study of God." And he says, "That is the prism through which you even rightly interpret every other area of theology: Christ, Holy Spirit, angel, Satan, man, sin, salvation, church, second coming, even the Bible itself." The ultimate lens that sharpens your focus to accurately see yourself is through the lens of God. It will enable you to see the cross through the lens of God, and to see your need for a Savior through who God is, who is holy, holy, holy, who is sovereign over all the affairs of life, and who is so full of mercy and grace and love for His people. Do not size up what's going on in your life simply by circumstances, size up everything through the impeccable character of who God is.

The last thing I'll say: if you're here today without Christ, you will never come to see your need for Christ until you see who God is. And God is so perfectly holy. He is sinless, He is flawless; He is so high and lifted up; He is so transcendent, that there is no way you can come to God, there's no way you can reach God in your own sinful life. You have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and you cannot pull yourself up to this Holy God, the chasm is too great. But because you cannot come up to God by your own efforts, God has come down to you. God has come all the way down when He sent His Son Jesus Christ into this world. And what the cross became was really a bridge from you to the Father, and it is the only bridge, it is the only way that will take you to the Father.

And so Jesus came and He became a man. He entered the human race. He was born of a woman, and yet He was without sin. He was tempted at every point, such as we are, yet without sin. And when He went to the cross, He was the sinless One. And God the Father took all of our sins and laid them upon Jesus Christ, and He died in the place of sinners. He died of vicarious death on behalf of those who are guilty. And because of what He accomplished on that cross as He shed His blood and gave His life, He created the only way for guilty sinners to come to Holy God and find acceptance with God, to be embraced by God, to be received by God; and that is for us to put our faith in this Christ who was crucified for us. He was buried; and on the third day, He was raised from the dead; and He has now ascended back to the right hand of God the Father. And whosoever – that could include you – whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. It's not simple, but that's all you have to do, just call on the name of the Lord.

Now in that, you're going to have to repent of your sin, you're going to have to confess your sin, because Jesus only died for one kind of person: sinners. He didn't die for good people, He died for bad people; and you're going to have to come to the point where you recognize that you have sinned against a holy God, and the wages of your sin is death, eternal separation from the mercy of God. But if you will turn to Christ, He will receive you, He will take you in, He will forgive you, He will cleanse you, He will clothe you with His perfect righteousness.

So that's what you need to know; but not just know, that's what you need to do, and you need to do that now, you need to do it today, this very moment. If you have never committed your life to Christ, you may never have a moment like this with God ever again. So whoever you are wherever you are here today, the gates of paradise are swung wide open. And if you would but take that step of faith and enter through the narrow gate, you will find a glad reception with a perfect Savior, Jesus Christ, and He will save you forever; and you one day will be taken all the way up to the throne, and there you will be received by the Father forever. But it's all in Christ. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for the record of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Hagar and Ishmael. But we know there's a far greater story taking place in this passage. It is all about what You did in their lives to bring about Your perfect will for them, and even for us; for Isaac was a link to the coming Messiah. So Father, make all of these various truths known to us. Anchor them in our heart by Your Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name. Amen.