

The Generations of Ishmael

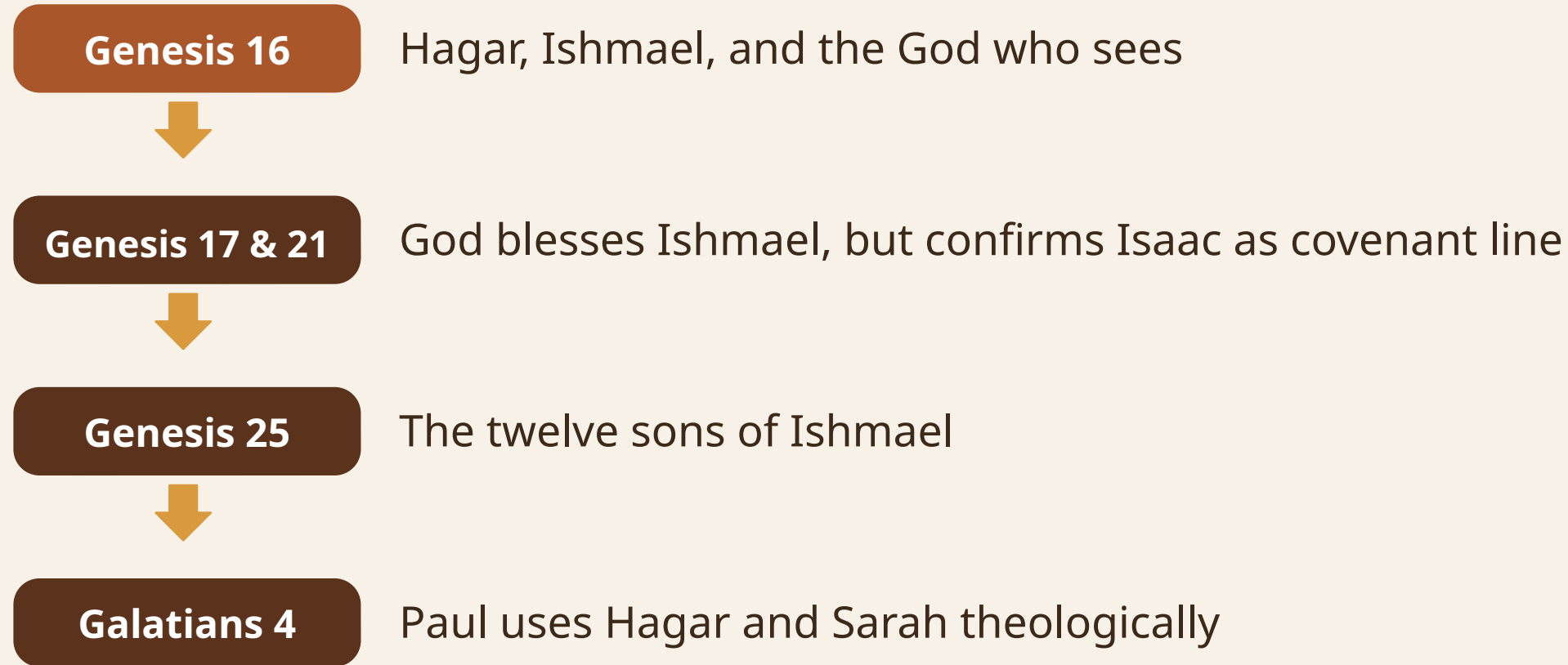
A Bible Study from Genesis 16, 17, 21, 25 and Galatians 4

Study aim: to trace Ishmael carefully without going beyond Scripture.

**God hears
God sees
God blesses
God still
keeps
His covenant
line**

Study Flow

Read the story first, then trace the generations carefully.



Key balance

Ishmael is truly blessed by God, but the covenant promise is still carried through Isaac.

Genesis 16: The Birth Story

The family tension begins while Abram and Sarai are still waiting.

Genesis 16:1

"Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar."

Hagar is Egyptian and is described as Sarai's handmaid.

Ishmael's name carries the message: God hears affliction.

The story begins in human impatience, but God still intervenes with mercy.

Genesis 16:11

"...thou shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction."

Genesis 16:13

Hagar calls the LORD "Thou God seest me."

Important lens: the Bible does not treat Hagar and Ishmael as invisible.

Historical Identification

Ishmael is the son of Hagar, “the bondwoman.”

Abraham

father

Hagar

bondwoman

Ishmael

son of the bondwoman

Sarah

freewoman

Isaac

son of promise

Galatians 4:22–23

“Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman...”

Important

Scripture does not trace every son in equal detail.

Where the Bible is silent, we should not speculate too strongly.

God Blessed Ishmael

God's covenant line is Isaac, but Ishmael is not discarded.

Genesis 17:20

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful..."

Genesis 21:13

"And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed."

Genesis 21:18

"Arise, lift up the lad... for I will make him a great nation."

Study note

The blessing on Ishmael should be recognised, while Genesis still distinguishes the covenant promise through Isaac.

Genesis 25: The Twelve Sons

The genealogy fulfils the promise of twelve princes.

1. Nebajoth

2. Kedar

3. Adbeel

4. Mibsam

5. Mishma

6. Dumah

7. Massa

8. Hadar/Hadad

9. Tema

10. Jetur

11. Naphish

12. Kedemah

Genesis 25:16

"These are the sons of Ishmael... twelve princes according to their nations."

Where Did They Dwell?

Genesis gives a broad regional description rather than a modern map.

Genesis 25:18

“And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria...”

Genesis 16:7

Hagar was found “by the fountain in the way to Shur.”

1 Samuel 15:7

Saul smote Amalek “from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt.”

Havilah

Shur / before Egypt

toward Assyria



Broad desert corridor around Egypt–Arabia–Mesopotamia

Some Names Appear Later

The clearest later references are selective, not exhaustive.

Nebajoth

Genesis 28:9; 36:3

linked with Esau's marriage into Ishmael's family

Kedar

Psalms 120:5; Isaiah 60:7; Jeremiah 49:28

a prominent Arabian/desert tribal name

Tema

Job 6:19; Isaiah 21:14; Jeremiah 25:23

associated with desert travel and trade

Jetur & Naphish

1 Chronicles 5:19

named among eastern tribes in conflict with Israelite tribes

Galatians 4:22–31

Paul uses Hagar and Sarah as a theological picture.

Galatians 4:22–31

Make this passage loud in the study.

It explains how Paul interprets Hagar and Sarah.

Galatians 4:22–23

“Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman... he of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.”

Galatians 4:31

“So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”

Do not confuse Paul’s spiritual argument with a simple ethnic label.

How to Teach This Carefully

Keep the Bible's distinctions clear.

Historically

Ishmael is Abraham's son by Hagar, the bondwoman.

Mercifully

God hears Hagar and blesses Ishmael.

Covenantally

Isaac is the son through whom the covenant promise continues.

Theologically

Galatians 4 uses the story to contrast bondage and freedom.

Discussion Questions

Move from genealogy to spiritual application.

1. What does Hagar's story teach us about people who feel unseen?
2. How can God bless Ishmael while still confirming Isaac as the covenant line?
3. Why should we avoid saying more than Scripture says about Ishmael's descendants?
4. How does Galatians 4 help us distinguish promise from flesh?
5. Where do we sometimes try to manufacture what God promised?

Closing thought: God sees the afflicted, blesses with mercy, and still fulfils His covenant promise.