

Ishmael

1. Ishmael was born to Abram, the father of the Jewish race, and to Hagar, the maid of Sarai, Abram's wife (Gen. 16:1, 15 Acts 7:2).
2. Both of Ishmael's parents believed in Jesus Christ (Gen. 15:6 16:13).
3. The primary unconditional covenants to Abraham would be fulfilled through his son by Sarah (Gen. 17:15–19, 21 Rom. 9:7).
4. Abraham circumcised Ishmael; since circumcision is an outward demonstration of inward faith, this means that Ishmael was likely a believer in Jesus Christ (Gen. 17:10–14, 23 Rom.:28–29 4:9–12)
5. Abram was 86 when he sired Ishmael and 99 when Isaac was born. He had hoped that God would fulfill His covenant through Ishmael (Gen. 16:16 17:1, 17–18).
6. Ishmael would be the father of a great nation and he would have descendants too many to count (Gen. 16:10 17:20).
7. Ishmael would also be a wild ass of a man (Gen. 16:12).
8. Ishmael, during a celebration of the weaning of Isaac, rather than treating him with the affection of a younger brother, mocked the ritual (Gen. 21:8–9).
9. Because of Ishmael's lack of discipline and lack of natural affection, God allowed Sarah to finally force them from their periphery (Gen. 21:10–12).
10. Ishmael was blessed by God due to blessing by association with Abraham, a mature believer (Gen. 21:13).
11. God provided living grace (basic necessities) for Ishmael and Hagar, but He spoke to Hagar because Ishmael was out of fellowship from at least Gen. 21:9 on (Gen. 21:14–20).
12. Isaac and Ishmael reunited, temporarily, at the death of their mutual father Abraham (Gen. 25:8–9).
13. Although Abraham was emotionally involved with Ishmael at first (Gen. 16:18) he later adjusted to the fact that the descendant through whom the promise was made was Isaac (Gen. 25:5).
14. Ishmael had twelve sons and lived to the ripe old age of 137 (Gen. 25:12–17).
15. As predicted in Gen. 16:12, the descendants of Ishmael would dwell nearby the descendants of Isaac, in defiance of them between Havilah and Shur (Gen. 25:18). We do not know where Havilah is (and this is not Havilah of the antediluvian age). Shur is, as is described in this verse, just east of Egypt. In order for the Ishmaelites to live in defiance of their half brothers, they must have lived on and near the borders of southern and eastern Palestine.
16. Ishmael means *God hears* (Gen. 16:11). Twice, when Hagar cried out to God, God heard her and answered her prayer (Gen. 16:6–9 21:14–21). God heard Ishmael; if only Ishmael heard God.
17. Paul uses the contrast between Ishmael and Isaac (actually, between their mothers) to make a point concerning the difference between law and grace. He will draw an analogy where Hagar, Ishmael's mother, represents the law and Sarah, Isaac's mother, represents God's grace: *Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it stands written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and one by the free woman. But the son by the slave woman was born according to the norm of the flesh and the*

son of the free woman through the promise. This is an analogy¹ for [you see] these [women] are two covenants, one from Mount Sinai bearing children who are slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it stands written, "Rejoice, barren woman, who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband." And you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him according to the norm of the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son for the son of the slave woman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman." So then, brothers, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman. The law condemns us to slavery to the law; if we chose to follow the letter of the Law, we chose to remain slaves to the Law. If we chose to be sons of God through the promise, through God's grace, we are free. Our true spiritual heritage is that of the son of Sarah, the free woman.

18. Although I am not ready to substantiate the following at this time, it is likely that Ishmael's descendants began living on the southern and eastern borders of Palestine, and expanded west and south, away from Palestine, intermingling with the Egyptians at times, and occupying, in general, Arabia, along with certain of the sons of Cush, namely Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Sheba, and Dedan. There are also some descendants of Joktan (from the line of Shem) and descendants of Nahor, Abraham's uncle(?), who are found associated with Arabia. Arab genealogists trace their own heritage back to Ishmael and Abraham; tragic that they would choose to be identified with the sons of the slave woman or the sons of the free woman, which is by faith in Jesus Christ. Some of the names of Ishmael's sons are found in Assyrian records as tribes.
19. Ishmael's descendants would long be a thorn in the side of Israel (Gen. 16:11–12 | Chron. 1:29–31 | 5:19).
20. The Arab merchants who bought Joseph as a slave from his brothers were identified as Ishmaelites and later as Midianites, a more specific tribe in Arabia (Gen. 37:25–28 | 39:1).

¹The Greek word used here is ἀλληγορέω (allēgoreō), which is obviously transliterated into our language *allegory*. We should not assume that the meaning of the transliteration of Greek word is the actual meaning of the Greek word. This word is a *hoxolegomena* in the truest sense; it occurs only here in the NT and not at all in the LXX. It is used by several later Hellenistic writers, however, and by Philo and Josephus. This is used in religious writings as a situation when a purely literal account is taken and a deeper meaning is developed from that account. The Stoics took Hesiod's and Homer's myths of the gods and gave an interpretation to the stories presented; this would be an example of them *allegoreo'ing*. This does not mean that the original story is a myth, but that there is more meaning which can be developed beyond the literal interpretation.