

A Study of Genesis: Troubles and Grace

Scripture Focus: Genesis 21:8-21

Just when things seemed to be working out so well with the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21:1-7), there is trouble in Abraham's family once again. Isaac is weaned (the Hebrew meaning "to become a person" or a young child old enough to show his personhood or character) and Abraham throws a party to celebrate (21:8). During the feast, Sarah observes interaction between Isaac and Ishmael that she finds offensive, perhaps playful mocking. Nevertheless, it is so bothersome to Sarah, she wants Hagar and her son gone.

Consider the reaction to the events by each of those involved and how God responds.

1. What was Abraham's response to Sarah's directive, and then God's gracious response? (Genesis 21:11-14)
2. Notice what happens to Hagar and Ishmael. What is Hagar's greatest concern as they journey into the wilderness of Beersheba? (vv. 15-16) How does God graciously respond to Hagar and Ishmael? (vv. 17-19)
3. What then is the outcome of their banishment? (vv. 20-21)

God is definitely at work in the course of human affairs. Even though there certainly are times when we question and ask, "What in the world is going on?" God is working, graciously working and showing steadfast love.

On Christmas day in 1863, during the heart of our country's terrible Civil War, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was inspired to write the poem we now know as the Christmas carol, I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day. In the 6th verse of the poem Longfellow wrote:

*And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said:
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

Longfellow knew what he was writing about since at the time the Civil War was raging and he had lost two wives and a son. But with incredible resolve and God's Spirit seemingly inspiring him, he persevered, and fought against rage and cynicism to write the following last verse of the poem:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The Wrong shall fail
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!"*