

What happened to Ishmael in the Bible?

Ishmael is the son of Abraham and Hagar, the Egyptian slave-girl belonging to Sarah, Abraham's wife. Abraham gave him the name Ishmael, which means "God hears," presumably because he and Sarah had thought he was the son of God's promise. Ishmael became the father of the Arab nations.

God had promised Abraham that he would have a son (Genesis 15:4) and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. But as time passed, and God had not fulfilled that promise, Sarah devised a plan, and Abraham agreed. She gave her Egyptian maid-servant, Hagar, to Abraham. Hagar conceived a child and gave birth to Ishmael when Abraham was 86 years old (Genesis 16:16). Before Ishmael was born, the angel of the Lord told Hagar, "This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives" (Genesis 16:12, NLT).

Ishmael was raised in his father's house, but when he was 13 years old, God returned to Abraham to re-affirm His covenant and assure Abraham that the child of promise would come through Sarah (Genesis 17:16-19; 18:10), not Hagar. God told Abraham, "As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, just as you have asked. I will make him extremely fruitful and multiply his descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year" (Genesis 17:20-21, NLT). As a symbol of His covenant pledge, the Lord instituted the rite of circumcision. Both Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised that day.

A year later, when Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac was born to Sarah. When the boy was

two or three years old, around the time he was to be weaned, Abraham held a huge feast to celebrate the occasion. Ishmael was probably 16 years old by then. At the banquet, Ishmael mocked Isaac, angering Sarah. She demanded that Abraham get rid of Hagar and Ishmael. (Genesis 21:8-10). Sarah was determined that Ishmael have no part in Isaac's inheritance.

Abraham was deeply troubled by the idea of sending Ishmael away, but God reassured him: "Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted. But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar's son because he is your son, too" (Genesis 21:12-13, NLT). So Abraham gave Hagar a little food and water and sent them away.

Mother and son wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba until their provisions ran out. Then Hagar put Ishmael under the shade of a bush and stepped away, not wanting to watch him die. As she sat down at a distance and wept, the angel of God came to comfort Hagar and reassure her that Ishmael would survive and prosper (Genesis 21:14-18, NLT).

The Bible says God was with Ishmael as he grew up in the eastern Sinai Peninsula: "He became a skillful archer, and he settled in the wilderness of Paran. His mother arranged for him to marry a woman from the land of Egypt" (Genesis 21:20-21, NLT). When Abraham died, Ishmael attended his funeral (Genesis 25:9), proving that at least occasional and civil communications were maintained between him and his father's household.

Ishmael fathered 12 sons and a daughter who married Esau (Genesis 28:9; 36:2-3). He lived to the ripe old age of 137 (Genesis 25:17). Scripture says Ishmael's numerous

descendants settled near the eastern border of Egypt and lived in hostility toward all of their relatives (Genesis 25:18).