



Question: "Who are the descendants of Ishmael?"

Answer: Ishmael was a son of Abraham, born of Sarah's maidservant Hagar in an attempt to bring into the world the son God had promised to Abraham and Sarah. Later, Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah, and Hagar and Ishmael were driven away because of Ishmael's attitude toward Isaac (Genesis 21:9–10, 14). But God still had plans for Ishmael.

God promised Hagar that Ishmael, as a son of Abraham, would become a great nation (Genesis 21:17–18). The fulfillment is recorded in Genesis 25:12–18—Ishmael had twelve sons who became great rulers and eventually a nation of people. That came about in this way: Hagar, who was Egyptian herself, found a wife from Egypt for her son, and Ishmael settled in the desert of Paran (Genesis 21:21). Ishmael's descendants "settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt as you go toward Ashur" (Genesis 25:18). The Bible lists Ishmael's sons as Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah (verses 13–15).

The area of Havilah where Ishmael's descendants lived is in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula; Shur is a wilderness area between Beersheba in the Negev Desert and Egypt. Isaiah 60:7 mentions the descendants of Nebaioth and Kedar as those who raise flocks. The descendants of Ishmael became known as Arabs, which basically means "nomads." From the beginning, the descendants of Ishmael were a warlike people, as "they lived in hostility toward all the tribes related to them" (Genesis 25:13). This fulfilled God's earlier word that Ishmael would be "a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers" (Genesis 16:12).

Later, others settled in the Arabian Peninsula as well, including the descendants of Keturah's sons (1 Chronicles 1:32–33) and some of Esau's descendants, among them the Amalekites (Genesis 36:12).

There is a popular theory common among Muslims and some Christians that Arabian Muslims are direct descendants of Ishmael. In fact, Muhammad was a major proponent of this idea, claiming to be a descendant of Ishmael according to the Quran. There is most likely some truth in this theory. According to missionary and author Kenneth Fleming, "what we know for certain seems to support the theory that the Ishmaelites are, at the very least, a major element in the Arab genetic line. Old records clearly link the north Arabians with Ishmael's descendants" ("Ishmael and the Bible," *Emmaus Journal* 13:2, 2004). But it's unlikely that all of those in Arabia are descendants of Ishmael, as the descendants of Keturah and the children of Esau also lived in the Arabian Peninsula.

Although some modern Arabians could trace their lineage back to Ishmael, not all Arabians are descendants of Ishmael as Muslims try to claim. We know from the Bible that God made Ishmael into a great nation. His descendants can share in the blessings of Abraham by putting their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

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**Question: "Why did Abraham banish Ishmael (Genesis 21:14)?"**

Answer: "Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac'" (Genesis 21:10).

Abraham was not happy with Sarah's response (Genesis 21:11). He cared about Sarah, but he did not share her view that Hagar and Ishmael should be sent away. Ishmael was his own son, after all.

Then God spoke to Abraham on this issue: "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring" (Genesis 21:12-13). God's promise to make another nation from Ishmael began to be fulfilled when Ishmael had twelve sons who presided over twelve tribes (Genesis 25:16).

Abraham obeyed the Lord. "So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away" (Genesis 21:14). As far as we know, Abraham did not see Ishmael again. Ishmael appears later at Abraham's burial (Genesis 25:9).

Sending away Hagar and Ishmael may seem cruel from our perspective, but the Bible records both Abraham's concern and God's command. Abraham expressed compassion for his son, but he also demonstrated obedience when God required something different from what Abraham personally desired. In doing so, Abraham models a humility that still applies today.

God calls us to obedience, and that requires us to be willing to give up personal desires in order to follow Him. Those who love the Lord know that the Lord's will is what matters most. Abraham obeyed God and was known as a friend of God (James 2:23). His faith followed God's will, even in difficult times.

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