

Breaking Up a Party: Perspectives on Hagar's Banishment

1. The Scene: Party for Isaac's Weaning

Genesis 21: 8-13

(8) The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. (9) Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing/making sport. (10) She said to Abraham, "Cast out that maidservant and her son, for the son of that maidservant shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." (11) The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. (12) But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed over the boy or your maidservant; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you. (13) As for the son of the maidservant, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed.

(14) Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away.

(ח) ויגדל הילד ויגמל ויעש אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל מצרית אשר-ילדה את-יצחק: (ט) ותרא שרה את-בן-הגֵר הלאברהם מצחק: (י) ותאמר לאברהם גרש האמה הזאת ואת-בנה כי לא יירש בן-האמה הזאת עם-בני עם-יצחק: (יא) וירע הדבר מאד בעיני אברהם על אולת בנו: (יב) ויאמר יי אל-אברהם אל-ירע בעיניך על-הנער ועל-אמתך כל-אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקלה כי ביצחק יקרא לה זרע: (יג) וגם את-בן-האמה לגוי אשימו כי ורעה היא:

וישכם אברהם | בבקר ויקה-לקחם וזמת מים ויתן אל-הגֵר שם על-שכמה ואת-הילד וישלחה ותלה ותמע במדבר באר שבע:

Why did each person respond in this way?

2. Abraham's perspective – what else was on his mind?

Rabbeinu Bahya on Genesis 21:8

"Avraham prepared a great feast." There is no doubt that the notables in the land were invited to this feast since the birth of Yitzchak had been a wonderous event. Also, Avraham was a wealthy man, and it is possible that even kings and advisors of surrounding countries attended this feast.

ויעש אברהם משתה גדול. אין ספק שהיו גדולי הארץ באותו משתה כי היה הפלא גדול ביצחק, גם העושר בבית אברהם רב, ואפשר שהיו שם מלכים ויועצי ארץ

3. Sarah's perspective – why did she respond so harshly?

Midrash Tanchuma, Shemot 1:2

The word *making sport* refers only to practicing idolatry...She said to him: *Abraham, cast out this maidservant and her son* (Gen. 21:10), lest my son learn from his behavior. (Same verb used in reference to the Golden Calf)

Rashi on Genesis 21:9

"Another explanation is that it refers to immoral conduct..." (Same verb used in reference to Potiphar's wife)

4. Hagar's & Ishmael's perspectives – did any of this make sense to them?

Genesis Rabbah 53:13

Hagar: "Yesterday you told me [Gen. 16:10]: 'I will greatly increase your offspring,' and now he is dying of thirst!"

אמרה אתמול אמרת לי (בראשית טז, י) הרבה ארבה את ורעה וגו', עכשו הוא מת בצמא