

Vayera, Chapter 21:9-11

וַיִּתְּרָא שָׂרָה אֶת־בֶּן־הַגֵּר הַמִּצְרִית אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם
מִצְחָק:

Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had
borne to Abraham playing.

וַתֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָהָם גֵּרָשׁ הָאִמָּה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־בְּנָהּ כִּי לֹא יִירָשׁ
בֶּן־הָאִמָּה הַזֹּאת עִם־בְּנֵי עַם־יִצְחָק:

She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman
and her son, for the son of that slave shall not
share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

וַיִּרַע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּעֵינָי אַבְרָהָם עַל אֹדֶת בְּנוֹ:

The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it
concerned a son of his.

Issues:

- Sarah's concern for Isaac
- Inheritance by Ishmael
- Abraham's dilemma

Sarah saw Ishmael dominating Isaac at play (he was 14 years older) and realized the promise of Isaac being the conduit of God's covenant was in jeopardy. She knew she had to act, so she plays the "heavy" by carrying the moral burden of sending away Hagar & Ishmael against her husband's wishes. This leaves Abraham's character unblemished.

- Machzor

Sarah saw mockery in Ishmael's behavior and requested Abraham drive out both Hagar and her son.

- Malbin, 19th Century

Sarah saw the play as close affinity between the brothers and resolved to end the relationship. According to the laws of the day (2000BCE) freeing a slave nullified entitlements to inheritance.

- The Torah, A Modern Commentary, Plaut 1962

God had already told Avraham that Sarah would bear a son and the Covenant would be maintained through him. So it was reasonable to banish Ishmael.

- Radak, 13th Century

Is Sarah oppressing Hager? These verses sensitize the Reader to Hagar's plight. It also places the enmity between Jews and Moslems upon women, especially Sarah.

- The Torah, A Women's Commentary, 21st Century

If Sarah had told Abraham to cast away Hagar, there would have been no problem, but Sarah also said "her son". Since Ishmael was also Abraham's son he was distressed. God said listen to your wife, since your name will be carried through Isaac, plus Ishmael will establish another nation; only then did Abraham relent.

- Ramban, 13th Century

Ishmael was not deserving of the inheritance for he had taken on degenerate ways. Isaac was a good man and son, so was more deserving of the inheritance.

- Rashi

At the instigation of his mother Ishmael lied about Isaac's legitimacy, in order to claim the inheritance.

- Sforno

Sarah's justification for banishment was based on Ishmael's deeds. She did not want Isaac to learn from Ishmael, particularly because he was Egyptian (through Hagar) and thus prone to sexual immorality.

- Kli Yakar, 17th Century

Ishmael could claim a double portion of the inheritance as Abraham's first son.

- Chizkuni

Ishmael (20 years old) could hold sway over Isaac, a child, if there was an issue of inheritance.

Sarah was concerned that Abraham gave status to his maidservant (as Jacob did), giving Ishmael entitlement to the inheritance.

- Malbin, 19th C

Only Ishmael should have been banished, based on his behavior, but he needed Hagar for his journey(?).

- Steinsaltz

Based on their age, Sarah and Abraham may have been near death, and Ishmael would claim inheritance without opposition.

- The Torah: A Women's Commentary

Abraham was distressed because he had freed his maidservant, taken her as his wife, and named their son.

- Haamek Dvar

Abraham resented Sarah for describing Ishmael as “the son of a slave woman”. Also he thought the expulsion would lead to his son feeling rejected.

- Or HaChaim

Note Sarah says “cast out”, not drive out; so Abraham is obligated to give Hagar and Ishmael food and drink (per Devarim 15:13, you shall not send them away empty-handed). “Sending away” is in goodness, while “driving away” is with anger and a strong hand.

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The human sentiments of Abraham are in conflict with the inexplicable divine choice. I.e., human love versus divine will. (re: Akedah)

Sarah’s desires coincide with God’s plan, hence her actions find approval while Abraham’s do not.

- The Torah, A Modern Commentary

Abraham submits to the divine command, not his wife's demands. The divine command is superior to "natural" human feelings.

- Zvi Adar, 1954