

## Ishmaelites Study Notes

Gal 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

Gal 4:22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.

Gal 4:23 But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

Gal 4:24 Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.

Gal 4:25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

Gal 4:26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

Gal 4:27 For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband."

Gal 4:28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

Gal 4:29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

Gal 4:30 But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."

Gal 4:31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

- Paul used the relationship between Sarai (Isaac's mother) and Hagar (Ishmael's mother) to explain "under the law" and "under grace" as two separate covenants.
- One was based on the flesh (Sarai did not wait for God's promise and enacted her own physical plan based on unbelief or impatience). The other (grace) was based on God's provision and not man-made or man-conceived.

### **1. They are "brother nations" through Abraham**

Both peoples come from **Abraham**:

- **Ishmaelites** descend from **Ishmael**, Abraham's son through **Hagar** (Genesis 16).

- **Israelites** descend from **Isaac**, Abraham's son through **Sarah**, and then through **Jacob (Israel)** (Genesis 21; Genesis 25).

So the Ishmaelites and Israelites are essentially **cousin peoples**, since Ishmael and Isaac were half-brothers.

## 2. Ishmael was not the covenant line, but still blessed

God made it clear that His covenant promises (the Messianic line, the land promise, and the covenant nation) would come through **Isaac**, not Ishmael:

- "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." (Genesis 21:12)

However, God still promised to bless Ishmael greatly:

- Ishmael would become a **great nation** (Genesis 17:20).
- He would father **twelve princes** (Genesis 17:20; Genesis 25:12–16).

So Ishmael is not the covenant heir, but he is not rejected from God's providence.

## 3. Early on, there is separation, not extermination

The relationship begins with family tension:

- Sarah and Hagar conflict (Genesis 16).
- Ishmael mocks Isaac (Genesis 21:9).
- Hagar and Ishmael are sent away (Genesis 21:14).

This sets the tone: **they are related, but divided**, with Isaac representing the covenant household and Ishmael representing a separate line.

## 4. Ishmaelites appear as traders and desert peoples

As history progresses, Ishmaelites are often portrayed as **nomadic desert traders**.

The most famous example is Joseph:

- Joseph's brothers sell him to a traveling caravan called **Ishmaelites** (Genesis 37:25–28).
- The same group is also referred to as **Midianites**, showing how closely these desert tribes interacted or overlapped (Genesis 37:28).

This shows Ishmaelites as a people living around Israel's world, often involved in commerce.

## 5. There is often hostility or rivalry

Genesis actually predicts tension:

- Ishmael would be "a wild man," and his hand would be against others (Genesis 16:12).

Later, Ishmaelite-related peoples are sometimes among the groups hostile to Israel.

One example is Psalm 83, which lists enemies of Israel and includes:

- “the Ishmaelites” (Psalm 83:6)

So while not constantly at war in Scripture, they are pictured as part of the surrounding peoples that sometimes opposed Israel.

## **6. Israel’s law assumes Ishmaelites are foreign neighbors**

In the Mosaic context, Ishmaelites are treated as part of the broader Gentile world around Israel. They are not singled out often, but they are part of the non-Israelite peoples with whom Israel traded, fought, or interacted.

## **7. Theological meaning: flesh vs promise**

In the New Testament, Ishmael becomes symbolic.

Paul uses Ishmael and Isaac to represent two “lines”:

- Ishmael = born “after the flesh”
- Isaac = born “by promise”

This is explained in **Galatians 4:22–31**, where Paul uses them as an illustration of law vs grace / bondage vs promise.

So spiritually, Ishmael often represents **natural descent**, while Israel (through Isaac) represents **covenant promise**.

The list appears in **Genesis 25:13–16**, where Ishmael’s sons are named and identified as princes:

“These are the names of the sons of Ishmael... twelve princes according to their nations.”

## Ishmael's Twelve Sons

Order	Name	Notes / Possible Historical Identification
1	<b>Nebaioth</b>	Often associated with the Nabataeans (later Arabian kingdom)
2	<b>Kedar</b>	Frequently mentioned in prophets; linked with Arabian tribes
3	<b>Adbeel</b>	Little extra-biblical information
4	<b>Mibsam</b>	Possibly an Arabian clan
5	<b>Mishma</b>	Name appears in Arabian genealogies
6	<b>Dumah</b>	Likely connected to Dumat al-Jandal in northern Arabia
7	<b>Massa</b>	Possibly linked to Arabian tribes mentioned in Assyrian records
8	<b>Hadad</b> (also called Hadar in some manuscripts)	Name common in Edomite and Syrian regions
9	<b>Tema</b>	Mentioned in Job and Isaiah; likely Arabian oasis settlement
10	<b>Jetur</b>	Ancestor of the Itureans (north of Israel)
11	<b>Naphish</b>	Mentioned in Chronicles in conflict with Israel
12	<b>Kedemah</b>	Means "eastward"; likely eastern desert tribe

## **Nebaioth in prophecy**

Nebaioth is Ishmael's **firstborn** (Genesis 25:13). Prophetically, Nebaioth is not mentioned often, but when it is, it appears in a **positive, worship-oriented** context.

### **Key Prophetic Passage: Isaiah 60**

Isaiah 60 is a major "kingdom glory" chapter describing the future exaltation of Zion and the nations coming to the Lord.

Nebaioth is mentioned directly:

"All the flocks of **Kedar** shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of **Nebaioth** shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar..."

*(Isaiah 60:7)*

### **Prophetic development:**

- Nebaioth's "rams" are pictured as **acceptable offerings**.
- This implies Nebaioth is not merely an enemy nation, but part of the **Gentile peoples brought into worship of the true God**.
- It becomes a picture of the **nations being converted and included** in the worship of Yahweh.

So Nebaioth prophetically represents **Ishmaelite peoples being drawn into God's kingdom blessing**, bringing tribute and worship.

## **Kedar in prophecy**

Kedar is Ishmael's **second son** (Genesis 25:13), and he becomes far more prominent than Nebaioth in later Scripture. Kedar is strongly associated with:

- tents / nomadic desert life
- archers / warriors
- wealth in livestock
- Arabian trade

### **1. Kedar as a desert tribe known for tents and hardship**

Kedar is referenced poetically as a symbol of the desert lifestyle:

"I am black, but comely... as the tents of **Kedar**..."

*(Song of Solomon 1:5)*

This paints Kedar as a well-known Arabian tribe with distinctive tent culture.

## 2. Kedar as a powerful people destined for judgment

Isaiah and Jeremiah describe Kedar as a real nation subject to God's sovereign judgment.

### Isaiah 21:16–17

“Within a year... all the glory of **Kedar** shall fail: And the residue of the number of archers... shall be diminished...”

Kedar is pictured as:

- militarily strong (noted for archers)
- but soon humbled by divine decree

### Jeremiah 49:28–33

Jeremiah speaks an oracle against Kedar and Hazor:

“Concerning **Kedar**... Arise ye, go up to **Kedar**, and spoil the men of the east...”

The prophecy describes invasion, loss of livestock, and scattering—typical prophetic judgment language.

So prophetically, Kedar develops as a **proud desert power** that will be brought low.

## 3. Kedar ultimately joins in worship of the Lord

The prophetic story does not end in judgment. Kedar also becomes part of the nations that acknowledge Yahweh.

### Isaiah 42:10–12

This chapter is strongly Messianic (the “Servant of the LORD” theme).

“Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that **Kedar** doth inhabit... let them give glory unto the LORD...”

Here Kedar is pictured as:

- responding to the Lord's salvation
- giving glory to Yahweh
- rejoicing under the Servant's reign

So Kedar is not only judged—Kedar is also **redeemed in the kingdom vision**.

**Nebaioth + Kedar together: a major prophetic theme**

The most important passage linking them is again:

### **Isaiah 60:6–7**

“All they from Sheba shall come...

All the flocks of **Kedar** shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of **Nebaioth** shall minister unto thee...”

This is one of the clearest Old Testament pictures that **Arabian/Ishmaelite peoples** will be included in the future glory of Zion.

### **Meaning of their joint appearance**

- **Kedar** brings flocks (wealth, tribute, abundance).
- **Nebaioth** brings rams (offerings, worship service).
- Both are shown as being drawn into God’s kingdom purposes.

This is consistent with the broader prophetic theme that **Gentile nations will stream to the Lord** (Isaiah 2:2–4; Isaiah 56:6–8).

### **Summary of Prophetic Development**

#### **Kedar**

- Known for tents, desert life, warriors, archers.
- Receives judgment for pride and worldly glory (Isaiah 21; Jeremiah 49).
- Later appears worshiping the Lord under the Servant’s reign (Isaiah 42).
- Ends as a nation contributing to Zion’s glory (Isaiah 60).

#### **Nebaioth**

- Mentioned prophetically mainly in Isaiah 60.
- Depicted as providing acceptable offerings at God’s altar.
- Symbolizes Ishmaelite peoples becoming part of the worshiping nations.

Ishmael plays a **major role in Islam**, a **minor or indirect role in Judaism**, and a **theological-symbolic role in Christianity**.

## Islam

In **Islam**, Ishmael (Arabic: **Ismāʿīl**) is extremely important.

- He is viewed as a **prophet** and righteous man.
- Islamic tradition commonly teaches that **Ishmael**, not Isaac, was the son Abraham was commanded to offer (though the Qur'an does not explicitly name him in that passage).
- Ishmael is strongly associated with **Mecca**, and Islamic tradition holds that he and Abraham helped build or restore the **Kaaba**.
- Many Muslims trace Arab lineage (especially "northern Arabs") through Ishmael, making him a key ancestral figure.

So in Islam, Ishmael is a central figure tied to **prophethood, Arab identity, and sacred history**.

## Judaism

In **Judaism**, Ishmael is recognized as:

- Abraham's son through Hagar
- a nation blessed by God
- but not the child of covenant promise (that role belongs to Isaac)

Jewish tradition often views Ishmael as part of the surrounding nations related to Israel, sometimes in tension, sometimes as kin.

He matters, but he is not central to Jewish covenant identity the way Isaac and Jacob are.

## Christianity

In **Christianity**, Ishmael is primarily important for theological meaning.

The New Testament uses Ishmael as an illustration of the difference between:

- **human effort / flesh**
- versus **God's promise / grace**

Paul uses Ishmael and Isaac symbolically in **Galatians 4:22–31**, comparing Hagar and Sarah to two covenants.

So Christianity does not treat Ishmael as a prophet, but as a significant biblical figure whose life illustrates a spiritual contrast.