WHERE DID EVERYTHING GO WRONG?

All the Middle East mayhem current today goes back to one awful night as described in Genesis 16, the night in which Abraham and Sarah opted out of God’s Plan “A” for their own Plan “B.”

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Our friends at Campus Crusade remind us frequently that “God has a plan for your life.” They’re right, you know. He does have such a plan. And it’s a good one. It’s Plan “A.” The simple, tragic fact is that most folks miss Plan “A” and some, thinking they have done right well, hang on grimly to plan “B.”

Plan “B” is the proverbial can of worms. It has all the excitement of a kiss from your sister. It’s like setting out to build a Rolls Royce and ending up with a skateboard. Both have wheels, right? It’s like going into an exquisite French restaurant and ordering Spam. It’s like needing facial plastic surgery and getting a haircut. It just doesn’t get the job done. Plan “B” is God’s allowance, not His will, His masterplan. But many people prefer it to Plan “A.”

Plan “B” is a whole lot less expensive than Plan “A.” It doesn’t take anywhere near the commitment or involvement. It’s much more convenient. Plan “B” allows a person to do his own thing. It gives believability to the absolute lie that God somehow longs to be your partner, not your God. Plan “B” dresses up disobedience and self-will and allows these sins to come out as “personality traits.” Participants in Plan “B” are not committed. They nothing about being reconciled to the will of God for their lives.

The neat thing about Plan “B” is that it allows a person to have some contact with religion, with a church, with spiritual respectability. Nobody would ever mistake such a person for a heathen. Unfortunately God would also never mistake such a person for a disciple, a crown-winner, an overcomer.

The trouble in the Middle East did not start that way. It certainly was not God’s will for that vast region. It began with the call of God upon an Iraqi, a fellow who lived in a city
call Ur in the region of the Chaldeans. His name was Abraham:

Genesis 12:1-5

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: [2] And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: [3] And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. [4] So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. [5] And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

Genesis 13:15-16

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. [16] And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Abram was 75 years old when he and Sarah left Iraq for the promised land of Canaan. But years went by and the couple was still childless. BUT GOD HAD PROMISED, and so age was not germane to the issue, though it seemed to be to the childless couple. God’s Plan “A” was for Abraham and Sarah to have a natural-born son, the product of the normal procreation process. However, as the years went by and Sarah never became pregnant, the couple panicked and decided to “help God out.” It was a fatal error:

Genesis 16:1-2

Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. [2] And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

To put the issue in unmistakable terms, old Abraham had sex with the young Egyptian girl, Hagar, and she became pregnant with a youngster who would be called ISHMAEL. God warned them what this young fellow would be like:

Genesis 16:12

And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.
This is where some of today’s problems started, but certainly not all of them. Let me explain. While it is normal for Christian pastors to proclaim that all Muslims and Arabs came from Ishmael, that just isn’t really fully true. But Abraham’s liaison with Hagar, which produced Ishmael, certainly did not assist humanity at all. Let’s discuss the genetic pool of the Arabic people for a moment:

In Arabic and Hebrew, the term “arab” means “nomad,” and is synonymous with bedouin. Originally it referred only to the nomadic people who roamed the Arabian Peninsula (see map at top of page). According to the Old Testament, the earliest inhabitants of the peninsula descended from JOKTAN (from the family of Shem from whom 13 Arab tribes sprang. - Genesis 10:26-29 And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazar-maveth, and Jerah, [27] And Hadoram, and Uzal, and Diklah, [28] And Obal, and Abimael, and Sheba, [29] And Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab: all these were the sons of Joktan. Joktan was a descendant of SEM (when the term Semite). Later, the area was also settled by Abraham's sons through Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4 Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. [2] And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. [3] And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leumnim. [4] And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.
(Abraham married Keturah when Sarah died. Some scholars believe that Keturah was really Hagar which would have made Abraham legitimize Ishmael. I am on the fence on this question.) A careful reading of Genesis 25 reveals that the sons of Esau, all descendants of Abraham, settled in the peninsula. So clearly Ishmael’s descendants were just a part of all the Arab peoples.

There is another reason why we should not say all Arabs came from Ishmael. Following the Arab conquest of the Middle East and North Africa in the 7th century, many of those conquered countries eventually adopted Arabic as their mother tongue - as well as Islam. So while some Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula certainly did come from Hagar, many others did not.

In all probability, Muhammad was not a direct descendant of Ishmael.
ARAB WORLD MINISTRIES (SOURCE)

However - the breach of faith had been made, the covenant God made to Abram and Sarah was compromised. Instead of giving God the “time” He wanted to bring Isaac into the world, the patriarch decided to “help” the Creator, Who did not need nor want his help.

One of my favorite writers, John Phillips, wrote of a naturalist who decided to “help” nature. He “took a cocoon of an emperor moth and kept it in his study for months, hoping to witness its emergence in due time. The cocoon was flask-shaped with a narrow opening in the neck through which the moth would emerge. The great difference between the narrow opening and the size of the moth made the naturalist wonder how ever the insect would get out of its prison. At last the day came and all morning the man watched the struggles of the insect. It never seemed to get beyond a certain point. The struggle to emerge is what forces the fluids of the moth’s body into the wings and makes it possible for it to fly. The naturalist ran out of patience and decided to help things along. With the point of his scissors he carefully snipped the confining threads to make the exist just a little easier. At once the moth crawled out with perfect ease. But the naturalist watched in vain to see the gorgeous wings expand. They never did. His impatience and false kindness had ruined the moth. It never became anything but a stunted abortion, crawling painfully through the brief life it should have spent flying through the air on rainbow wings. It is always a mistake

It is interesting to note that Abram was 86 when Ishmael was born and 99 when Isaac came along - 13 years in which God left Abram alone. 24 years after God’s original promise to Abram (Abraham) and Sarah that they would have a son, Isaac was born.
God fulfilled His commitment to them even though it did not seem in the natural that such a miracle could occur. Would there be such turmoil in the Middle East today had Abraham and Sarah been content to wait on God’s timing? Doubtful. The seeds of “lack of faith” are a great potential danger to any child of God.

It was a somewhat normal thing for a childless wife (in those days) to give her husband the alternative of a concubine. It was certainly common in Ur of the Chaldees where Abraham and Sarah had lived before God’s call upon their lives. BUT THE WORLD’S WAY AND GOD’S WAY ARE USUALLY TWO DIFFERENT PATHS! J. Vernon McGee made a relevant observation on the choice to involve Hagar: “...the moral angle is not the thing that for them was so wrong. The terrible thing was that they just did not believe God. The wrong that they committed by Abraham taking Sarah’s maid Hagar was a sin, and God treated it as such. But today we reverse the emphasis and say that taking a concubine is a sin, but we do not pay too much attention to the unbelief. Yet the unbelief was the major sin here; that is, it was lots blacker than the other.”

THRU THE BIBLE / VOLUME I / PAGE 70 / NELSON PUBL.

So Ishmael was born and lived in Abraham’s camp until Isaac was born long years later. Despite his upbringing, Ishmael apparently had little spirituality about him. His attitude was a mocking one when Isaac was born, according to Genesis 21:9, And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. He was viewing a true miracle of God for Isaac had been born to a mother who was 90 years old, but his response was to make fun of it.

Ishmael had been brought up in a godly home; he had seen his father’s godly life; he had seen his father Abraham in daily prayer; he had possibly seen the mighty angels who visited Abraham’s camp (Genesis 18) but none of these things meant much to Ishmael. He had even been circumcised but that did not mean he had any spiritual life. It takes more than a religious rite to make one spiritual.

Later he would become the father of 12 sons, but little is heard of them. In fact, not much is written in Scripture of Ishmael himself from that time on. His story fades from view by Genesis 25. John Phillips has observed: Here was a man who was rich and increased with goods, who felt his need of nothing. Here was a man who was destitute of spiritual wealth, poor, wretched, miserable, blind, and naked in the things that mattered most. Like his half nephew Jacob, Ishmael founded twelve tribes. From those tribes sprang the Arab peoples who have contributed much to the world’s culture and the world’s cruelty. The atrocious African slave trade was largely the work of the Arabs. The abysmal spiritual darkness of Islam is yet another Arab contribution to the woes of the world. And persistently, to this day, Israel’s bitterest foes have been of Ishmaelite
So far we have discussed events and commitments made nearly 4,000 years ago. One would almost think from today’s news commentators and political blowhards that Israel is a “Johnny-come-lately” issue. The truth of the matter is that Islam is the “Johnny-come-lately.” Let’s take a look at history here:

MUHAMMAD

Muhammad (also spelled Mohammed) was born around 570 A.D. in the city of Mecca (located on the Arabian Peninsula). I have mentioned earlier that despite all the claims, there is little reason to believe he was a direct descendant of Ishmael. His father Abdullah died shortly before Muhammad’s birth. His mother Amina passed away 6 years later. Muhammad was raised by an uncle, the chief of Mecca and the keeper of a pagan shrine. He used the boy as a shepherder and goatherd near the city. Eventually Muhammad became a camel driver, accompanying his relatives on trading journeys to Syria and possibly even Palestine.

When Muhammad reached the age of 25, he was hired by a wealthy widow named Cadija to manage her caravan to and from the city of Bosra, somewhat near the Palestinian border. The young camel driver was so good at his job that the widow offered him her hand in marriage. Thus Muhammad became owner of the caravan and had a source to great wealth. He also became an observer of life around him and drew history-making decisions.

Through contacts with Christians and Jews on trading journeys, Muhammad learned of the Jewish and Christian faiths. He appears to have had a growing revulsion to the paganism of his tribe and especially to the many deities they worshiped. Perhaps he was seeking for something to satisfy his heart’s desire and was trying to understand Jewish and Christian doctrine. Later, he included in Islam some Jewish and Christian practices such as fasting and regular hours for prayer.”

WHAT CHRISTIANS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MUSLIMS / DAVID IRWIN / BOOKLET FROM CENTER FOR MUSLIM MINISTRIES

Muhammad came to a fervent conclusion in all his observations that there was only one God and his wife became perhaps his first disciple. Soon Muhammad declared himself as God’s prophet, greater than even Moses or Jesus, and claimed he was receiving divine revelations. His book, the Koran, was forthcoming.

The people of Mecca did not receive Muhammad and his teachings so he looked for a
more favorable setting. When his wife Cadija passed away, he moved 400 miles away to Medina in the year 622 AD. This move, of flight, is referred to by Muslims as Hegira. Muhammad’s cause now began to move ahead with incredible speed, aided by the point of a sword. In just 15 years, he Muslims conquered most of their known world, including Palestine, which set the scene for the bloody crusades which followed.

One of the reasons for such a swift escalation of this religious fervor was the degenerate and disorderly period of world history in the sixth century. Persia’s influence had waxed old to depths of weakness and humiliation. Rome was no longer the mistress of the world and was wracked by inner decay. Invading hordes of barbarians kept Rome on the defensive, so much so that she could not long stand. This left two world powers - Europe and “Asia Minor. Western Europe could not rise to the challenge of supremacy, and its Byzantine sun soon sank into the horizon of oblivion. This left a power vacuum which would soon be filled by Muslims.

Germany’s first professor of Islamic theology - a Muslim convert - is a conservative Muslim, fasting during the Muslim holy month and refusing to shake hands with Muslim women. He says that Islamic scripture guides his life. That’s why those around him are shocked for Muhammed Sven Kalaish, has concluded, The prophet Muhammed probably never existed. Many Islamic scholars question the accuracy of ancient sources on Muhammed’s life, but only a few have doubted Muhammed’s existence. Interesting, isn’t it - that there are alleged scholars today who say Jesus never lived, and now we’re hearing the same nonsense about Muhammed.

In our first studies, we have examined some of the Middle Eastern situation from the past. Let’s add to that now with a quick look at one of the present-day situations, one very clearly told us in prophetic scripture.

**Damascus, Syria**

The world has watched the turmoil in Damascus for the past years as opponents of the Assad regime had struggled to unseat the long-time dictator (whose father reigned for years before him). I have only been to Damascus and while I enjoyed the opportunity, I must say the huge Syrian city (second largest only to Aleppo) was the only place I have been to (62 countries) where I felt “antsy.” It was obvious to me, even in that short time, that Americans were not welcome there.

I was shooting a .16 mm movie camera (shoulder mount) when Syrian soldiers made it very clear they did not want me taking any film at all.
The Bible teaches that in the last days a horrible series of events will take place in the lands of Syria (or Aram, as it is sometimes called) and Israel. One of those events will be the disappearance of Damascus as one of the longest-lasting cities on earth. Damascus is certainly one of the oldest-continually-inhabited cities in human history, going back at least 5,000 years, if not 7,000 years. We Bible students know the area because of Paul’s trip there in Acts 9:1-2  And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, [2] And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

In the very near future, Damascus will once again play a major role in scriptural prophecy. The prophet Isaiah provides us with God’s commentary on a future conflict between Damascus and Israel (at each other’s throats for thousands of years). Some of those prophecies have been fulfilled; however, the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 17 remains to be completed. The current existence of Damascus will one day cease to be a
city:

Isaiah 17:1-3  NLT

This message came to me concerning Damascus:
"Look, Damascus will disappear! It will become a heap of ruins. [2] The cities of Aroer will be deserted. Sheep will graze in the streets and lie down unafraid. There will be no one to chase them away. [3] The fortified cities of Israel will also be destroyed, and the power of Damascus will end. The few left in Aram will share the fate of Israel's departed glory," says the Lord Almighty.

What a bleak prophecy! The great city of Damascus - with its current population of over 3 million - will become a heap of ruins (and is well on its way to that even now). This once-great metropolis will be devoid of human life and become a home to wildlife since there will be no people to drive them away. While I believe the final fulfillment of this passage will not take place until during the Tribulation, following the Rapture, I must even now take into consideration the compiling of virtually every terrorist organization known to man (including ISIS) in Syria. Note carefully that even in the last several weeks Israel has bombed points of contention within Syria itself.

While it is "hell on earth" now in Syria, what is coming is clearly described in prophecy. Isaiah 17:4-6 NLT "In that day the glory of Israel will be very dim, for poverty will stalk the land. [5] Israel will be abandoned like the grainfields in the valley of Rephaim after the harvest. [6] Only a few of its people will be left, like the stray olives left on the tree after the harvest. Only two or three remain in the highest branches, four or five out on the tips of the limbs. Yes, Israel will be stripped bare of people," says the Lord, the God of Israel.

Isaiah 17:9-11  NLT  Their largest cities will be as deserted as overgrown thickets. They will become like the cities the Amorites abandoned when the Israelites came here so long ago. [10] Why? Because you have turned from the God who can save you—the Rock who can hide you. You may plant the finest imported grapevines, [11] and they may grow so well that they blossom on the very morning you plant them, but you will never pick any grapes from them. Your only harvest will be a load of grief and incurable pain.

Israel will be invaded by armies from Jordan, the West Bank (Samaria), Lebanon, Syria and Gaza. ALL OF THESE ARE CURRENTLY NEWS-MAKING NATIONS!

With those two nations lying in virtual ruin, the enemies of Israel will view her suffering as an opportunity to invade; however, God has a plan to overcome them:
Psalm 83:1-18  (While this is primarily a prayer of supplication, it will also be a fulfillment of prophecy against the invaders of Israel in the last days of Tribulation)
A psalm of Asaph. A song.

O God, don't sit idly by,
silent and inactive!
[2] Don't you hear the tumult of your enemies?
  Don't you see what your arrogant enemies are doing?
[3] They devise crafty schemes against your people,
laying plans against your precious ones.
  We will destroy the very memory of its existence."
[5] This was their unanimous decision.
They signed a treaty as allies against you—
[6] these Edomites and Ishmaelites,
Moabites and Hagrites,
[7] Gebalites, Ammonites, and Amalekites,
and people from Philistia and Tyre.
[8] Assyria has joined them, too,
and is allied with the descendants of Lot.

Interlude
[9] Do to them as you did to the Midianites
  or as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the Kishon River.
[10] They were destroyed at Endor,
  and their decaying corpses fertilized the soil.
[11] Let their mighty nobles die as Oreb and Zeeb did.
  Let all their princes die like Zebah and Zalmunna,
[12] for they said, "Let us seize for our own use
  these pasturelands of God!"
[13] O my God, blow them away like whirling dust,
  like chaff before the wind!
[14] As a fire roars through a forest
  and as a flame sets mountains ablaze,
[15] chase them with your fierce storms;
  terrify them with your tempests.
[16] Utterly disgrace them
  until they submit to your name, O Lord.
[17] Let them be ashamed and terrified forever.
  Make them failures in everything they do,
[18] until they learn that you alone are called the Lord,
that you alone are the Most High, supreme over all the earth.

As of tonight, the conditions could well be fulfilled for Isaiah 17 and Psalm 83. In light of such developments, we should zealously preach the Gospel of Christ to all who will listen for the time is close at hand when the King of Kings will appear!

Next week: Armageddon