

From Ishmael to Islam

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All research has been assisted by use of the King James Bible, available online maps that coincide with those in my office, the Blue Letter Bible for easy cross referencing, and several different Hebrew lexicons as I am certainly no scholar of the language. Additional resources will be noted within the text.

Readers are encouraged to purchase or make use of ancient maps (often located in the back of each Bible) so as to follow the discussion on geographic locations.

INTRODUCTION

On many levels, this is knowingly a study that offers very little pizzazz or refreshing application. In fact, by many likely standards, it could be a most "boring" journey through genealogy and history. The purpose, however, is purely for our understanding as we engage an attempt to figure out and trace the path of Ishmael's descendants. My hope is that the material itself might not be perceived as hard to follow.

In order to achieve this, my goal is to work through a lot of Scripture to set a stage for our modern understanding. Hopefully one or all of the following questions might peak your curiosity.

Who were the descendants of Ishmael?

Where did they go after they fled Abraham with a small flask of water?

Does Ishmael still have relevance today?

These are the primary questions in play. To begin, we must start immediately in laying out the fascinating truth that there were indeed "12 sons" each established to be a "great nation." And in this case, we're not tracing the lineage of Israel and the paths that they took. Rather, we're looking at the "other son" of Abraham who was not born of faith.

For those who may, in fact, be unfamiliar with the character of Ishmael, you're encouraged to read Genesis 16 and 17. Ultimately, the story is summed up in noting that the Lord told Abraham his descendants would be as the stars. Yet, the man had no children and his wife was quite "up there" in age. In order to achieve what he believed God had in mind for him, he took it upon himself to bring Hagar, his handmaid into his chambers, get her pregnant, and hopefully usher in the fulfillment of God's intention. The offspring of that union was born Ishmael.

As most of us know, the child of promise was Isaac... not Ishmael. And from Isaac came Jacob whose name was eventually changed to Israel after he had wrestled with God and overcome. And from Israel came the twelve tribes to whom we so often recognize in the majority of Scripture's accounted storyline.

The interesting truth to Ishmael, however, is that although he was NOT the child of promise, the Lord said this:

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." Genesis 17:20

His own sons would number 12 and from them would come a "great nation." Quite fascinating if you ask me, but I grant that this type of study still leads one to say, "Eh... who cares?" If I may reiterate the purpose of this particular study, it is not to enlighten or provide an amazing insight into the obvious. Rather, what we'll be doing is investigating the direction that these 12 sons take in the Scriptures. Who were they? Where did they go? And who does Scripture not follow?

THE TWELVE PRINCES

To start, we must begin isolating the 12 sons by name:

"And these [are] the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael,

(1) Nebajoth

(2) Kedar

(3) Adbeel

(4) Mibsam

(5) Mishma

(6) Dumah

(7) Massa

(8) Hadar

(9) Tema

(10) Jetur

(11) Naphish

(12) Kedemah

These [are] the sons of Ishmael, and these [are] their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations. And these [are] the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people. And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that [is] before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: [and] he died in the presence of all his brethren." Genesis 25:13-18

The same account is given here:

"These [are] their generations: The firstborn of Ishmael,

(1) Nebaioth

(2) Kedar

(3) Adbeel

(4) Mibsam

(5) Mishma

(6) Dumah

(7) Massa

(8) Hadad

(9) Tema

(10) Jetur

(11) Naphish

(12) Kedemah

These are the sons of Ishmael." I Chronicles 1:29-31

There are only two different renderings of spelling from the first account. Nabajoth, which in Chronicles is listed as Nabaioth... and Hadar, which in Chronicles is listed as Hadad. Taking that into account, we're going to watch the Biblical record of each individual son as far as the Word will take us. Once that's complete, it will force us into asking a few extra biblical questions that are necessary for figuring out both geography and modern relevance.

(1) Nebajoth/Nebaioth

"Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife." Genesis 28:9

"Now these [are] the generations of Esau, who [is] Edom. Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan; Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite; And Bashemath Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth. And Adah bare to Esau Eliphaz; and Bashemath bare Reuel;" Genesis 36:1-4

Initially, the theater of view that we have takes us toward two of Nebajoth's sisters, also of Ishmael. These two daughters, Mahalath and Bashemath, become the wives of Esau. What's immediately obvious to the modern day reader is that Esau's grandfather is Ishmael's father. That is, if Esau takes Ishmael's daughters as his own, he is taking his two cousins as wives.

From Bashemath, we follow the child Reuel. But we must keep in mind that this particular lineage is merely from Ishmael and not from the 12 sons.

"And these [are] the sons of Reuel; Nahath, and Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah: these were the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife." Genesis 36:13

"And these [are] the sons of Reuel Esau's son; duke Nahath, duke Zerah, duke Shammah, duke Mizzah: these [are] the dukes [that came] of Reuel in the land of Edom; these [are] the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife." Genesis 36:17

Reuel, Ishmael's grandson, has four sons. Duke Nahath, Duke Zerah, Duke Shammah, and Duke Mizzah. This information can also be found here:

"The sons of Reuel; Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah." I Chronicles 1:37

Nahath, Ishmael's great grandson whose name means "rest," has very little recorded other than his part in the lineage.

Zerah, Ishmael's great grandson whose name means "rising," has the following written about him.

"And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead." Genesis 36:33

He was born in Bozrah, known as a fortress of palaces, which was located in one of two possible Bible locations: Moab or Edom.

"Who [is] this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this [that is] glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Isaiah 63:1

"And upon Kerioth, and upon Bozrah, and upon all the cities of the land of Moab, far or near." Jeremiah 48:24

Down the line, we see prophecy destined both Edom and Moab for an end of destruction. But Bozrah seems to be a primary location of such desolate intent.

"For I have sworn by myself, saith the LORD, that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all the cities thereof shall be perpetual wastes." Jeremiah 49:13

"Behold, he shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread his wings over Bozrah: and at that day shall the heart of the mighty men of Edom be as the heart of a woman in her pangs." Jeremiah 49:22

"But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah." Amos 1:12

Zerah, this second son of Reuel and great grandson of Ishmael is also said to have fathered Jobab as we read above. Basic presumption would conclude that Jobab was, by generations, the reigning King of Edom. Edom is the primary spot of Esau and his children... thus we know by lineage that Jobab's great grandfather was Esau and his great great grandfather was Ishmael. So it makes sense that Edom would have been the location of Bozrah.

For the sake of necessary visualization, the following image should provide a fairly strong idea of where these major locations were:

Edom is quite a large land mass to the south of the Jordan River. Its capital is Petra. And by what we've just deduced, Bozrah in Edom is the birth home for Ishmael's great grandson Zerah.

So we don't too quickly lose sight of Reuel's third son, let's get back on track and continue.

Shemmah, Ishmael's great grandson whose name means "astonishment" and/or "desolation," has nothing written about him.

Mizzah, Ishmael's great grandson whose name means "fear," also has nothing written about him.

These traces follow the descendants of the firstborn "son" mentioned of Ishmael, Nebajoth or Nebaioth.

Nebajoth/Nebaioth comes from the Hebrew word, "nuwb," which means "to bear fruit and flourish." Translations seem to indicate that a direct meaning of his name is simply "heights" or "high places."

"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, and I will glorify the house of my glory." Isaiah 60:7

All that covered, we see very little in the direct lineage of Ishmael's firstborn beyond his two sisters. And from such an evaluation, we end up observing the intermarriage of Esau to this line. Due to the fact that Esau himself is not a descendant of Ishmael and the two daughters of Ishmael are, in themselves, not relevant to the Hebrew genealogy... it's fair to conclude that Edom is not necessarily the home of Ishmael's firstborn son and his children (for we really do not know where they went).

(2) Kedar

One might find that Kedar is most extraordinary because his name means "black skinned" or "dark" and comes from the Hebrew word qadar, which means "to mourn or be dark." However, it's not unreasonable to consider the firm possibility that the darkness does not refer to skin tone, but instead refers to his state of mind. Generally, however, children are named upon their coming forth from the womb and it seems likely that Kedar was named for his appearance like Esau was named for his. Furthermore, it is a likely descendant of Kedar to whom Solomon's "Song of Songs" is written. In the opening, she describes herself as such:

"I [am] black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I [am] black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; [but] mine own vineyard have I not kept." Song of Songs 1:5-6

One fair challenge to Solomon's lover not being of Kedar lineage is the notion that the "blackness" of her skin was due to the constant beating of the sun when she was "keeper of the vineyards." For she concludes this thought by saying that she has not kept her own vineyard... that is, her own body. It is for this reason that she wonders if Solomon would have cause to notice her.

What we DO know about Kedar and his descendants is noted in the following:

"For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail:" Isaiah 21:16

They were a glorious group. That is, they were quite a remarkable nation to observe.

"And the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the LORD God of Israel hath spoken [it]." Isaiah 21:17

They were mighty men. Archers of great number.

"Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up [their voice], the villages [that] Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains." Isaiah 42:11

They inhabited the mountains with their villages. It is, however, the following two verses that lay out their location more specifically.

"Concerning Kedar, and concerning the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon shall smite, thus saith the LORD; Arise ye, go up to Kedar, and spoil the men of the east." Jeremiah 49:28

"Arabia, and all the princes of Kedar, they occupied with thee in lambs, and rams, and goats: in these [were they] thy merchants." Ezekiel 27:21

Kedar and his sons would become the "men of the east" and thus the great nation of Arabia. Out of Arabia, we find a couple of Biblical truths.

"Beside [that which] chapmen and merchants brought. And all the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon." II Chronicles 9:14

Israel and Arabia had an economic trading relationship.

"And all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert," Jeremiah 25:24

The kings and princes of Arabia dwell in the desert.

So it's fair to say that while we cannot follow a name recognition series of men to whom Kedar's genealogy might be traced, we can and do see a geographic placement for their settlement. They were in the desert mountains of the east and as such, became rather nomadic in their freedoms to trade, practice archery, and understand warfare enough to become great mighty men.

(3) Adbeel

Apart from being the third noted son of Ishmael, all we know is that his name means "chastened/miracle of God" and the latter "el" to his name suggests a man of great strength. One might assert that his lack of further mention indicates that he may have inhabited the land of a fellow brother.

(4) Mibsam

Apart from being the fourth noted son of Ishmael, all we know is that his name means "sweet odor" and that it stems from the word "besem" under which we recognize the spice that comes out of Balsam Trees. Interestingly enough, the Balsam Trees around today are a very grand fir tree through which we might think of the Christmas season. Mibsam is named, perhaps in theory, by the notion that he was born in the midst of these trees.

There is an odd correlation between Balsam Trees and Mulberry Trees (though neither are even remotely identical) that can be found here:

"And when David enquired of the LORD, he said, Thou shalt not go up; [but] fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines." II Samuel 5:23-24

Blue Letter Bible resources indicate that the Baca Tree (Hebrew) is noted simply for the fact that when cut, it drips sap. As a result, we see the King James translate this as Mulberry Trees while several other translations go in the direction of Balsam Trees. If indeed, these are the same, and we're seeing a tie between Philistine residence and such trees, then it's not horribly far-fetched to consider that Mibsam could have been born in midst of Balsam/Mulberry Trees in the region of the Philistines (that is, Philistia).

By looking at a map of ancient Israel, you'll notice that Philistia is located to the southwest of Israel. But any reasonable student of Scripture should already know that this escalation is mere speculation and should not constitute the exact or even the remote location of Ishmael's fourth son.

(5) Mishma

Apart from being the fifth noted son of Ishmael, all we know is that his name means "hearing" and comes from the same word which is understood to be referring "rumour" or the "thing heard."

(6) Dumah

Dumah offers a little bit more insight into territorial geography. His name means "silent" and stems from a word, duwmah, which means "a place of silence." This "place of silence" is referred to by David when he says:

"Unless the LORD [had been] my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence." Psalm 94:17

"The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence." Psalm 115:17

An association is made between this duwmah and the depths of Hades. However, it's more important that we isolate the primary city to which Dumah is ACTUALLY associated.

"The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim." Isaiah 21:11-13

Quite possibly these are two different burdens and Arabia ought not be connected to Dumah, but unquestionably, Seir has a relevant consideration in the land of Edom.

"And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan, which [is] by the wilderness." Genesis 14:6

"And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom." Genesis 32:3

"Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir." Genesis 33:14

"So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir." Genesis 33:16

"Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau [is] Edom. And these [are] the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir:" Genesis 36:8-9

"These [are] the sons of Seir the Horite, who inhabited the land; Lotan, and Shobal, and Zibeon, and Anah, And Dishon, and Ezer, and Dishan: these [are] the dukes of the Horites, the children of Seir in the land of Edom." Genesis 36:20-21

"Duke Dishon, duke Ezer, duke Dishan: these [are] the dukes [that came] of Hori, among their dukes in the land of Seir." Genesis 36:30

"And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly." Numbers 24:18

"Then we turned, and took our journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea, as the LORD spake unto me: and we compassed mount Seir many days." Deuteronomy 2:1

"And command thou the people, saying, Ye [are] to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: Meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau [for] a possession." Deuteronomy 2:4-5

"And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, through the way of the plain from Elath, and from Eziongaber, we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab." Deuteronomy 2:8

"The Horims also dwelt in Seir beforetime; but the children of Esau succeeded them, when they had destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their stead; as Israel did unto the land of his possession, which the LORD gave unto them." Deuteronomy 2:12

"As he did to the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, when he destroyed the Horims from before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead even unto this day:" Deuteronomy 2:22

" (As the children of Esau which dwell in Seir, and the Moabites which dwell in Ar, did unto me;) until I shall pass over Jordan into the land which the LORD our God giveth us." Deuteronomy 2:29

"And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand [went] a fiery law for them." Deuteronomy 33:2

" [Even] from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them." Joshua 11:17

"And these [are] the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel smote on this side Jordan on the west, from Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon even unto the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir; which Joshua gave unto the tribes of Israel [for] a possession according to their divisions;" Joshua 12:7

"And the border compassed from Baalah westward unto mount Seir, and passed along unto the side of mount Jearim, which [is] Chesalon, on the north side, and went down to Bethshemesh, and passed on to Timnah:" Joshua 15:10

"And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau: and I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it; but Jacob and his children went down into Egypt." Joshua 24:4

"LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water." Judges 5:4

Seir is the mountainous region that spans from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea creating the western border of Edom. Originally, the land had been inhabited by the Horites, but the Lord gave Esau the power to overcome them and take over the land. Thus, Edom became the new residence of the Seir Mountains.

Based on Isaiah 21, we have every reason to believe that Dumah took residence with the Edomites and there resided with his descendants.

(7) Massa

Apart from being the seventh noted son of Ishmael, all we know is that his name means "burden" and could easily have been named so because of the "burden" he caused his mother in childbirth. Again, this is purely speculation and offers little to no assessment on where he took his family.

(8) Hadar/Hadad

Apart from being the eighth noted son of Ishmael, all we know is that his name means "honour" and "mighty." This follows suit with other brothers who were known as mighty men. Records indicate that our only conclusion to be told is that he simply fit the bill of yet another Edomite King among the twelve.

(9) Tema

Gesenius's Lexicon points out that Tema became known as a country and nation in the northern part of the Arabian desert on the borders of the desert of Syria. Tema's name does indeed mean "desert" and we see characteristics here:

"The troops of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them." Job 6:19

"The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim. The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled." Isaiah 21:13-14

In a desert land, the people of Tema are identified as troops and those who provided water to the thirsty. Of all the groups mentioned thus far, they seem to be the most civilized.

(10) Jetur

Jetur, who is the tenth son listed to Ishmael, means "enclosed." What's even more provocative is that his sons appear to have been erased, along with Naphish (the 11th son) during a God-supported raid against them by the Hebrew tribes of Manasseh and Reuben.

"The sons of Reuben, and the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, of valiant men, men able to bear buckler and sword, and to shoot with bow, and skilful in war, [were] four and forty thousand seven hundred and threescore, that went out to the war. And they made war with the Hagarites, with Jetur, and Nephish, and Nodab." I Chronicles 5:18-19

It's tough to figure out where exactly the family of Jetur really resided except on the basis that Manasseh took over the area where they had been.

"And the children of the half tribe of Manasseh dwelt in the land: they increased from Bashan unto Baalhermon and Senir, and unto mount Hermon." I Chronicles 5:23

From Bashan (east of the Jordan River) unto Baalhermon and Senir (both of similar location to the northernmost border of the Promised Land).

So it would appear that Jetur had established himself along with his family in the midst of the promised land that the Israelites were told to inhabit. Thus, they were removed from their land and never returned again. That is, we've never heard or seen of their existence after Manasseh takes over the land. By his very name meaning of "enclosed," we ought to conclude that the tribes of Israel "closed" Jetur in so that they could not escape and live in, say, another area.

(11) Naphish

The same fate seems true for Naphish as it was for Jetur in that they resided in the same lands that Manasseh took over. The only contrast is that Naphish carries the name meaning of "refreshment" and perhaps offers some insight into the goings and comings of David's army in the following scenario:

"And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust. And the king, and all the people that [were] with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there." II Samuel 16:14

The same Hebrew word is used to say "refreshed" for David's military. And it refers to a specific region. Might one draw some possible conclusions about the type of land that Naphish had inhabited previously? By now, we no longer see their existence, but it seems quite clear that they were wiped out by Manasseh.

(12) Kedemah

Absolutely nothing is said of Kedemah other than his being the baby of the family. His name means "original" and he easily falls as such due to his being the last born.

REVIEWING THE GEOGRAPHY

For the sake of putting some of this altogether, let's summarize the geographic realities of Ishmael's sons and family.

(1) Nebajoth

We have no clear sign of where the firstborn went to inhabit, but we do get to follow the journeys of his two sisters when they intermarry with Esau and establish themselves in the land of Edom. So for the sake of a broad overview, we can reasonably draw out that Nebajoth is associated with the land of Edom.

Edom, according to maps of Ancient Israel, is located to south of both Judah and Moab, while being north of Arabia (not shown) and east of the Red Sea. If you'll recall, one of the primary cities mentioned in our previous assessment was Bozrah.

(2) Kedar

Kedar established his residence in what became known as Arabia. After looking at the maps above, one might initially think that Edom is fairly large. But by viewing the map below, you should gather a much bigger picture in your mind of just how large Arabia was.

Petra is, as we covered briefly earlier, the capital of Edom. Clearly to any thinking individual, it becomes apparent and obvious that the people of Arabia would naturally have liked to take ownership of the full region that stretches from the Arabian Sea to the Red Sea to the Mediterranean and across to the Dead Sea. Just as Americans are comforted by two oceans and great rivers that stretch across our nation, so goes the natural inclination of an ancient Arabian group before the Hebrews took over the Promised Land.

(3) Adbeel

Without much mention, it can only be deduced that this, the third son of Ishmael, joined one of his brothers in the same regions that they were going. Not every brother in a large family goes his own way. Some trounce the same path.

(4) Mibsam

Mibsam allows us tremendous and theoretically stretched potential for his residence near or in the midst of the Philistines. If so, his land would have been located on westernmost land. The Philistines made their home along the Mediterranean Sea and only inhabited a small portion of the area. Whether Mibsam was in the midst of this is, again, just theoretical.

(5) Mishma

We have absolutely no clues on the location of Mishma and therefore must conclude, for lack of any better suggestions, that like Adbeel, he followed one of the paths of his brothers.

(6) Dumah

Here we're given a fair amount of detail, but only insomuch as Seir is a primary city of Edom. If you look back to information about Edom above and cite an ancient map of Israel, you should see the "hillside of Seir" which implies a mountainous region west and south of the Dead Sea extending through Jerusalem. Dumah makes a home amidst this region and appears to dominate the borders by way of archery and military prowess.

(7) Massa

No clear picture is given of Massa's location after birth, so although he was a "burden," he may have well been a tag along with an older brother.

(8) Hadar

Few resources offer any concrete evidence to suggest Hadar was anything other than an Edomite king who reigned along with many others.

(9) Tema

Tema's likely residence was on the southern border of Syrian deserts. Thus, one might find their boundary if they look at a map of ancient Syria.

While the borders are relatively modern, keep in mind that it was in Assyria that Nineveh and Jonah's story took place. Jonah left the northern regions of Israel to obey the second command of God to communicate with his enemy. So when we think of Syria and Assyria, they are not so far apart in location. Hence, it is easy to see that the formation of Ishmael's family has been arguably stretching across a fair amount of land.

(10) Jetur

Along with his brother Naphish, they both established homes and families within the borders of the Promised Land and were destroyed when Manasseh and Reuben brought war upon them. We can see where Manasseh's tribe laid out their inhabitation after this war.

Manasseh took over both sides of the Jordan River, but if this was the original location of Jetur, then they, along with Naphish, had quite a bit of land.

(11) Naphish

Exactly the same fate awaited Naphish (along with his brother Jetur) as they temporarily dominated a fairly large land mass until the arrival of God's People Israel.

(12) Kedemah

As the baby of the family, it'd be understandable (considering that we have nothing else to go on) that he also adopted a following to his older brothers. Where he went we just don't know.

UPDATING THE GEOGRAPHY

Summing up the 12 princes means isolating those whose geographical residence can be either fully identified or theoretically considered. As a result, the following is a better reduction of what was just covered.

(1) Nebajoth = Edom

(2) Kedar = Arabia

(4) Mibsam = Philistia

(6) Dumah = Seir Mountains of Edom

(8) Hadar = Edom

(9) Tema = Southernmost Syria

(10) Jetur = Manasseh

(11) Naphish = Manasseh

Hence, it is our current task to figure out where such locations are found today. What constitutes modern-day Edom, Philistia, Syria, Arabia, and Manasseh? These five regions will be covered next.

1. Edom no longer exists. In its place is a divided region between modern-day Israel and modern-day Jordan. What was once Edom is now split between two current nations.

2. Philistia is the infamous war-embattled place referred to as the Gaza Strip.

3. Syria is still quite fully intact to the amazement of a geographic student. With so many places adjusting their borders and losing their individual status, Syria has hardly been displaced, if at all.

4. Arabia also still encompasses a tremendously large region now known as Saudi Arabia with regard to the Saudi Dynasty that began in 1744. Although still very much intact, Arabia has been a coveted land by the Egyptians as well as the Ottomans and the Persians. The very fact that it is now called Saudi Arabia merely suggests that it is internally governed and is not dominated by those who have desired to take it over for centuries.

5. Manasseh. In between Israel and Jordan, there is a strip called the West Bank. This is a disputed area that is fought over to this day. At the foot of the West Bank is Jerusalem and so goes the modern day

fight over who controls such an important city. Manasseh would have been right down the middle of Israel, the West Bank, and the western area of Jordan.

FROM HAVILAH UNTO SHUR

One of the earlier Scriptures indicated that Ishmael's family spread "from Havilah unto Shur," so it is with great necessity that we must isolate this area to at least a rough geographic consideration based on all that has been covered thus far.

"And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that [is] before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: [and] he died in the presence of all his brethren." Genesis 25:18

Havilah is one of the most intriguingly complex regions because it seemingly introduces us to the very essential notion that Ishmael was able to inhabit quite a vast region by contrast to Joshua. As most Bible students are aware, Joshua's entrance into the Promised Land began when he crossed over the Jordan River and approached Jericho. Thus, his land mass was to be from the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea. Remember, they had been wandering "the desert" for many years prior to this moment.

If you look at the present day map of the land, you can see that our natural understanding of Israel is based on a fairly small plot of land by contrast to other areas. Yet, Ishmael and his family were established "from Havilah unto Shur." Where, then, did the child of the handmaid settle?

If you'll recall from your early Genesis reading, Havilah was one of the areas surrounded by an Eden River known as Pison.

"And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first [is] Pison: that [is] it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where [there is] gold;" Genesis 2:8-11

Pison was a river that circled around the entire land of Havilah. Biblical scholars and archaeologists who study the region have debated on an important school of thought. When the Scriptures of Genesis 2 reference Havilah, are they referring to a land that was only there before the flood or was the land potentially mentioned to readers of Moses' day who would recognize its location? That is, could Havilah have been purely a pre-flood region or was it relevant to post-flood understanding?

My suggestion is that it was named for what the Hebrews would later understand. Here's why.

"And the sons of Cush; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtecha: and the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan." Genesis 10:7

"And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah [until] thou comest to Shur, that [is] over against Egypt." I Samuel 15:7

A fair study on the rivers of Eden is reasonable to do in conjunction with this geographic study of Ishmael, but for now let us consider that Havilah was of great importance in assessing the region by which a group had resided.

Havilah is considered, in theory, to be located from the base of Assyria to the lowest borders of Arabia. And if not, the lowest borders, very likely a deep area of Arabia where gold most certainly existed. Gold, throughout Scripture, is found in a variety of places, not the least of which would have been Arabia. The first person known to have gold in his possession was Abram...

"And Abram [was] very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." Genesis 13:2

The Persians were known for their gold, the Romans for theirs, the Greeks and Egyptians for theirs. However, many of these areas became dominant forces in the less civilized areas of the world where armies had not been developed. An ancient kingdom with vast armies might seek to suppress a lesser kingdom with smaller armies and thus make that land subject to the imperial nation.

"Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which [is] in Judah. Who [is there] among you of all his people? The LORD his God [be] with him, and let him go up." II Chronicles 36:23

General history would show us that this has been true for all mankind's existence. Where there is a profitable element of the world, a dominant imperialism will take place. England, France, and Denmark have done this to Africa where ivory and slave trade become most prevalent. England, France, and Spain have done this to the western hemisphere of the Americas where cotton, rum, and other such elements were useful to the mother country. Arabia is vast indeed, but it has usually been dominated by other nations who are more powerful.

Keeping in mind that Havilah is likely to BE the very land of Arabia, what, then, is Shur?

"So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water." Exodus 15:22

After the Red Sea, Moses led the children of Israel into the wilderness of Shur where there was no water.

The Wilderness of Shur would have been dead center to the west of the Red Sea.

Without much challenge a sensible reader of this text should now be able to conclude that Ishmael's descendants did not inhabit Africa or the far reaches of Asia. Their borders were from Shur (at the edge of Egypt) to Havilah (at the borders of Syria and no further). How far south this group established themselves is debatable, but by any scope of the imagination, Arabia itself is greater in land mass than any single nation otherwise inhabited in the region.

CONCLUSION

Karen Armstrong, in her book entitled "Islam: A Short History," described Arabia during the 5th century AD like this:

"In the aggressive stampede for wealth [due to civilized society] some of the old tribal values had been lost. Instead of looking after the weaker members of the tribe, as the nomadic code prescribed, the Quraysh [Muhammad's tribe] were now intent on making money at the expense of some of the tribe's poorer family groupings, or clans. There was also spiritual restlessness in Mecca and throughout the peninsula. Arabs knew that Judaism and Christianity, which were practiced in the Byzantine and Persian empires, were more sophisticated than their own pagan traditions. Some had come to believe that the High God of their pantheon, Al-Lah (whose name simply meant "God") was the deity worshipped by the Jews and the Christians, but he had sent the Arabs no prophet and no scripture in their own language. Indeed, the Jews and Christians whom they met [for trade] often taunted the Arabs for being left out of the divine plan. It seemed to many of the more thoughtful people in Arabia that the Arabs were a lost race, exiled forever from the civilized world and ignored by God Himself. But that changed on the night of the 17 Ramadan, when Muhammad woke..."

When Ishmael's descendants were removed from the Promised Land and ushered into the peninsula that is today's Saudi Arabia, it is understandable that they would have felt abandoned by the former promise given to Ishmael:

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." Genesis 17:20

How could they perceive that God had blessed them when they were now isolated to an uncivilized desert? Such is the dilemma that allowed Muhammad to rise both in popularity and eloquence. Arabs were searching for a purpose and Christians had done little to reach across their civilized notions to a world that they deemed primitive.

Today's battles rage on in ways that modern man has ignorantly said, "Just let it go and be nice to each other." The solution isn't in such a vague or bland hope for peace, but in the reality that this war goes back to Isaac and Ishmael. To whom has God promised to bless? To whom has God given which land?

As you take this study and consider the consequences of our traditional way of thinking, allow the Scripture to open your eyes to a battle much larger than the one we wish would just go away. Just imagine what might have happened if Christians had gone south from Antioch and reached their hands across the border to extend love where it might have seemed undeserved. History has written its pages and it is our responsibility to consider how we will proceed forward knowing our place in the present dispensation of God's grace.