

## Notes on Genesis 17:20 in reference to the 12 Tribes of Ishmael

Ishmael was the first child born to Abraham through Sarah's Egyptian slave Hagar. While speaking to Abraham about Sarah's pregnancy and Isaac's birth, God also gave a blessing to Ishmael. In Genesis 17:20, God says: "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of **"twelve rulers"** (sons), and I will make him into a great nation."

In Genesis 25:13-15, those twelve sons are listed as: Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah, fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham regarding Ishmael. Their names also represented people, land, and languages. They eventually became known as Arabs, which basically means "nomads" (synonymous with Bedouin). Later, the word Arab was used to designate all the inhabitants of the peninsula—both nomads and town-dwellers.

The sons of Ishmael were a warlike people, as "they lived in hostility toward all the tribes related to them" (Genesis 25:18). This fulfilled God's earlier word that Ishmael would be "a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers" (Genesis 16:12).

There is a popular theory common among Muslims that Arabian Muslims are descendants of Ishmael, also known as the Ishmaelites. In Genesis 37:28; 39:1, the Ishmaelites were also called Midianites and were known for the buying and selling of slaves. Isaiah 60:7 mentions the descendants of Nebaioth and Kedar as those who raised flocks. In Judges 8:24 they were known for plundering gold and other fine jewelry. During the reign of King David, they joined a confederacy against God (Psalm 83:5-6) with the goal to "destroy the nation of Israel so that their name would be remembered no more" (verse 4).

Although Ishmaelites only have a very small genetic connection to Arabic people, Muhammad claimed to be a direct descendant of Ishmael. As proof, Muslims refer to genealogies written around 770-775 A.D. by Muslim scholar Ibn Ishak, which contradicts the sayings of Mohammed, who expressed his ignorance about his ancestors before his 13th ancestor.

Prior to Ibn Ishak, Muslims who lived in Muhammed's own time also created genealogies in an attempt to connect him to the descendants of Ishmael, even though other narrations of the customs, or sayings, of Muhammed (Hadiths), show Muhammed refused to be genealogized. It should be further noted that some trace Muhammad's ancestry through Nebaioth, and others through Kedar, revealing no one is really sure if there is any truth to the claim.

Nonetheless, considering the current turmoil in the Middle East and the hatred often directed toward Israel, the prophecies concerning the descendants of Ishmael continue to prove prophetic.