

## Genesis 16 – Trading Faith for Expediency

### I. Finding Disaster in Worldly Schemes (1-6)

#### A. Sarai and Abram Try to “Help” God’s Promise (1-4a)

##### 1. Sarai’s Plan to Fulfill the Promise (1-2b)

###### a. Sarai Has an Egyptian Servant Named Hagar (1)

- i. Abram has just come from a mountaintop experience where God formally covenanted to Give Abram a Son from his own body
- ii. Sarai is probably reminded of her own barrenness as she hears of God’s covenant with Abram
  - Perhaps she feels rejected because the seed will come from Abram, but there is no mention that it will come from her (yet)
- iii. We are introduced to Hagar, Sarai’s Egyptian maidservant. Where did she come from?

###### b. Sarai Sees Her Barrenness as God’s Doing (2a)

- i. Sarai may simply be recognizing that God is sovereign over the womb (something we have already seen from Scripture)
- ii. However, there seems to be a hint that Sarai is casting blame upon God for her inability to have children.
  - What does this say about the condition of Sarai’s heart as Abram has just had validation of his promise from God?

###### c. Sarai Offers Hagar to Abram to Bear Children (2b)

- i. While modern readers will be horrified by such a suggestion, this was actually customary and quite common in the ancient near East.
  - Nuzi Tablet number 67 shows such a situation where a barren wife is allowed to give a slave to her husband for childbearing – the child would be the legal child of the wife.
  - In this case, the slave would become a secondary wife or concubine to the man while the first wife remained the superior.
  - This situation may have been very conventional and customary in the eyes of society – but it was not good in God’s sight.

- ii. Sarai hoped that she would gain children from Hagar’s fertility. She fully expects that the

children of Abram and Hagar would be considered Sarai's children.

- Sarai's motivation was probably to help God fulfill His promise to Abram.
- Since God restrained Sarai from having children, the promise of God could not be fulfilled (in her mind) unless she did something about it.
- Sarai probably assumed that it was necessary to do. The end justified the means. Abram must have a son and this is the only foreseeable way it would happen.

2. Abram Faithlessly Complies with Sarai's Plan (2c-4a)

a. Abram Heeded His Wife's Counsel (2c)

- i. Instead of acting in faith to the God who just made covenant with Abram, he listens to his wife and agrees to her plan. – Abram fails another test of his faith.
- ii. Abram is sidestepping his responsibility as spiritual leader of his household and is passively listening to his wife's counsel
- iii. This is the same folly of Adam. Instead of taking responsibility to lead his family, Adam listened and obeyed his wife's voice

b. Sarai "Took" Hagar and "Gave" her to Abram (3)

- i. The same language used here is used of the fall in the garden of Eden.
  - Sarai "took" Hagar / Eve "took" of the fruit
  - Sarai "gave" Hagar to her husband / Eve "gave" the fruit to her husband
  - Abram passively obeys Sarai's wish / Adam passively obeys Eve
- ii. There is a direct parallel between this account and the account of the fall
  - Abram, after all his great success and acts of faith, is still susceptible to the flesh
  - Abram is continuing to grow in his faith

c. Hagar Conceive Abram's Child (4a)

- i. This is exactly what both Sarai and Abram were hoping for
- ii. This will not turn out the way Sarai and Abram hoped.

B. Sarai and Abram's Scheme Backfires (4b-6)

1. Prideful Hagar Treats Sarai with Dishonor (4b)

- a. Hagar, who has been used by Abram and Sarai, begins to feel superior over Sarai – Hagar thought she was now bearing the promised seed
- b. Hagar may have been confident that Abram now needs her more than Sarai because she is bearing the only heir.
- c. Hagar treats Sarai spitefully – probably dishonoring her by rubbing her nose in the fact that she is barren.
  - i. NOTE: Something to notice is that everyone in this scene is wrong in one way or another.

## 2. Sarai and Abram Compound Their Sin (5-6)

### a. Sarai Complains and Blames Abram (5)

- i. In one sense, this is her own fault. It was her idea to go against God's design for marriage and to try to help God's promise along with worldly plans
- ii. In another sense, this is most certainly Abram's fault. He should have been the leader of his household and held to trusting the covenant of God. – After the deed was done, he should have protected his wife from disgrace and shame.
- iii. Although Abram bears much of the blame in this entire situation, it seems Sarai's motives in blaming him are not righteous.

### b. Abram Disregards Responsibility For the Situation (6a)

- i. Abram sins again! Rather than repent and lead his family to repentance, Abram continues to be passive.
- ii. Abram tells Sarai to handle it herself, once again sidestepping his responsibility as God's covenant bearer and leader of the family.
- iii. This could be a "demotion" of Hagar. Abram may be removing Hagar as his second wife (i.e. concubine) and placing her back in service of Sarai. (Notice that Sarai never claims Ishmael as her own son)

### c. Sarai Begins Oppressing Hagar (6b)

- i. We are not told exactly what Sarai did to Hagar, but the word translated "dealt hardly" is the same word used in chapter 15 to describe the affliction Israel would experience at the hands of the Egyptians. (עָנָה – oppress, humiliate, afflict)
- ii. Sarai sins again rather than repenting. She begins oppressing and afflicting her servant Hagar

## 3. Hagar Flees From the Presence of Abram and Sarai (6c)

## II. Finding Grace in The Wilderness (7-16)

### A. God Meets Hagar In The Wilderness (7-8)

1. God Appears To Hagar By a Well On The Way To Shur (7)
  - a. Hagar is fleeing toward her homeland (Egypt)
    - i. Shur is east of Egypt and below the promised land (See Gen. 25:18 and 1 Sam. 15:7)
    - ii. Hagar was out on her own in a dangerous land for young women, with presumably very little provisions, and pregnant.
  - b. The “Angel of the Lord” appears to Hagar
    - i. Remember the word “angel” means messenger (whether divine or otherwise)
    - ii. In the Old Testament “THE” Angel of the Lord should almost always be identified as the second person of the Trinity, the pre-incarnate Christ.
      - The angel of the Lord speaks as God, identifies Himself with God, and exercises the responsibilities of God ([Genesis 16:7-12](#); [21:17-18](#); [22:11-18](#); [Exodus 3:2](#); [Judges 2:1-4](#); [5:23](#); [6:11-24](#); [13:3-22](#); [2 Samuel 24:16](#); [Zechariah 1:12](#); [3:1](#); [12:8](#)).
      - Even in this episode, we will see that this “angel of the Lord” says “I will multiply thy seed...” but also says “thou shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction” (v.11) – And in v.13, Hagar will describe her experience as having “seen God”
      - In each episode, the angel of the Lord speaks as God Himself but also distinguishes between Himself and God – representing the doctrine of the Trinity.
    - iii. Notice that the Angel of the Lord does not say “Hagar, Abram’s wife” but instead “Hagar, Sarai’s maid”
    - iv. Hagar is asked where she is coming from and where she is going – did He not know?

2. Hagar Explains Her Situation To God (8)

- a. Hagar explains that she is fleeing from Sarai
- b. Perhaps Hagar feels justified in leaving because of the treatment she has received

- B. God Instructs and Comforts Hagar (9-12)

1. God Gives Hagar a Command (9)

- a. God commands Hagar to return to Sarai and to submit herself to her authority.
- b. This must have been a tough command to follow after all that has transpired between the two

- c. God goes on to explain the reasons why Hagar must return to Abram's house – God has plans for Hagar and her offspring
- 2. God Gives Hagar a Promise (10)
  - a. Notice that Hagar is not part of the covenant family. She is from Egypt, of the line of Ham, yet God hears her desperation and shows grace to her in her need.
  - b. God gives Hagar a promise that sounds very similar to the promise given to Abram – yet Hagar will not bear the seed of the promise. She will become a great multitude. This is the only time in Scripture this promise is given to a mother (6x to Abram, and then to Isaac and Jacob)
    - i. Her children will be counted among the children of Abraham. She would be an honored woman
    - ii. This promise from God may have led Abram to believe that Ishmael was indeed the son of promise (later he will beg God to include Ishmael in the promised line)
- 3. God Gives Hagar a Prophecy (11-12)
  - a. God Foretells the Birth of Ishmael (11)
    - i. The name Ishmael means “God Hears”
    - ii. The child's name would always remind the family that God hears the cries of the afflicted (perhaps it also reminds Abram and Sarai that God hears the schemes of His people)
  - b. God Foretells the Future of Ishmael (12)
    - i. He will be wild (the word used here means a “wild ass or donkey” –
      - This has many connotations that people have mentioned
      - It means he will be free and independent, stubborn and unyielding, and he will fight against his brethren
      - “dwell in the presence” here means he will live “against” all his brethren
    - ii. Although we see this as a bleak prophecy, the slave Hagar would have seen this very favorably
      - Her son would be no slave, he would be free
      - Her son would not endure the “hardships” that Hagar has endured – He would be a fighter
    - iii. We see a partial fulfillment of this in Genesis 25:17-18

- iv. These are the years of the life of Ishmael, one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people. They settled from Havilah to Shur which is east of Egypt as one goes toward Assyria; **he settled in defiance of all his relatives.** – 25:17-18
  - v. Because of Abram and Sarai's scheme as a shortcut to the promise, they have produced a wild man rather than a promised son. The people from Ishmael will prove to be a thorn in the side of God's people throughout their history.
- C. Hagar Trusts God's Word (13-16)
- 1. Hagar Honors God With Her Mouth (13-14)
    - a. Hagar Understands That "God Sees" (13a)
      - i. Hagar calls this God "El Roi" – The God who sees me
      - ii. She learns that this God whom Abram worships is truly omniscient. Even when Hagar suffered under the hand of Sarai, God saw her distress. Even when Hagar was alone in the wilderness, God saw her.
      - iii. For Hagar, she realizes that this God is not like the gods of Egypt or the idols of the Amorites. This God actually sees the actions and needs of His people.
    - b. Hagar Marks the Place She Met God (13b-14)
      - i. She names this place "Beer Lahai Roi" (The Well of the Living One Who Sees Me)
      - ii. She says that it is here that she has seen the one who "sees" her.
  - 2. Hagar Honors God With Her Actions (15-16)
    - a. Hagar obeys God's command and returns to Abram's house
    - b. Hagar indeed bears a son as God said
    - c. Notice that Abram named the boy Ishmael – Hagar must have related the story to Abram
      - i. Now every time Abram or Sarai yelled the boy's name, they would be reminded that "God hears"
      - ii. God hears the schemes of his people and their attempts to justify worldly actions
      - iii. But God also hears (and sees) those who are in need and desperate.