

Genesis Chapter 16

Genesis 16:1 "Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name [was] Hagar."

"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bare him no children": She is before said to be barren, and he to be childless (Genesis 11:30); God had promised him a seed, but as yet he had none, which was a trial of his faith.

Abram had been married many years to Sarai his wife, who was his wife when they came out of Ur of the Chaldees, and how long before is unknown. They stayed and dwelt some time at Haran, the Jews say five years, and they had been now ten years in the land of Canaan (Gen. 16:3).

Sarai had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar; no doubt but she had many, but this was a principal one, that might be over others, and was chiefly entrusted with the care and management of family affairs under her mistress.

She might be the daughter of an Egyptian, born in Abram's house, as Eliezer was the son of a Syrian of Damascus, born there also. Or she might be one of the maidservants Pharaoh, king of Egypt, gave to Abram.

See (Galatians 4:21-31), where Paul uses Hagar as an illustration.

Genesis 16:2 "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."

Sarai, no longer expecting to have children herself, proposed to Abram to take another wife, her slave Hagar, whose children would be her property. This was done without asking counsel of the Lord. Unbelief worked, God's almighty power was forgotten. It was a bad example, and a source of manifold uneasiness.

"Go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her": This was according to legal customs as witnessed in legal codes and marriage contracts of the time.

Ten years had elapsed since God's original promise of an heir (16:3), and Abram and Sarai took matters into their own hands (see note on Gen. 30:3). The negative commentary concerning this episode is written by Paul in Galatians 4 and contrasts the "work of the flesh" and the product of the "Spirit of God" in verse 29.

This scheme that Sarai came up with caused nothing but trouble. First of all, this would not be Sarai's child. Sarai had lost faith that she would ever have a child, and decided to help God out. Anytime you get ahead of God and start figuring out the details yourself, you wind up with a mess. This was no exception.

Even mixing the blood of Abram with an Egyptian, was not pleasing to God. Egypt is a type of the world. This union between Hagar and Abram could be nothing but worldly (opposed to God's plan). Any child from this union would have to be of the flesh.

The poor maid was caught in a trap not of her making. Abram could have said no. He did not have to obey Sarai. In doing what she said, he got all of them in a mess.

Genesis 16:3 "And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife."

“Gave her to her husband”: After 10 childless years (12:4), Sarai resorted to the custom of the day by which a barren wife could get a child through one of her own maidservants (verse 2, “I will obtain children through her”).

Abram ignoring divine reaction and assurance in response to his earlier attempt to appoint a heir (15:2-5), sinfully yielded to Sarai’s insistence, and Ismael was born (verse 15).

The only thing to add here is we should look at the worldly aspect of this, even the 10 in the number of years. Abram was allowing his flesh to rule him.

Genesis 16:4 "And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes."

“And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived”: The formality of the marriage being over, he enjoyed her as his wife, and she immediately conceived by him. And when she saw that she had conceived; when she perceived that she was with child: her mistress was despised in her eyes.

She thought herself above her, and treated her as her inferior, with contempt, and reproached her for her barrenness, as Peninnah did Hannah, (1 Sam. 1:6) and it was the more ungrateful, as it was at the motion of her mistress that she was given to Abram for wife.

She (Hagar) suddenly felt her importance. Her affair with Abram had resulted in pregnancy. She was angry and jealous of Sarai. Two women cannot share one man. In Genesis, when God made Adam and Eve, He said they two shall become one flesh.

Marriage where more than two people are involved cannot work. It is not compatible with the plan God made from the beginning. Jealousy between these two women reigned in this household.

Genesis 16:5 "And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong [be] upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee."

“Wrong be upon thee ... I was despised”: Sarai, not anticipating contemptuous disregard by Hagar (verse 4), as the result of her solution for barrenness, blamed Abram for her trouble and demanded judgment to rectify the broken mistress-servant relationship.

Sarai had given her maid to Abram, yet she cries out, “my wrong be upon thee”. That is never said wisely, which pride and anger put into our mouths. Those are not always in the right, who are most loud and forward in appealing to God: such rash and bold imprecations commonly speak guilt and a bad cause.

Abram transferred his responsibility to Sarai, giving her freedom to react as she wished (verse 6), “your maid is in your power”.

At least in this verse, Sarai was admitting that she was wrong. Just like so many people who do wrong, Sarai did not want to take the blame. She tried to shift her blame to Abram. With Hebrew women, it was a disgrace, not to have children, and they were looked down on. Children were considered a blessing from God. Not having children was considered a curse.

Whether this was what Hagar was feeling for Sarai, or not, was not evident. Perhaps, Hagar had in her mind to take the place of Sarai with Abram. Sarai, in the last sentence, was asking God to decide whether she was at blame, or whether it was Abram's fault that all of this happened.

Genesis 16:6 "But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid [is] in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face."

Abram's unhappy marriage to Hagar very soon made a great deal of mischief. We may thank ourselves for the guilt and grief that follow us, when we go out of the way of our duty. See it in this case, Passionate people often quarrel with others, for things of which they themselves must bear the blame.

Hagar forgot that she herself had first given the provocation, by despising her mistress. Those that suffer for their faults, ought to bear it patiently (1 Pet. 2:20).

“But Abram said unto Sarai”: In a meek, mild and gentle manner: behold, thy maid is in thine hand; though Hagar was Abram's secondary wife he still considers her as Sarai's maid, and as subject to her, allows her to exercise authority over her; for he still retained the same love and affection for Sarai, his first and lawful wife.

He showed the same respect he ever did, and supported her in her honor and dignity.

“Do to her as it pleaseth thee”: not giving her liberty to take away her life, nor even to use her cruelly, but to deal with her as a mistress might lawfully do with a servant, or however exercise that power which a first wife had over a second. Perhaps Abram, in complaisance to Sarai, gave her too large a commission, and left it too much in her power to distress Hagar.

It might have been more correct to have heard both sides, and judged between them, and used his own authority, by reproofing and correcting as he saw fit. Had she been only Sarai's maid and not

his wife, it would have been less exceptionable; however, for peace sake, he gave leave to Sarai to do as she would.

Abram just backed away here. This is Sarai's maid. Sarai punished Hagar some way for her attitude. Whatever the punishment, it was severe enough that Hagar fled in fear.

Genesis 16:7 "And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur."

“The angel of the Lord”: This special individual spoke as though He were distinct from Yahweh, yet also spoke in the first person as though He were indeed to be identified as Yahweh Himself, with Hagar recognizing that in seeing this Angel, she had seen God (verse 13).

Others had the same experience and came to the same conclusion (22:11-18; 31:11-13; Exodus 3:2-5; Num. 22:22-35; Judges 6:11-23; 13:2-5; 1 King 19:5-7). The Angel of the Lord, who does not appear after the birth of Christ, is often identified as the pre-incarnate Christ (see note on Exodus 3:2).

This was likely the preincarnate appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity as the angel's character, deeds, and power confirm this interpretation (17:1-22; 22:11-18; 31:11, 13; Judges 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-24; 13:3-22; 2 Sam. 24:16; Zech. 1:12; 3:1; 12:8).

“Shur”: south of Palestine and east of Egypt, which meant that Hagar attempted to return home to Egypt.

In the Old Testament, an angel identified as the “angel of the Lord”, the “angel of God” (21:17), the “angel of his presence” (Isa. 63:9), and the “messenger of the covenant” (Mal. 3:1), appeared to individuals.

A closer look at the context of His appearances reveals that He is more than another angel, He is God. The expression usually signifies a preincarnate appearance of Christ, and is sometimes called a “Christophany,” meaning the visible and bodily manifestation of God the Son before His incarnation.

That He is not merely another angel is evident in those appearances where He is called God. This was recognized by Hagar (verse 13), Abraham (22:14), Moses (Exodus 3:14), Gideon (Judges 6:22), and Manoah (Judges 13:18, 22). The expression is also used of men, but on such occasions, is translated “the Lord's messenger” (Hag. 1:13).

The Angel of the Lord no longer appears to men today, since God has commissioned Christians to be His messengers to the world.

Genesis 16:8 "And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai."

"And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid": He calls her by her name, which might surprise her, and describes her by her character and condition, in order to check her pride, and put her in mind of her duty to her mistress; and to suggest to her, that she ought to have been not where she was, but in the house of her mistress, and doing her service.

It seems that Hagar had fled out in a deserted place. She probably, knew there was water there, and came to get a drink. She had run from the only home she had known. She was pregnant, and nowhere to go. The father of the child had turned his irate wife on her. The nearest thing she had as a benefactor was Sarai, and she had misbehaved toward her mistress and had been punished.

What would she do? Where could she go? She was out here all alone feeling sorry for herself. And then, who appeared but the angel (ministering Spirit of God). This word that was here translated angel, in other places it is translated prophet, priest, teacher, ambassador, king or messenger. This did not say an angel. It said the angel.

It seems that God had seen her predicament and sent help. As if he did not know, he asked where did you come from, and where are you going? Here was the first time, since she conceived, that she admitted who Sarai was (her mistress).

Genesis 16:9 "And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands."

The angel of the Lord found her by a fountain (verse 8). This well, pointed out by tradition, lay on the side of the caravan road, in the midst of Shur, a sandy desert on the west of Arabia, to the extent of a hundred fifty miles, between Palestine and Egypt.

By going that direction, she seems to have intended to return to her relatives in that country. Nothing but pride, passion, and sullen obstinacy, could have driven any solitary person to brave the dangers of such an inhospitable wild; and she would have died, had not the timely appearance and words of the angel recalled her to reflection and duty.

"Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself": The verb here employed is the same as that, which the historian uses to describe Sarah's conduct towards her (verse 6); its meaning obviously is that she should meekly resign herself to the ungracious and oppressive treatment of her mistress - under her hands.

Both the salutation and the instruction given by the Angel and the response by Hagar treated the mistress-servant relationship as if it were still intact. Rebellious and leaving was not the solution.

In short, he said, go back and apologize for your behavior.

Genesis 16:10 "And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude."

“I will multiply thy seed exceedingly”: A servant she might have been, but mother of many she would also become thus making Abram the father of two groups of innumerable descendants (see 13:16; 15:5).

Genesis 16:11 "And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou [art] with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction."

Ishmael”: The name means “God Hears” and was intended to remind Hagar of God’s special intervention on her behalf. This is the first time that the Angel of the Lord appears in the Old Testament.

Ishmael was the eldest son of Abram by Hagar; Sarah’s Egyptian handmaid (verses 15-16). He was later guilty of taunting his half-brother Isaac (21:9), and he and his mother were expelled by Abraham at Sarah’s insistence.

God promised that Ishmael would be “a wild man” (verse 12). His life was spared by God. He married an Egyptian and became the father of 12 princes; he was the forefather of the Arabs (Gen. 16:15-16; 17:20-27; 21:9-21).

God promised Hagar that she also, would have a multitude of descendants. She now knew that she was to have a boy child. She was to name him Ishmael, which means (God hears). His name was this because God heard Hagar's cries, not Ishmael's. In a way, she was innocent in this mess.

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."

Hagar’s son will be a “wild man” and “shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren”. The Hebrew actually means “in defiance/disregard of” as shown in Genesis 25:18; and Deut. 21:16. The language and context denote a hostility on the part of Ishmael (and his descendants), toward his brethren (Isaac and his descendants), and even among Ishmael’s own people.

The untamable desert onager (wild donkey), best described the fiercely aggressive and independent nature Ishmael would exhibit, along with his Arabic descendants.

Thus, began the Jewish and Arab conflict, due to an act of the flesh on the part of Abram. When Hagar gave birth, Abram was 86 years old. Eleven years had passed since God first promised an heir, and His promise was still unfulfilled.

This wild man's descendants live in the midst of their Israelite brethren even today, and truly they do hate each other. They battle continuously, and it has been going on ever since Genesis in the Bible.

Genesis 16:13 "And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?"

“Thou God seeth me”: Recognizing the angel as God and ascribing this new name to Him arose from Hagar’s astonishment at having been the object of God’s gracious attention. The theophany and revelation led her to call Him also “The One Who Lives and Sees me”.

Genesis 16:14 "Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, [it is] between Kadesh and Bered."

Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi. It appears, from (Genesis 16:7), that Hagar had sat down by a fountain or well of water in the wilderness of Shur, at which the Angel of the Lord found her; and, to commemorate the wonderful discovery which God had made of himself, she called the name of the well Beer-lahai-roi "A well to the Living One who seeth me."

Two things seem implied here:

- (1) A dedication of the well to Him who had appeared to her; and
- (2) Faith in the promise: for He who is the Living One, existing in all generations, must have it ever in his power to accomplish promises which are to be fulfilled through the whole lapse of time.

Hagar realized that God provided the well, and that this was God (El), who was instructing her to go back to Sarai. I believe this means she was aware that she did not get God's permission to leave. The name that was given the well means (well of the living One). Wells are very valuable in this area and Jewish people of today use the Bible to find these old wells.

Genesis 16:15 "And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael."

"And Hagar bare Abram a son": It appears, therefore, that Hagar returned at the command of the angel, believing the promise that God had made to her. Being returned to his house, and received by him, and reconciled to Sarai, she brought forth a son to Abram, according to the prediction of the angel.

“Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael”: And this name Jarchi suggests he gave by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that dwelt in him: but it is highly reasonable to suppose, that Hagar upon her return reported to Abram the whole of the conversation she had with the angel; wherefore Abram believing what she said, in obedience to the order and command of the angel, gave him this name.

“His Son ... Ishmael” (2079 B.C).

Remember, Ishmael means (God will hear). This son is of the flesh, not of the promise.

Genesis 16:16 "And Abram [was] fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram."

“And Abram was eighty six years old when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram”: Which is easily reckoned, for he was seventy five years of age when he left Haran (Genesis 12:4). And he had been ten years in Canaan when Hagar was given him by Sarai for his wife (Genesis 16:3). And so must be then eighty five years of age, and of course must be eighty six when Ishmael was born.

Genesis Chapter 16 Questions

1. What was the name of Sarai's servant girl?
2. What nationality was she?
3. Why did Sarai send Abram to Hagar?
4. What happens when we run ahead of God and start figuring things out for ourselves?
5. What is Egypt a type of?
6. When Abram did what Sarai suggested, what were the results?
7. How many years had Abram dwelt in Canaan when this happened?
8. The minute Hagar discovered she was expecting. how did she feel about her mistress?
9. What sentence in Genesis lets you know one man cannot peacefully live with 2 women?
10. With what women was it a disgrace not to bare children?
11. Did Abram take up for Hagar?
12. When Sarai punished Hagar, what happened?
13. Who found Hagar at the well?
14. This well was on the way to where?
15. What 2 questions did he ask Hagar?
16. Who was the nearest thing to a benefactor?
17. What did the angel of the LORD speak to Hagar?
18. What blessing did the angel of the LORD speak to Hagar?
19. What was Hagar to name her son?
20. What does his name mean?

21. What kind of a man would this son be?
22. Where will he live?
23. What did Hagar call the Angel of the LORD?
24. What was the name of the well?
25. What does it mean?
26. Where was it located?
27. Who named the child?
28. How old was Abram, when the child was born?