

Genesis 16 - Sarai and Hagar; Hagar and the Angel of the Lord; The Birth of Ishmael

II. Epilogue: Patriarchal history (Gen 11:10—50:26)

(1) Life of Abraham (Gen 11:10—25:11)

(B) Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1—25:11)

(a) Establishment of the covenant (Gen 12:1—17:27)

(iv) Covenant distinguished from alternate line (16:1-16)

(a) Hagar conceives (16:1-6)

(b) God's promises to Hagar (16:7-14)

(c) Birth of Ishmael (16:15-16)

Genesis 16-20: The Walk of Abraham

This cycle of narratives presents the struggle Abram the patriarch underwent while he was waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. At times he stumbled, but eventually his faith was proved. As Abram's faith was developed and tested, delay was seen in the fulfilling of God's promise.

In moments of weakness there are suggestions of alternative plans—plans not characterized by faith. Human efforts to assist in the fulfilling of divine promises complicated the matter.

Genesis 16

(iv) Covenant distinguished from alternate line (16:1-16)

(a) Hagar conceives (16:1-6)

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not borne him a child, but she had **an Egyptian slave woman** whose name was Hagar.

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no *children*, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar.

1 Now Abram's wife Sarai had not borne a child for him. She had an Egyptian servant girl whose name was Hagar.

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

- Sarai was still barren, in spite of God's promise of a son to Abram back in Gen 15

— Thus far, what God had clearly revealed was that Abram would be the father, but God never stated (yet) that Sarai would be the mother

- "...an Egyptian slave woman" - in the context of Genesis, the only place she would have received an Egyptian handmaid was in 12:16 when her and Abram sojourned in Egypt
— Even though she was an Egyptian, her name was Hebrew; this means her name was probably given to her by Abram or Sarai because of their experience in Egypt
— Hagar means "to be a fugitive" or "to flee"

2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing *children*. Please have relations with my slave woman; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

2 So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing *children*. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

2 So Sarai told Abram, "You are well aware that the LORD has prevented me from giving birth to a child. Go have sex with my servant, so that I may possibly bear a son through her."

Abram listened to Sarai's suggestion,

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.

- The basis for Sarai's proposal was her continuing barrenness, a problem first noted in 11:30

— Sarai couldn't wait for God's promise to be fulfilled; it had been 10 years since the promise was given; Sarah felt the passing of time meant that the promise would not be fulfilled (Cf. Prov 14:12; Is 30:1)

— Yet God won't provide confirmation if there is unbelief (Matt 16:1-4) or unreasonable doubt (Luke 1:18-20)

— Giving children to the barren is God's work (Ps 113:9). Later, Leah also knew that God heard her affliction, for she named Reuben and Simeon to reflect that (Gen 29:32-33).

— Yet Jehovah had been specific in his promise of an heir (Cf. 15:4)

- In the legal custom of that day, a barren woman was obligated to give her handmaid to her husband as a wife, and the child born of that union was regarded as the first wife's child. This was not necessarily immorality, but was so the husband's seed did not die out. However, it was still a failure to trust God to fulfill His promise through the normal course of events.

— What Sarai proposed was in keeping with the laws of the day (see note below), however for Sarai, it was a lapse of faith. Although God had not specifically said she would be the mother, it should have been an assumed fact since she was Abram's only wife.

— If the husband said to the slave-wife's son, "You are my son," then he was the adopted son and heir. But God often repudiates social customs; God's people are expected to hold themselves to a higher standard.

- For Abram, this was another lapse of faith, in addition to his flight to Egypt during the famine

— Abram obeyed the voice of Sarai against obeying the voice of God

— The same wording is used in 3:17 when Adam "obeyed" his wife, and in both instances, negative circumstances were the result

Code of Hammurabi

The Code of Hammurabi, which dates from about 2000 BC, states the following regarding this issue: *When the freeman marries a priestess and she gave a female slave to her husband and she has then born children, if later that female slave has claimed equality with her mistress because she bore children, her mistress may not sell her; she may mark her with the slave mark and count her among the slaves.* [Paragraph 146]

3 And so after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave woman, and **gave her to her husband Abram as his wife.**

3 After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife.

3 so Abram's wife Sarai took her Egyptian servant, Hagar, and gave her as a wife to her husband Abram. This took place ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.

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.

- Ten years had passed since the promise in Gen 12; because of that wait, there was a lapse of faith

— At this time, Abram was 85 years old and Sarai was 75 years old

- "...gave her to her husband Abram as his wife" - what took place here was an actual marriage; Hagar was not a concubine for sexual pleasure; this was a legal marriage for producing children

— In Genesis, a woman could be both a wife and a concubine. Here, Hagar is called a wife; in 25:6, she is called a concubine. Keturah is called a wife in 25:1 and a concubine in 25:6; 1 Chr 1:32. Bilhah is called a wife in 30:4; 37:2 and a concubine in 35:22.

4 Then he had relations with Hagar, and she conceived; and when *Hagar* became aware that she had conceived, her mistress was **insignificant** in her sight.

4 He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight.

4 He had sex with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she realized that she was pregnant, she looked with contempt on her mistress.

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.

- In those days, few women were more despised than barren women; once Hagar became pregnant, she began to display this negative attitude toward Sarai, who was barren

- "...insignificant" - *qalal*, same word used for "curse" in 12:3; Hagar "lightly esteemed" Sarai because of her barrenness

5 So Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be upon you! I put my slave woman into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was insignificant in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me."

5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me."

5 Then Sarai told Abram, "My suffering is your fault! I gave you my servant so you could have sex with her, and when she discovered that she was pregnant, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!"

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.

- Sarai blamed Abram for her "cursing" by Hagar

6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Look, your slave woman is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her **harshly**, and she fled from her presence.

6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence.

6 Abram answered Sarai, "Look, your servant is under your control, so do to her as you wish." So Sarai dealt so harshly with Hagar that she ran away from Sarai.

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 response to Hagar was that Hagar, officially, legally and technically, still Sarai's possession

— Returning Hagar to slave status was in keeping with the laws of the day. Hagar could not be sold now that she had conceived, but she could be returned to slave status, which is essentially what happened.

— Moving Hagar to slave status meant there would be no more sexual relations between Abram and Hagar

— The Code of Hammurabi states: "If she gave a female slave to her husband, and she has then born [sic] children; if that female slave has claimed equality with her mistress because she had born [sic] children, her mistress may not sell her, she may put her among the slaves."

- "...harshly" - same word used of the Egyptian affliction in Egypt (Ex 1:11-12); the irony here is that a Jewish woman is afflicting an Egyptian

— Sarai's harsh treatment of Hagar caused Hagar to flee; this shows the truth of Prov 30:21-23

Flesh vs. Spirit (Gal 4:22-31)

- Abraham lived 430 years before the Law: Promises preceded the Law: cannot be disannulled (Gal 3:17)
- Ishmael vs Isaac: two sons of two principles: Flesh & Spirit
 - (1) Ishmael: of the flesh, in unbelief
 - "The son of the bondwoman will not be heir..."
 - (2) Isaac: of promise, in response to faith
 - The Ultimate Triumph of Faith: the offering of Isaac

In Gal 4, Paul uses the story of Abraham/Sarah/Hagar as an allegory to instruct justified but immature believers who, under the influence of legalistic teachers, "desire to be under the law." He reminded his readers that Abraham had two sons (those born later are not important to his illustration), and that they should consider which of the two they were most like. One son, Isaac, was born of Sarah, the free woman; the other, Ishmael, was born of Hagar, the slave woman. According to ancient law and custom, the status of a mother affected the status of her son.

The Old Covenant of Law

- Symbolized by Hagar the slave-girl
- Ishmael, a son born after the flesh
- Represents Jerusalem in Paul's day, still in spiritual (and political) bondage

The New Covenant of Grace

- Symbolized by Sarah, the free woman
- Isaac, a son born miraculously by God's promise
- Represents the heavenly Jerusalem which is free and glorious

When Christ, the Seed, came, the old was done away. Now that the promise has come, believers are co-heirs with the promised Seed by adoption through God's grace.

- To go back under the Law would be to undo the fulfillment of God's promise. Those adopted by the Seed become seeds and are set free from the bondage of the Law (Gal 5:1).
- Just as Ishmael and Isaac were in conflict (Gal 4:29), so the flesh and the Spirit do not harmonize.
 - The flesh struggles against the Spirit, often mocking it (Gal 5:16-18).
 - Therefore believers are to "get rid of the slave woman and her son" (Gal 4:30), that is, to remove the threat of the flesh and "live by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16).

In order to emphasize the contrast between Law and Grace, Paul next used the historical events above as a type or an allegory, that is, he treated those two mothers figuratively (*ajllhgorevw*). He did not in any sense deny the literal meaning of the story of Abraham, but he declared that that story, especially the matters relating to the conception of the two sons, contained an additional meaning. Thus he compared the narrative to the conflict between Judaism and Christianity.

The lesson was clear for Sarai, Abram, Hagar, Israel, and for Christians: God's servants are to trust His Word and to wait for its fulfillment, enduring patiently till the end. It becomes increasingly clear in Genesis that any person or any nation that owes its existence to divine election should live by faith. Human efforts will not help. But the good news for God's people is that the living God sees and hears.

Isaac as a Type of Christ

- Supernaturally announced beforehand
- Named before he was born (Gen 17:19)
- "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen 21:12; Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18)
- Offered as a substitutionary offering (Gen 22)
- Returned to Abraham after 3 days

(b) God's promises to Hagar (16:7-14)

7 Now the **angel of the LORD** found her by a spring of water in the **wilderness**, by the spring on the **way to Shur**.

7 Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur.

7 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the desert on the road to Shur.

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.

- "...angel of the LORD" - first recorded appearance of an angel of the Lord; 58x in Scripture; also called the "Angel of God" 11x

— Whenever the expression “angel of Jehovah” or the “angel of the Lord” is used, in every case, it is the OT appearance of Christ (a “theophany”)

- “...wilderness” - the Negev Desert

- “...way to Shur” - a major highway between Egypt and the Land of Canaan (Cf. Gen 20:1; 25:18; Ex 15:22; 1 Sam 15:7; 27:8)

— This puts Hagar in the border area between Sinai and the Negev; this implies she was on her way back to Egypt

“Angel of YHWH”

- Identified with Yahweh (Gen 16:13; 22:11-12; 31:11,13; 48:16; Judges 6:11,16,22; 13:22-23; Zech 3:1-2)
- Yet distinct from YHWH (Gen 24:7; 2 Sam 24:16; Zech 1:12)
- May refer to a theophany of the pre-incarnate Christ (Cf. Gen 18:1-2; 19:1; Num 22:22; Judges 2:1-4; 5:23; Zech 12:8)

8 He said, “Hagar, Sarai’s slave woman, from where have you come, and where are you going?” And she said, “I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.”

8 He said, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from and where are you going?” And she said, “I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.”

8 “Hagar, servant of Sarai,” he asked, “Where are you coming from and where are you going?”

She answered, “I am running away from my mistress Sarai.”

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.

- The Angel of the Lord found the maidservant in the desert at a spring beside the road to Shur (Cf. 25:18) on the way to her homeland, Egypt.

- When she reached Shur (the wall), she paused before crossing the border. Here the Egyptians maintained a wall or strong line of forts to protect Egypt from invaders from the east. It is mentioned in Egyptian records as early as 2000 BC.

9 So the angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority.”

9 Then the angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority.”

9 The angel of the LORD told her, “You must go back to your mistress and submit to her authority.”

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

- The salutation and instruction (return, submit) given by the Angel and the response by Hagar treated the mistress-servant relationship as if it were still intact

— The angel commanded Hagar to not despise ("curse") Sarai any further; she was to submit to Sarai, even in ill treatment

10 The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be **too many to count.**"

10 Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count."

10 The angel of the LORD also told her, "I will greatly multiply your offspring, who will be too many to count.

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

- "...too many to count" - Ishmael will also have 12 sons who will be highly prolific

— Hagar was promised innumerable descendants, just like Abram had been promised

— Each of the patriarchs were given similar promises, but Hagar was the only woman given such a promise

11 The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are pregnant, And you will give birth to a son; And you shall name him **Ishmael**, Because the LORD has heard your affliction.

11 The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, And you will bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction.

11 "Look, you are pregnant and will give birth to a son," the angel of the LORD continued to say to her. "You will name him Ishmael because the LORD has heard your cry of misery.

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.

- This was a prophecy that the baby she was carrying would be a male

- "...Ishmael" - "God hears"

— This is the first unborn child to be named by God; other will include Isaac (17:19), Jesus (Matt 1:21; Luke 1:31), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:13)

12 "But he will be a **wild donkey of a man; His hand *will be* against everyone, And everyone's hand *will be* against him; And he will live in defiance of all his brothers."**

12 "He will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand *will be* against everyone, And everyone's hand *will be* against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers."

12 He'll be a wild donkey of a man. He'll be against everyone, and everyone will be against him. He will live in conflict with all of his relatives."

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.

- "...wild donkey of a man" - *peh'-reh*, a wild ass among men; a provocative prediction

— This wasn't derogatory; it meant that Ishmael and his descendants would be characterized as roamers, leading a nomadic lifestyle (Cf. Job 39:5-8; Is 32:14; Jer 2:24; 14:6; Hosea 8:9); he would break the generational cycle of slavery in Hagar's f

- "...His hand *will be* against everyone" - he will be characterized as an aggressor; as he roamed the desert, his tendency would be to attack others

— The Arabs have never gotten along—even with themselves

— Her son would become the father of a great tribe of wild, hostile people (25:18), living in the Arabian desert (25:12-18). But they would not be the promised seed; they would only complicate matters

— Sarai's sin sowed a harvest that is still being reaped. In fact Joseph, Sarai's great-grandson, was later taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites (37:28)

- "...everyone's hand *will be* against him" - those he attacks as an aggressor will retaliate against him

- "...he will live in defiance of all his brothers" - he will live side by side with his brother Isaac, but at the same time, the side-by-side living will be with an attitude of hostility

13 Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "**You are a God who sees me**"; for she said, "Have I even seen *Him* here *and lived* after He saw me?"

13 Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"

13 So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are 'God who sees,' because I have truly seen the one who looks after me."

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?

- "...You are a God who sees me" - or "You Are The God Who Sees"

— Hagar recognized the angel as God; she ascribed Him a new name from her astonishment at having been the object of God's gracious attention

— This is the only name of God in Scripture given to Him by a person; all other of His names were given by Him

14 Therefore the well was called **Beer-lahai-roi**; behold, it is between Kadesh and **Bered**.

14 Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

14 That's why the spring was called, "The Well of the Living One who Looks after Me." It was between Kadesh and Bered.

14 Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

- "...Beer-lahai-roi" - means "the Well of the Living One Who Sees Me"
- Later, this became the home of Isaac (24:62; 25:11)
- "...Bered" - only mention of this location in Scripture; exact location is unknown, but it was in the vicinity of the Sinai/Negev border

(c) Birth of Ishmael (16:15-16)

15 So Hagar bore a son to Abram; and Abram named his son, to whom Hagar gave birth, Ishmael.

15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.

15 Hagar eventually gave birth to Abram's son. Abram named his son whom Hagar bore Ishmael.

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

- ~2079 BC

- Hagar was the biological mother, while Sarai was the legal mother

- The name was given by Abram, not Hagar; this shows that Hagar told the story to Abram, and Abram believed her account

16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

16 Abram was 86 years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael for Abram.

16 And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.

- Abram was caught up in a chain of causes and effects that would trouble him for years to come

- Abraham was 75 when he left Haran, 86 when Ishmael was born. Isaac will be born when he is 100