

Genesis 16
Hagar and Ishamel

I. Barrenness

- A. **16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar;**
- B. Sarai's barrenness is a test. She is approaching her 90s. By Modern standards long past fertility. However, recall the longer life spans of this part of the bible. Yet the whole matter is clearly problematic! However in the Letter to the Romans declared Abraham and Sarah's body as good as dead in terms of child bearing. (See below)
- C. This whole events will amount to infidelity in two senses of the term.
 - 1. There is the marital infidelity to which Abram and Sarai agree in introducing Hagar between them.
 - 2. There is the "infidelity" in terms of the lack of faith of the both of them who conclude that God is not quite up to the task of his promise and take matters into their own hands.
- D. Later scripture is nonetheless more glowing in its assessment of Abraham's faith perhaps glossing over the particular struggle of Abram and emphasizing his later strength:
 - 1. Rom 4:18 *In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, "So shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,*
 - 2. Well here, Abram and Sarai do waver as we shall see.

II. Blame

- A. **2a and Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children;**
- B. To a certain extent Sarai is right. God alone brings about new human life. Biology alone is not enough. Hence God has prevented her.
- C. Yet she should refine her statement: "God has prevented me thus far, but he has promised that the curse of my barrenness will lift and at length I shall conceive."
- D. Scripture often commands us to wait on the Lord
 - 1. Ps 27:13 *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the LORD!*

2. Ps 37:7 *Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; fret not*
3. Ps 130:5 *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;*
4. Is 40:31 *but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

E. Here then is the test: Wait

F. Sadly Sarai blames God and grows impatient rather than waiting in trust.

III. Backsliding

A. ***2b go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. 3 So, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. 4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived;***

B. Here is infidelity in both senses stated above.

1. What Sarai suggests is sinful. For God's command to be fruitful and multiply was in the context of his establishment of Marriage. Adam was to cling to his wife, together in this context of marriage they were to be fruitful and multiply.

C. The occasion of this sin is fallout from Abram's sin in going to Egypt. It is likely that Hagar became one of his slaves during his sojourn there. Now she becomes a temptation to further exploitation by Abram and Sarai. His earlier sin thus gives rise to occasion of further sin.

D. Does the early Bible approve of such practices in recording them?

1. No. No more than it approved of murder in recording Cain's murder of Abel.
2. It is true, God does not directly intervene or even later directly condemn the actions here. But the negative consequences become the teaching: such practices lead to trouble and evil.
3. Later in the Bible God explicitly teaches against polygamy and insists on the sanctity of marriage. But here God "allows" the mistake and gently calls Abram and Sarai back to his promise.
4. Hagar too will be blessed.

E. The Conception of Ishamel is of tremendous significant for the history of the world and the history of the Jewish people for Ishmael is the father of the Arab peoples with whom the Jews will have to do.

IV. Bitterness

- A. *and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my maid to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!"*
- B. Hagar's look of contempt is unfortunate and will surely result in a difficult situation for her. Yet it is also understandable to some extent. She has been used and exploited by Abram and Sarai. She had little choice in the arrangements. Since she was a slave she had to accept Abram's advances whether this pleased her or not. Not that she has conceived the child will not even be her own. Nevertheless, her having conceived gave her a type of social superiority to Sarai who could not conceive. All these things surely contributed to her look of contempt.
- C. Further her projection of her own guilt fully on to Abram is also of psychological interest. We often underestimate our own contribution to the sinfulness of a situation. Abram surely shared the blame but, it was Sarai's idea. Thus that Abram should care full blame is unreasonable.
- D. Sarai's insistence that God judge between her and Abram is rich! God had nothing to do with this sinful scheme.

V. Badness

- A. *6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.*
- B. Now Abram multiplies his sin. He simply hands Hagar over to the whims of his unreasonable and angry wife. Abram owed Hagar more. She was carrying his child and he had taken advantage of her vulnerability. He should have protected her and upheld her rights as the mother of his child. This sin began with infidelity now ends in injustice.
- C. What exactly Sarai did is uncertain but it must have been severe for Hagar finds it necessary to flee.

VI. Blessing

- A. *7 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." 9 The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." 10 The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude." 11 And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael; because the*

LORD has given heed to your affliction. 12 He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." 13 So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "Thou art a God of seeing"; for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" 14 Therefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. 15 And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

- B. Hagar has suffered much indignity but, God has not overlooked her sorrow. He sends an angel to both instruct and bless her. She is instructed to return to Sarai and “submit to her” this submission however will result in blessings. Her son will be great and powerful and he shall exact revenge by “dwelling over against all his kinsmen”. Here is the origin of the Arab peoples.
- C. She is instructed to name him Ishmael. A name which means God has heard.
- D. Hagar responds by uttering a title for God: *El Roi* the God who sees. She is also grateful that she has survived her encounter with God through the angels.
- E. What exactly happened when Hagar returned is uncertain. Was Sarai still a bully, etc.? She seems to have told Abram of her encounter with God/the angel. For he ends up calling the child the name that was given.