

Bible Study for Wednesday May 19, 2021
[adapted from The Serendipity Study Bible]

Read Genesis 16

Now Sarai,^[a] Abram's wife, had not given birth to any children,^[b] but she had an Egyptian servant^[c] named Hagar.^[d] ² So Sarai said to Abram, "Since^[e] the LORD has prevented me from having children, please sleep with^[f] my servant. Perhaps I can have a family by her."^[g] Abram did what^[h] Sarai told him.

³ So after Abram had lived^[i] in Canaan for ten years, Sarai, Abram's wife, gave Hagar, her Egyptian servant,^[j] to her husband to be his wife.^[k] ⁴ He slept with^[l] Hagar, and she became pregnant.^[m] Once Hagar realized she was pregnant, she despised Sarai.^[n] ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "You have brought this wrong on me!^[o] I gave my servant into your embrace,^[p] but when she realized^[q] that she was pregnant, she despised me.^[r] May the LORD judge between you and me!"^[s]

⁶ Abram said to Sarai, "Since your^[t] servant is under your authority,^[u] do to her whatever you think best."^[v] Then Sarai treated Hagar^[w] harshly,^[x] so she ran away from Sarai.^[y]

⁷ The angel of the LORD^[z] found Hagar near a spring of water in the wilderness—the spring that is along the road to Shur.^[aa] ⁸ He said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She replied, "I'm running away from^[ab] my mistress, Sarai."

⁹ Then the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit^[ac] to her authority. ¹⁰ I will greatly multiply your descendants," the angel of the LORD added,^[ad] "so that they will be too numerous to count."^[ae] ¹¹ Then the angel of the LORD said to her,

"You are now^[af] pregnant and are about to give birth^[ag] to a son. You are to name him Ishmael,^[ah] for the LORD has heard your painful groans.^[ai]

¹² He will be a wild donkey^[aj] of a man. He will be hostile to everyone,^[ak]

and everyone will be hostile to him.^[al]
He will live away from^[am] his brothers.”

¹³ So Hagar named the LORD who spoke to her, “You are the God who sees me,”^[an] for she said, “Here I have seen one who sees me!”^[ao] ¹⁴ That is why the well was called^[ap] Beer Lahai Roi.^[aq] (It is located^[ar] between Kadesh and Bered.)

¹⁵ So Hagar gave birth to Abram’s son, whom Abram named Ishmael.^[as] ¹⁶ (Now^[at] Abram was 86 years old^[au] when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael.)^[av]

Footnotes

- a. Genesis 16:1 **tn** The disjunctive clause signals the beginning of a new episode in the story.
- b. Genesis 16:1 **sn** On the cultural background of the story of Sarai’s childlessness see J. Van Seters, “The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel,” *JBL* 87 (1968): 401-8.
- c. Genesis 16:1 **tn** The Hebrew term שִׁפְחָה (*shifkhah*, translated “servant” here and in vv. 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8) refers to a menial female servant.
- d. Genesis 16:1 **sn** The passage records the birth of Ishmael to Abram through an Egyptian woman. The story illustrates the limits of Abram’s faith as he tries to obtain a son through social custom. The barrenness of Sarai poses a challenge to Abram’s faith, just as the famine did in chap. 12. As in chap. 12, an Egyptian figures prominently. (Perhaps Hagar was obtained as a slave during Abram’s stay in Egypt.)
- e. Genesis 16:2 **tn** *Heb* “look.” The particle הִנֵּה (*hinneh*) introduces the foundational clause for the imperative to follow.
- f. Genesis 16:2 **tn** *Heb* “come to.” The verb בּוֹא (*bo’*; “to come, enter”) with the preposition אֶל (*el*; “to”) means “to approach, to come to” (HALOT 1:113) and is a euphemism for coming together for sexual relations (see further at 2 Sam 12:24). “Please get together with” might be closer to the Hebrew but would be less clear about the implication, so a different euphemism has been used for the translation. **sn** Sarai simply sees this as the social custom of having a child through a surrogate. For further discussion see C. F. Fensham, “The Son of a Handmaid in Northwest Semitic,” *VT* 19 (1969): 312-21.

- g. Genesis 16:2 **tn** *Heb* “perhaps I will be built from her.” Sarai hopes to have a family established through this surrogate mother.
- h. Genesis 16:2 **tn** *Heb* “listened to the voice of,” which is an idiom meaning “obeyed.” **sn** *Abram did what Sarai told him*. This expression was first used in Gen 3:17 of Adam’s obeying his wife. In both cases the text highlights weak faith and how it jeopardized the plan of God.
- i. Genesis 16:3 **tn** *Heb* “at the end of ten years, to live, Abram.” The prepositional phrase introduces the temporal clause, the infinitive construct serves as the verb, and the name “Abram” is the subject.
- j. Genesis 16:3 **tn** *Heb* “the Egyptian, her female servant.”
- k. Genesis 16:3 **sn** *To be his wife*. Hagar became a slave wife, not on equal standing with Sarai. However, if Hagar produced the heir, she would be the primary wife in the eyes of society. When this eventually happened, Hagar become insolent, prompting Sarai’s anger.
- l. Genesis 16:4 **tn** *Heb* “came to.” See the note on the same expression in v. 2.
- m. Genesis 16:4 **tn** Or “she conceived” (also in v. 5)
- n. Genesis 16:4 **tn** *Heb* “and she saw that she was pregnant and her mistress was despised in her eyes.” The Hebrew verb **קָלַל** (*qalal*) means “to despise, to treat lightly, to treat with contempt.” In Hagar’s opinion Sarai had been demoted.
- o. Genesis 16:5 **tn** *Heb* “my wrong is because of you.”
- p. Genesis 16:5 **tn** *Heb* “bosom” or “lap.”
- q. Genesis 16:5 **tn** *Heb* “saw.”
- r. Genesis 16:5 **tn** *Heb* “I was despised in her eyes.” The passive verb has been translated as active for stylistic reasons. Sarai was made to feel supplanted and worthless by Hagar the servant girl.
- s. Genesis 16:5 **tn** *Heb* “me and you.” **sn** *May the LORD judge between you and me*. Sarai blamed Abram for Hagar’s attitude, not the pregnancy. Here she expects to be vindicated by the LORD who will prove Abram responsible. A colloquial rendering might be, “God will get you for this.” It may mean that she thought Abram had encouraged the servant girl in her elevated status.
- t. Genesis 16:6 **tn** The clause is introduced with the particle **הִנֵּה** (*hinneh*), introducing a foundational clause for the coming imperative: “since...do.”
- u. Genesis 16:6 **tn** *Heb* “in your hand.”
- v. Genesis 16:6 **tn** *Heb* “what is good in your eyes.”
- w. Genesis 16:6 **tn** *Heb* “her”; the referent (Hagar) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

- x. Genesis 16:6 **tn** In the Piel stem the verb עָנָה (*‘anah*) means “to afflict, to oppress, to treat harshly, to mistreat.”
- y. Genesis 16:6 **tn Heb** “and she fled from her presence.” The referent of “her” (Sarai) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
- z. Genesis 16:7 **tn Heb** “the messenger of the LORD.” Some identify the angel of the LORD as the preincarnate Christ because in some texts the angel is identified with the LORD himself. However, it is more likely that the angel merely represents the LORD; he can speak for the LORD because he is sent with the LORD’s full authority. In some cases the angel is clearly distinct from the LORD (see Judg 6:11-23). It is not certain if the same angel is always in view. Though the proper name following the noun “angel” makes the construction definite, this may simply indicate that a definite angel sent from the LORD is referred to in any given context. It need not be the same angel on every occasion. Note the analogous expression “the servant of the LORD,” which refers to various individuals in the OT (see BDB 714 s.v. עֶבֶד).
- aa. Genesis 16:7 **tn Heb** “And the angel of the LORD found her near the spring of water in the desert, near the spring on the way to Shur.”
- bb. Genesis 16:8 **tn Heb** “from the presence of.”
- cc. Genesis 16:9 **tn** The imperative וְהִתְעַנִּי (*v^ehit’anni*) is the Hitpael of עָנָה (*‘anah*, here translated “submit”), the same word used for Sarai’s harsh treatment of her. Hagar is instructed not only to submit to Sarai’s authority, but to whatever mistreatment that involves. God calls for Hagar to humble herself.
- dd. Genesis 16:10 **tn Heb** “The angel of the LORD said, ‘I will greatly multiply your descendants...’” The order of the clauses has been rearranged in the translation for stylistic reasons.
- ee. Genesis 16:10 **tn Heb** “cannot be numbered because of abundance.”
- ff. Genesis 16:11 **tn** The particle הִנֵּה (*hinneh*) focuses on her immediate situation: “Here you are pregnant.”
- gg. Genesis 16:11 **tn** The active participle refers here to something that is about to happen.
- hh. Genesis 16:11 **sn** The name *Ishmael* consists of the imperfect or jussive form of the Hebrew verb with the theophoric element added as the subject. It means “God hears” or “may God hear.”
- ii. Genesis 16:11 **tn Heb** “affliction,” which must refer here to Hagar’s painful groans of anguish.**sn** This clause gives the explanation of the name *Ishmael*,

using a wordplay. Ishmael's name will be a reminder that "God hears" Hagar's painful cries.

- jj. Genesis 16:12 **sn** *A wild donkey of a man*. The prophecy is not an insult. The wild donkey lived a solitary existence in the desert away from society. Ishmael would be free-roaming, strong, and like a bedouin; he would enjoy the freedom his mother sought.
- kk. Genesis 16:12 **tn** *Heb* "His hand will be against everyone." The "hand" by metonymy represents strength. His free-roaming life style would put him in conflict with those who follow social conventions. There would not be open warfare, only friction because of his antagonism to their way of life.
- ll. Genesis 16:12 **tn** *Heb* "And the hand of everyone will be against him."
- mm. Genesis 16:12 **tn** *Heb* "opposite, across from." Ishmael would live on the edge of society (cf. NASB "to the east of"). Some take this as an idiom meaning "be at odds with" (cf. NRSV, NLT) or "live in hostility toward" (cf. NIV).
- nn. Genesis 16:13 **tn** *Heb* "God of my seeing." The pronominal suffix may be understood either as objective ("who sees me," as in the translation) or subjective ("whom I see").
- oo. Genesis 16:13 **tn** *Heb* "after one who sees me." **sn** For a discussion of Hagar's exclamation, see T. Booij, "Hagar's Words in Genesis 16:13b," *VT* 30 (1980): 1-7.
- pp. Genesis 16:14 **tn** The verb does not have an expressed subject and so is rendered as passive in the translation.
- qq. Genesis 16:14 **sn** The Hebrew name *Beer Lahai Roi* (רְאִי לַחַי בְּאֵר, *b^e'er lakhay ro'i*) means "The well of the Living One who sees me." The text suggests that God takes up the cause of those who are oppressed.
- rr. Genesis 16:14 **tn** *Heb* "look." The words "it is located" are supplied in the translation for stylistic reasons.
- ss. Genesis 16:15 **tn** *Heb* "and Abram called the name of his son whom Hagar bore, Ishmael." **sn** *Whom Abram named Ishmael*. Hagar must have informed Abram of what the angel had told her. See the note on the name "Ishmael" in 16:11.
- tt. Genesis 16:16 **tn** The disjunctive clause gives information that is parenthetical to the narrative.
- uu. Genesis 16:16 **tn** *Heb* "the son of eighty-six years."
- vv. Genesis 16:16 **tn** The Hebrew text adds, "for Abram." This has not been included in the translation for stylistic reasons; it is somewhat redundant

given the three occurrences of Abram's name in this and the previous verse.

Questions to Consider

1. How long did you [or would you] wait before having children?
2. Growing up, who made most of the decisions in your family: Mom? Dad? Kids? Or was decision-making shared?
3. Of the three main characters in this story – Abram, Sarai, and Hagar – whom do you like the most? The least? Why?
4. What might change your opinion of Abram and Sarai: a) Knowing it was a common cultural practice in their day for childless couples to include as their own any children the man had by his servants? B) Knowing Sarai is now 77 years of age and is past child-bearing years. C) Knowing it has been 10 years since God promised them a son?
5. What, if anything, might justify the strategy of surrogate motherhood? Why does God reject their plan?
6. How does God comfort Hagar [vs.7-12]? Why does God insist she submit to Sarai's authority?
7. What does Genesis 16 tell you about God? About Angels?
8. Where have you been waiting for God to fulfill a promise? How do you cope with his seeming delays?
9. From what are you feeling tempted to run?
10. Where have you met God lately? As a result of that encounter, what name would you give to God or to the place where you met him [as Hagar did in vs.13-14]?