

Day 15 - SUNDAY: November 6th

Genesis 16

Genesis 16:1-16 NKJV

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me." So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence. Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand

against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are- the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered. So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Daily Deep Dive:

Abram is now 85 & Sarai 75 years old. Ten years have passed since God had promised to make Abram a great nation (Gen 12:4), yet they remain childless.

Barrenness in this culture was extremely difficult. Being able to have children was seen as a gift from God and therefore if you could not have children, you were thought to be punished or cursed by God. This would lead to a woman to experience reproach or "social death."

The bible shows us how hard it was on women of that society to not be able to have children. Consider these verses (place yourself in these women's shoes):

Gen 30:1 – Barren Rachel says "Give me children, or else I die!"

In the previous chapter, Leah, who feels unloved/unwanted by her husband, clearly feels her husband will love her for giving him sons.

Notice what she says:

Gen 29:32 So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."

Gen 29:33 Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon.

Gen 29:34 She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi.

In 1 Samuel we can read about the anguish of Hannah (Samuel's mother) who at this time is barren.

In 1 Samuel 1:6 it states "And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb."

1Sa 1:7 So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat.

1Sa 1:8 Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"

1Sa 1:10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish.

1Sa 1:11 Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."

It's clear from these scriptures that barrenness was extremely difficult. It's from this difficult place that we find Sarai 10 years later.

Verse 1 – Introduces us to Hagar. Bible translations tell us she is Egyptian (which is accurate), but I found it interesting that the Hebrew

word used here (Mitsriy) comes from the root (Mitsrayim) which if you will remember back to Gen 10:6, Noah's son Ham had four sons, one of them being Mizraim. Bible dictionaries tell us that Mizraim settled in Egypt and his family name becomes known as "Egyptians". I find these family connections interesting.

Commentaries bring out that Sarai probably obtained Hagar from the Pharaoh in Gen 12:16.

Verse 2 – Notice that Sarai attributes her barrenness as something God is actively withholding from her. "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing *children*."

Verse 3 – So Sarai suggest Abram have a child through her servant Hagar. Here's what the UCG reading program says about this cultural practice:

"No doubt Sarai longed for the fulfillment of the promise, just as Abram did. But with no fulfillment in sight, Sarai began to consider other options. Was not Hagar able to bear children? Did not God promise Abram a son without limiting Himself to providing the son through Sarai? Perhaps the promised son would come through Hagar. Besides, if it was not God's will, wouldn't He simply close up Hagar's womb? So goes human reasoning. Impatience produced the "solution" to the problem: Abram should go into Hagar and father children by her. That Abram offered no resistance to the idea seems to suggest that he, too, found the reasoning compelling.

This might strike us today as a very strange way to attempt to solve the problem. There is, however, more than meets the eye here—a cultural factor that would have provided a rationalization for Abram and Sarai.

Dr. Eugene Merrill explains in his book *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old*

Testament Israel: “Certain peculiar actions of Abram and his wife in Genesis 15 and 16 require some attention to ancient Near Eastern custom and law, especially a few Hurrian practices attested in the Nuzi tablets [documents from northern Mesopotamia of the patriarchal age] [An] example is Sarai’s barrenness and the steps she took to ensure offspring in spite of it (Genesis 16:1–6). She simply offered her slave girl Hagar to Abram as a surrogate mother, and the child of that union, Ishmael, came to be regarded as the son of Abram and Sarai. This...is paralleled by Nuzi texts which describe the same remedy for a similar situation” (1987, pp. 38–39).” [END]

Verse 6 – Hagar didn’t ask for this situation. She is simply a servant being forced into a bad situation. The name Hagar means “Flight” and here we see that Hagar flees after being treated harshly from Sarai.

Verse 10 – God gives Hagar a divine prophecy of her son and his descendants.

Verse 11 – God tells Hagar to name her son “Ishmael” meaning “God will hear.”

Who would the descendants of Ishmael become?

From the UCG booklet “The Middle East in Bible Prophecy”, it states:

“This description of Hagar's descendants is significant because many of today's Arabs are Ishmaelites—descendants of this same Ishmael, whose father was Abraham. Muhammad, the founder and prophet of Islam, was descended from Kedar, one of the 12 sons of Ishmael (Ismail in Arabic).

Today 22 nations in the Middle East and North Africa are Arabic nations, most of whose people are adherents of Islam. An additional 35 countries

are members of the Islamic Conference, most of them with Islamic governments, but whose people are of different descent.” [END]

Let’s end today’s study with another excerpt from the UCG reading program:

“Ishmael would ultimately become the father of many of the Arab peoples so that, even today, we still live with the tragic results of Sarai’s solution—i.e., major facets of the perpetual Middle East conflict. The lesson ought to be obvious. What would have happened if Sarai and Abram had simply waited for God to provide the solution? Perhaps generations of strife could have been avoided. The geopolitical scene today might be very different, with the ever-present threat of war much diminished. We must learn to live with what God gives us, trusting that if He has made a promise He will fulfill it at just the right time and in just the right way. Man cannot bring about the fulfillment of God’s promises on his own. To attempt to do so is presumptuous and inevitably leads to misery. But to patiently wait for God to act, knowing that He *cannot* lie, builds faith and character, and avoids what could be generations of strife.” [END]