



BE GINNINGS

A Study of the Book of Genesis

Sanctuary Bible Studies – Woodbury Lutheran Church

Session 12, "Hagar and Ishmael" (Genesis 16)

1. DO-IT-YOURSELF COVENANT FULFILLMENT? (16:1-6)

- Abram was 75 when God first promised him a son in Gen 12:4, 7. He is now 85, and Sarai is 75. Still they have no son and Sarai is questioning if God is going to keep His promise. Hoping to "build a family through her" (16:2), she offers her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, to Abram as a surrogate. This was a common practice in the 2nd Century BC. Marriage contracts dating around 1500 BC and found at Nuzi stipulate that if a wife turns out to be barren, she should provide the husband with a surrogate child-bearer:
 - *"If Gilimninu bears children, Shennima shall not take another wife. But if Gilimninu fails to bear children, Gilimninu shall get for Shennima a woman from the Lullu country (a slave girl) as concubine. In that case Gilimninu shall have authority over the offspring."*
- Abram agrees to Sarai's plan, and Hagar conceives. As soon as she realizes that she is pregnant, though, Hagar becomes bitter toward Sarai. That bitterness may have resulted from Hagar's realization that her unborn child really belonged to Abram and Sarai. Hagar's attitude may also reflect her culture which saw fertility as a blessing of God and infertility, therefore, as a curse. See Psalm 113:7-9 and 16:2, "The LORD has kept me from having children." Sara herself seems to have struggled with the same thoughts as well as intense envy.
- Sarai is quick to blame Abram for her conflict with Hagar, giving him a hostile, "May the Lord judge between you and me." Abram responds with a "NOT TO BE DISTURBED" passive pose, throwing it back at Sarai to do as she likes with her servant. Her decision? She made Hagar's life miserable until Hagar finally leaves.
- Abram and Sarai likely acquired Hagar as a servant while in Egypt, where they had deceived Pharaoh and were deported. They were now reaping the consequences of that deception and their own impatience. Sarai was angry. Hagar was miserable. Abram was bewildered. The child they had hoped for was gone with Hagar.

2. MISERY LOVES COMPANY – ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S GOD (16:7-16)

- It appears that Hagar escapes in the direction of her homeland, Egypt. Shur is in the northern region of the Sinai Peninsula. She is visited "on the road to Shur" by "the angel of the LORD" (vs. 7). He asks where she's come from and where she's going. Hagar admits that she is

running away from her mistress. She does not answer as to her destination.

- The angel of the LORD, appearing here for the first time in Genesis, is likely the LORD Himself, the pre-incarnate Christ in human form, since He uses the first person singular in vs. 10. (See also vs. 13.)
- In vs. 9, the LORD tells Hagar to return to her mistress and submit to her. It is a lesson that we cannot find blessing in life if we run from our misery. Rather, in humbly staying where God wants us to be, even when we're miserable, we open ourselves to His blessing.
- The promise of verse 10 is given again in 17:20 and fulfilled in 25:13-16. To be fruitful and increase in number is also the creation mandate given to all humanity (Gen 1:28).
- In vs. 11 the LORD promises Hagar a son and tells her that he is to be named Ishmael, which means, "God hears," because God heard the misery of Hagar.
- In vs. 12, the LORD describes Ishmael's destiny in less than positive terms. He describes him as "a wild donkey of a man," denoting his living in the desert apart from cities. See Job 24:5ff. The metaphor of a donkey is not pejorative in terms of Ishmael's intelligence but a prediction of where he would live. The hostility the LORD mentions shows that the breach between Sarai and Hagar would continue with their descendents. Ishmael would become the ancestor of the Arabs, hostile throughout history toward the descendents of Abram. He also is the ancestor of Mohammed, founder of Islam. Look at Gen 25:18.
- Vs. 13 gives us the only occurrence in the entire Old Testament of someone giving God a name. Hagar calls the LORD "YOU ARE THE GOD WHO SEES ME" (Hebrew El Roi, "the God who sees"). She explains, no doubt with wonder and amazement, "For I have now seen [the back of?] the One who sees me." Vs. 14 relates the naming of the well to this incident. It is named "Beer Lahai Roi," which can mean "well of the Living One Who Sees Me" or "well of the One Who Sees Me and Lives." See Exodus 33:20, 23 on seeing God. The name Hagar gives God, El Roi, speaks volumes for those who wonder if God knows and sees our misery and our need. Note, too, that God saw and knew Ishmael before he was born. See Psalm 139:13-18.
- In vss.15-16 Hagar bears a son, whom Abram names Ishmael. Abram is 86 years old at the time.

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1. We ask for trouble when we rush God's plan or seek to implement it on our own.
2. Infertility is a heavy burden that can leave us questioning God, but we are wrong to see it as a curse sent from God.
3. The consequences of our sin or a lack of faith can play out over time and in several lives.
4. To stay and endure our misery is often to open ourselves to God's blessing.
5. God sees, even when we run from Him.
6. Some of God's prophecies continue to play out over thousands of years.