

Last week we saw the amazing initiation of the Abrahamic Covenant. If you remember, God made a covenant with Abram. But it was God and He alone who performed during the covenant ceremony. I gave a summary at the end of the sermon tying it all together for a Big Idea. You might remember that the last thing that I mentioned was that Abram did not perform, and yet, he was not able to nullify the promises of God (even when he stepped outside of what God had promised to him). Today we will see Abram really mess up, but in spite of his mishandling of God's grace, God's will continues to be worked out.

***16 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. (Genesis 16:1, NKJV).***

We must remember that at this time, it was quite common for a man to divorce a woman who was unable to bear children. Ten years had passed without Abram seeing God's promise come to fruition, and yet he remained committed to Sarai. Abram had not abandoned her.

***<sup>2</sup> 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. (Genesis 16:2, NKJV).***



We notice from the text that Sarai is saying that God has prevented her from bearing children. There's some blaming going on here from the start, and we see more of her attitude in reading how she refers to Hagar. The text tells us her name, but Sarai doesn't even refer to her by name. She denigrates Hagar by just calling her "my maid." The Laws of Hammurabi had a provision that if a wife was infertile, she could be provided "offspring" by furnishing a concubine to the husband through whom she would have children that she would then consider her own. Think of it in

terms of couples today who sometimes find a surrogate mother to bear a child. It all seems very odd to us that a wife would tell her husband to go into another woman and cheat on her, but it was very common in the legal system of early Mesopotamia. Then we read, "and Abram heeded the voice of Sarai." Men, it's often a good idea to heed the voice of your wife, but if your wife is saying something that doesn't line up with God's word, it's a good idea not to heed her advice. Abram was listening to Sarai's voice

instead of God's voice. When "Abram heeded the voice of Sarai" he was about to dig himself a deep hole that has ramifications even today.

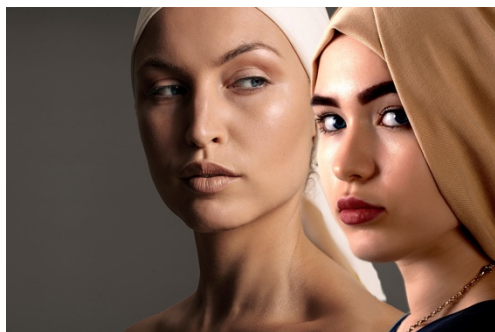
**<sup>3</sup> Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife [isha] after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. <sup>4</sup> So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. (Genesis 16:3-4, NKJV with author's notes in brackets).**



So, Sarai actually gave Hagar to Abram to be his wife. The Hebrew states clearly that she is a "wife" and not a concubine. Some translations have called her a concubine, but the text clearly states that she is given to him as a wife. I guess from a human perspective, this isn't so perplexing because Sarai had grown impatient as she had remained barren for 10 years since God made the covenant with Abram. So, the fact that Hagar became his wife and not just a

mistress complicates the whole business. In trying to "help out God," Sarai has stirred up a hornet's nest. Then Hagar began to gloat and heap shame on Sarai. It's easy to see that this just isn't going to end well. In ancient times, women felt superior to other women if they were able to have children while others were not. We see the despair of barren women many times in the Bible.

**<sup>5</sup> 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." (Genesis 16:5, NKJV).**



Sarai launches into the typical blame game of sin. She is blaming Abram, blaming Hagar, and blaming God, but she never looks to see or be open to what her contribution to the whole mess has been. In that day Sarai was considered to have been cursed by God, but she was taking it out on all others. It is very common for a perpetrator exhibiting abusive behavior to blame the victim of his or her abusive

behavior.

***<sup>6</sup> 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. (Genesis 16:6, NKJV).***

Interestingly, Abram doesn't even name his new wife by her name. He just refers to her as "your maid." He, in effect, is "throwing her under the bus." Abram does this because he is taking the easy way out. He's following that old adage of "happy wife, happy life." Abram was abdicating and delegating his authority over the situation. So, not knowing exactly what to do and feeling abandoned, Hagar headed for the hills.

***<sup>7</sup> Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. <sup>8</sup> And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" (Genesis 16:7-8a, NKJV).***

The Angel of the LORD found Hagar by a spring in the wilderness. Interestingly, Muslims



claim that this spring is located in Mecca and is called the Kaaba. The name Hagar in Arabic is Haajar, and she is considered the mother of Islam. One thing we can learn from this exchange is that God loves all people - not only the Jews. Hagar was an Egyptian. We find places in scripture where He says that the Ethiopians, the Assyrians, and even the Phillistines are loved by Him and have been guided like He has guided His "own people" (Amos 9:7). Here, God Almighty, King of All the

Universe, is tenderly looking to the needs of a lowly Egyptian handmaid. Yet, it is obvious from the text that God never intended Hagar to be taken as a wife by Abram because God doesn't address her as Abram's wife either, but as "Sarai's maid."

***She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."***

***<sup>9</sup> The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." <sup>10</sup> Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." (Genesis 16:8b-10, NKJV).***

Interestingly, God tells her to return to Sarai and to submit to her. This reminds us that often, when we're having difficulty getting along with someone, although there is work to be done in them, there is also work to be done in our own hearts and lives. Hagar could have blamed God, blamed Abram, and blamed Sarai, but she is very open for God to handle the situation, and He does so. He blessed her. He promised her that she

would be the mother of many descendants. In fact, there will be so many that they will be unable to be counted. He then pronounces a blessing on her.

The real victim in this story is Hagar. She was just a servant who was in the household of Abram and Sarai and she didn't ask for any of this. When we find ourselves in a difficult situation, often the only attitude we can deal with is our own attitude. Often, we want God to change our circumstances, but frequently as a side issue, we're going through difficulty because God wants to change something in our own attitudes. I'm not saying we're to always stay in an abusive relationship. I'm just saying that we must make sure that we're open to God doing a work in us while He's working in those who are treating us wrongly.



***<sup>11</sup> 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, [means God hears]***

***Because the LORD has heard your affliction.***

***<sup>12</sup> 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." (Genesis 16:11-12, NKJV with author's notes in brackets).***

Well, this is a pretty ominous blessing isn't it? God tells her that her offspring will be a "wild man." This reminds me of Jacob's "blessing" over his sons when he says: "Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between two burdens." (Genesis 49:14, NKJV). The Lord is making prophesy here that this offspring of Abram will be a wild man who is at odds with everyone, and everyone will be at odds with him. Boy, if this isn't being lived out in the Middle East today I don't know what is. The sons of Ishmael are a boil on the backside of not only Israel, but of the whole world.

***<sup>13</sup> 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?" <sup>14</sup> Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered. (Genesis 16:13-14, NKJV).***

In verse 13, Hagar names God. This is the ONLY INSTANCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (and maybe the whole Bible) where a human bestows a name on God. This is interesting for several different reasons. First, naming something or someone denotes a certain amount of authority in the matter. Second, whatever the reason behind it, Hagar

bestows a name on God when she says: ***"You are El-Roi."*** This is generally translated as "You are the God who sees me." Some Jewish commentators interpret this as meaning "Have I not gone seeing after He saw me!" She's saying, "I was able to go on seeing a path forward knowing that God saw me." To me it means what it says: God is a God who sees our every sorrow and knows our every pain. He collects our tears and understands us in every way. While in the custody of his enemies, David wrote, *"You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle."* (Psalm 56:8a, ESV).

***<sup>15</sup> So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. <sup>16</sup> Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Genesis 16:15-64, NKJV).***

So, Hagar bore Abram a son who was to be the father of many peoples, and unfortunately, he was to be a wild man who would be at odds with all men. WOW! What a mess! This all happened when Abram and Sarai had a moment of weakness, and they doubted that God was and is a promise-keeper. So why is this narrative in the Bible and what can we learn from it?

Abram and Sarai had feet of clay. You and I have feet of clay. Even though God had taken Abram out of his tent and showed him the sky, AND EVEN THOUGH ABRAM BELIEVED IN GOD and it was counted as righteousness to him, Abram slipped and he failed. The Bible is clear to us as well that *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23, NKJV). *"There is none righteous, no, not one"* (Romans 3:10-12).



God works through ways that are beyond our human perspective. In this account, Abram became a father at the age of 86, and very soon in the narrative we're going to see him become a father again at the age of 99. Think about how crazy that all is. God made a promise to Abram, and although Sarai was barren, God's

promise didn't depend on that or on Abram's age or strength. God's promises don't depend on our human strength. Why is that? It's because when we walk by sight we focus on the impossible. When we see things from God's perspective, we see that all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). When the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked, "What must I DO TO BE SAVED," Jesus came back with a laundry list that seemed impossible not only to the young ruler but also to Jesus' disciples who were listening.

<sup>25</sup> When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>26</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:25-26, NKJV). When I look back on my life I can see over and over how God has worked things out that I just couldn't control. He has gotten Sandy and me out of jams that seemed unsolvable. When we have found ourselves in situations that seemed hopeless and unworkable, God provided a way. How and why did this happen? It happened because with God nothing is impossible.

We also learn from this story that God works His purposes out in spite of our misguided human efforts. Sarai was wrong to offer her handmaid. Abram was wrong to take her. Sarai was wrong to mistreat her. Abram was wrong to turn his back on her. Yet, in spite of their failings, God blessed Hagar and made promises to her. God is working His purposes out in spite of humans persistently trying to get in the way and trying to "help God out." His will is sovereign regardless of our failings.

#### Galatians 4:22-23 (ESV)

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

In spite of their failings, God's grace covered the sin of Abram and Sarai. We will find next week that God DID INDEED KEEP HIS PROMISE and that Abram and Sarai became the parents of Isaac, the offspring of their own bodies. Paul uses this story of Sarai and Hagar to illustrate the results of two different

covenants: the New Covenant based on grace, and the Old Covenant based on the Law. Paul argues that when Abram tried to bring about God's promises through his own efforts, he was producing works of the flesh. But when Abram relied on the promises of God, God delivered through works of the Spirit. Paul says that believers in Jesus are like the children born of Sarai. They were born free as the result of God's promise. Those who try to work their way to heaven are like the child born of Hagar, a slave. Those from her were born out of human effort to accomplish and fulfill the promises of God. WE CAN'T BE SAVED THROUGH HUMAN EFFORT. We are saved by grace, and it is not of our own work.

THE BIG IDEA TODAY IS:

1. GOD DOESN'T NEED OUR HELP.
2. IT IS SUCH A RELIEF WHEN YOU REALIZE THAT YOU ARE NOT GOD! It is also a great relief when you openly receive His grace to not only save you, but to keep you saved.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at [uniongrove362@gmail.com](mailto:uniongrove362@gmail.com) or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.