

Genesis

Chapter 16



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Theme: Sarai's suggestion; Hagar flees; the tests of Abraham.

A marriage definitely not made in heaven.

In Genesis 15 Abram is seen as the man of faith, in chapter 16 as the man of unbelief. In Genesis 15 he "believed in the Lord," in Genesis 16 he "hearkened to the voice of Sarai." There he walks after the Spirit; here he acts in the energy of the flesh. Sad inconsistency!¹

After Abram rose to the heights in chapter 15, you would say that he certainly is treading on high places—but he is not perfect. In chapter 16 we see the lapse of this man's faith relative to Sarai and Hagar, the Egyptian maid. We have here the unbelief of both Sarai and Abram, and the birth of Ishmael. This is certainly a letdown after the wonder of the previous chapter.²

Torah Class – Review:

We are now at a time that is 10 years after Abraham left his father and brother in Haran of Mesopotamia, and journeyed south to the Promised Land. A lot has happened in that 10 years; Avram and his family were forced to sojourn for a time in Egypt because the land of Canaan began experiencing a famine. While in Egypt, Avram's wife, Sarai, was taken by Pharaoh to be part of his harem, but later she was returned when Pharaoh found out that Sarai was Abraham's wife and NOT only his sister as Abraham and Sarai had implied.

Abraham and his family were kicked out of Egypt, and so they went back up to Canaan, much wealthier, and then had to part company with his nephew, Lot, and Lot's family when the herds and flocks of their animals had grown so large as to be outstripping the pasture land they shared, and it was creating trouble among the herdsmen. Lot moved to Sodom, down by the Dead Sea. And, some time later, several allied kings came from the north with their armies to put down a tax rebellion in the district where Lot lived. Lot and his family were kidnapped in the process, and, as captives on their way back up north to become permanent slaves to these kings from Mesopotamia, they were rescued by Abraham and 318 men from Abraham's clan.

Upon his triumphant return from freeing Lot, Avram meets the mysterious Melchizedek. Shortly thereafter, Yahweh, using the customary Middle Eastern covenant ceremony, confirms His covenant with Abraham, promising Abraham protection, wealth, land, and an heir...by definition, a son.³

¹Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (Page 173). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
²McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

³ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

Genesis 16:1

Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar.

[handmaid] *shiphchah*, (H8198) Bondmaid (Genesis 21:9-12; Galatians 4:22-24). *shif-khaw'*; feminine from an unused root meaning to *spread* out (as a *family*; see Hebrew 4940 (*mishpachah*)); a *female slave* (as a member of the *household*) :- (bond-, hand-) maid (-en, -servant), wench, bondwoman, womanservant.

[Hagar] As Hagar was an Egyptian, St. Chrysostom's conjecture is very probable. It is that she was one of those female slaves which Pharaoh gave to Abram when he sojourned in Egypt; see Genesis 12:16. Her name Hagar, signifies a stranger or sojourner, and it is likely she got this name in the family of Abram, as the word is pure Hebrew.

Abram got two things down in the land of Egypt which really caused him trouble: one was wealth, and the other was this little Egyptian maid.⁴

Seven Barren Women

1. Sarah (Genesis 11:30; Genesis 16:1)
2. Rebekah (Genesis 25:21)
3. Rachel (Genesis 29:31)
4. Manoah's wife (Judges 13:2)
5. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:5)
6. Michal (2 Samuel 6:23)
7. Elisabeth (Luke 1:7). See Genesis 20

Rashi; Who Was Hagar: She was Pharaoh's daughter. When Pharaoh saw the miracles that were wrought for Sarah, he said, "it is better that my daughter be a handmaid in this household, than a mistress in another household".⁵

Chumash – The Last Word: Hagar left a position of importance in Pharaoh's house to become a maid to Sarah so that she could join Abraham's household. Certainly, she would have raised Yishma'el in the same spirit of self-sacrifice. This explains why Avraham was content with Yishma'el, pleading to God, "if only Yishma'el will live (in fear of) You, (that would be sufficient)!"⁶

⁴McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:70). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

⁶Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

Genesis 16:2

And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

Yet Jehovah had been specific in his promise of an heir (cf. 15:4). In the legal custom of that day a barren woman could give her maid to her husband as a wife, and the child born of that union was regarded as the first wife's child. If the husband said to the slave-wife's son, "You are my son," then he was the adopted son and heir. But God often repudiates social customs. God's people are expected to hold themselves to a higher standard.

[the LORD hath restrained me from bearing] Sarai knew that conception was from the Lord (see 4:1); her words, the Lord has restrained me, expressed her grief

[go in unto my maid] It must not be forgotten that female slaves constituted a part of the private patrimony or possessions of a wife, and that she had a right, according to the usages of those times, to dispose of them as she pleased, the husband having no authority in the case. Slave women or bondswomen were considered both property and legal extensions of their mistress. As a result it would be possible for Sarai to have Hagar perform a variety of household tasks as well as to use her as a surrogate for her own barren womb.

[I may obtain children by her] The slave being the absolute property of the mistress, not only her person, but the fruits of her labor, with all her children, were her owner's property also. The children, therefore, which were born of the slave, were considered as the children of the mistress. It was on this ground that Sarai gave her slave to Abram; and we find, what must necessarily be the consequence in all cases of polygamy, that strifes and contentions took place.

[obtain] *banah* (H1129), be built by her (Genesis 30:3,6; Exodus 21:4).

[hearkened] *shama`*, (H 8085) *shaw-mah'*; a primitive root; to *hear* intelligently (often with implication of attention, obedience, etc.; causative to *tell*, etc.)

In this suggestion of Sarai's we witness a fresh testing of Abram. Again and again our patriarch was tried—tried, may we not say, at every point. First, his faith had to overcome the ties of nature: God's call was for him to leave his country and his kindred. Then, shortly after he had actually arrived in Canaan, his faith was tried by stress of circumstances—there was a famine in the land. Next, he had to meet a trial respecting *a brother*: Abram feared that the friction between his herdsman and the herdsmen of his nephew might lead to "strife" between brethren, and how he met this by his magnanimous offer to Lot we have already seen in an earlier chapter. Later, there was a testing of Abram's *courage*, as well as his *love* for his nephew. Lot had been captured by a powerful warrior, but Abram hastens to his rescue and delivers him. Subsequently, there was a testing of his cupidity. The King of Sodom offered to "reward" him for overcoming Chedorlaomer. And now he is tested by a suggestion from his wife.

Thus, at six different points (to this stage in his history) was the character of Abram tested. We might summarize them thus: there was the trying of the *fervor* of his faith—did he love God more than home and kindred. There was the trying of the *sufficiency* of his faith—was he looking to the living God to supply all his need, or was he depending on propitious circumstances? There was the trying of the *humility* of his faith—would he assert his “rights,” or yield to Lot was the trying of the *boldness* of his faith—would he dare attempt the rescue of his nephew from the hands of a powerful warrior? There was the trying of the *dignity* of his faith—would he bemean himself by accepting honors from the King of Sodom? There was the trying of the *patience* of his faith—would he wait for God to fulfil His word in His own good time and way, or would he take matters into his own hand?⁷

When we try to help god we usually get in trouble. The old saying “The Lord helps those who help themselves” may not be a good way to look at things.

It seems to be a general principle in the ways of God with His own to first bless and enrich and then to *test* the recipient. Elisha ardently desired to receive Elijah’s mantle. His wish was granted; and the next thing we read of him is the facing of Jordan—the mantle had to be used at once! Solomon prayed for wisdom, and his prayer was heard, and at once his gift was called into exercise by the case of the two mothers each claiming the living child as hers. Thus it was, too, with our blessed Lord; no sooner had the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove than we read, “And *immediately* the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12), where He was tempted of the devil. It is highly necessary for us to take the lesson to heart—it is when we have received some special mark of the Lord’s favor or immediately after we have enjoyed some unusual season of communion with him, that we need most to be on our guard!⁸

The thing that Sarai suggested was the common practice of that day. When a wife could not bear a child, there was the concubine. Now don’t say that God approved it. God did not approve of this at all. This was Sarai’s idea, and Abram listened to her. It looks like he is surrendering his position as head of the home here, and he followed her suggestion.⁹

Believers Study Bible: The attitude and deed of Sarai exhibited her lack of faith. Attempting to usurp the leadership of her husband and use her own plan, she sought to manipulate the fulfillment of the promise of a “seed” for Abram through her maid. This amounted to walking by sight, stooping to human design to accomplish the heavenly purpose. The word “obtain” is more literally rendered “I shall be built,” showing the selfishness of Sarai’s yearning. Abram clearly shared the blame by abandoning his responsibility of leadership and adopting her plan (cf. v. 6; 3:17). Abram in his relationship with Hagar violated God’s basic ordinance for marriage, which dates back to

⁷Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (Page 173). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁸Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (174). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:70). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

creation itself (cf. 2:24, note). Sarai's plan amounted to polygamy, and the presence of two wives under the same roof inevitably brings trouble (cf. v. 4). Hagar despised her mistress. Though she felt inferior in essence, she claimed to be superior in function.¹⁰

Didymus the Blind; Moderation and Passionlessness: When Sarah, therefore, who was wise and holy, had observed for a long time that in spite of coming together with her husband she was not conceiving, she abstained from conjugal relations, and since she knew that it was in the order of things that he should have children, she gave him her slave girl as a concubine. This shows the moderation (*sophrosyne*) and the absence of jealousy of Sarah and the passionlessness (*apatheia*) of Abraham, who chose this solution at his wife's instigation and not on his own initiative and who yielded to her request only in order to give birth to children. The literal sense too, then is useful according to the considerations offered above.¹¹

Genesis 16:3

And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.

This was when Abraham was eighty-five or eighty-six, or fourteen years before Isaac was born (Genesis 16:16; cp. Romans 4:17-22; Hebrews 11:11-12). After this Abraham had eight known sons (Genesis 16:16; Genesis 21:1-8; Genesis 25:1-2) and a number of unnamed sons by concubines (Genesis 25:6).

[Hagar] is a type of the law, which, as Paul says, "beareth children to bondage." Galatians 4:22-26 is the inspired commentary upon the doctrinal principles involved in this act and in Abram's response to it.¹²

Torah Class: But to this point, Abraham's barren wife Sarai was STILL barren; she hadn't produce children. Sarai had her very own servant girl, an Egyptian named Hagar, and Sarai decided to solve the problem of being childless by using Hagar as a surrogate mother. Hebrew tradition is that Hagar was gift from Pharaoh when Abraham had his little excursion in Egypt some years earlier; in fact, she supposedly was a princess from Pharaoh's own household. In a completely usual and normal tradition for the day, Sarai offered Hagar to Abraham as a substitute; that is, Hagar would have Abraham's child, but technically as per the tradition of the era, the child would actually belong to Abraham and Sarai.¹³

¹⁰Believers Study Bible, Study Notes

¹¹ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

¹²Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (Page 175). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹³ .com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

This little Egyptian maid becomes a concubine, and this is not according to God's will. God is not going to accept the offspring at all—He didn't; He wouldn't. Why? Because it was *wrong*. Don't say that God approved this. All you can say is that this is in the record because it is an historical fact.¹⁴

Nachmanides: “at the end of ten years” This is the established period for a woman who has lived with her husband for ten years without having given birth to children, after which he is bound to take another.¹⁵

Nachmanides: On the Mishnah: Rather, the intent of the law which excludes the period one dwells outside the land of Israel from the ten year total is that if a man lived with his wife for five or ten years outside the Land and then they came to the land of Israel, we give them a period of ten years from the time they came to the Land, for perhaps due to the merit of the Land they will build up a family. And thus did Abraham and Sarah our mother do from the time they came there.¹⁶

Genesis 16:4

And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.

Sarai still had a way to go in her faith. Giving children to the barren is God's work (Ps 113:9). Later, Leah also knew that God heard her affliction, for she named Reuben and Simeon to reflect that (Gen. 29:32-33).

Ambrose; The Merit of Having Done One's Duty: It was not because he was ablaze with the heat of some unbridled passion, not because he was overcome by the charm of seductive beauty that Abraham gave preference to a relationship with a slave girl over the conjugal bed, but through a desire to procure a posterity and to enlarge his progeny.¹⁷

Genesis 16:5

And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee.

[My wrong be upon thee] This appears to be intended as a reproof to Abram, containing an insinuation that it was his fault that she herself had not been a mother, and that now he carried himself more affectionately towards Hagar than he did to her, in

¹⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:70). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁵ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

¹⁶ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

¹⁷ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

consequence of which conduct the slave became petulant. To remove all suspicion of this kind, Abram delivers up Hagar into her hand, who was certainly under his protection while his concubine or secondary wife; but this right given to him by Sarai he restores, to prevent her jealousy and uneasiness.

This was Sarah's policy, yet Abraham got the blame. She was angry that he let Hagar go unpunished for her insolent and ungrateful conduct toward her mistress (Genesis 16:8).

[the LORD judge] This is as close as we come to the use of cursing among God's people in the Bible; such words arose out of Sarai's utter desperation.

And now, when it is too late, Sarai repents and complains to her husband—"And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong *be upon thee*. I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes; *the Lord judge between me and thee*" (v. 5). How true to human nature (fallen human nature)—to throw the blame of wrongdoing upon another! Man ever seeks to shelve his responsibility and charge either God or Satan with what he terms his "misfortunes."¹⁸

McGee: Don't pass this verse by. Don't assume that God approved of this. God says that it is wrong, and now Sarai sees that she has done wrong. "My wrong be upon thee"—she is *wrong*, my friend. God will not accept this, and it is going to be a real heartbreak to old Abram. But, you see, Abram and Sarai are not really trusting God as they should. After all, Abram at this time is nearly ninety years old and Sarai eighty. I think they have come to the conclusion that they are not going to have a child. Sarai could probably rationalize and say, "I think maybe this is the way God wants us to do it, for this is the custom of the day." It *was* the custom of that day, but it was contrary to God's way of doing things. We get the wrong impression if we think that just because something is recorded in the Bible God approves of it. The Bible is inspired in that it is an accurate record, but there are many things God does not approve of that are recorded in His Word.

The moral implications that you and I read into this are not quite here in the historical record. Abram and Sarai were brought up in Ur of the Chaldees where this was a common practice, and the moral angle is not the thing that for them was so wrong. The terrible thing was that they just did not believe God. The wrong that they committed by Abram taking Sarai's maid Hagar was a sin, and God treated it as such. But today we reverse the emphasis and say that taking a concubine is a sin, but we do not pay too much attention to the unbelief. Yet the unbelief was the major sin here; that is, it was lots blacker than the other.¹⁹

¹⁸Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (Page 176). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:70). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Genesis 16:6

But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

[do to her as it pleaseth thee] Abram, who like Adam followed the wrong advice of his wife (3:17), was caught weakly in the middle.

[Sarai dealt hardly with her] Women in the ancient world obtained honor through marriage and children. Although Hagar was a servant, the fact that she had conceived a child and Sarai had not gave her cause to hold her mistress in contempt. Sarai's reaction in abusing Hagar may be based on both jealousy and class difference.

“But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee” (v. 6). Abram refuses to accept the responsibility of Sarai's “wrong” and leaves her to deal with the evil which was the fruitage of her own sowing. But observe how one evil leads to another; in wronging his wife, Abram now surrenders to her his position as *head* of the household.²⁰

“And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face” (v. 6). Was it to this Solomon had reference when he said, “It is better to dwell in *the wilderness*, than with a contentious and an angry woman” (Prov. 21:19)?²¹

Reminds us of Adam earlier in Genesis.

(Gen. 3:12) *And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*

Torah Class: Now, notice that the scripture does NOT say that Abraham married Hagar; it says Sarai gave her to him AS, or LIKE, a wife. In other words, she was a substitute, a concubine. She was a baby-making machine. But, there is no marriage involved here, which is not only the ancient Hebrew view, it makes sense within the context of the verses, whereas some translations labeling her as Abraham's wife do not. She REMAINED a handmaiden to Sarai, as Abraham affirms in V6, and in V9 the Angel of the Lord tells her to go back and submit to her mistress, Sarai. If Hagar was a true wife, she would no longer have been under Sarai, she would have become an equal; further, she wouldn't belong to Sarai any longer, she would belong to Abraham.

While the Bible doesn't give much detail about how all this concubine/wife/substitute child bearer stuff worked, it is clear from records of other Middle Eastern cultures of Abraham's time, that what we read in this story follows those laws and traditions. The Law Codes of Ur-Nammu that date to 2100 BC deal with this issue quite specifically, as does the Law of Hammurabi from around 1800 BC. And, these laws make it clear that the barren wife who takes this serious step of making her servant a concubine for her

²⁰Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (Page 176). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

²¹Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (176). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

husband, puts the wife....Sarai in this case.....in a lower social position in the eyes of the people. Legally nothing changes.....the concubine does NOT gain extra rights, nor does she legally achieve equality with, or supplant the authority of, the barren wife. And, just as we see in this story, it must have happened regularly that this tradition of using a servant as a surrogate mother created all kinds of problems. Listen to this law directly from the law code of Ur-Nammu: “.....*if the servant, comparing herself to her mistress, speaks insolently to her.....*” Doesn’t that sound exactly like what is happening here with Sarai and Hagar? Let me also point out that it was also customary that the handmaiden of a wife BELONGED solely to the wife; she was the wife’s property, not the husband’s. The husband did not OWN the handmaiden servant, and then just allow the wife to use her. This is important to understand our story. Because when the wife, Sarai, said, “I want this servant girl oughta-here”, that was that. She didn’t need her husband’s approval, per se.

It was the now pregnant Hagar’s attempt to behave as an equal that prompted Sarai to literally drive Hagar awaysomething perfectly within Sarai’s legal and social jurisdiction to decide. So, in verse 6 when Sarai goes to Abraham, angry as a hornet, and tells him she is NOT happy with this situation, Abraham replies..... “your maid is in your hands, deal with her as you think right.” Sarai didn’t go to Abraham seeking permission, nor did he at that moment did Avram give Hagar to Sarai; Sarai just wanted to gripe; she was informing Abraham what she was about to do. It was her right and personal privilege to send Hagar away.....with or without Avram’s OK.

And drive Hagar away she did, until the Angel of the Lord found Hagar and told her to return UNDER SARAI’s authority. Verses 11 and 12 say that Hagar was told she’d have a boy child, and that his child would produce an enormous number of descendants. And, Ishmael, meaning, “God pays attention”, or “God has given heed”, was to be the child’s name.

Then, God pronounces what the child’s destiny shall be. Of course, this is referring not only to the child, but also to the child’s descendants. And, this destiny is that Ishmael is going to be a wild donkey of a man, going against everyone, and that he will live in the presence of his kinsmen. While Ishmael is the patriarch of several races and lines, primarily he is remembered for creating the Arabs. And, notice where the land of the Arabs, Arabia, eventually came to be: EAST of Israel.

It’s important to remember today, in our time, that Abraham **is** the **true** father of both the Arabs and the Israelites; or, as I have begun to enjoy calling them, the Ishmaelites and the Israelites. And, that both the Arab peoples AND the Israelites are from the line of Shem, meaning they are Semites. But, even so, another of God’s divisions is going to take place, and we are going to see that occur in the next Chapter. Let us also remember, that in our time, what the Evening TV News Anchors call Arabs rarely actually are. Most of these supposed Arabs are actually Persians, Egyptians, and others from the line of Ham..... totally different from TRUE Arabs who are from the line of Shem. What the news tends to do is identify every Muslim (which is a religion) as an Arab (which is a family line), which is completely incorrect.²²

Nachmanides: “And Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from before her face.” Our mother did transgress by this affliction and Abraham also by his permitting her to do

²² Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

so. And so, G-d heard her [Hagar's] affliction and gave her a son who would be a wild-ass of a man, to afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all kinds of affliction.²³

Genesis 16:7

And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.

[angel of the LORD] The Angel of the Lord found the maidservant in the desert at a spring beside the road to Shur (cf. 25:18) on the way to her homeland, Egypt. When she reached Shur (*the wall*), she paused before crossing the border. Here the Egyptians maintained a wall or strong line of forts to protect Egypt from invaders from the east. It is mentioned in Egyptian records as early as 2000 B.C.

This is the first reference in the Old Testament to “the Angel of the Lord” (lit., “the Angel of Yahweh”).

“Angel of YHWH”

- Identified with Yahweh (Gen 16:13; 22:11-12; 31:11, 13; 48:16; Judg 6:11,16, 22; 13:22-23; Zech 3:1-2);
- Yet distinct from YHWH (Gen 24:7; 2 Sam 24:16; Zech 1:12);
- May refer to a theophany of the preincarnate Christ (Cf. Gen 18:1-2; 19:1; Num 22:22; Judg 2:1-4; 5:23; Zech 12:8).

Fruchtenbaum: Angel of the Lord always in every case in the OT is an appearance of Jesus. Never is the angel of Jehovah a common, ordinary angel, but Jesus.²⁴ (Manuscript 8)

However **The Bible Background Commentary** comments on angel as messenger: The word translated “angel” simply means “messenger” in Hebrew and can be used for either human or supernatural messengers. Since these messengers represent God, they do not speak for themselves, but only for God. It is therefore not unusual for them to use the first person, “I.” Messengers were granted the authority to speak for the one they represented and were treated as if they were the one they represented.

Torah Class: Now, before we move forward, let's take a moment with this term, “The Angel of the Lord” that we saw in verse 11. I'd almost rather not do this, but I know that many of you are probably eager and loaded for Bear about this topic. The thing is, Angels, let alone “The Angel of the Lord”, is a difficult concept and theological issue, for there are many reasonable people who disagree on what this means. But, studying the original Hebrew helps to cut through all the fantasy.

²³ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

²⁴ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Ariel Ministries, Tustim, CA www.ariel.org

First, the Hebrew word that many will say is the word for Angel is “Mal’ach”. But, actually, angel is a mistranslation; the term mal’ach simply means messenger, and standing by itself could be any kind of messenger or agent, and in the bible it is often used that way. It’s when the term Adonai, or Yahweh, gets added to the wordsuch as “Mal’ach Adonai” or “Mal’ach Yahweh”, that the Hebrews consider the word Mal’ach no longer meaning messenger in the human sense, but rather meaning Angel in the spiritual sense. In other words, by associating the name of God (Adonai) with the word messenger (Mal’ach), we get an angel..... a spirit-messenger from God.

Now, in Greek, the word for Angel is Angelos, which, like Hebrew, technically means messenger. And, just like in Hebrew, angeloi can mean simply any kind of messenger, not necessarily a heavenly messenger. But, as happens with words over the centuries, their meaning and usage can change. With the advent of gentile Christianity, angeloi, when used in scripture, came to mean, in every case, a “messenger from God” an angel. The problem here is that there is several places where our English bibles say angel, and it probably, within the cultural context, meant not angel at all, but was simply referring to a human messenger or agent, even if that messenger was mysterious. So, from the Hebrew point of view, if the word Mal’ach, messenger, is used all by itself, it’s something other than a heavenly messenger.....it’s usually just a man. Add the word Adonai or Yahweh to it, and this messenger becomes what we call an angel. The problem is, the usual English translation approach is that the translators take the word Mal’ach when used all by itself and make it Angel; and then when Adonai gets added it becomes an Angel of the Lord, which has been taken to mean some kind of very high or special angel.

What I’m telling you is that as a result of allegory, hyperbole, fantasy and just plain error, Christian writers have taken every instance of the word Mal’ach in Scripture and turned it into a heavenly messenger, an angel; which in many cases it was not. Even more, as a result of that misguided approach, when they saw the words “Mal’ach Yahweh”.....they translated it to Angel of the Lord, and assumed it was some SPECIAL type of angel, or even perhaps another kind of manifestation of God Himself. Actually, in general, the ONLY time the word “angel” (meaning a spirit being sent from God) should appear in our Bibles is WHEN the words “angel of the Lord” are written. In reality, angels are barely even mentioned in Scripture; it’s our traditions that have multiplied their presence, amplified their purpose, and humanized their form. So, the search for the elusive Angel of the Lord is a snipe-hunt....it’s a red herring.

I tell you this not so much to provide a good explanation of what this Angel of the Lord is, but rather to point out why it has proven to be such a source of disagreement and scholarly argument. And, this is not a new argument. Going back to before the time of Christ, the Pharisees had worked out an elaborate hierarchy of angels, little of which comes from Scripture, and therefore is mostly Tradition. The Sadducees, contemporaries of the Pharisees, didn’t even believe Angels existed. The Essenes had their own understanding of Angels, quite different from the Pharisees, and the Essene theology became the basis for the Christian Angeology system we have today.

In any case, what exactly the Angel of the Lord is we don’t know. Was it a special kind of Angel? Was it another manifestation of God, like the Logos, or like the Holy Spirit? Was it a specific Angel that God set aside for certain tasks? Was it God taking on the form of an Angel? Probably most times a Mal’ach is not even an angel, except when the

word Adonai is attached to it, meaning that ALL true angels should be called Angels of the Lord.

One thing, however, does seem certain: the being that spoke to Hagar, whether this is a regular Angel, or whether this is a more special Angel, or God Himself, WAS a spirit being and NOT a human messenger. Other than that slim fact, the rest I'll leave for you to wrestle with.²⁵

[In the way to Shur] As this was the road from Hebron to Egypt, it is probable she was now returning to her own country.

What *grace* was this, *Divine* grace, for we need not stop to prove that the “Angel of the Lord” (mentioned here for the first time) was God Himself in theophanic manifestation. The *place where he* found this poor Egyptian maid attracts our attention. It was “by a fountain of water in the wilderness,” termed in verse 14 “the well.” This is the first time we read of the “well” in Scripture. We pause to look at several other passages in the Old Testament where the “well” is mentioned, for the purpose of noting how beautifully they pointed to “the One Who giveth the living water, that water of which those who drink shall never thirst” and which is in them a well of water springing up into “everlasting life” (John 4).²⁶

McGee: I am inclined to believe that the Angel of the Lord is none other than the preincarnate Christ. This is characteristic of Him: He is always out looking for the lost. Hagar had traveled quite a distance from home.²⁷

Didymus the Blind; Why Hagar is Found by a Spring: It is well too that Hagar was found “by a spring of water,” for beginners find themselves engaged in purifications, which are signified by water. By contrast, those who are more fully matured come into a desert place, no longer needing purifications, having already rid themselves of vices and having been endowed with virtue.²⁸

Genesis 16:8

**And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?
And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.**

[Hagar, Sarai's maid] This mode of address is used to show her that she was known, and to remind her that she was the property of another.

Questions 18-19. Next question is in Genesis 16:13.

²⁵ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

²⁶ Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (Page 176). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

²⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:71). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²⁸ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

Didymus the Blind; Hargr, Sarah's Maid: (The virtue of Hagar)

From this text one gains insight into the virtue of Hagar as well, and one becomes aware that she is a woman not to be despised since an angel converses with her and shows concern for her that is hardly superficial, for it is evidently by the will of God that [the angel speaks]. It is not at all improbable that Hagar was a person of zeal, because she was chosen by the holy woman Sarah to sleep with Abraham. Her nobility of soul is likewise shown by the fact that she says, "I am fleeing from my mistress, Sarah," without saying anything bad about her. We earlier had hypothesized that Sarah represented virtue and a spiritual understanding of the Scriptures but that Hagar represented the introductory knowledge and the shadow. One who approaches the divine teaching should listen first according to the letter, while grasping its spirit gradually and in due order.

Genesis 16:9

And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

"Return...submit." If we have done wrong, no matter what the temptation or provocation may have been, the only way to Divine blessing, to peace and happiness, is to retrace our footsteps (as far as this is possible), in repentance and submission.²⁹

God not only raises questions, but offers solutions. He always asks people to do the best thing, though it may be the hardest to do. Hagar did submit, but was cast out of Abraham's home when Ishmael was about nineteen (Genesis 21:1-21). This is referred to in the allegory of Galatians 4:21-31.

McGee: In the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul uses this as an allegory. He speaks there of Hagar and her offspring as being Mount Sinai where the Mosaic law was given, and he speaks of the legality and the bondage of that law. Then he speaks of Sarai as being the one who is free. The point is that the one who belonged to Abram was Sarai—she was his wife. Many people today want to take on something different; they want to get under the law. But, my friend, as believers we have been joined to Christ. The church has been espoused to Christ, Paul says, as a chaste virgin and will someday be the bride of Christ.³⁰

Grace is God's answer to man's pride. The heart of Christianity is God's free grace in Jesus Christ. Legalism always seems to take the heart out of Christianity and replace it with a heart of stone. Let the law do the honorable work of showing a man his sin, but remember that it can't save the man from sin.

²⁹ Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (Page 180). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:71). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

[the angel of the LORD said unto her] On several occasions this passage states that the Angel of the Lord spoke directly to Hagar (vv. 9, 10, 11).

Genesis 16:10

And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

[I will] Shows who is talking here, Christ, the second person of the trinity. Again, refers to a theophany of the preincarnate Christ

[multitude] Ishmael will, also, have 12 sons who will be highly prolific.

The 19th prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 16:10-12). Next prophecy in Genesis 17:2. This is the first prophecy of Ishmael being a great nation and at enmity with others. This is still in the process of fulfillment.

Didymus the Blind; Hagar’s Descendants Not Luminous: It is not implausible that one who is living the life of a beginner should also be judged worthy of a blessing, for, if his progress continues toward the appropriate goal, he will arrive at perfection. But notice that when the text was talking about virtue – for it is from virtue that the true seed of Abraham comes – after God had led him outside and said to him, “look toward heaven, and number the stars if you can count them, “he had added, “So shall your descendants be.” But notice that in the case of Hagar it is not said, “Your descendants will be like the stars,” but only “They will not be able to be numbered for their multitude.” Can you not conclude from this a difference: that the progeny of that which is perfect is luminous and that which pertains to the introductory level is not? ³¹

Genesis 16:11

And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou *art* with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.

The story has both a dark side (Sarai mistreated her maidservant) and a bright side (the Angel of the LORD communicated with Hagar in the desert). There is no problem seeing what went wrong in the dark side of the story. When the way of faith (which involves patient waiting) was abandoned and the way of human calculation was taken, Abram was caught up in a chain of causes and effects that would trouble him for years to come. (Ishmael became the ancestor of the Arabs, who are still hostile to the Jews.)

[shalt call his name] There were seven persons named before birth. This is the list of the seven persons named before birth: Ishmael (Genesis 16:11); Isaac (Genesis 17:19); Solomon (1 Chron. 22:9); Josiah, (325 years before birth, 1 Kings 13:2; 2 Kings 22:1);

³¹ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

Cyrus (175 years before birth, Isaiah 44:28-45:1); John the Baptist (Luke 1:13,60-63); Jesus (Matthew 1:21).

[Ishmael] Meaning, whom God hears (Genesis 16:11). His biography is in Genesis 16:11-25:18; 1 Chron. 1:29. One other person named Ishmael (2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 40:14; Jeremiah 41:1-18).

Ishmael, the child of Sarai's and Abram's lapse into unbelief, was the progenitor of the Arabs, the traditional enemies of the Jewish people. Moreover Mohammed, the founder of Islam, whose adherents form Christianity's most difficult missionary problem, came from the line of Ishmael.

Nachmanides: "and thou shalt call his name Ishmael" The angel informed Hagar that his name will be Ishmael – just as in the verse, *Behold, a son shall be born unto the house of David Josiah by name* – and he told her that she should so call him, and thus remember that G-d heard her affliction. Now Abraham either called him by this name on his own, with the intent that G-d hear him and answer him, or the Holy Spirit rested upon him, as Rashi has it, and he called him Ishmael because G-d had heard his mother's affliction, as the angel had said.

The correct interpretation appears to me to be that the angel commanded Hagar that she call him so, but she, being a concubine, was afraid to give a name to her master's son, so she revealed the matter to him, and Abram fulfilled the word of G-d. Scripture, however, did not need to delve at length into this matter.³²

Genesis 16:12

And he will be a wild man; his hand *will be* against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

[wild man] *pere'*, (H6501) *peh'-reh*, wild ass: Wild man, indeed. The Arabs have never gotten along—even with themselves. Provocative prediction. Her son would become the father of a great tribe of *wild, hostile people* (cf. 25:18), living in the Arabian desert (25:12-18). But they would not be the promised seed; they would only complicate matters. Sarai's sin sowed a harvest that is still being reaped. In fact Joseph, Sarai's great-grandson, was later taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites (37:28).

Used 10 times of wild asses (Job 6:5; Job 11:12; Job 24:5; Job 39:5; Psalm 104:11; Isaiah 32:14; Jeremiah 2:24; Jeremiah 14:6; Hosea 8:9).

The whole cycle of aggression and retaliation is characterized in the Middle East today, and this is in fulfillment of this prophecy.

³² Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

[his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him] True today after four thousand years. Cp. Isaiah 21:13; Jeremiah 3:2; Ezra 8:31.

[dwell in the presence of all his brethren] Especially with Midianites, their half-brothers (Genesis 25:1-4; Genesis 37:28; Judges 8:22-24; cp. Genesis 25:18).

The epithet was one of praise, because the almost untameable *onager* (wild ass) was an admired and valuable animal. The last phrase of the verse may mean that Ishmael's descendants would live to the E of Abraham's other descendants, or it may mean that they would live in defiance of Abraham's other descendants. The hostility between Arabs and Jews is well known.³³

Didymus the Blind; A Man of the Country: There are a number of differences that distinguish a man who is studious, sophisticated and urbane from a man who is none of these things. We say then of this latter type that by comparison with one who is a city person and a man of science, he is a simpleton, a rustic or "man of the country", and that by comparison with an educated and cultivated individual, he is uneducated or at least of low education.³⁴

Nachmanides: "*Pere Adam*" The correct interpretation is that *pere adam* is a construct form, meaning that he will be a wild-ass man accustomed to the wilderness, going forth to his work, seeking for food, devouring all and being devoured by all. The subject pertains to his children who will increase, and they will have wars with all the nations.³⁵

Genesis 16:13

And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?

[Thou God seest me] The other naming was Hagar's referring to God as "the One who sees" after her, that is, looks out for her. So in these two names is a world of theology: God hears and God sees. This spot would afterward become holy, a place where God could be found providing for and hearing the cries of His people.

Though Hagar was Egyptian, she had evidently come to faith in the Lord of Abram and Sarai. As a recipient of God's blessing, she gave Him a commemorative name, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees. Her words, have I also seen him, suggest amazement at God's grace and humility in His presence. After the death of Abraham, his son Isaac lived at Beer Lahai Roi (25:11).

³³ The Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition,

³⁴ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

³⁵ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

What a message for you and me in this passage. When life becomes too painful to bear, we can find strength in remembering what Hagar discovered. The Lord is “the God who sees me.” When we sense this, when we know the Lord is aware of our pain and need, our strength will be renewed. For God not only sees us, He sees the future. He promised Hagar that a bright future for her unborn son lay ahead. We too have hope for tomorrow, whatever our pain today.

Question 20, Next question in Genesis 17:17.

We have watched three people make serious mistakes: (1) Sarai, who took matters into her own hands and gave her maidservant to Abram; (2) Abram, who went along with the plan but, when circumstances began to go wrong, refused to help solve the problem; and (3) Hagar, who ran away from the problem. In spite of this messy situation, God demonstrated his ability to work in all things for good (Romans 8:28). Sarai and Abram still received the son they so desperately wanted, and God solved Hagar’s problem despite Abram’s refusal to get involved. No problem is too complicated for God if you are willing to let him help you.

God, Presence—The name for God that Hagar used in this passage literally means the God who sees. Hagar was in a moment of severe personal crisis. As the angel of the Lord confronted her, she realized that she was not alone, that God saw her in her time of distress. This awareness of God’s presence is not neutral or indifferent, but is positive and gracious. Not only was God with Hagar, but He also provided support and the promise of blessing.³⁶

Genesis 16:14

Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, *it is* between Kadesh and Bered.

[Beer-lahai-roi] Meaning, "Do I live after seeing God?" Or, "the well of living after seeing" (cp. Genesis 32:30). It was an Egyptian custom to name every god, indicating their offices and attributes. It was natural for Hagar to honor the One who appeared to her in her distress.

[Kadesh and Bered] were located in the southern Negeb on the route to Sinai and Egypt.

Summarizing the typical teaching of the Scriptures we have little more than glanced at, we learn: first, that the “well” is to be found “by the fountain of water,” which, to interpret, signifies, that Christ is to be found in the written Word. Second, that it is at the well God revealed Himself, just as in Christ God is now fully told out. Third, it was not until God opened the eyes of Hagar, that she “saw” the well. So it is not until the eyes of our heart are opened by God the Spirit that we are enabled to see Christ as the One we need and as the Fairest among ten thousand Fourth, that it is at the well the “sheep” are

³⁶ Believers Study Bible, Study Notes

“watered;” So it is in communion with Christ our souls are refreshed. Fifth, that the well was the place where Israel were gathered together by the Word of Jehovah through Closes. So Christ is now the appointed Gathering Center when we come together for worship. Sixth, unto the well Israel were bidden to “sing.” So throughout time and eternity our adorable Lord will be the Object and Subject of our praises. Seventh, the well was the place where Jonathan and his servant found protection from their enemies. So in Christ we find shelter from every foe and refuge from every storm.³⁷

McGee: How gracious God is to Hagar! It is not her sin, so God very graciously deals with her. Let me repeat that I believe the Angel of the Lord here is none other than the preincarnate Christ gone out to seek the lost again. He’s that kind of Shepherd, and He brings to her this good word.

“And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me.” This is something new to her that she did not realize before. The Egyptians did have a very primitive idea and conception of God. “For she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?” She is overwhelmed by the fact that she is seen of God. That doesn’t seem to be very impressive to us today because we have a higher view of God than that. But wait just a minute! We probably come just as far short of really knowing about God as Hagar did. It is difficult for a little, finite man to conceive of the infinite God, and all of us come short of understanding and of knowing Him. I think that a theme which will engage us throughout the endless ages of eternity is just coming to know God. That is worthy of any man’s study. To come to know God is something that will dignify a man’s position throughout eternity.³⁸

Didymus the Blind; The Angel Spoke the Words of God: In the verses read before, it was an “angel of God” who was speaking with Hagar. Here she names him “Lord” and “God.” It is not too much of a stretch to say that the angel was not in the service of his own words but of God’s, as are also the prophets. For, in a certain sense, when angels exercise their ministry and when they foretell the future, they do the work of prophets.³⁹

Didymus the Blind; Between Kadesh and Bered: It is well too that the vision of the instructing Word was seen “between Kadesh and Bered.” Kadesh in fact is interpreted to mean “holy,” and Bered, “lightning.” It is between these two things that divine education takes place: the holy, on the one hand, to which it belongs (to see the divine things) and the lightning, on the other, which is luminous state. For “your lightnings lighted up the world.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (Page 178). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³⁸ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:71). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁹ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

⁴⁰ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

Genesis 16:15

And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael.

[called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael] Abraham got this name from Hagar who got it from God (Genesis 16:10-12).

Genesis 16:16

And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.

Abram was caught up in a chain of causes and effects that would trouble him for years to come. Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born. Isaac will be born when he is 100. The eleventh year in Canaan (Genesis 12:4).

[fourscore and six years old] (eighty-six)—Eleven years had passed since God initially called Abram (Gen. 12:4). The age of individuals is usually given at important junctures in their lives—here Abram's first son is born.

Didymus the Blind; Profitable Seed: It is plausible to say that it was to establish the fact that Hagar was a serious woman and Ishmael an authentic son of Abraham that Scripture went out of its way to remark that Hagar bore a son “to Abram.” What follows is clear as to the literal sense, but let us examine too the anagogical [mystical] sense. When the person who is making progress gives birth according to the goal assigned by the master, the child he bears is not to be despised. The verse then applies the metaphorical notion of generation to the master who correctly teaches and who thus provides profitable seed. This is why it is said “Hagar bore to Abram.” The proof that the meaning is indeed what I have indicated according to the terms of Scripture is that, in the following phrase, “And Abram called the name of his son,” the Word adds, “whom Hagar bore him.” If an idea (like the text would simply have said, “And Abram named his son,” without adding “whom she bore him.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

Flesh vs. Spirit

- Abraham lived 430 years *before* the Law: Promises preceded the Law: cannot be disannulled (Galatians 3:17).
- Ishmael vs Isaac
 - Two sons of two principles: Flesh; Spirit.
 - Ishmael: of the flesh, in unbelief.
- “The son of the bondwoman will not be heir...”
 - Isaac: of promise, in response to faith.
- The Ultimate Triumph of Faith: the offering of Isaac

(Gal 4:22-31) *For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Hagar. For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.*

The lesson was clear for Sarai, Abram, Hagar, Israel, and for Christians:

God’s servants are to trust His Word and to wait for its fulfillment, enduring patiently till the end. It becomes increasingly clear in Genesis that any person or any nation that owes its existence to divine election should live by faith. Human efforts will not help. But the good news for God’s people is that the living God sees and hears.

PROFILE: HAGAR

Escape of some kind is usually the most tempting solution to our problems. In fact, it can become a habit. Hagar was a person who used that approach. When the going got tough, she usually got going—in the other direction.

However, it is worthwhile to note that the biggest challenges Hagar faced were brought on by other people's choices. Sarah chose her to bear Abraham's child, and Hagar probably had little to say in the matter.

It isn't hard to understand how Hagar's pregnancy caused her to look down on Sarah. But that brought on hard feelings, and Sarah consequently punished Hagar. This motivated her first escape. When she returned to the family and gave birth to Ishmael, Sarah's continued barrenness must have contributed to bitterness on both sides.

When Isaac was finally born, Sarah looked for any excuse to have Hagar and Ishmael sent away. She found it when she caught Ishmael teasing Isaac. In the desert, out of water and facing the death of her son, Hagar once again tried to escape. She walked away so she wouldn't have to watch her son die. Once again, God graciously intervened.

Have you noticed how patiently God operates to make our escape attempts fail? Have you begun to learn that escape is only a temporary solution? God's continual desire is for us to face our problems with his help. We experience his help most clearly in and through conflicts and difficulties, not away from them. Are there problems in your life for which you've been using the "Hagar solution"? Choose one of those problems, ask for God's help, and begin to face it today.

Strength and accomplishment:

- Mother of Abraham's first child, Ishmael, who became founder of the Arab nations

Weaknesses and mistakes:

- When faced with problems, she tended to run away
- Her pregnancy brought out strong feelings of pride and arrogance

Lessons from her life:

- God is faithful to his plan and promises, even when humans complicate the process
- God shows himself as one who knows us and wants to be known by us
- The New Testament uses Hagar as a symbol of those who would pursue favor with God by their own efforts, rather than by trusting in his mercy and forgiveness

Vital statistics:

- Where: Canaan and Egypt
- Occupation: Servant, mother
- Relatives: Son: Ishmael

Key verse:

“Then the angel of the Lord told her, ‘Go back to your mistress and submit to her’ ”
(Genesis 16:9).

Hagar’s story is told in Genesis 16-21. She is also mentioned in Galatians 4:24-25.

PROFILE: ISHMAEL

Have you ever wondered if you were born into the wrong family? We don’t know much about how Ishmael viewed life, but that question must have haunted him at times. His life, his name, and his position were bound up in a conflict between two jealous women. Sarah (Sarai), impatient with God’s timetable, had taken matters into her own hands, deciding to have a child through another woman. Hagar, servant that she was, submitted to being used this way. But her pregnancy gave birth to strong feelings of superiority toward Sarah. Into this tense atmosphere, Ishmael was born.

For 13 years Abraham thought Ishmael’s birth had fulfilled God’s promise. He was surprised to hear God say that the promised child would be Abraham and Sarah’s very own. Sarah’s pregnancy and Isaac’s birth must have had a devastating impact on Ishmael. Until then he had been treated as a son and heir, but this late arrival made his future uncertain. During Isaac’s weaning celebration, Sarah caught Ishmael teasing his half brother. As a result, Hagar and Ishmael were permanently expelled from Abraham’s family.

Much of what happened throughout his life cannot be blamed on Ishmael. He was caught in a process much bigger than himself. However, his own actions showed that he had chosen to become part of the problem and not part of the solution. He chose to live under his circumstances rather than above them.

The choice he made is one we must all make. There are circumstances over which we have no control (heredity, for instance), but there are others that we can control (decisions we make). At the heart of the matter is the sin-oriented nature we have all inherited. It can be partly controlled, although not overcome, by human effort. In the context of history, Ishmael’s life represents the mess we make when we don’t try to change the things we could change. The God of the Bible has offered a solution. His answer is not control, but a changed life. To have a changed life, turn to God, trust him to forgive your sinful past, and begin to change your attitude toward him and others.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- One of the first to experience the physical sign of God’s covenant, circumcision
- Known for his ability as an archer and hunter
- Fathered 12 sons who became leaders of warrior tribes

Weakness and mistake:

- Failed to recognize the place of his half brother, Isaac, and mocked him

Lesson from his life:

- God’s plans incorporate people’s mistakes

Vital statistics:

- Where: Canaan and Egypt
- Occupation: Hunter, archer, warrior
- Relatives: Parents: Hagar and Abraham. Half brother: Isaac

Key verses:

“God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, ‘What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation’ ” (Genesis 21:17-18).

Ishmael’s story is told in Genesis 16-17; Genesis 25:12-18; Genesis 28:8-9; Genesis 36:1-3. He is also mentioned in 1 Chron. 1:28-31; Romans 9:7-9; Galatians 4:21-31.

McGee: THE TESTS OF ABRAHAM

Before we go farther, I would like to make a recapitulation of the seven appearances of God to Abram, five of which we have already seen. There were certain failures in the life of Abram, but also there were successes. Actually, there were seven tests which God gave to him:

(1) God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees, his home, and Abram responded partially. His faith was weak and imperfect, but at least he moved out. Abram finally arrived safely in the land of Canaan, and God blessed him.

(2) Then there was a famine in the land of Canaan, and Abram fled from the land of Canaan to Egypt. There he acquired riches and Hagar—and both were stumbling blocks.

(3) Abram was given riches which are a real test. They have been a stumbling block to many a man, by the way. Frankly, I have always wished that the Lord would have let me have that kind of test rather than some of the others I’ve had! But nevertheless, I’m of the opinion that He could not have trusted me with riches. Abram did not forget God, and he was certainly generous and magnanimous toward his nephew Lot. Riches resulted in his separation from Lot, and God appeared to him again.

(4) Abram was given power through his defeat of the kings of the east. That was a real test, for he happened to be the conqueror. This man Melchizedek met him, which I think strengthened Abram for the test, and so he refused the spoils of war. Afterwards, God appeared to Abram and encouraged him.

(5) God delayed giving Abram a son by his wife Sarai. Abram became impatient, and through the prompting of Sarai, he took matters into his own hands and moved outside the will of God. As a result, there was the birth of Ishmael. The Arabs of the desert today still plague the nation Israel, and they will keep right on doing that, I think, until the Millennium.

Abraham’s two final tests occur (6) at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in chapter 18 and (7) at the offering of his son Isaac in chapter 22.⁴²

⁴²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:72). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Be Obedient: Beware of Detours!

Back in the '60s, my wife and I enjoyed a brief vacation in the beautiful foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. As we began to drive home, she said, "Let's take this side road. It looks interesting."

Interesting! It turned out to be one of the worst rural roads we have ever encountered, including some we've seen on mission fields overseas. There were no potholes; they were all craters. And while my car was raising dust, my impatience was raising my temper. As we carefully rounded a curve, we concluded that few people ever took this route; for there in front of us were two turtles, leisurely taking a walk in one of the two ruts that kept you on the road.

When we finally reached civilization and a paved road, I thought of the statement Vance Havner often made: "The detour is always worse than the main road."

Genesis 16 records a painful detour that Abraham and Sarah made in their pilgrim walk, a detour that brought conflict not only into their home but also into the world. What today's journalists call "the Arab-Israeli conflict" began right here.

But this account is much more than ancient history with modern consequences. It's a good lesson for God's people about walking by faith and waiting for God to fulfill His promises in His way and in His time. As you study the stages in the experience of Abraham and Sarah, you will see how dangerous it is to depend on your own wisdom.

1. Waiting (Gen. 16:1a)

Abraham was now eighty-five years old. He had been walking with the Lord for ten years and had learned some valuable lessons about faith. God had promised Abraham and Sarah a child but had not told them when the child would be born. It was a period of waiting, and most people don't like to wait. But it is through "faith and patience [that we] inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12).

God has a perfect timetable for all that He wants to do. After all, this event was not the birth of just another baby: It was part of God's great plan of salvation for the whole world. However, as Sarah waited for something to happen, she became impatient.

Why did God wait so long? He wanted Abraham and Sarah to be physically "as good as dead" (Heb. 11:12) so that God alone would get the glory. At age eighty-five, Abraham was still virile enough to father a child by Hagar; so the time for the miracle baby had not yet arrived. Whatever is truly done by faith is done *for the glory of God* (Rom. 4:20) and not for the praise of man.

A willingness to wait on the Lord is another evidence that you are walking by faith. "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16). Paul quoted this verse in Romans 10:11 and amplified its meaning: "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." (The same Holy Spirit inspired both Isaiah and Paul, and He has the right to make these changes.) Whenever we stop trusting God, we start to "make haste" in the wrong direction and we end up being ashamed.

A third evidence of faith is *that you are acting on the authority of God's Word*. "So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). You can act by faith, and know that God will bless, if you are obeying what He says in His Word. Hebrews 11 records the mighty acts of ordinary men and women who dared to believe God's promises and obey His commandments.

Finally, whenever you act by faith, *God will give joy and peace in your life*. “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing” (Rom. 15:13). Conflict may surround you, but you will have God’s peace and joy within you.

These, then, are the evidences of true biblical faith: (1) you are willing to wait; (2) you are concerned only for the glory of God; (3) you are obeying God’s Word; and (4) you have God’s joy and peace within. While Abraham and Sarah were waiting, God was increasing their faith and patience and building character (James 1:1–4). Then something happened that put Abraham and Sarah on a painful detour.

2. Scheming (Gen. 16:1b-4a)

Sarah knew that she was incapable of bearing a child but that her husband was still capable of begetting a child. God had specifically named Abraham as the father of the promised heir, *but He had not yet identified the mother*. Logically, it would be Abraham’s wife; but perhaps God had other plans. Sarah was “second-guessing” God, and this is a dangerous thing to do. Remember, true faith is based on the Word of God (Rom. 10:17) and not on the wisdom of man (Prov. 3:5–6), because “faith is living without scheming.” Sarah said, “It may be”; she did not say, “Thus saith the Lord!” God had told Abraham, “Know of a surety” (Gen. 15:13); but Sarah had no such assurance on which to base her actions.

Furthermore, Sarah was not concerned about the glory of God; her only goal was “that I may obtain children by her” (16:2). Perhaps there is a hint of disappointment with God and even *blaming* God when she says, “The Lord hath restrained me from bearing” (16:2). It has often been said that God’s delays are not God’s denials, but Satan whispers to us, “God is holding out on you! If He loved you, things would be different! Blame Him!” (See 3:1–6.)

Abraham’s taking Hagar as a second wife was perfectly legal according to the marriage code of that day. In later years, Jacob would marry his wives’ maids, Bilhah and Zilpah; and each would give him two sons. Moreover, the plan seemed to be successful, for Hagar conceived a child. Perhaps Sarah was right after all.

But not everything that is legal or that appears to be successful is approved by the will of God. God never accepted Hagar as Abraham’s wife; the Angel of the Lord called her “Sarah’s maid” (16:8). Later she was called “this bondwoman and her son” (21:10), not “Abraham’s wife and son.” Why? Because “whatever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). God rejected the whole enterprise because He had something far better in mind for Abraham and Sarah.

When you review the four evidences of biblical faith that were explained above, you can see that Abraham and Sarah did not pass the test. They were unwilling to wait on the Lord but rushed ahead with their own plans. They acted only to please themselves and not to glorify God. They were not obeying the Word, and what they did certainly did not bring joy and peace to their hearts or their home.

Scottish novelist George MacDonald was right when he said, “In whatever man does without God, he must fail miserably, or succeed more miserably.” This leads us to the third stage in Abraham and Sarah’s “detour” experience.

3. Fighting (Gen. 16:4b-6)

When you follow the wisdom of the world, you will end up warring like the world (James 3:13–18). Of all fights, family fights are the most painful and the most difficult to settle.

Had Hagar maintained the attitude of a servant, things might have been different; but she became proud, and this irritated her mistress (Prov. 30:21–23).

“Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” Paul asked (Gal. 3:3); and you see this illustrated in Abraham’s home. He and Sarah had begun in the Spirit when they put their faith in the Lord, but now they had turned to the flesh for help; and some of the works of the flesh were starting to appear (Gal. 5:19–21). Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar were at war with each other because they were at war with the Lord, and they were at war with the Lord because they had selfish desires warring within their own hearts (James 4:1–10).

The first thing they should have done was build an altar, worship the Lord, and tell Him their problems. They should have confessed their sins and received His gracious forgiveness. Once you stop fighting with God and with yourself, you will have an easier time not fighting with others. The first step toward reconciliation with others is getting right with God.

However, instead of facing their sins honestly, each of the persons involved took a different course; and this only made things worse. Sarah’s solution was *to blame her husband* and *mistreat her servant* as she gave vent to her anger. She seems to have forgotten that she was the one who had made the marriage suggestion in the first place. Abraham’s solution was to give in to his wife and *abdicate spiritual headship* in the home. He should have had pity for a helpless servant who was pregnant, but he allowed Sarah to mistreat her. He should have summoned them all to the altar, but he did not.

Hagar’s solution was to *run away from the problem*, a tactic we all learned from Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8). However, you soon discover that you cannot solve problems by running away. Abraham learned that when he fled to Egypt (12:10ff). There was peace in the home for a short time, but it was not the “peace of God.” It was only a brittle, temporary truce that soon would fail.

4. Submitting (Gen. 16:7–16)

James 4:1–10 explains why Christians fight and how Christians can be at peace. Our battles among ourselves are caused because we obey our three enemies: the world (James 4:4), the flesh (4:1), and the devil (4:7). How can we expect to be at peace with God and each other if we are living for the enemy! “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God” (4:6–7, NKJV).

Hagar had to submit to God (Gen. 16:7–14). This is the first appearance in Scripture of the Angel of the Lord, who is generally identified as our Lord Jesus Christ. In Genesis 16:10, the angel promised to do what only God can do; and in 16:13, Hagar called the angel “God.” These pre-Incarnation visits of Jesus Christ to the earth were to meet special needs and to accomplish special tasks. The fact that the Son of God took on a temporary body, left heaven, and came down to help a rejected servant-girl surely reveals His grace and love. His servants Abraham and Sarah had sinned against the Lord and against Hagar, but the Lord did not desert them.

The angel called her “Sarah’s maid,” which suggests that God did not accept her marriage to Abraham. Apparently Hagar was on her way back to Egypt when she met the angel, but God told her to return to Abraham’s camp and submit herself to her mistress. That would take a great deal of faith, because Sarah had mistreated Hagar before and might do it again.

God then told her that she was pregnant with a son whom she should name Ishmael (“God hears”). While he would not be Abraham’s heir in the blessings of the covenant, Ishmael would still enjoy blessings from God since he was Abraham’s son. God promised to multiply Ishmael’s descendants and make them into great nations (21:18; 25:12–18), and He did; for Ishmael is the founder of the Arab peoples.

Ishmael would be a “wild donkey of a man” (16:12, NIV), which is not a very flattering description. It identified him with the wilderness where he lived by his skill as an archer (Gen. 21:20–21; Job 24:5). It also revealed his independent and pugnacious nature.

He would be a hated man, living “in hostility toward all his brothers” (Gen. 16:12, NIV). While we must not apply these traits to *every* descendant of Ishmael, the centuries-long hostility between the Jews and the Arabs is too well known to be ignored. The Arab nations are independent peoples, dwelling in the desert lands and resisting the encroachments of other nations, especially Israel and her allies.

Hagar’s wilderness experience brought her face-to-face with God and taught her some important truths about Him. She learned that He is the living God who sees us and hears our cries when we hurt. The name of the well means “The well of One who lives and sees me.” He is a personal God, concerned about abused people and unborn babies. He knows the future and cares for those who will trust Him.

Hagar did return and submit herself to Sarah. Surely she apologized for being arrogant, for despising her mistress, and for running away. She trusted God to protect her and her son and to care for them in the years to come. We never solve life’s problems by running away. Submit to God and trust Him to work things out for your good and His glory.

Sarah had to submit to God. How did Sarah feel when Hagar came back to the camp and reported that God had talked with her? Did God have time for a poor servant? Was God concerned about a slave-girl’s baby? Did the God of Israel care for an Egyptian? Yes, because that Egyptian’s baby had Abraham as a father; and God had a covenant with Abraham. The record does not tell us how Sarah responded, but it would appear that she accepted both Hagar and her report and took her back as her servant. Sarah did not mistreat her again; for, after all, God was watching!

Abraham had to submit to God. In this entire episode, Abraham played a rather passive role. He let Sarah talk him into marrying Hagar, and he allowed Sarah to mistreat Hagar and drive her from the camp. Apparently, Abraham did not offer to help Hagar in any way. (Later, he made up for that—Gen. 21:9ff.) But when his son was born, Abraham acknowledged him and obediently gave him the name that God had appointed.

Both Abraham and Sarah had to learn to live with their mistakes. Certainly Abraham enjoyed watching the boy grow up, and the old man’s heart was full of love for him (17:18). But Abraham knew that Ishmael would not be a permanent part of the covenant family. God’s solution to the “Ishmael problem” was not to blame Abraham, Sarah, or Hagar, but *to send another baby into the home—Isaac*. Ishmael did not give Abraham and Sarah any trouble *until Isaac came along*; then he started to create problems (21:1–11). As we shall see in later chapters, all of these things have profound theological significance for the Christian believer today.

As you review the chapter, you will see that several key texts from Romans are illustrated by what is recorded here.

“*For whatsoever is not of faith is sin*” (Rom. 14:23). Be sure that your plans and procedures can pass the four “tests of faith” outlined above. People may agree with you,

and the law may defend you; but if God cannot bless you, *don't do it!* Let God accomplish His will in His way and in His time. Sarah tried to run ahead of God, and she created problems that are with us yet today.

"They who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life" (Rom. 5:17). In Genesis 15, grace was reigning through righteousness because of Abraham's faith (15:6); and Abraham was reigning in life to the glory of God. But he abdicated the throne in chapter 16, and sin started to reign. Unbelief, impatience, anger, pride, and indifference took over in Abraham's home and almost destroyed it. God's people are kings and priests (Rev. 1:6), who should "reign in life" by yielding to Jesus Christ (see Rom. 6:11–14).

"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). This does not mean that God winks at sin or that abundant sinning is the key to abundant grace (6:1–7). Rather, it means that God's grace is greater than man's sin and can accomplish God's best even when men do their worst. In grace, God saw Hagar fleeing to Egypt; and He came to her and met her needs. He made her the mother of a great nation. Of course, He did it because of Abraham; but God's covenant with Abraham was a covenant of grace.

From the human viewpoint, this "detour" was a tragedy that brought God's great salvation plan to a standstill. Consider, however, the divine point of view. God is never caught by surprise. When He cannot rule, He overrules; and He always accomplishes His purposes.

Satan wants us to think that our "disobedience detours" must become the permanent road for the rest of our lives; *but this is a lie.* Like Abraham and Sarah, we can confess our sins, accept God's cleansing (1 John 1:9), and then learn to live with our mistakes. Yes, there will be pain and regret; but God's grace will overcome in the end.

George Morrison is worth quoting again: "The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings."⁴³

⁴³Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1991). *Be obedient* (Ge 16:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

The Angel of the Lord

The Angel (or “Messenger”) of the Lord in the O.T. is a mysterious messenger of God. The Lord used this heavenly emissary to appear to human beings who otherwise would not be able to see Him and live (Ex 33:20). The Angel of the Lord performed actions associated with God, such as revelation, deliverance, and God’s judgment. This has led many to believe that the Angel of the Lord is a Christophany, i.e. an appearance of Christ in the O.T. The Angel of the Lord appeared to the following O.T. personalities and performed the following actions on God’s behalf.

Appeared to	Action	Biblical Reference
Hagar	Instructed Hagar to return to Sarah and told her she would have many descendants	Gen 16:7-10
Abraham	Prevented Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac	Gen 22:11-13
Jacob	Wrestled with Jacob through the night and blessed him at daybreak	Gen 32:24-30
Moses	Spoke to Moses from the burning bush, promising to deliver the Israelites from enslavement	Ex 3:1-8
Israelites	Protected the children of Israel from the pursuing Egyptian army	Ex 14:19, 20
Israelites	Prepared the children of Israel to enter the Promised Land	Ex 23:20-23
Balaam	Blocked Balaam’s path, then sent him to deliver a message to Balak	Num 22:22-35
Joshua	Reassured Joshua, in his role as commander of the army of the Lord	Josh 5:13-15
Israelites	Announced judgment against the Israelites for their sinful alliances with the Canaanites	Judg 2:1-3
Gideon	Commissioned Gideon to fight against the Midianites	Judg 6:11-24
Elijah	Provided food for Elijah in the wilderness	1 Kin 19:4-8
David	Appeared to David on the threshing floor of Oman, where David built an altar	1 Chr 16:22
Residents of Jerusalem	Delivered the citizens of this city from the Assyrian army	Isa 37:36
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego	Protected these young Israelites from Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace in Babylon	Dan 3:25
The Temple	The “Messenger of the Covenant” coming in judgment	Mal 3:1

Believers Study Bible Chart

The Book of Jasher

23 And Sarai, the daughter of Haran, Abram's wife, was still barren in those days; she did not bear to Abram either son or daughter.

24 And when she saw that she bare no children she took her handmaid Hagar, whom Pharaoh had given her, and she gave her to Abram her husband for a wife.

25 For Hagar learned all the ways of Sarai as Sarai taught her, she was not in any way deficient in following her good ways.

26 And Sarai said to Abram, Behold here is my handmaid Hagar, go to her that she may bring forth upon my knees, that I may also obtain children through her.

27 And at the end of ten years of Abram's dwelling in the land of Canaan, which is the eighty-fifth year of Abram's life, Sarai gave Hagar unto him.

28 And Abram hearkened to the voice of his wife Sarai, and he took his handmaid Hagar and Abram came to her and she conceived.

29 And when Hagar saw that she had conceived she rejoiced greatly, and her mistress was despised in her eyes, and she said within herself, This can only be that I am better before God than Sarai my mistress, for all the days that my mistress has been with my lord, she did not conceive, but me the Lord has caused in so short a time to conceive by him.

30 And when Sarai saw that Hagar had conceived by Abram, Sarai was jealous of her handmaid, and Sarai said within herself, This is surely nothing else but that she must be better than I am.

31 And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee, for at the time when thou didst pray before the Lord for children why didst thou not pray on my account, that the Lord should give me seed from thee?

32 And when I speak to Hagar in thy presence, she despiseth my words, because she has conceived, and thou wilt say nothing to her; may the Lord judge between me and thee for what thou hast done to me.

33 And Abram said to Sarai, Behold thy handmaid is in thy hand, do unto her as it may seem good in thy eyes; and Sarai afflicted her, and Hagar fled from her to the wilderness.

34 And an angel of the Lord found her in the place where she had fled, by a well, and he said to her, Do not fear, for I will multiply thy seed, for thou shalt bear a son and thou shalt call his name Ishmael; now then return to Sarai thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

35 And Hagar called the place of that well Beer-lahai-roi, it is between Kadesh and the wilderness of Bered.

36 And Hagar at that time returned to her master's house, and at the end of days Hagar bare a son to Abram, and Abram called his name Ishmael; and Abram was eighty-six years old when he begat him.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Book of Jasher, Published by JH Perry & Company, Aalt Lake City 1887

