

Genesis Chapter 16 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 16 Overview:

In Chapter 16, Abram and Sarai were still childless. They decided to take matters into their own hands. The chapter can be divided into 3 parts: (1) Sarai gives Hagar to Abram in verses 1-3. (2) Hagar's impudence to Sarai in verses 4-6. (3) The Angel of the Lord commands and give promise to Hagar in verses 7-16.

Genesis 16 : 1 - *Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar.*

- Ten years had passed since God had appeared to Abram at Haran and promised to bless him.
- Abram and Sarai still had no children after 10 years.
- Sarai's maid, Hagar, was an Egyptian.
- Throughout the Scripture, Egypt is generally symbolic of the world.
- During a time of testing, doubt, and wavering, Abram and Sarai had gone into Egypt.
- Though not explicitly stated, they may have obtained Hagar while in Egypt.

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.*

- It is of note that Sarai suggested to Abram to **go in unto my maid**.
- Sarai made it real clear that she is the wife and Hagar is the maid.
- Abram was just going to sleep with Hagar for the purposes of providing Sarai with a child
- Sarai had become impatient waiting for God to fulfill His promise.
- Notice further that Sarai said, **it may be that I may obtain children by her**.
- Sarai thought it was time to take matters into their own hands.
- Her unwillingness to wait on the Lord is indicative of her lack of faith.
- That lack of faith would bring much trouble thereafter.

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.*

- It apparently was a socially acceptable custom of the day for a couple to seek children through the maid of the wife.
- However, it should be noted that though it may have been socially acceptable, it was not God's way.
- Abram and Sarai may have picked up this idea while in Egypt.
- Or, they may have gotten the idea from their Canaanite neighbors.
- Either way, the idea came from the world, and not from God.
- Sarai gave Hagar "**to her husband Abram to be his wife.**"
- The idea is **not** that Hagar received equal standing with Sarai.

- Rather, she was allowed to sleep with Abram for the purpose of conceiving a child by him.

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.*

- The scheme of Sarai worked.
- Her maid conceived by Abram.
- However, when Hagar discovered she was pregnant by Abram, “***her mistress was despised in her eyes.***”
- Sarai had not anticipated this.
- Now Hagar looked with contempt upon her barren mistress.
- She, the lowly maid- servant, had been able to achieve what Sarai had not been able to do in many years of married life.
- Sarai was now the one looked down upon by Hagar.
- Hagar exhibited carnal pride, thinking she was more of a woman than Sarai.

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.*

- It may be that Sarai had wondered in the back of her mind if the problem of infertility had been on Abram’s part.
- It was now clear the opposite was in fact the case.
- In any event, she was aware of Hagar’s newly achieved rivalry.
- So Sarai, went to Abram and said, “***My wrong be upon thee.***”
- The idea is that she came to her husband and said in effect, “**My problem is now your problem.**”
- I can only bet that emotions were running high on this day.
- Sarai in effect said, “**Look at her attitude! I am despised by her!**”
- She blurted out, “***the LORD judge between me and thee.***”
- Through their lack of faith, they had made a major error.
- They could not undo it.
- Sarai, in frustration implied if Abram would not do anything about it, then she would appeal to God.
- Their marriage without question was in a crisis.

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.*

- Abram told his wife, **thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee.**
- Sarai needed Abram’s permission to evict Hagar from their home.
- Abram told Sarai to do whatever she wished in the matter.
- It must have been a time of bitter emotions.
- Abram was finally going to be a father, but now his wife was terribly upset.
- The poor maid-servant involved was going to be unceremoniously kicked out along with his unborn child.
- The word translated as **hardly** (*hne awnaw*) has the sense of ‘**harshly.**’

- Hagar fled.

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.*

- One can only imagine Hagar's bitter emotions.
- She had in obedience, loyalty, and total innocence participated in her mistress' scheme.
- Now the whole affair had blown up in her face.
- She was alone, pregnant, and rejected.

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.*

- What is clear is God's mercy upon her.
- He sent an angel to assist her.
- The angel found her by a spring of water on the way to *Shur*.
- *Shur* was the border of Egypt.
- Hagar was probably heading home to Egypt.

Genesis 16 : 9 - *And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.*

- The angel had a profound message for this young, unwed mother.
- ***“Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.”***
- The word translated as **submit** (*hne awnaw*) has the idea ‘to humble.’
- Hagar's arrogance is what had made her trouble worse.
- She was instructed to thus return and humble herself.

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.*

- God promised Hagar that He would multiply her seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

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 angel told her that her child would be a son.
- She was to name him ***“Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.”***
- The name *Ishmael* literally means, ‘*God will hear.*’
- God had heard and intervened to help Hagar.
- Ishmael indeed would become a great people.
- The Arabic peoples to this day are descended from the seed of Ishmael.

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.*

- The angel went on to prophesy that Ishmael would 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.”***

- The word translated as **wild** (*arp pereh*) literally means ‘**wild ass.**’
- Ishmael evidently would grow up as an unruly, stubborn man.
- The reference to his hand being against every man and every man against him may have long term fulfillment.
- The Arabic nations down through the centuries have been a warring people ever since

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?*

- Hagar coined her own name for Jehovah God: “*Thou God seest me*” (*yaral Lahai-roi*).
- The final phrase in verse 13 could be rendered, ‘*For said she, I have also here seen Him that saw me.*’
- What is implied is that Hagar (in her mind) thought the angel of the Lord to in fact be the Lord Himself.
- The greater truth is that God indeed does see us.
- He saw this miserable maid-servant in her distress.

Genesis 16: 14 - *Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.*

- It is not clear if she or someone else named the well-spring of water, but in any event, it came to be known *Beer-Lahai-roi*.
- That phrase literally means ‘*The well of the Living One Who saw me.*’
- It is in southern Palestine in what today is called the Negev.

Genesis 16 : 15-16 – *15 And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son’s name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. 16 And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.*

- Hagar returned to Abram’s place, bore her son, and Abram named him Ishmael.
- Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born.
- Recall how that Abram was 75 years old when God first promised him a son in Genesis 12:1
- Thus, eleven years had passed.
- After waiting for about ten years, Sarai and Abram took events into their own hands in the matter of Hagar.
- That decision of the will of the flesh would haunt them and their descendants from that day to the present hour.