



In Genesis 15, we find Abram in a bit of a panic. He asks the Lord, “What can you give me since I remain childless (v. 2)?” God takes Abram outside and invites him to “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Abram is probably thinking, “This is nice, but what does it have to do with kids and grandkids.” Then the Lord tells him, “So shall your offspring be (v. 5).”

In one of the more remarkable passages in the Old Testament, we read, “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness (v. 6).”

As we roll into Genesis 16, Abram is not nearly as steady. Sarai is desperate as well. In chapter 12, Abram devises a scheme that goes horribly wrong. Now it’s Sarai’s turn. She imagines she has the perfect remedy for an otherwise impossible situation. By the end of the story, no one is more miserable than Sarai.

If Abram ever longed for a “do-over,” I imagine this is it. This will not be Abram’s only mistake but it will be his most consequential.

In the middle of an unfortunate story, however, we find a remarkable portrait of grace. An Egyptian slave girl has an encounter with the living God and discovers God cares deeply for those the world has all but forgotten.

SARAI'S SCHEME (vv. 1-4)

^{16:1} Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

1. Verse 1 reminds us that Abram and Sarai remain childless. Who does Sarai seem to blame for her predicament?
2. Sarai adopts an ancient custom of offering her handmaiden to her husband as a surrogate mother. What does Sarai hope to achieve by offering Hagar to Abram?

THE SCHEME GOES HORRIBLY WRONG (vv. 4-6)

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me."

⁶ "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

1. In an honor/shame culture, few things brought more shame to a woman than the inability to have children. Hagar responds predictably by despising her mistress. How does Hagar's response inflame an already tense situation?
2. Who does Sarai seem to blame for her predicament?
3. How does Abram respond? How might we have expected Abram to respond? How does Abram's response inflame an already tense situation?
4. How does Sarai respond to Abram's passivity? How does Sarai's response inflame an already tense situation?
5. How different is this reality from what Sarai might have initially hoped to achieve?

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE LIVING GOD (vv. 6-14)

⁷ The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

⁹ Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." ¹⁰ The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count."

¹¹ The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, ⁹ for the Lord has heard of your misery. ¹² He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

¹³ She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." ¹⁴ That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

1. How do you think Abram and Sarai felt about Hagar's departure?
2. Why do you think the Lord pursued her?
3. The Lord seems to be fond of asking "where" questions. He asks Adam, "Where are you?" He asks Cain, "Where is Able?" He asks Hagar, "Where are you coming from, and where are you going?" What is the significance of each of these questions? Why is it important for Hagar to consider where she is coming from and where she is going?
4. On a deeper level, why is it important for us to consider where we are coming from and where we are going? From a big picture perspective, how should we answer the question? How should your answer shape the way you live? ...approach difficulty and hardship?
5. What does the Lord promise Hagar?
6. Does the Lord promise things will get easier for Hagar once she returns? Why not?
7. Will following God always make things easier for us? Why or why not?
8. What does Hagar learn from her encounter with the Lord?
9. What do we learn from Hagar's encounter with the Lord?