

Genesis 16

Whatever you say, dear

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Shalom, my friends. Lately we've been studying the Bible's first book, the book of Genesis. It's an exciting book with characters who are more alive than those on Home and Away, Neighbours. Fraser and Seinfeld put together. We've seen world wars and giant building projects, promises made and sibling rivalry that resulted in murder. Phew...this is good stuff! Today's episode is no different.

The person of consequence in today's story is Hagar, an Egyptian handmaid. This is wonderful to imagine-- this is not only a book about heroes of major record and men of valor. It is not only about faith-filled world class giants, but is about the little people who not only decorate the book, but also feature in it. That's good news for you and me, isn't it?

In our story today, we have the 2<sup>nd</sup> recorded conversation between a husband and wife in the Bible. OK, not the full conversation. Remember a man has 10,000 words he speaks a day, according to the sociologists whereas a woman has over 25,000, so for the sake of biblical brevity, one snippet of conversation will have to do for now. The 1<sup>st</sup> husband/ wife conversation took place in the Garden of Eden; the 2<sup>nd</sup> is in our story today. The 1<sup>st</sup> ended in tragedy and the dismissal from God's presence; the 2<sup>nd</sup> is equally devastating. On both occasions, Moses records this phrase, the husband "listened to the voice of his wife." So I'm titling that part of my message today, "Whatever you say, dear."

Let's read Genesis 16.

The highlights today seem to fall into four categories and all centered on the woman known as Hagar. One the conversation between Abram and his wife about Hagar, two the interaction between Sarai and Hagar alone, third the promises made by the Angel of the Lord and finally the birth of the baby.

## **1. CONVERSATION BETWEEN ABRAM AND SARAI**

*Whatever you say, dear*

Last week, God again reminded Abram that he would personally be the father of many nations. No, Abram was corrected, it would not come through your servant Eliezer. It would not come through your nephew Lot. The promise would be fulfilled through someone in your own loins; the nation will grow so numerous that the 10,000 visible stars would pale in number to them. Sarah, called Sarai as our story begins, is really upset at the whole future seed thing that Abram and God have apparently cooked up. She comes to Abram's tent and lets him know of her displeasure.

I'm barren because God said so, she declares. So you're going to have to come up with some other method of the production of children as stars. I have one Egyptian handmaiden and her name is Hagar. Go have a child with her; maybe that will count for God. This is a creative method of solving the apparent problem, isn't it?

Her words appear in verse one. Perhaps I will have children through her. This is a common middle eastern view in those days. If a child is born in the house, it's the child of the woman and more realistically the man of the house. Listen to Sarai's concern. They are for *her* progeny, not for Abram's! Keeping peace however was very important to Abram, and his concern for his wife was riveted to her pleasure. Remember, misplaced pleasure never satisfies. When you aim at something often you get it, thus pleasure misdirected is ephemeral at best and self manipulating. Self pleasure is often auto eroticism. Not the way of God, to be sure.

Alfred Edersheim says this of this episode: "Ten years had elapsed since Abram had entered Canaan, when Sarai, despairing of giving birth to the heir of the promise, followed the common custom of those days and countries, and sought a son by an alliance between her husband and Hagar, her own Egyptian maid. The consequences of her folly were dispeace in her home, then reproaches, and the flight of Hagar. [Her name הַגָּר signifies a stranger or sojourner, and it is likely she got this name in the family of Abram, as the word is pure Hebrew.] What else might have followed it is difficult to tell, had not the Lord in mercy interposed. None less than the Angel of the Covenant Himself appeared to the slave, as she rested by a fountain in the

wilderness that led down into her native Egypt. He bade her return to her mistress, promised to the son whom she was to bear that liberty and independence of bearing which has ever since characterized his descendants, and gave him the name of Ishmael — the Lord heareth, — as it were thus binding him alike by his descent, and by the Providence that had watched over him, to the God of Abram." (Commentary on Genesis)

Let me clarify, the halacha is that if your wife has not given you a child after 10 years of marriage, you actually were required to remarry, at least for those who lived in the Land.

Also from verse 2:

אֵלַי אֲבִנָה מִמְנָה

"Obtain children" from the root "to build up. Boneh" And the root of that may be "ben" meaning 'son'. The son is the building block of the family. So Sarai says that this is the only method she can sort out to get this promise fulfilled.

My friends, it's not up to you to fulfill God's promises. It's up to God. Last week we read about the covenant of the pieces and that God alone walked through the parts of the animals. He alone is required to fulfill what He said. He will do it! Throughout the book of Genesis and really, throughout the whole of the Bible, the worst enemy to God's accomplishing God's purposes is often His own people. Wasn't it King Saul who thought up ideas to override Samuel's prophecy? Wasn't it Peter who came up with his own creative ideas in the Garden of Gethsemane about protecting Y'shua from harm?

Some people want to bring Jews to Israel today in order to fulfill prophecy. As if God needed this definitively human enterprise! Like without us God cannot do His will. How scandalously pompous! Sarai's sin is not only self pleasing, but also self fulfilling. In other words, her desire to raise up a family is not about fulfilling God's plans, but here, it's her own plan.

Maybe that's what I have against all those who move Jewish people around the globe. I find their desires satisfied, not in the finding of Jews in the Homeland of Israel, nor even in Jews finding Messiah like we celebrate here, but in the satisfying of biblical prophecy so that they can meet Jesus and get

to heaven. In other words, the end is about their getting to their pleasure rather than extending that pleasure to others. Now, please hear me, this is not an indictment of each person involved in such global efforts. Most of the people involved, no doubt, have genuine affection for Israel, the entity, and for God. My caution however, is very real and substantial.

The problems caused by Abram's listening to his wife's voice were not only for the people of that day, 4000 years ago, but continue to this day. Never let someone say that two consenting adults can break God's rules and still have no consequences for generations. What you do and what you believe matter.

## **2. CONFLICT BETWEEN SARAI AND HAGAR**

Our second section today is about Hagar and Sarai particularly. Listen to this from the book of Galatians chapter 4. Read from verse 22 to 31. The contrast is clear-- Hagar represents Arabia, which is present Jerusalem, which means those who keep the covenant of Sinai and all its commensurate legal bindings. The woman Sarah represents the covenant of freedom and it's called the Mount Zion, Jerusalem above, which is free, and she is our mother. This is the covenant of Y'shua, known in our story today via the Angel of the Lord.

So in our story the construct seen in Galatians comes clear. There is almost nothing directly noted between the two women. Only at the end of verse 4, "her mistress was despised in her sight." And again in verse 6 "Sarai treated her harshly and she fled from her presence." "dealt hardly with her—  
תַּנְּחָהּ tannha, she afflicted her; the term implying stripes and hard usage, to bring down the body and humble the mind. If the slave was to blame in this business the mistress is not less liable to censure. Antipathy and enmity (the Bible's word) are common between those of the City of God and those of the City of Man. Those who want to solve God's problems are from the human venture but don't bring God into the picture. They even bring their own will into the dilemma. Hear this from verse 5 "May the Lord judge between you and me" I would not want to have been Abram in that day, to be sure.

## **3. PROMISES, PROMISES**

Thirdly we see the promises made to Hagar via the Angel of Yahweh.

### The angel of the Lord ...

Verse 7. The angel of the Lord— Some theologians interpret the appearance of this angel anywhere in the OT as representing Y'shua. They note the person mentioned here was greater than any created being and sufficiently evidence this from the following particulars:

1. From his promising to perform what God alone could do, and foretelling what God alone could know; "I will multiply your seed exceedingly," etc., verse 10. "You are with child, and shall bear a son," etc., (verse 11) "He will be a wild man," etc., Genesis 16:12. All this shows a prescience which is proper to God alone.
2. Hagar considers the person who spoke to her as God, calls him **אֱלֹהִים** El, and addresses him in the way of worship, which, had he been a created angel, he would have refused. See Revelation 19:10; 22:9. (also compare Y'shua who also received such worship, whereas Paul and Peter would not)
3. Moses calls this angel expressly JEHOVAH; for she called **שֵׁם יְהוָה**, the NAME of the LORD who spoke to her, :13. Now this is a name never given to any created being.
4. This person, who is here called **מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה**, the Angel of the Lord, is the same who is called **הַמַּלְאֲכֵי הַגּוֹעֵל** hammalach haggoel, the redeeming Angel or the Angel the Redeemer, Genesis 48:16; **מַלְאֲכֵי פָנָיו** malach panav, the Angel of God's presence, Isaiah 63:9; and **מַלְאֲכֵי הַבְּרִית** malach habberith, the Angel of the Covenant, Malachi 3:1; and is the same person which the Septuagint, Isaiah 9:6, term *μεγαλης βουλης αγγελος*, the Angel of the Great Counsel or Design, viz., of redeeming man, and filling the earth with righteousness.
5. These things cannot be spoken of any human or created being, for the

knowledge, works, etc., attributed to this person are such as belong to God; and as in all these cases there is a most evident personal appearance, Y'shua alone can be meant; for of God the Father it has been ever true that no man hath at any time seen his shape, nor has he ever limited himself to any definable personal appearance.

The angel tells her 4 times of things to do or to come. It appears to be 4 different conversations or subsequent items in a very long one without Hagar's responses listed. Remember Moses is telling this story hundreds of years later, and he is going by the story that had been told him tribally. The words "further" and "moreover" don't exist in the Hebrew. It's just "the angel of the Lord said to her..."

Verse 10

הִרְבָּה אֲרַבָּה אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ

Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." The Hebrew says "the good". But she didn't, did she? She negotiated with 'good' and came up with her own version of what is right and true and good. It's the personal negotiation, what we called in the Garden of Eden, the rationalized self-will, which defines what most people call *sin*.

Gen. 16:11 The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction.

What a conversation between a servant, an asylum seeker perhaps, given by Pharaoh (12.16), and the Living God. Especially in light of 12.3 where those who are cursed are those who curse God's chosen ones. I wonder often if the Muslims who flowed from Arabia, as religious heirs of Hagar, not the natural physical ones, are cursed due to Hagar's cursing and despising recorded here.

Last week I watched a video with David Brickner. It featured an Egyptian man, Ibrahim and an Israeli named Dan. They both spoke of hatred between them from their youth. It was ingrained. It was shocking to be sure. But I wonder if the hatred and curse on the Muslim people is not a direct result of this early despising.

## Verse 12

From Egypt to the Persian Gulf; a tract of land not less than 1800 miles in length, by 900 in breadth; see Genesis 17:20.

## Verse 14

She called the name of the well **בַּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי** beer-lachai-roi, "A well to the Living One who sees me." Two things seem implied here: 1. A dedication of the well to Him who had appeared to her; and, 2. Faith in the promise: for he who is the Living One, existing in all generations, must have it ever in his power to accomplish promises which are to be fulfilled through the whole lapse of time. He alone will do it. He alone needs to satisfy His own promises.

## 4. THE BABY IS BORN

Finally today we end with the birth of the baby Ishmael. It is matter of fact, and doesn't warrant much discussion this morning. But let us note that the baby is Abram's and it is not for Hagar. Abram named the boy after the words that Hagar told him. He listened to her voice, as she reported what God had instructed her.

## SUMMARY

So what do we get from today's story. Let me list a few things and you should add your own to your own list.

1. When you solve God's problems you increase your own
2. God will still bless the Jewish people and curse those who curse us
3. Self will, rationalized, will still accomplish its plans and ruin God's
4. Finally God wants you free.