

January 8, 2017 - Gen. 16:1-16 - Hagar & Ishmael

Torah Reading: Gen. 16:1-16 - Hagar & Ishmael

Psalm 11 again

Haftorah - Isaiah 40:10-18 + 21 + 31

Jeremiah 31:15-19 + 22-25 + 36

Genesis 16:1-2 -“Now Sarai Abram's wife bore him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, Behold now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing: I pray you, go in to my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.”

Hagar

The name Hagar apparently comes from the Arabic verb “to flee,” it cannot have been her original name, unless we suppose that she really was an Arab fugitive who had taken refuge in Egypt. More probably she was an Egyptian woman who had escaped to Abram when he was in the Negev, and had then received this appellation, which virtually means “run-away.”

— Ellicott's Commentary

[In Arabic, *hagara* means “to flee,” and the well-known word “hegira” refers to Mohammed’s “flight” from Mecca.]

Hagar might be one of the maidservants Pharaoh, king of Egypt, gave to Abram, Genesis 12:16; the Jews (Targum Jon. & Jarchi in loc. Bereshit Rabba, sect. 45. fol. 40. 2.) have a tradition, that she was a daughter of Pharaoh, who, when he saw the wonders done for Sarai, said, it is better that my daughter should be a handmaid in this house, than a mistress in another, and therefore gave her to Sarai; others say (Pirke Eliezer, c. 26.) she was a daughter of his by a concubine, but neither is probable: from her came the people called Hagarites, 1 Chronicles 5:10, and Hagarenes, Psalm 83:6; and there were a people in Arabia called Agraai, both by Strabo (a) and Pliny (b).

—Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

A bad idea from good intentions

Abram and Sarai act without waiting on God. This leads to animosity and complications later, and is a perfect example of “will worship” mentioned in Colossians 2:23 - this misdirected zeal gives a “show of wisdom,” but it’s following God in a way that one prescribes and devises for himself, contrary to the contents and nature of faith.

Calvin notes that Sarai’s desire of offspring was not prompted by natural impulse, but by the zeal of faith which made her wish to secure the promised blessing. As yet it had not been clearly intimated that Sarai herself was to be the mother of Abram's child; and hence her recourse to what was a prevalent practice of the times, while unjustifiable in itself, was a signal proof of her humility, of her devotion to her husband, and perhaps

also of her faith in God. — Pulpit Commentary

Alternately, Josephus (*Antiqu.* I. 1. c. 10. sect. 4.) says that Sarai proposed this to Abram by the direction and order of God himself; and the Jewish writers (Jarchi in *loc. Bereshit Rabba*, *ut supra.* (sect. 45. fol. 2.)), say that Abram hearkened to the Holy Spirit of God that was in her.

“That I may obtain children by her” means “that I may be builded by her” in Hebrew. Women, by bearing children, build up a house, (see *Ruth* 4:11); hence a son in Hebrew is called “ben”, from “banah”, to build. — Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible

Genesis 16:6 - “But Abram said to Sarai, Behold, your maid is in your hand; do to her as it pleases you. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.”

The character of Hagar is depicted as high-spirited and courageous, as well as independent. There is no evidence that her conduct was insolent. - Cambridge Bible

But -

Genesis 16:9 - “And the angel of the LORD said to her, Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hands.”

See **Ecclesiastes 10:4** - “If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.”

The Angel of the Lord

Genesis 16:10 - “And the angel of the LORD said to her, I will multiply your seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.”

“I will” multiply thy seed - indicates that this Angel is God himself appearing to her, as in other places in the Old Testament.

Genesis 16:11 - “And the angel of the LORD said to her, Behold, you are with child and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Ishmael; because the LORD has heard your affliction.”

The Targum of Onkelos paraphrases, “for the Lord hath received thy prayer.”

Ishmael, the “wild-ass man”

The name “Ishmael” may mean either “God hears,” or “God will hear” or “may God hear.” From “Shema” as in “Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord.”

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 brothers.”

"A wild ass among men", as Targum Onkelos; or "like to a wild ass among men", as in the Targum of Jonathan. Aben Ezra translates the word rendered "wild", or "wild ass", by "free", and refers to the passage in Job 39:5.

Heb., he will be "a wild-ass man." The wild ass of the Arabian deserts is a very noble creature, and is one of the animals selected in the Book of Job as especially exemplifying the greatness of God (Job 39:5-8). Its characteristics are great speed, love of solitude, and an untamable fondness of liberty. It is thus the very type of the Bedouin Arabs, whose delight is to rove at will over the desert, and who despise the ease and luxury of a settled life. - Ellicott's Commentary

"He shall dwell in the presence of all his brothers" means "in direct opposition to," similar to the modern phrase "in your face!" - Ishmael will continue to be like he is, and isn't going away. The Bedouin life includes constant feuds and raiding.

A glimpse of death to self

Genesis 16:13 - "And she called the name of the LORD that spoke to her, You God see me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that sees me?"

Heb., "Thou art El Boi," that is, a God of seeing. Targum Onkelos paraphrases it, "Thou art a God that sees all things." But more probably, "Thou art a God that permits Himself to be seen." For so Hagar proceeds herself to explain the name, "Do not I still see after seeing?" - Am I still alive though I have seen God? In joy and thankfulness, she is surprised that she has survived the encounter.

Believers become a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1) - they have seen God, have died to themselves but still function in the world.

Exodus 33:20 - "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."

Galatians 2:20 - "I live, yet not I that liveth, but Christ who liveth in me."