GENESIS

Chapter 16

*Hagar and Ishmael*

**Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; 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 maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. 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 servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.” 6 “Your servant is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. 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, servant 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 so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.” 11 The angel of the Lord also said to her: “You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael,for the Lord has heard of your misery. 12He 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.**

**16:1** *no children.* See note on 11:30. (CSB)

*Egyptian.* Perhaps Hagar was acquired while Abram and Sarai were in Egypt (see 12:10–20). (CSB)

Sari may have acquired Hagar while she and Abram sojourned in Egypt. Ironically, the Isarelites later became slaves to Egyptians. (TLSB)

**16:2** *The Lord has kept me from having children.* Some time had passed since the revelation of 15:4 (see 16:3), and Sarai impatiently implied that God was not keeping his promise. (CSB)

*Go, sleep with my maidservant.* An ancient custom, illustrated in Old Assyrian marriage contracts, the Code of Hammurapi and the Nuzi tablets (see note on 15:3–4), to ensure the birth of a male heir. Sarai would herself solve the problem of her barrenness. (CSB)

BUILD A FAMILY THROUGH HER – Literally, “be built up by her.” The OT saints sometimes obtained children through means that Holy Scriptures describes but does not advocate. However, they were recognized legal practices of the day and shared many of the same benefits and complications realized in today’s fertility options (e.g., surrogacy). (TLSB)

**16:3** *ten years.* Abram was now 85 years old (see 12:4; 16:16). (CSB)

TO BE HIS WIFE – For conjugal relations, as would be normal between husband and wife. (TLSB)

**16:4** *despise her mistress.* Peninnah acted similarly toward Hannah (see 1Sa 1:6). (CSB)

Sari became slighted or demeaned in Hagar’s eyes. Hagar was guilty of judging by appearances, assuming that because Abram’s seed took root in her, while Sarai remained barren, it meant she, not Sarai, had God’s and Abram’s favor. Later, St. Paul would use Hagar and Sarai as types of the two religions known to man – those teaching justification by the Law and those teaching justification by the Gospel. (Gal. 4:22-23). (TLSB)

**16:5** YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WRONG – Although Sarai gave occasion for the contempt that Hagar showed her, Abram may have contributed to the problems, thus giving rise to Sarai’s complaint. (TLSB)

*May the Lord judge between you and me.* An expression of hostility or suspicion (see 31:53; see also 31:49). (CSB)

This is an assertion of innocence. (TLSB)

**16:6** DO WITH HER WHATEVER YOU THINK BEST – In prudence, Abram sided with his barren wife, over the pregnant maidservant. (TLSB)

SHE FLED – Hagar would not receive the discipline of her mistress. By fleeing she also took away the couple’s hope of an heir. (TLSB)

**16:7** *The angel of the Lord*. Since the angel of the Lord speaks for God in the first person (v. 10) and Hagar is said to name “the Lord who spoke to her: ‘You are the God who sees me’ ” (v. 13), the angel of the Lord is a manifestation of God himself (see Ex 3:2, 4; Jdg 2:1–5; 6:11–24; 13:22; Zec 3:1–7; 12:8). Traditional Christian interpretation has held that this “angel” was a preincarnate manifestation of Christ as God’s Messenger-Servant. But whether this “angel” was the second person of the Trinity remains uncertain. (CSB)

*Shur.* Located east of Egypt (see 25:18; 1Sa 15:7). (CSB)

**16:8** *I’m running away from my mistress.* Not yet knowing exactly where she was going, Hagar answered only the first of the angel’s questions. (CSB)

**16:9** GO BACK…SUBMIT – Literally, “put yourself under her hands.” Sarai, in her harsh treatment of Hagar, was disciplining her servant, who had become arrogant on account of God’s gift. To this, Hagar should have submitted in the first place (cf Heb. 12:11). (TLSB)

**16:10** A promise reaffirmed in 17:20 and fulfilled in 25:13–16. (CSB)

God’s promise to Hagar was different from His promise to Abram. The children of the slave woman are separate from the children of the free woman (cf Gal. 4:21-31). On an earthly level, God promised to multiply a people from Hagar (Arabs), who even now contend with those born from Sarai (Israelites). (TLSB)

**16:11** *Ishmael.* See NIV text note and 17:20. (CSB)

**16:12** *wild donkey.* Away from human settlements, Ishmael would roam the desert like a wild donkey (see Job 24:5; Hos 8:9). (CSB)

Unbridled, wild in temperament and spirit, and given to war and bloodshed. This prophetically describes Ishmael (Cf 25:12-18). (TLSB)

*hostility.* The hostility between Sarai and Hagar (see vv. 4–6) was passed on to their descendants (see 25:18). (CSB)

Live in opposition to all. (TLSB)

**16:13** *I have now seen the One who sees me.* See NIV text note and cf. Ex 33:23. To see God’s face brought death (see 32:30; Ex 33:20). (CSB)

Hagar recognized in the Angel of the Lord a manifestation of the Lord Himself. Hagar confessed that God sees and takes care of her, or that she saw God and He had not destroyed her. Hebrew is difficult, comparable to Ex. 33:23, where God graciously promised to allow Moses to see His “back.” (TLSB)

**16:14** *Beer Lahai Roi.* See NIV text note. Another possible translation that fits the context equally well is: “well of the one who sees me and who lives.” (CSB)

*Kadesh.* See note on 14:7.

**Ch 16** Sarai seeks alternative means for fulfilling God’s promise. When God provides a son to Hagar, discord and strife arise because of jealousy and pride. How often our own households and marriages are torn asunder when we devise ways and means that God has not commanded! Consider how willing our Lord was to submit Himself to everything the Father willed, even when that meant suffering at the hands of evil men and dying in their place. He has seen your suffering, and has taken it upon Himself. By His dying and His rising, He makes sure the God who sees all is now graciously disposed toward you. • Dear Lord, though You see all, You promise now to see us only in Jesus. Tenderly work among us by Your means of grace, exercising Your fatherly care. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)