

Lesson 34
Failure to Trust the God of the Covenant

Genesis 16:1-16

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Abram has been in the land for ten years, and, being in the land is symbolic of being in temporal fellowship with the Lord. Abram has been assured of the Covenant (Gen. 15:8-21) and that God would give him a son from his own loins (Gen. 15:4). God Himself is responsible to work the Covenant out, and God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2).

B. It seems that with such assurance from Genesis 15 Abram would continue in the pathway of God's will without hesitation, mistake or trouble. But the true believer still has a sin nature and is prone to sin when not in fellowship with the Lord. Abram, because of lack of spiritual perception, falls into sin, which results in serious and far reaching consequences.

II. ATTITUDE AND SIN 16:1-3

A. 16:1. Sarai is barren (11:30). She conceives of an idea of how she might provide a child to satisfy Abram's yearning for a son. Abram was 85 years old and God had not fulfilled His promise of a son. This is a test to the faith of both Abram and Sarai. Would they depend on divine means or human means to see the Covenant fulfilled? NOTE. Sarai believes God's promise but she does not believe that God, in His own way, can fulfill that promise. She is committed to the will of God, but impatiently runs ahead of God to accomplish His will in His time and in His way.

B. 16:2a. Sarai's plan is that Abram take her maid, Hagar, and bears a child through her. This practice is very distasteful to the modern mind but it was an accepted practice in that day. Archeologists have discovered the Nuzi tablets which reveal a marriage contract. It says that if the bride does not bear a child for her husband, she may accomplish this through the maid she supplies. This maid would be from Lulluland where the best slaves, known as Lullians, could be found. Also the Hammurabi Code had something very similar:

When a seignior married a hierodule and she gave a female slave to her husband and she has then born children, if later that female slave has claimed equality with her mistress because she bore children, her mistress may not sell her; she may mark her with the slave-mark and count her among the slaves. (B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the O.T.*)

Assuming that Sarai was influenced by such custom, we have insight into Genesis 16. Hagar, after becoming pregnant and even after giving birth to Ishmael, is still to take her place as Sarai's handmaid. NOTE. Sarai was wrong for she compromised by resorting to a custom of the day. She thought of a human solution to a divine problem; she conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2).

C. 16:2b. Abram listened to his wife when he should have listened to the Lord. While a man should listen to his wife's advice, he must ultimately listen to God, for his wife is not always right. A wife can give wrong spiritual advice. Abram gives assent to this human solution to a divine problem, and the result is chaos. NOTE. Hagar was an Egyptian slave girl. Egypt is a type or picture of worldliness,

Abram had left Egypt but Egypt is portable. Through Hagar, he went back to Egypt without going back to Egypt.

D. 16:3. Sarai gave her maid Hagar to Abram to bear a child. Sarai's motive was good and she showed a spirit of self-sacrifice, but the proposal was wrong in itself, and the method of attaining the end was wrong. Abram would actually be committing adultery. The end does not justify the means, and this was a clear-cut failure in Abram and Sarai's ability to trust God. NOTE. Their sin began with a failure to believe God. All sin begins with an attitude of unbelief.

III. ACTION AND SIN 16:4-6

A. 16:4. Abram had a sexual relationship with Hagar and she became pregnant. Upon realizing that she had conceived and Sarai had not, she began to put herself above, or at least on an equality with Sarai. She despised Sarai. NOTE. Overt acts of sin are a result of a mental attitude that is not trusting God. Abram commits adultery (but allowed by custom) and Hagar forgets to be humble as a slave.

B. 16:5. When Sarai saw that Hagar was pregnant, she became insanely jealous, for her own pride had been deflated and she thought that she was no longer the favorite of Abram. She said to Abram, "My wrong be upon thee." She tries to justify her own position and blame the whole thing on Abram. She is also rebuking Abram for not setting the record straight with Hagar so she will have no grounds for her conceit.

C. 16:6. Abram did not deal personally with Hagar and the reason for this is that Hagar was Sarai's maid, not Abram's. Hagar was under the direct authority of Sarai. Abram told Sarai to do as she pleased with Hagar and bring whatever corrective discipline that was necessary. We read, "Sarai dealt hardly with her." Sarai, blinded by jealousy, despises Hagar and treats her "dirty." The result is that Hagar ran away. Perhaps she fled from the problem as a planned move. She planned to remove from her mistress not only her service but also her child. In this way, she reasoned, she might compel Abram to seek her and bring her back home with honor. NOTE. Sarai's mental attitude of unbelief brought a harsh treatment of Hagar, and this resulted in more animosity in the heart of Hagar towards Sarai. Sarai took her own sin out on Hagar, which proves that we cannot persecute others to drive out our own mistakes.

IV. GRACE AND SIN 16:7-14

A. 16:7. Hagar had fled to the wilderness, thinking that no one knew where she was, but God knew and He appeared to her in the form of the Angel of Jehovah, who is the pre-incarnate Christ. Christ is the only visible manifestation of the Trinity (Isa. 42:8). The Lord appears to Hagar who is in a hopeless condition and this is pure grace.

B. 16:8. God immediately faces Hagar with questions designed not for information, which He already has, but to lead her to rebound from her past with its sin and step into the future with hope. She then admits that she is fleeing from Sarai, which is a step in the right direction.

C. 16:9. The Lord then tells her to return to Sarai and to submit to her. This would take a great deal of courage but God would take care of her. NOTE. God tells Hagar to go back to the place where she got off the right track and face life trusting in Him rather than running from a difficult situation. Hagar was wrong in not submitting to Sarai.

D. 16:10. God now makes Hagar a promise that through her son there shall come multitudes of people. NOTE. Upon her submission, God gives Hagar a promise. God loves to comfort in time of distress, providing men are submitted to Him.

E. 16:11-12. Hagar was to name the child Ishmael, which means "God will hear." This, of course, is an assurance that God will carry out His promise to Hagar through Ishmael. But God is forthright to tell this mother-to-be in summary form what will be the characteristics of Ishmael and his descendants.

He will be a wild man, literally, “a wild ass of a man.” The sense is that he and his people through the centuries will roam freely and independently like the wild ass, never rooting themselves. This is an accurate, concise description of the Bedouin life of the Arab people ever since Ishmael. Also, it says, “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.” This speaks of the dwelling of Arabs around the land of Palestine and they shall be hostile to the Jews in that land.

F. 16:13-14. This confrontation with the Lord touched Hagar deeply. She gave the Lord a name, “Thou God sees me”; literally this says. “Thou art a God of seeing” or “the all-seeing God who misses no person even in the most lonely spot.” NOTE. She realized that one could not hide from God. So impressed was Hagar that she named the place “*Beerlahairoi*” or “The well of the Loving God who sees me.”

V. GRACE AND DISCIPLINE 16:15-16

A. 16:15. Abram named the child Ishmael (God will hear). NOTE: This was a real rebuke to Abram, for he had not believed that God would hear his prayer and bring a child from his loins in the womb of Sarai.

B. 16:16. Abram was 86 when Ishmael was born. Ishmael was a child of the flesh, not a child of God. Abram and Sarai certainly received discipline for their act of sin.

1. Abram’s Sin. (1) The birth of Isaac was postponed 14 years; (2) He lost control of his household; (3) He suffered a broken heart, for he loved Ishmael very much but ultimately lost his son; and (4) Arabs and Jews have been fighting ever since, and this explains the Arab-Israeli conflict.

2. Sarai’s Sin. (1) She despised Hagar; (2) She was filled with jealousy; (3) She blamed others for her sin; (4) She took her own sin out on others; and (5) She lost the character of grace in her life.