

Genesis 16 • Less Than Ideal Circumstances

Introduction

Jacob works for seven years for whom he thinks he'll receive as his wife only to be given her sister, and has to work another seven for the one he thought he was getting in the first place. Joseph does the "right thing" and refuses to commit adultery with his master's wife and because of her lies gets sent to prison. Daniel's enemies trick the king that favors Daniel into having to execute Daniel. There are many instances provided throughout Scripture that aren't "fair" by most of our standards, but God uses and works through them just the same. The promises of God for this life do not advertise that every obstacle will be removed, every unfair situation averted, nor that there will never be "rough waters"; only that we can trust Him to keep and protect us through everything and be used by Him in every circumstance, both as a personal and public witness of His power, glory and sovereignty. Our walk has to endure less than ideal circumstances in order that **HE** may be exalted.

¹Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. ²So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

[Read v.1-2]

Q: Knowing what we know about God's promises to Abram, what is wrong with Sarai's assertion about bearing children?

A: It would be more accurate if she'd stated, "**To this point**, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children." She's making it sound like it's never going to happen based on the fact it hasn't happened yet. In fact, that's most likely her belief, and therefore she's actually encouraging a form of unbelief to take root.

Q: Why might this statement sway Abram to go along?

A: Because it's couched in terminology that makes it sound like Sarai is seeking to fulfill God's will. It sounds like a request that might be in line with what they know to be the will of God for their lives, instead of transparent despair and lack of faith.

Q: So what is Abram's basic mistake?

A: He "*listened to the voice of Sarai*" instead of to the voice of the Lord.

Application: Have you every postulated to someone—or someone postulated to you—that God might be providing a way to fulfill His will in an unconventional or alternative method? What should we do to verify the truth of such a possibility? Do we ever believe God might be speaking through someone without asking God Himself if it is so?

³After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife.

⁴He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight.

⁵And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me."

⁶But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence.

[Read v.3-6]

Q: Is what Abram did "wrong", "illegal", or breaking the law in any way?

A: Actually it was not just "accepted" but legal at this time. This was still a time of concubines, multiple marriages and practices such as these that ensured the all-important security of passing one's lands and legacy to an heir. This is why there is no record in Scripture of either Abram or Sarai being reprimanded for doing this.

Q: Why would Hagar begin to despise Sarai just because she became pregnant?

A: At this time Abram had no direct heir, therefore Hagar had become the mother of Abram's only heir. This would have been quite a huge thing going from a servant to the potential mother of someone in line to inherit a very rich man's estate. In terms of human laws and customs at the time, Hagar would have become much more important and powerful than Sarai as time progressed and the child grew.

⁷Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸He said, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from and where are you going?”

And she said, “I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.”

⁹Then the angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority.” ¹⁰Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, “I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count.”

¹¹The angel of the LORD said to her further,

“Behold, you are with child,
And you will bear a son;
And you shall call his name Ishmael,
Because the LORD has given heed to
your affliction.

¹²He will be a wild donkey of a man,
His hand will be against everyone,
And everyone’s hand will be against
him;
And he will live to the east of all his
brothers.”

¹³Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, “You are a God who sees”; for she said, “Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?”

¹⁴Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

Q: Is Abram’s response “wrong”?

A: No, he is reinforcing the “chain of command”, so to speak, that Hagar is under Sarai’s direction. It may be a polite way of saying, “You got yourself into this, so you can get yourself out.”

[Read v.7-14]

Q: To where was Hagar most likely fleeing?

A: Since the wilderness of Shur is the northern Sinai wilderness between Israel and Egypt, and since Hagar was an Egyptian, it’s pretty clear that she was intent on returning to her home country of Egypt.

Q: But what is revealing about Hagar’s answer as to why she’s fleeing?

A: She isn’t so much intent on the destination as much as getting away from the source of her problem, “*the presence of my mistress Sarai*”.

Q: How does the angel of the Lord promise to remedy the problem with Sarai?

A: He doesn’t. He addresses the issue only as far as Hagar in concerned, telling her to “*submit yourself to her authority*”. The angel of the Lord confirms Abram’s initial assessment that Hagar is a subordinate to Sarai and subject to Sarai’s authority.

Q: Why wouldn’t the angel of the Lord MAKE Sarai treat Hagar better, even ultra-nicely?

A: Sarai is to be judged by God for her own decisions and how she handles the things entrusted to her by God, just as Hagar is to do the same. The issue is doing what **YOU’RE** responsible to do regardless of the circumstances or the choices of others. It’s Hagar’s faithfulness and behavior that’s in question, not Sarai’s; **that’s** between Sarai and God.

Application: Do we ever pray, “Lord, make my boss/husband/pastor treat me better” rather than, “Lord, help me submit to the authorities You’ve placed over me?” Do we ever consider that although we are mistreated that the entire situation is still under God’s control and that He is using it to address issues with the **OTHER** person?

Q: What is the similarity between the things Hagar names and the things God names?

A: “*Beer-lahai-roi*”, named by Hagar, means “the well of the living one who sees me”; “*Ishmael*”, named by God, means “God hears”. It’s an indication that Hagar has learned that regardless of the circumstances, God sees and hears and is therefore in control.

Application: Do we ever think that because of the difficulty of circumstances or a particular relationship, that God does not “see” or “hear” and therefore care to respond as we’d like? What is the viewpoint we need to arrive at in terms of God’s working when circumstances are hard or far from ideal? Does it mean that we’re on our own or that God is not responding?

¹⁵So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

[Read v.15-16]

Q: Do we know if Sarai treated Hagar any better upon her return?

A: No. We only know that Hagar returned and submitted to the situation.

Q: What will eventually happen to Hagar?

A: According to Genesis 21:10, after Sarah bears Isaac, she will force Hagar to be driven from Abraham's presence forever. God will personally respond and take care of them and fulfill His promises to Hagar.

Overall Application

- *Do we realize that not everyone speaking in spiritual terms may be interpreting correctly the signs and direction of God's will for our life? How do we ensure that we're making the right assumptions and acting according to **HIS** time table and will?*
- *Are we automatically entitled to leave any situation or sever any relationship that is abusive or unfair towards us? Do we take seriously our responsibility to act rightly regardless of the circumstances, that it might even be part of God holding the other party accountable to do the right thing—even if they never do?*
- *Hagar was not the recipient of persecution for her faith but as a result of a personal relationship. How well do we discern such differences for our own life?*
- *How well do we rise above situations to trust that God sees and hears everything, and therefore must be in control regardless of how it might appear? How would that help us endure, submit, and ultimately be successful?*