Genesis 16:1-16

(4/8/15)

As we come to Genesis 16 Abram has been in the land of Canaan for 10 years—Abram is now 85 years old and Sarai is 75.

The promise that God gave to Abram to give him a son is now 10 years old.

Between God's promises and the fulfillment of His promises there is waiting and trusting—the hardest time and the period Satan attacks the most.

And the way he attacks is to get us to doubt that God will keep His promise—or as we're going to see tonight—that God needs our help in fulfilling His promise.

Genesis 16:1 (NKJV)
1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no *children.* And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.

When we studied chapter 12 we saw how at one point a famine arose in the land of Canaan—Abram panicked, had a lapse of faith, and took his family, servants and livestock down to Egypt.

He eventually got right with God and returned to Canaan—but not before Sarai picked up a servant girl or handmaiden named Hagar.

Little did Abram and Sarai realize at the time how this young woman would impact their lives and their family—an impact the Jewish people are still dealing with today and have been for the last 4000 years.

Genesis 16:1-2 (NKJV)
[1] Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no *children.* And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. [2] **So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing *children.* Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.**

There are a few things we need to understand here—

First, while this seems incredibly immoral to us living in Western culture—it was perfectly acceptable in Eastern culture at that time.

Ancient tablets found in the region of Mesopotamia, where Abram and Sarai were originally from, state that if a wife is barren her handmaiden could become the husband's concubine and act as a surrogate to raise up children that would legally be the children of the barren wife and her husband.

And although this must have been extremely difficult and unnatural for the wife to give her handmaiden to her husband for him to bear children with her—it was an act of desperation demonstrating how tragic a wife considered her barrenness to be.

In fact so tragic and abhorrent was barrenness back then that many saw it as a judgment from God upon a woman.

This seems to be implied in Sarai's statement to Abram**—" the LORD has restrained me from bearing *children.***

The Hebrew word for **'restrained'** means *"to make barren or to close".*

So Sarai is telling Abram that the Lord had purposely made her barren by closing her womb.

And this is why she proposed this radical solution by giving Hagar to Abram to raise up a child through her—

You see Sarai knew that God had promised Abram that he would be the father of a great multitude—not necessarily Abram and her.

Over the last ten years Sarai came to believe that *she* was the problem with God's promise being fulfilled.

So in an effort to help God fulfill His own promise she allowed her husband to take her handmaid Hagar to raise up a child—which again culturally was a legitimate and legal solution to this problem.

Who knows maybe the old (unbiblical) proverb, *"God helps those who help themselves"* started with Sarai!

But make no mistake about it—just because something is legal doesn't mean it's right or that God approves.

This was totally a work of the flesh and not the leading of the Holy Spirit (God never calls her Abram's wife).

Genesis 16:2 (NKJV)
2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing *children.* Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." **And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.**

To make matters worse, Abram comes across as weak and passive in this situation.

Instead of acting like a spiritual leader and saying to Sarai, *"We're not going to do that. God made a promise to me (and you)—a promise He doesn't need our help to fulfill. Let's pray and worship Him and trust Him to fulfill His promise without any 'help' from us."*

Unfortunately Abram didn't do that—he listened to his wife and got himself into trouble—just like Adam listened to his wife and ate the forbidden fruit—

Genesis 3:17 (NKJV)
17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat *of* it All the days of your life.

Now before you men take from this that God is saying we should never listen to our wives if we want to stay out of trouble—

In Genesis 21:12 God tells Abraham to listen to the voice of his wife.

So sometimes we should listen to our wives and sometimes we shouldn't—you say *"but when should I and when shouldn't I?"*

Men you're on your own when it comes to that—just pray a lot!

Genesis 16:3-4 (NKJV)
3 Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan.
4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

So now it has become obvious that the problem of infertility was clearly on Sarai and not Abram.

This caused everything Sarai had feared about God closing her womb to be confirmed—that she had been cursed by Him.

And this led to Hagar despising Sarai **'in her eyes'.**

It probably wasn't that Hagar said anything to Sarai directly—it was the way she looked at her—her eyes said it all.

We've all been on the receiving end of dirty or condescending looks. (Explain)

Now this caused an interesting reaction from Sarai towards Abram—

Genesis 16:5 (NKJV)
5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong *be* upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me."

One the face of it, it seems that Sarai is unfairly blaming Abram for her own sin (of not trusting in God to fulfill His promise).

And it is true that this is often a common response when we act contrary to God's will and do what we think is best—when things blow up in our face we often want to blame God or others for the outcome.

We need to take responsibility for our actions and not scapegoat others.

Sarai should have confessed her sin to God and asked for forgiveness for carnally trying to help Him keep His promise to give them children.

Scottish novelist George MacDonald was right when he said, *"In whatever man does without God, he must fail miserably, or succeed more miserably."*

But there is a sense in which Sarai was right when she said to Abram, *"This is your fault…the Lord judge between you and me"* or in other words *"the Lord judge which one of us is guilty of the greatest wrongdoing in this matter".*

Abram was the spiritual leader of his home—it was his responsibility to make godly choices by which his family would be led in the right paths in obedience to what God had said.

One author put it this way—
"Logically Sarai was wrong to place all the blame on Abram. After all, it was her idea. But actually she was right. He was the patriarch. He was the head of the house. God had spoken to him, not to her. He should never have allowed the situation. Abram was truly responsible for the "wrong" (Hebrew, "violence") she was suffering."

Genesis 16:6 (NKJV)
6 So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid *is* in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.

Once again Abram demonstrates a lack of spiritual maturity not to mention compassion for Hagar—who is not completely innocent in this whole matter in that she failed to respect Sarai as her mistress.

But again Abram is the patriarch, the believer in God—and yet he isn't acting very spiritually mature at all.

In that he treats Hagar, the woman who is now carrying his son, as some kind of disposable commodity instead of like his concubine and a human being.

Now to put things in better perspective—in the Code of Hammurabi (Law 146), it states that if a concubine claims equality with her mistress because she bore children, her mistress may demote her to her former status.

And it could be that this was why Abram said to Sarai—**"Indeed your <u>maid</u>** (not my concubine) ***is*** **in your hand; do to her as you please."**

But I don't think this absolves Abram of wrongdoing—the world's standards are not the child of God's standards.

J. Vernon McGee said, after how beautiful and powerful Genesis 15 was—he wished chapter 16 wasn't even here.

And that's because Abram doesn't come across as a spiritual man but rather an insensitive, worldly man.

Genesis 16:6-7 (NKJV)
6 So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid *is* in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence. 7 **Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur.**

The word 'angel' means *messenger*—as in supernatural messenger from God.

This is the first time the phrase 'Angel of the Lord' appears in the Bible.

Sometimes it simply refers to an angel—and sometimes, like here, it is an O.T. preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ called a 'theophany'.

Here we know it's a theophany because Hagar calls this Angel 'God' and the Messenger doesn't correct her—so this is Jesus.

And notice that the "Angel of the Lord" (Jesus) found her—she didn't find Him.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd that goes out looking for lost sheep—He finds us we don't find Him—He isn't lost we are (or were if we've received Him as Lord and Savior).

But notice the picture the Holy Spirit is painting for us here.

A broken, unloved Egyptian slave girl—a nobody, on the run from an abusive situation sitting by a well in the wilderness on her way to Shur.

Shur is the name of the desert in northwestern Sinai, next to Egypt.

Hagar was going home to her people, the descendants of Ham, bearing her half-Shemite baby.

And she was almost there—and there the Lord Jesus Christ meets her.

Genesis 16:8 (NKJV)
8 And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?"…

I don't believe the Lord is simply asking Hagar some basic information—He knew where she had come from and that she was headed back to Egypt.

This was one of those probing questions the Lord will ask us when our lives are on the wrong road—*"Where have you come from—<u>and where do you want to end up</u>?"*

The Lord is saying to her, *"You came from Egypt (the world) do you really want to go back there? Is that where you want your journey in life to end—right back where you started?"*

Israel, after God delivered them from Egypt, wanted to go back. (Explain)

I think there are a lot of Christians the Lord is saying this to also…(elaborate)

Genesis 16:8 (NKJV)
8 And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, **"I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."**

Running away from our problems is never the answer—God wants us to go back and deal with the problem which may require us to humble ourselves—as Hagar would have to do.

Genesis 16:9-11 (NKJV)
9 The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." 10 Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." 11 And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you *are* with child, And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has heard your affliction.

Ishmael means "God hears".

Genesis 16:12 (NKJV)
12 He shall be a wild man; His hand *shall be* against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

"He (Ishmael) shall be a wild man"—the Hebrew is *"a wild donkey of the man".* (Explain)

This identifies Ishmael as one who would live in the wilderness and whose **"hand shall be against every man"**

Ishmael is the founder of the Arab peoples—and we can see to this day the conflict that the descendants of Ishmael have brought and continue to bring into the world.

"And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren"

The NIV translates this— *"and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."*

While it isn't fair to apply these traits to every descendant of Ishmael—the centuries long conflicts between the Jews and Arabs is a reality that can't be ignored.

One commentator made this observation—
"Little did Abram and Sarai imagine that their shortcut would originate a conflict that would run for millennia and that oceans of blood would be spilt. Abram, the father of the faithful, had begotten a wild man instead of a child of grace. How tragic was Abram's expediency."

O, the problems we get ourselves into when we try to 'help' God out.

Genesis 16:13 (NIV)
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."

This just blew Hagar's mind that God saw her, knew her, and took the time to reveal Himself to her.

She's amazed that God saw her predicament and cared about her—and that's what she's really saying—not that God just sees her—but sees her in the sense of caring about.

She's blown away that God cared about a broken, abused, unloved slave girl.

And where did the Lord reveal Himself to her—

Genesis 16:7 (NKJV)
7 Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness…

Genesis 16:14 (NKJV)
14 Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, *it is* between Kadesh and Bered.

This story reminds us of another unloved and rejected woman that Jesus met by a well in John 4 (Explain)

God loves the unloved and His ears are always attentive to their cries.

In the midst of the wilderness of life we find ourselves in—there is a spring, a well we can drink from to revive our weary souls—it is Jesus our "Beer Lahai Roi" ('well of the One who lives and sees me').

God sees abused women and unborn children—He sees and cares.

The Lord looks for those who are broken, abandoned and unloved—and He will come to them and reveal Himself to them to redirect their lives onto the right path—the path of obedience and surrender.

In this world when something is broken—it isn't worth anything—but in God's Kingdom when someone is broken—that's when their life has value in His eyes. (Explain)

The Lord knows who you are and what you're going through—and is offering you a destination (as He redirected Hagar away from Egypt)—but you need to answer the question *"where do you want to end up?"*

I believe Hagar is now a believer in the God of Abram—I believe we will see her in heaven someday.

Genesis 16:15-16 (NKJV)
15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.
16 Abram *was* eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

So apparently Hagar went back, apologized to Sarai and told Abram and Sarai that God appeared to her, told her she was going to have a son and what He wanted him named.

Abram believed her and did as God had said naming the child Ishmael.

The chapter ends by telling us that Abram was now 86—it would be another 13 years for God to fulfill His promise to both Abram and Sarai—

Once again between God's promise and the fulfillment of that promise—there is patience and trust so hang in there.