

THE BIRTH OF ISHMAEL

TEXT: GENESIS 16:1-16

INTRODUCTION:

1. We have seen in Abraham's life, steps both forward and backward.
2. In Genesis 12, Abraham stepped out by faith and left Ur of the Chaldees. Hebrews 11:8 says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."
3. Then, later in chapter 12 we see a setback. Abraham was tested and failed. God sent a famine, and went down into Egypt. Furthermore, in his backslidden condition he lied to Pharaoh and told him his wife Sarah was his sister.
4. But in Genesis 13, Abraham returned to the promised land, "unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD" (13:4).
5. And in chapter 14, Abraham bravely rescued his nephew Lot, who had been taken away captive during the battle in the vale of Siddim. After the rescue, Abraham was met by Melchizedek, king of Salem.
6. In chapter 15, the LORD confirmed His covenant with Abraham, and told him his seed would be as innumerable as the stars up in heaven.
7. After all these wonderful experiences and promises, you would think that Abraham would have stayed faithfully in the center of God's will, but unfortunately that's not what happened.
8. There are three key individuals in this chapter: Abraham, his wife Sarah, and her handmaid Hagar.
9. More than likely, Abraham and Sarah brought Hagar with them when they came out of Egypt (12:20; 13:1, 2).
10. My outline is simple:
 - Sarah tempted (16:2a)*
 - Abraham hearkened (16:2b)*
 - Hagar fled (16:6)*
11. There are serious consequences to sin. Abraham and Sarah made some costly mistakes. The blunder recorded here in Genesis 16 caused a lot of grief for them, and has caused much grief for their descendants. And for the whole world.
12. Throughout history, and up to this day, the children of Ishmael hate the children of Israel (cf. Genesis 16:11, 12; Psalm 83:1-8).

I. SARAH TEMPTED

1. Sarah's temptation has been described as a "specious temptation," because while it seemed plausible, it was deceptive. It was based on unbelief, and not faith.
2. Sarah blamed God, "Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing" (16:2). But God had already promised Abraham that his seed would be as innumerable as the stars up in heaven (15:5).
3. Back in Genesis 13:16, the LORD said to Abraham, "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered."
4. But Sarah got tired of waiting on the LORD. Psalm 37:7 says, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him," but Sarah got tired of waiting.
5. There is a story about a man going to visit a friend and finding his friend restlessly pacing up and down the floor. The man asked, "What's the trouble?" The friend answered, "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry but God isn't."
6. People get into trouble when they grow impatient. Saul grew impatient waiting for Samuel in Gilgal, so he went ahead and offered a burnt offering.
7. But the Bible says, "And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came" (I Sam. 13:10).
8. Samuel rebuked Saul and told him, "Thou hast done foolishly," and told him that his kingdom would not continue, and that God would give it to David.
9. God is never in a hurry, and God is always on time.
10. But apparently Sarah didn't understand that and so she came up with a worldly scheme (16:1-3).
11. Genesis 16:3 says Sarah gave Hagar to her husband Abraham "to be his wife," but this doesn't mean Abraham and Hagar were formally married. God never recognized Hagar as Abraham's wife.
12. The phrase, "gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife" means Hagar became Abraham's concubine. The Hebrew word translated "wife" simply means "woman" (cf. Genesis 6:2).
13. The Hebrew word is often translated "woman." For example, Genesis 20:3 says, "Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman (same Hebrew word used in Genesis 16:3) which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife" (different word; can only mean "wife").
14. In Genesis 16:9, the angel of the LORD said to Hagar, "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." The angel did not say, "Return to your husband, and submit yourself under his hands."

15. Cf. Genesis 16:6 -- "Behold, thy maid is in thine hand..."
16. Furthermore, in Genesis 21:10, Sarah refers to Hagar as "this bondwoman" (female slave, handmaid, concubine). And in Genesis 21:13, the Lord refers to Hagar as a "bondwoman."
17. And in Galatians 4, the apostle Paul refers to her as a bondwoman.
18. Concubines are mentioned often in Scripture. But just because something is recorded in Scripture doesn't mean God approves of it.
19. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. Therefore it is historically accurate. But we need to remember that there are many things recorded in the Bible that God does not approve of that are -- fornication, adultery, polygamy, homosexuality, incest, etc.
20. I read an article online about this drunken man in Brooklyn who is accused of committing incest with his daughter in a playground. Under the article were many comments from readers. One foolish reader said, "There is incest in the Bible."
21. Yes there is incest in the Bible (e.g. Lot and his daughters) but God never approves of it. And just like the children of Ishmael have caused trouble all over the world, so have the children of Lot (cf. Psalm 83:8).
22. Sarah's worldly scheme seemed to work -- Hagar conceived (16:4). But just because she conceived doesn't mean God was in it.
23. Oftentimes men make worldly plans and they disobey God, and for a while it appears that their plans are successful.
24. For example, Jonah disobeyed God. God told him to go to Nineveh, but Jonah "went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish" (Jonah 1:3).
25. Jonah paid the fare, and he got on board the ship, and he must have thought everything was fine.
26. "But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken" (Jonah 1:4).
27. A man can never be successful when he disobeys God.
28. We often read in the newspapers unusual stories about surrogate mothers, that is, the practice by which a woman (the surrogate mother) becomes pregnant and then gives birth to a baby in order to give it to someone who cannot have children herself. Oftentimes these stories get into the newspapers because of litigation.
29. Here is the first record of a surrogate mother in the Bible, and it did not work out well for the surrogate mother, or the father, or the child.
30. Or for Sarah (16:4).

31. Bible scholars tell us that this was an ancient custom. That is, if a wife could not conceive, the husband would have children with one of her maids (cf. Genesis 30:1-13). So Sarah's idea wasn't original.

II. ABRAHAM HEARKENED (16:1, 2)

1. Here in Genesis 16:2, we see yet another testing of Abram. Time and time again, Abraham was tried and tested -- he had to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees; then when he arrived in the promised land there was a famine; then he had trouble in Egypt; then there was strife between his herdmen and Lot's herdmen, leading to Abraham separating from Lot.
2. Then later on Lot was taken captive; then Abraham went and rescued Lot; then there was his meeting with the king of Sodom, etc.
3. Some of these tests he passed with flying colors. But here in Genesis 16, Abraham failed when he "hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (16:2b).
4. Abraham got tired of waiting on God. Psalm 37:4 and 5 says, "Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."
5. The Bible says, "He shall bring it to pass," but sometimes it is hard waiting for God to "bring it to pass."
6. In Genesis 15:2 and 3, Abraham said, "LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?... Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir."
7. The LORD assured Abraham that he indeed would have a son, and the son would come forth out of his own bowels (15:4).
8. But now three more years had passed, and Abraham was growing impatient.
9. A lack of patience tends to foster unbelief. In chapter 15 Abraham believed the LORD (15:6), but here in chapter 16 Abraham hearkened unto the voice of his wife Sarah (16:1, 2).
10. In chapter 15 Abraham walked after the Spirit; but here in chapter 16 Abraham walked after the energy of the flesh.
11. Hebrews 10:36 says, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."
12. Abraham needed patience to do the will of God and "receive the promise" (a son by his wife, not by her Egyptian handmaid).
13. We hear people say, "God helps those who help themselves," but it is not Biblical. It is the voice of human reasoning. Abraham and Sarah were trying to help God along, but God does not need our help.
14. We hear, "The end justifies the means" but that too is not Biblical. It is also the voice of human reasoning.

15. The Bible says, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

III. HAGAR FLED (16:1-6)

1. The contempt of Hagar was wrong, but it was not surprising (16:4). In fact, this is one of the main problems with polygamy.
2. Polygamy is wrong because the Bible teaches monogamy. God created Adam and Eve -- one man and one woman.
3. According to Genesis 4, Lamech was the first polygamist. Genesis 4:23 says he was also a murderer.
4. Polygamy always leads to strife (cf. I Samuel 1:1-7). It caused terrible problems for King David, and then for King Solomon.
5. People with a shallow understanding of the Bible say that the Bible condones polygamy, but that is not true. The Mormon cult was built on polygamy. Joseph Smith, their founder, had at least forty wives.
6. I read an interesting article. A Mormon missionary asked a man to read the book of Mormon. The man agreed on one condition -- that the Mormon read Zane Grey's book, *Riders of the Purple Sage*.
7. The Mormon agreed. He read Grey's book, and he left Mormonism.
8. I hope he got saved!
9. The contempt of Hagar was unjustifiable, but it was the natural consequence of Sarah's own foolish suggestion (16:1-4).
10. In giving her maid Hagar to her husband as a concubine, she set things up for bitterness and strife.
11. Once Abraham "hearkened to the voice of Sarah," all of this bitterness and strife was inevitable. Life is full of trials and troubles. We need to be very careful before we make unwise decisions that have disastrous consequences.
12. Unwilling to admit that she herself started the trouble, Sarah tried to shift the blame to her husband Abraham, who then instructed her to deal with Hagar as it pleased her (16:5, 6).
13. By refusing to accept his responsibility, Abraham surrendered his position as the head of the household (16:6).
14. Abraham should have been more thoughtful and compassionate. It wasn't Hagar who started the trouble. As a servant to Abraham and Sarah, Hagar could be viewed as an innocent victim. As a servant, she was forced to obey Sarah and Abraham.
15. When Sarah dealt harshly with her, Hagar fled from her face (16:6).

16. We cannot solve our problems by running from them. After she ran away, the angel of the LORD found Hagar by a fountain of water in the wilderness (16:7).
17. This is the first reference in Scripture to the angel of the LORD, and here He appears to an Egyptian bondwoman.
18. Genesis 16 begins with sin and shame, but now we see a beautiful picture of God's grace (16:7).
19. Notice the angel of the LORD found Hagar "by a fountain of water in the wilderness" (16:7). A picture of God's grace.
Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea
Higher than the mountain
Sparkling like a fountain
All sufficient grace for even me
Broader than the scope of my transgressions
Greater far than all my sin and shame
O magnify the precious name of Jesus
Praise His name!
20. W.H. Griffith Thomas said that here in Genesis 16, "Man is seen blundering, sinning, and suffering, and then God intervenes with His overruling providence, wisdom, and grace" (*Genesis*).
21. God is seen here graciously intervening in order to bring about the best possible results after the error and sin of Abraham and Sarah. How often does God do this when Christians get into sin!
Broader than the scope of my transgressions
Greater far than all my sin and shame
O magnify the precious name of Jesus
Praise His name!
22. "The angel of the LORD" is the pre-incarnate Christ in angelic form (16:7-13). Only God can multiply seed (16:10).
23. These Old Testament appearances are often called "Christophanies," visible appearances of God in the Old Testament (cf. 16:13 -- "the LORD that spake unto her").
24. Hagar was on the way to Shur, probably fleeing to Egypt, her native land (16:7). It was a long, dangerous trip but she was desperate.
25. The angel of the LORD interrogated her, and then told her to return to her mistress Sarah, and to submit herself under her hands (16:9).
26. Then the angel of the LORD said to Hagar, "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly..." (16:10; cf. 17:20).

27. Then the angel of the LORD said to Hagar, "Behold, thou art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction" (16:11).
28. *Ishmael* means, "God has heard."
29. God's promise has been fulfilled. Ishmael is the father of the Arab nations. The descendants of Ishmael are referred to as "Ishmaelites" in Genesis 37:27, 28; 39:1; Judges 8:24; and Psalm 83:6. The descendants of Abraham and Hagar are all over the Middle East, as well as all over the world.
30. Up until modern times, Arabs were referred to as "Ishmaelites."
31. The angel of the LORD said to Hagar, "And he will be a wild man" (16:12). The Hebrew word translated "wild" is literally "wild ass."
32. In other words, "he will be a wild ass of a man."
33. This Hebrew word is found ten times in the Old Testament. The other nine times it is translated "wild ass."
34. Job said, "Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass?" (Job 6:5).
35. After the birth of Ishmael, Abraham had to wait another fourteen years before Isaac was born (16:16; cf. 21:5).

CONCLUSION:

1. Sin has consequences. The sin of Abraham and Sarah dominates the world today, four thousand years after the birth of Ishmael.
2. John Phillips said, "From Ishmael the Arab tribes have sprung to fulfill the role of destiny upon the stage of time so accurately predicted of them here. They remain in the background of the Bible, joining hands with Israel's foes. They found for themselves a prophet and hurled themselves like wild men against the ramparts of the world...spreading their creed with the sword...Today they sit astride the oil reserves of the world and threaten the peace of the world. Their rage against Israel keeps the world in turmoil, even on the brink of global war" (*Exploring Genesis*).
3. John Phillips wrote those words in 1980 -- twenty-one years before September 11, 2001.
4. Since then, Muslim fanatics have increased their terrorizing, raping, killing, bombing, and beheading. Innocent people are being slaughtered all over the Middle East, Africa and Europe.
5. And it is getting worse here in America.
6. In the recent San Bernardino attack, a Muslim couple, one of whom posted an "oath of allegiance" to ISIS on Facebook, shot and killed 14 people and injured 21 others.
7. These are perilous times. But as our guest preacher said last Sunday evening, it is an exciting time to get the Gospel out!

8. These are perilous times. Make sure you are right with God!