

Sent: Wednesday, November 28, 2018 11:37 AM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Genesis 16

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding! In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path!" (Proverbs 3:5-6)

In last week's lesson on Genesis 15, "the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision" promising (again!) that he would have an "heir"--and, through that heir, "descendants as many as the stars of the heavens"! But the Lord made it clear that the heir would not be Eliezer, Abram's trusted servant--as Abram had come to surmise! The heir would actually "come forth from Abram's own body"! And Genesis 15:6 says that Abram "believed in the Lord" and it was "reckoned to him as righteousness"!

But, in Genesis 16, we see Abram getting "back to reality" and human reasoning and "just plain common sense"! He's been married to Sarai for about 60 years, ten years since they left Haran and first entered the land of Canaan, and still no heir (and no land!). And he, and Sarai for sure, are certainly beyond their child-bearing years! So what are they going to do? Can they continue to "simply wait on the Lord" and trust Him for the promise?

Then Sarai comes up with a plan--"since the Lord had prevented her from bearing children" (she complains)! Why not have a child through Hagar, her maid, whom she (Sarai) could then call her own? After all, it was "acceptable" in that culture to do it that way! Childless wives were marked as "ignominious failures" (so says Dr. Constable) and, if they could afford it, sometimes resorted to "surrogate motherhood"!

So Sarai took the initiative in suggesting this as the way to go to Abram! And verse 2 says (without further comment) that "Abram listened to the voice of Sarai"! (We can't help but see the parallel here to the Garden of Eve story in Genesis 3! Bill Arnold calls it "an instant replay of the original sin"!) Nothing new under the sun!

So what was Abram thinking? This "man of faith"! The text never really tells us! But, humanly thinking, we can conjecture! The fact that this practice was acceptable in that culture may help explain his willingness to buy into the scheme! On the other hand, he may have honestly thought (and this really giving him the benefit of the doubt!) that maybe it was part of God's plan! After all, God had said specifically (in Gen. 15:4) that the heir would "come forth from his own body"--but not necessarily from Sarai's! So maybe this was what God intended, he might have rationalized! (But don't think God bought it!)

And so, you know the rest of the story! "Sarai took Hagar, the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife...and he went into her and she conceived!" (vv.3-4) Then the sparks began to fly! For some reason (not clear to the mind of a man), after conceiving, "her mistress (Sarai) was despised in her sight"! And one thing led to another, with Sarai treating Hagar so "harshly"--with Abram's permission and passiveness--that Hagar finally "fled from her presence"! Apparently intending to return to Egypt where she had been acquired by Abram and Sarai on their sojourn there!

What else do we know, and learn, about this woman, Hagar? According to the Rabbinic Judaism, and the Midrash (the "classical collection of the Sages' homiletic teachings on the Torah"), she was actually the daughter of King Pharaoh of Egypt! According to this writing, "when she saw the miracle that God performed for the sake of Sarai, to save her from the hands of the Egyptian king during Abram's time down there, she apparently concluded that it's better to be a slave in Sarai's house than a princess in my own"!

And something even more astounding, again according to the same Midrash (and this is getting ahead of our story), Hagar maintained a faithful bond to Abram, even though driven away by Sarai, and later, upon Sarai's death, was reunited with Abraham and became his second wife, now named Keturah (meaning "tied to" Abraham), and they had six more sons, as recorded in Genesis 25:1-6! (And that's another story!)

But back to our text, in Genesis 16:7-14! Hagar is alone in the "wilderness by a spring on the way to Shur" (east of Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula) where--amazingly--she is "found by the angel of the Lord" who, after greeting her, instructs her to "return to her mistress and submit to her authority"!

But "the angel of the Lord"--who very well might actually have been the "pre-incarnate Christ" (as a "theophany")--has much more to say to Hagar! And it's worth citing in full:

"I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count....Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael (which means "God hears"!), because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. He 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"! Wow! These words could only have been uttered by God! (Dr. Constable notes that the "wild donkey" figure of speech depicts very accurately the freedom-loving Bedouin--sect of Arabs--moving across vast areas of the desert, even to this day!)

Then! Hagar "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 from seeing Him (God!)? Therefore the well was called Beerlahai-roi (meaning "the well of the living God who sees")...!" (Hagar may well have been divinely prepared for her confrontation with God through her life in Abraham's household!)

And, though not specifically stated here, Hagar returned to Abram and Sarai--and all is "well"! Or is it?

So many things could be said here! God (perhaps through a theophany) appearing to Hagar, the Egyptian, the bondswoman of Galatians 4! And Hagar actually "hearing" and "seeing" God? And given promises and blessings! And a future! Interesting too that the birth of Ishmael is "announced"--like the birth of Christ by an angel in Matthew 1:20-23! And that the two names--Ishmael (God hears!) and Beerlahai-roi (God sees!)--reveal a major revelation about God! He hears and sees! And that Hagar actually recognizes and calls God a "God who sees"! And apparently "believes" the God of Abraham--and responds, in obedience, by returning to the household of Abram and Sarai! Wow! All of which gives me, for one, a whole different outlook on Hagar than I ever had before!

What more can we say?

Our text concludes with: "So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael!" (which must have resulted from conversation with Hagar)! Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him!"

But is this the "son of promise"? And what will become of Ishmael? Much more on this and related subjects as we pursue Lesson #12 on Genesis 17--and beyond!

So what lessons can we take with us from the amazing story of Genesis 16?

What happens when we fail to fully trust God and "lean on our own understanding? Dr. Constable writes that "resorting to fleshly means, rather than waiting for God to provide what He has promised, always creates problems"! (Ever experienced that?) But this lesson also shows that human failure, ultimately, does not frustrate God's plans! He's sovereign! He's never caught by surprise!

We were reminded too that we have a God who hears and sees! Even in times of our deepest trials and desperation! We can "cry" out to Him, like Hagar! He wants to "direct our path"!

So, go with the God of Abraham for the next couple of weeks, until we meet again--and "trust in the Lord with all your heart"!

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