

Genesis 16:1-16 and 17:1-3

In Chapter 15, God made a covenant, giving Israel the title deeds to Canaan.

Following God's instructions, Abram sacrificed five animals in preparation for this most important event.

Genesis 15:9-10 **"And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.**

¹⁰ **And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not."**

As Abram made these preparations, I'm sure he knew what God had in mind, for in his day, this general procedure was commonly used to bind a contract.

According to custom, the two parties involved in the covenant would walk between the pieces to legally seal the agreement.

However, in the case before us, only the Godhead was involved. Abram was just an observer.

Genesis 15:17 **"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces."**

Some commentators believe that the **"smoking furnace"** and the **"burning lamp"**

picture the Heavenly Father and the
Light of the world, Jesus Christ.

So this covenant did not depend upon
Israel's ability to hold up their end
of the bargain.

It was signed, sealed, and delivered by God
Himself.

And the very day the "**smoking furnace, and
a burning lamp**" -- "**passed between
those pieces,**" the deed to the
Promised Land belonged to Israel.

Yes, Israel immediately became the legal
owners of Canaan, even though they
were as yet unborn.

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This is a reminder to us of the permanency
of the covenant of grace that was
purchased by Christ's own blood.

It, too, is a covenant sealed in heaven,
and one that assures a heavenly
Canaan to the Church of Jesus Christ.
It is a covenant sealed before the creation
of the earth, one that was finalized
before the Church even existed.

Ephesians 1:4-6 **"According as he hath
chosen us in him before the
foundation of the world, that we
should be holy and without blame
before him in love:**

⁵ **Having predestinated us unto the
adoption of children by Jesus Christ
to himself, according to the good
pleasure of his will,**

⁶ **To the praise of the glory of his
grace, wherein he hath made us
accepted in the beloved."**

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As we enter Chapter 16, we find that some years have passed since that wonderful day that God made His covenant before Abram.

And over the process of time, Abram's faith, and particularly Sarai's faith, had weakened.

They had grown impatient in their long wait for a promised son.

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However, God had not forgotten His promise, nor was He being neglectful.

No, God was simply waiting until it would be completely impossible for Abram and Sarai to have a child by natural means.

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During all those years that Abram had been promised a son, there had always been

one very obvious difficulty--"**Sarai was barren.**"

This had nothing to do with her age. Sarai had been barren all their married life.

It was a problem that they had lived with ever since their days in Ur of the Chaldees.

However, as the years went by, another obvious problem was looming on the horizon.

Abram was getting older, and very soon he would also be unable to have children.

Looking at this dismal situation, Sarai became increasingly impatient with God's seeming delay.

But, in actual fact, there was no delay. God's plan was right on schedule.

He simply would not move until the possibility of having a son by natural means was totally impossible. Yes, the promised son must be the result of a perfectly *miraculous* birth. This birth must demonstrate God's omnipotence beyond any shadow of doubt.

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But there was another important reason for this long delay.

Isaac had to be a miracle baby because he was to be a type of Jesus Christ who would be miraculously born of a virgin.

And in later years, when Isaac would lay upon the altar and Abram would offer up his only begotten son, Isaac must be a true type of God's Son.

So God's plans were developing right on schedule, and in the process, Abram and Sarai were being given the opportunity to exercise their faith in God's word.

Everything was going just fine. Everything was going according to plan.

But time, that great enemy of man, had weakened the old couple's resolve.

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It was Sarai who first became impatient with God's dealings.

It was obvious to her that something must be *done*.

Yes, for all of us, it is hard to wait, and so easy to rationalize.

We tend to put deadlines upon God's plans, and when those supposed deadlines have passed, we begin to rationalize.

Surely by this time something must be done.
Obviously it is up to us to do "our part"
before God will do His.

Yes, we sometimes give in to the popular
idea that "God helps those who help
themselves," and when that happens,
we devise all kinds of plans to "get
the job done."

And this type of blundering assistance
always does more harm than good.

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But it was obvious that something must be
done. After all, Abram was 85 years
old.

Yes, Sarai simply had to help God's plan
along before it was too late.

Genesis 16:1-2 **"Now Sarai Abram's wife
bare him no children: and she had an
handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was**

Hagar.

² **And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai."**

Sarai introduces the subject to Abram with the words, "**Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing.**"

She knew as well as Abram did that God had promised them a son.

So in light of that fact, her words definitely implied that the LORD had failed them.

And quickly, upon this lack of faith in God, there was the transfer of her faith to a new more understandable source.

The Egyptian maid was healthy. She could bring about the promise that God seemed to have neglected.

As shocking as this plan seemed, it was no worse than her husband's lack of faith some years earlier.

In the face of famine, Abram had relied upon the land of Egypt rather than the Almighty to meet his need.

Now it was Sarai's turn, and once again, Egypt seemed to be the answer to their dilemma.

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I am sure Sarai's suggestion was not an original idea.

It was probably a common practice among their heathen neighbours to use their servants as surrogate mothers.

But Abram and Sarai were not like the
heathen around them. They were
believers in the one true God.
So this practice on their part was the
essence of unbelief.

No, believers cannot just adopt the
practices of the society around them.
We march to the beat of a different drum.
However, when faith begins to waver, Satan
quickly appears with a reasonable
substitute.

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In this case, we can hardly blame Sarai any
more than her husband.

No doubt her faith weakened first because,
as a woman, she felt most keenly the
shame of her barrenness.

Yes, each of us has our own particular
point of weakness.

And also one cannot help but wonder where this Egyptian maid had to come from in the first place.

Was she not conveniently available at this particular time because of an earlier failure in Abram's faith?

Yes, she was probably part of the treasure that Pharaoh loaded upon Abram during his ill-fated journey into Egypt.

Genesis 12:16 **"And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.**

How our sins come back to haunt us!

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V 2-3 **"And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my**

maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

³ And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife."

Abram listened to his wife, as long ago Adam had hearkened to his.

Both men had personally received their instructions from God, and both had hearkened to the words of their wives instead.

Yes, Abram had grown as impatient as his wife.

None of us do very well when it comes to waiting upon the Lord.

It is a hard lesson to learn, but patient perseverance always brings God's blessings.

Hebrews 10:35-36 **"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.**

³⁶ **For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."**

Yes, faith, coupled with patience, is the mark of a mature believer.

It is the attitude of mind that shows the greatest respect for God's character.

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But Sarai and Abram couldn't wait.

So they decided to rely upon nature rather than God.

They trusted in youth rather than the giver of life, and the results were disastrous.

V 4 **"And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes."**

Sarai had given her maid to Abram **"to be his wife."**

V 3 makes that very clear.

No doubt in Sarai's and Abram's eyes, she was not an *equal* wife, but more of a concubine.

But Hagar didn't seem to see it that way. To her, Abram now had *two* wives; one that could give him children, and one that couldn't.

She was the wife of Abram now, and so **"her mistress was despised in her eyes."**

Yes, this clever solution to the problem seemed to have backfired.

Now, because of Sarai's compromise of faith, she was despised by her own servant, much as Abram's compromise of faith had made him a despised man in Egypt.

But Sarai wasn't in the mood to admit the mistake.

At least she wasn't in the mood to admit that it was *her* mistake.

V 5 **"And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee."**

"My wrong be upon thee"-- *It's all your fault, Abram!*

And Saria even put a self-righteous spin on it--"**the LORD judge between me and thee.**"

Abram was smart enough not to argue the point.

His wife was upset, and she wanted him to *do* something about it *right now*.

Well, he did something, all right, but he didn't do the right thing.

V 6 **"But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thine hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face."**

So the end of the story was this.

No one took the blame for their own sin.

No one confessed their wrongdoing to God and sought forgiveness. They simply passed the buck.

Sarai blamed Abram. Abram blamed the maid.
And the maid, who had no one else to
blame, simply "**fled.**"

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Let's think for a few minutes about Hagar.
We tend to think of her as the victim of
this misguided plan, and certainly
she was.

But, actually, she could have been quite
pleased to be Abram's wife, even
though she was his second wife.

After all, coming from the status of a mere
maid to the wife of the master would
be quite a promotion.

And certainly her change of attitude toward
Sarai showed that she definitely
considered herself to be the superior
wife.

But Hagar's plans for promotion had gone very wrong.

To her surprise, Abram backed up his first wife Sarai, and Hagar got the short end of the stick.

So she fled, not just because of her ill treatment, but also because her plans for superiority had collapsed.

During her years of service in Abram's house, her masters would have had the opportunity to tell her about the true and living God, but it seems they simply *used her* for their own convenience.

So now, with her plans of grandeur gone, she was fleeing from Abram and from Abram's God.

With a tear stained face, she fled, and she traveled fast.

She had crossed Sinai and had arrived at
the wilderness of Shur on the borders
of Egypt.

No doubt she was going home, back to Egypt,
back to her pagan people, and back to
her pagan gods.

She had been so close to the knowledge of
the one true God, but now she was on
the border of eternal darkness once
again.

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But God is not only concerned with
patriarchs.

Lowly maids, and even maids that are
fleeing their duty, are beloved in
His eyes.

So, although Abram and Sarai had so sorely
misrepresented Him, He would step in

to reveal His true nature before it would be eternally too late.

V 7-9 **"And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.**

⁸ And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.

⁹ And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands."

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This is the first occurrence in Scripture of the words **"the angel of the LORD."** So probably this angel actually was the pre-incarnate Christ.

It is touching to realize that Jesus had found it necessary to go to the **"wilderness of Shur,"** as He would also find it necessary to **"go through Samaria"** where there was another poor woman on the brink of disaster.

Yes, God loved Hagar just as much as He loved Abram.

He sought her and found her on the frontiers of Egypt, just as He had sought and found Abram in far off Ur of the Chaldees.

"And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur."

With loving tenderness, He called her by name, **"Hagar,"** for He knew her very well.

However, He also addressed her as "**Sarai's maid,**" for He intended to call her back to her duty.

**"Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou?
and whither wilt thou go?"**

What are you doing Hagar?

*I know you're upset, but this isn't the
right answer.*

V 9 **"And the angel of the LORD said unto
her, Return to thy mistress, and
submit thyself under her hands."**

To her great credit, in her first real encounter with Abram's God, she was obedient to His command.

God knew it would not be easy for her to return to Sarai, and He would not send her back empty-handed.

He would give her a promise and a prophecy.

First of all, God promised that she would be fruitful.

V 10 **"And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude."**

Sounds a lot like Abram's promise, doesn't it?

V 11 **"And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction."**

The name Ishmael means "God shall hear." God promised her a son, and then He gave her a prophecy about her dear Ishmael.

V 12 **"And he will be a wild man; 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."

It seems to me that this was quite a violent prophecy, but I suppose for a little maid, it would have given her a sense of importance.

And I'm sure this big strapping son of hers, although at war with everyone else, would have been good to his mother.

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And it also appears that Hagar responded in genuine faith that day.

She forsook Egypt and returned to Abram's household, and to Abram's God.

V 13-14 **"And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also**

here looked after him that seeth me?

¹⁴ Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered."

Yes, the true and living God would no longer only be the God of her master; He would be *her God* also.

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V 15 "And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael."

No doubt Hagar told Abram and Sarai about her experience with "**the angel of the LORD,**" and Abram obediently named his son according to the angel's directions.

V 16 "And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram."

So did everything turn out all right after all?

No, this was not the son of promise that they had hoped for.

No doubt at some point Abram and Sarai admitted their wrongdoing.

And no doubt God forgave them for running ahead of His will, but the fruits of their disobedience still remained.

Yes, there is a principle in scripture that says **"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"** Galatians 6:7.

No, Abram and Sarai had not accomplished God's promise by their own means.

Instead, they had produced a son that would bring discord into their home.

From that time on, they would live in a
divided household.

A divided household, by the way, that still
makes the news almost everyday.

It is always a mistake to try and hasten
the work of God.

He has His own reasons for what He does and
for when He does it.

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As a result of Abram's impatience, there
followed a solemn silence of 13 long
years wherein he received no further
word from God.

He was 86 when Ishmael was born to him, and
he was 99 when God at last broke the
silence.

Yes, Abram spent 13 fruitless years, during
which he made no further progress in
the things of God, and in which time

nothing worthy of note happened in
his life.

So much for running ahead of God.

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When God finally did speak, it was to
gather up the various threads of
promise that He had already made, and
to weave them into one great
comprehensive covenant.

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This covenant is known as the Abrahamic
Covenant.

It is one of the most important utterances
in human language.

It has left its mark on all subsequent
periods of history, and it controls
the future with an iron hand.

What is happening in the Middle East today is, in part, an outworking of some of the clauses of this covenant.

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So let's jump ahead past those 13 silent years and pick up the threads of God's promise in Genesis 17.

V 1-3 **"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.**

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,"-- and we'll just stop right there for a minute.

The time was nearly at hand for the
promised son to be born.

With this new revelation, God had picked up
the threads of His promise, and once
again given Abram an opportunity to
exercise his faith in God's word.

No doubt during those wasted years, Abram
had lived to a certain extent, if not
to a great extent, with discord in
his home.

But now that time was over.

God had appeared to him once again in the
full force of His covenant.

God's last revelation had only been second-
hand, as far as Abram was concerned,
being Hagar's account of her
interview with **"the angel of the
LORD."**

Now, however, God was personally speaking to him again, and none of His wonderful promises were diminished in the least degree.

It was a good day for Abram, a day to be remembered for the rest of his life!

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There are three names for God found in these verses.

In V 1, we find the name "**LORD**," all in caps, which indicates His name Jehovah.

Again in V 1 we see the name "**the Almighty God**," which indicates His name El Shaddai.

And finally in V 3, we see the name "**God**" or Elohim.

All of these names declared at this particular time seem to indicate that

the entire Godhead--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit--were present to convey this most important covenant.

V 3 says that Abram "**fell on his face**" in absolute subjection during the whole of the recitation of this covenant. Nothing was required of him but to listen, for all was of grace.

Yes, the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional, and in no way dependent upon Abram's co-operation, or even that of his descendants after him.

God was the only speaker, and Abram lay prostrate in the dust listening, as promise after promise was given to him and to his seed.

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Next week, as we examine this covenant which appears in V 4-16, we will be impressed with the fact that every word was spoken by God.

Not a sentence was added by man, only the voice of God Who had spoken all of creation into existence, confirmed and spelled out this one-sided contract in which all the benefits accrued to Abram, and all the responsibilities rested with God.

It is an everlasting covenant given to the nation of Israel.

And, Lord willing, it will be the subject of next week's lesson.