

Genesis in Biblical Perspective  
The Gospel of Christ from Genesis  
Walking By Faith and Not By Sight  
Genesis 16  
By: Dr. Harry Reeder

We are in Genesis 16. We will cover the whole chapter but we'll start by reading the first few verses. This is the Truth. Genesis 16:1-6 says *[1] Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. [2] And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children (or build a family) by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. [3] So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. [4] And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. [5] And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" [6] But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she (Hagar) fled from her.* May God bless the reading of His Word. The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of the Lord abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We have come to another dramatic episode in the life of Abram. This is our 27<sup>th</sup> study in the book of Genesis in which we come to Genesis to meet Christ. We will take a look at this dramatic episode as it unfolds in three scenes from Genesis 16. There are three primary figures that are presented in these scenes – Abram, Hagar, and Sarai. And you look in vain for a champion, a hero. As you look through these three scenes, where is our hero of the faith? Where is the champion for the Lord? Where is the one who is the overcomer by the grace of God? It is absolutely absent as you walk through this chapter. Abram, Hagar and Sarai don't attract us as we go through this. No one inspires us or brings us to the foot of the Savior in this text.

You would almost expect that here we would see the persistent obedience of Abram. He came into the land, met a famine and messed up and went to Egypt. He lied about his wife but God's grace sustained him. He taught him and brought him back. There is strife with the herdsmen of Lot and so he and Lot divide the land. God sustains him and then four marauding kings come down, along with five city kings with Abram in the midst of this warfare yet God gives him an unbelievable victory. God brings him to meet Melchizedek and affirms him with a blessing.

A covenant is made and God passes through the covenant, the flaming torch, the smoking incense of the pot that is aflame showing the glory of the Lord. As the animals are sacrificed and cut in two the Lord says "Abram you can't come through this to Me, I come through it to you and I pledge Myself to life and death. I will keep My covenant with you and your host will be innumerable throughout the land, throughout the world. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Certainly there will be persistence

in Abram now, but no he stumbles again as we look at Abram, Sarai, and Hagar, the Egyptian maid servant.

There is something I want you to keep in your mind as we walk through this. When you believe in the Lord and know God's saving grace, the thing you want to do is obey Him. It's not your obedience that saves you but your obedience is the evidence of faith in the Lord whereby He saves us by His grace. He saves us through faith but faith always has a commitment to obedience. That obedience will not be perfect but it will be persistent and desirous, but it's certainly imperfect as we're seeing time and time again in the life of Abram. But you can't obey the Lord if you don't hear the Lord and you can't hear the Lord unless you're listening for the voice of the Lord. The voice of the Lord is not in the air. It's in His Word.

If it's a normal day there will be 35,000 bits of communication that will be aimed at you this day in our society to get your attention. They are the voices of the world. In the midst of all of that cacophony and clamor God calls us to an intentional focus. "Oh no, I will hear the voice of the Lord." Abram gets caught up in the cacophony of voices. Now it's not from 35,000 bits and pieces but it's from his wife's voice and that's enough. Let's walk through this and look at the three scenes.

Scene one is Sarai's proposal. Here is what is in the back of her mind. God has promised to us a seed, a child and I am beyond the age of having children. Abram came into the land when he was 75 and the text says he had been there ten years so he is now 85 years old. So Sarai is thinking that God has made a promise but her assessment is that God has prevented her from being a part of that promise. So her proposal is to give to Abram her Egyptian hand maiden, Hagar, from the seed of Ham and Sarai will build her house through her. What she has done is called on something that her family historical and culturally would be very familiar with. Back where she was from in the land of the Chaldeans there were guiding tablets called the Tablets of Nuzi. The 67<sup>th</sup> tablet of Nuzi is that which gives direction as to what you do to have a family when you can't have a child. The mistress is allowed to raise up a maid servant to give as a wife to her husband in order for her to build a family through that maid servant. Sarai is using tablet 67 from the Law of Nuzi for her solution to obtaining God's promise.

So Sarai makes a proposal but what is Abram's response? He agrees. He submits. He enters in with Hagar. Notice what the text says. Genesis 16:3-4a says *[3] So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. [4] And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived.* So we have Sarai's proposal, Abram's response and now Hagar's reaction.

When Hagar has conceived what does she now do? She with this developing child within her develops an attitude toward Sarai. She becomes arrogant and despises her. She begins to belittle her and you can almost see her showing off her condition in front of Sarai. Now Sarai's solution to having a child has backfired. So what does she do now? The tablets of Nuzi have gotten her in trouble so maybe the code of Hammurabi can get me out of it. She goes to the 137<sup>th</sup> law from the code of Hammurabi that coincides with her situation. The mistress takes back over the maid servant and puts her back into subjugation.

So Sarai goes to Abram with her second proposition. She says "Abram look what you've done to me." Does this sound familiar? "I gave her to you for your

embrace and you did it. We have a child here and now she despises me. Look what you've done. May God judge between me and you." She is basically telling Abram that he needs to do something about this. Abram goes to the code of Hammurabi law 137 and says "No, she is your maid servant so you do as you please. You brought the proposition, I only agreed to it and now you don't like the response so you have to deal with it." So Sarai then begins to treat Hagar harshly. Hagar's reaction is to flee.

Forget Hammurabi and Nuzi, all of this is warned in the Bible. I want to look at Proverbs 30. Although Proverbs hasn't been written yet this wonderfully ordained book of common sense has already anticipated something like this. Proverbs 30:21-23 says *[21] Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up: [22] a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is filled with food; [23] an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress.* Yes, pagan codes and laws may suggest this as a solution but God warns that it is no solution for this will make the earth tremble if you try it. The earth started trembling in Abram's household. So Hagar flees into the wilderness under the mistreatment.

Now let's look at scene three. Another figure arrives in scene three. Genesis 16:7-16 says *[7] The angel of the LORD found her (Hagar) by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. [8] And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." [9] The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." [10] The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." [11] And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction. [12] He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."*

*[13] So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing (El Roi – the God who sees all)," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." [14] Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. [15] And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. [16] Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.*

Here Hagar is driven out by the mistreatment of Sarai. She flees to the wilderness and there near a spring next to a well she meets with the angel of the Lord. Here is the first time this phrase "the angel of the Lord" is used in your Bible. This phrase means the presence of God Himself. When you see the phrase "an angel" from the Lord, in your Bible that refers to any angel, a created being that is there to serve out the purposes of God. However in the Old Testament when you see the definite article "the" angel of the Lord that is not just an angel but a pre-incarnation appearance of the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ.

It is the angel of the Lord who will speak from the pillar of fire and the cloud. It is the angel of the Lord that will speak from the burning bush. It is the angel of the Lord who wrestles with Jacob and Jacob says "I have met God and wrestled with Him." So the angel of the Lord is actually referring not to an angel simply but a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. It's a phrase you'll never find in the New Testament because Christ is now incarnate. He has risen and He will come again. So there is no angel of

the Lord in the New Testament but this is referring to the Old Testament ministry of Christ when He would appear to do the bidding of the Father in anticipation of His incarnation.

So here is the angel of the Lord. Three times His name is given. It is the first time it appears and it's given three times. When He comes He asks Hagar two questions – where did you come from and where are you going? Hagar responds with one answer. She says “I am fleeing from the mistreatment of my mistress, Sarai.” The angel of the Lord then says a simple singular command, “Go back home. Be cared for by Abram and have the son. Here is the name of the son, Ishmael. He will be a wild man of a donkey.” That is a tough passage to translate. Literally the angel of the Lord is referring to a Syrian onager which looks like a wild burro. It cannot be controlled. You cannot tame it. It is known for its lack of restraint. So Ishmael will be like a wild donkey with a large number of descendents. Hagar responds by giving a name to this God. She says “El Roi, You are the God who looks after me. You see me and You have looked after me.” Then she goes back, finishes her pregnancy and by the time Abram is 86 years of age the child is born.

Now I'd like to give you five very practical takeaways from this text. What does this text have to say to us practically? The first takeaway from this text is God's promises must be fulfilled by God's power and God's means. What was God's promise? It was to Abram and to Sarai that God would give them a child. Sarai looks at the situation and says “I'm incapable of having a child therefore I now assess that God has now prevented me so I will build this house. We cannot trust God's power to fulfill His promise. I will come up with my own means to build my house. I will go back to our pagan guidelines and use these laws to elevate my mistress, my maidservant, to the point of being my surrogate mother. Therefore that's the way I'll build my house.” It is this human reliance, arrogance and manipulation that Paul ceases upon to teach us in the New Testament. God's promises can only be fulfilled by God's power and God's means not human arrogance and reliance.

This very account is referred to in the book of Galatians. Galatians 4:21-31 says *[21] Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? [22] For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. [23] But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. [24] Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. [25] Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. [26] But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. [27] For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.” [28] Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. [29] But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. [30] But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” [31] So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*

In this passage He is telling us that God made a promise. When Sarai tried to fulfill it with manipulation and her own mechanisms, what she brought was a problem,

not a solution. God's promises must be fulfilled by God's power according to God's means. So when we want people to come to Christ to be born again the means determine the end. The end does not justify the means. It is not human arrogance and pride that accomplish the purposes of God but it's God's power, God's means, God's Word. Here Sarai says "I will build my house" but Jesus Christ says "I will build My church. If we attempt to build with our own strength and arrogance whether it's a family or church or whatever it is, then it's nothing more than the flesh. It brings wood, hay and stubble burned up. God's promises of bringing people to salvation from spiritual death to spiritual life and then building a family, a church or whatever else must be done through God's means.

This does not mean there is no place for human involvement and human responsibility. Stop and think. God promised Abraham and Sarah a child and that child would come through the promise by God's power through the means. So there was the full expectation that Abraham and Sarah would enter into intimacy. There is appropriate human responsibility. Marital intimacy was to be engaged whereby God would bring His promise but because of being faithless, arrogance and pride she reaches back into paganism and says "God can't do it unless we do it. I will build my house." So instead of human responsibility with marital intimacy she brings forth polygamy and sexual immorality. The result is the wild donkey at odds with himself and everyone to this day. It is the seed of Ishmael. Ishmael will have twelve sons in clear contrast to the twelve tribes of Israel. There will come nations from Ishmael that will be at odds with one another and with the seed of Abraham, now 4000 years later.

It is not self-reliance or arrogance of self that will accomplish the purposes of God. When God gives a promise He'll bring His people to Himself. He will build a family, work in the lives of our children or whatever promise God gives our job, with human responsibility, is to be dependent upon the Holy Spirit and do what God has ordained to be done, not come up with our own mechanisms. What are God's principles, precepts and means whereby His power is seen?

Here is a second takeaway. Here we get again wonderful insights in Satan and spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare came to Abraham and it will come to Isaac. It comes to everybody. Remember spiritual warfare is not some exotic subset of the Christian life that is reserved for certain people with frocks on, relics, incantations and all kinds of mechanisms, but spiritual warfare is a way of life. It is another way to speak about the Christian life which is why we have to put on the full armor of God. Here is spiritual warfare with Abram.

What do you see about Satan, our adversary in this text? The first insight you see about Satan and spiritual warfare is that Satan is persistent. When Abraham comes into the land the first thing he has to deal with is a famine. He falters in that, goes down to Egypt, lies about his wife but God corrects him and brings him back. As soon as he gets back he then has to deal with strife in the land. Before long come four marauding kings into the land to conquer the land and he has to fight them with a personal army of 318 men. God made a promise to Abraham to give him a land and as soon as that promise came, there came Satan's adversarial activity. God sustained Abram and gave him the answer in each situation even when Abram faltered, but has Satan given up? No.

What else did God promise Abram besides the land? God promised him a seed. So here comes fear in Abram which we saw in Genesis 15. Abram said "I'm afraid I'll be childless." God tells him not to fear and He makes a covenant. God walks through the covenant and says He'll fulfill that covenant as He passes through as a flaming torch and a smoking pot. The incense is rising and God says "I pledge life and death to accomplish My covenant for you." Satan hasn't given up because now he attacks inside the family. Where there ought to be strength now comes another voice, a lie that will take Abram away from the promises of God. Satan is persistent. He is like the waves rolling up one after another upon the beach. The only people he doesn't bother are those whom he has and he lets the death of sin take them into the death spiral of life or those believers who go willingly to sit on the sidelines. If one steps up and says "As for me and my house we shall serve the Lord" there is an incessant, persistent attack of Satan and he comes time and time again.

Here is a second insight on Satan. He is not only persistent but he is predictable. Genesis 16:3b-4a says, *[3b] Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. [4a] And he went in to Hagar (slept with her).* Does that sound familiar? Let me change the words; took from the fruit, gave to her husband, and he ate. Satan is unbelievably predictable. In the garden he worked through a wife who got attached to the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, the boastful pride of life and did not believe the voice of the Lord. Here is it again. She took, she gave and he slept.

Secondly, not only is there a wife's allurements away from faithfulness to the Lord but beyond that there is a husband's leadership aversion. He makes use predictably of men in a home who avert their servant, sacrificial, shepherding leadership. Let's go back to the garden for a minute. Here is Eve. She is conversing with a snake that says "God is a liar, here's the truth." She saw that the tree was good for food, a delight to the eyes, desirable to make one wise, so she took it's fruit, gave to her husband with her and he ate. When she took from the fruit and gave to her husband how about Adam stepping up and saying "Let's don't believe the lie. Eve, I just went around naming animals a little bit ago and I didn't find any snakes that talked so something is fishy here. Also what you're telling me is not quoting the voice of the Lord right because that's not what God said. We have mistreated the Word of God." But no, he succumbed to the voice of his wife.

Sarai comes up and for all intensive purposes, Abram God promised us a child, I can't have one and I don't think God is going to be able to pull this off, but our pagan codes have a solution to this. Let's go to the tablet of Nuzi, number 67 for we can get by on this. I'll build the house for us. It was at that time that Abram should have stepped up and said "No, I will not believe a lie" but he agrees and submits. Then when it brings strife in the home she comes back to him and says "You're wrong for this is your fault." Logically when we look at that we think, how is this Abram's fault when you came up with this proposition. All he did was just go along with it. Logically she is wrong when she says "Abram, you are responsible" but theologically she is right. He is not only responsible for what has happened but he is responsible now for Hagar who for all intensive purposes is responsible for as his wife. He abandons his responsibility to Sarai and to Hagar.

What should Abram have done? He should have stood before the Lord and said “O Lord, forgive me. I have believed in a lie that You are unable to help us but now O Lord I see me wrong. Heal my heart and show Yourself strong in my eyes and in my song be magnified.” He should have stood up in that moment in time in his home and then sung the next verse that says “I’ve leaned on the wisdom of men O Lord, forgive me. I have responded to them instead of Your light and Your mercy but now O Lord I see my wrong.”

Satan is predictable for he know not only the wife’s usurpation but he knows the husband’s leadership aversion. Then Satan is always predictable when he’ll get you to listen to anybody’s voice but the Lord’s voice. Think back with me to Genesis 3. When God came to deal with Adam He said to him, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife...” The point here is not that it was his wife’s voice but we should listen to no one’s voice in place of the Lord’s voice. Back in Genesis 16:2b it says “*And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.*” Satan is absolutely predictable for he will get you away from God’s Word, the voice of the Lord, by getting you to anything and anyone else’s voice. Boy we will do it. We have no time for the Word of God but boy we have time to listen to the television. We have amazing abilities to listen to the voices of the world and with that cacophony we lose the voice of the Lord.

Satan is not only predictable and persistent but he is also inventive. Up until now he has attacked Abram from the outside with strife, famine and kings. Now he attacks from the inside. Satan loves to find your weak spot. Is outside or inside? Is it at work or at home? Therefore put on the whole armor of God.

The third takeaway is there is the display of God’s great love, what we call His common grace. He doesn’t just show grace to forebear with Abram and Sarai but He follows out. The first time the angel of the Lord is mentioned in the Bible, He is going to Hagar the Egyptian to bring her under care. This is the only time in the Bible that God ever gives a blessing to a woman directly. This is the only time in the Bible that God allows a woman to acknowledge His name and declare His name, El Roi. Here, God in opposition to every cultural moray God declares His common grace by reaching to Hagar. Who ought to have reached in the name of the Lord? It should have been Abram and that’s why she is overwhelmed when she says to the Lord “You’ve seen me. You have looked after me.” And she returns back from the wilderness.

Can you imagine how dramatically encouraging this must have been to God’s people? When the book of Genesis is written the Holy Spirit is using Moses to write it and the people of Israel are in the wilderness. As soon as they hear this can’t you just hear their heart leap for joy? If God in His gracious love reached outside the covenant to Hagar to take care of her, what will He do for us who today are in the wilderness? He will keep us and He will sustain us.

The fourth takeaway is we cannot dismiss sin’s inevitable downstream consequences of death. Sarai and Hagar move to the flesh and don’t trust the Lord. There is strife in the home. The strife will be repeated downstream in Genesis 21 and 25. It will be repeated with Ishmael and his twelve sons against Abraham’s twelve tribes. It will be repeated in 2000 years. It is being repeated today 4500 years later. When you and I sin God grants us full forgiveness, praise His name, but sin has consequences downstream.

Now watch this. Faithless Abraham gave Sarah to an Egyptian Pharaoh. Faithless Sarah gives an Egyptian servant to Abraham. She reflects her husband's faithlessness. What is Hagar? She is an Egyptian servant. Where did she come from? She came when Abram in faithlessness turned his wife over to Pharaoh. Pharaoh then sent them back with possessions and servants and here is one of them. Hagar would have never been in this home if Abram had remained faithful in the land. Our sins come downstream. They are multiplied even as you see it here in this text.

Finally, my last thought is come. I began in this episode with pessimism. Where is our champion? Where is our overcomer? Is it Abram? No. Is it Hagar? No. Is it Sarai? No. We have met again, sinners in need of being saved by grace but O praise the Lord. May the Lord be magnified for a Champion has appeared. It is the angel of the Lord who comes to a well and reaches a woman. It won't be just here that Christ, the angel of the Lord, reaches a woman at a well. He will come again. He will come in the flesh. He will live this perfect life. He will say "I must go through Samaria." He will come to an adulterous Samaritan woman and meet her at a well. He will tell her the Truth and she will believe. Here is the Champion again in the book of Genesis. It is not Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael, or Isaac but the Lord is our Champion.

When the voice of the Lord comes, His Word is proclaimed, hear Him, and believe Him for He will anchor your soul. I don't care what happens in your life. I know what will happen in your life but it matters not. Though the ship (your life) is battered by waves and winds, though the sails of life are torn, though we would be carried here and there by the roaring foam of this world's rebellion against God, the anchor in Christ will hold. Don't be anchored anywhere else. This day Christ is the Champion, your Anchor and He holds. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the time to be in this unbelievably, rich passage of Scripture. We have almost as it were, flown through it. Would You let these truths marinate and expand and flow through us that we might rest in Your promises and give ourselves with responsibility to your means, that we might know Satan's devices and not be taken unaware, that we might not only be encouraged by Your love extended but Your love intended for Your people. Father, may we know the death spiral of sin and even though there is freeness and forgiveness we would not be cavalier but that we would hate sin and the garment that it even spoils. O God, we flee to our Redeemer, our Champion, the angel of the Lord, Christ Himself for in Him it holds forever. If you want to know more about this Savior and your relationship with Him, it begins with a prayer saying "Lord, I know I'm a sinner. I want to put my trust in Jesus." If you want to talk with someone or have someone pray with you please contact us here at Briarwood Presbyterian at (205) 776-5200. Father, thank You for these moments, in Jesus' Name, Amen.