



JULY 26TH, 2020

GENESIS: MAN'S PLANS

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¹Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. ²And 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 by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³So, 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. ⁴And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived.

Genesis 16:1–4a (ESV)

In the ancient Near East, barrenness was always considered a female problem due to the belief that the man deposited a seedling child into the woman, where it would grow like a plant. Failure to grow the child was thus viewed as divine judgment against the woman.¹

Although the passage does not overtly condemn Abram for his concession to Sarai, the allusion to the Garden (16:2b; 3:17), in which the Lord condemns Adam for his complicity with his wife (see v. 2 below), shows that Abram and Sarai are repeating "Eden's" sin of doubting the word of the Lord.² That Sarai "took" (lāqah) her and "gave" (nātan) Hagar "to her husband" (v. 3) portrays the matriarch as another Eve (3:6)³

¹⁷And to Adam he said, "*Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'* cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

Genesis 3:17 (ESV)

⁴And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."

Genesis 15:4 (ESV)

And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵And 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!” ⁶But 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 fled from her.

Genesis 16:4b-6 (ESV)

grew small in her eyes Hagar viewed her conception as evidence of divine blessing, and by extension a curse against Sarai. Hagar thought she had gained greater status in Abram's household.⁴

By describing Hagar “in your [Abram's] arms,” which literally is “in your [Abram's] midst/lap/breast” (*běḥêqekā*), Sarai pictures the intimacy (“embrace,” NRSV) they enjoyed at her expense.

Abram plays on the complaint of Sarai by his retort, “Your servant [Hagar] is in your hands” (v. 6); putting Hagar “in your [Sarai's] hands” (*běyādēk*) rectifies the charge “in your arms” (v. 5). By issuing the decree Abram clarified Sarai's place as chief matron in the household.⁵

Thus the first scene ends in total disaster for all concerned. Hagar has lost her home, Sarai her maid, and Abram his second wife and newborn child.⁶

Please: good in your eyes

⁷The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸And 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.” ⁹The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress and submit to her.” ¹⁰The angel of the LORD also said to her, “I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.”

¹¹And 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. ¹²He 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.”

Genesis 16:7-12 (ESV)

On the way to Shur: Hagar was journeying toward Egypt, her native country⁷

This passage is the first reference to “the angel of the Lord” (*mal'ak Yahweh*) in the Old Testament, where it occurs forty-eight times. In Genesis the theophanic name occurs six times, four in chap. 16 (vv. 7, 9, 10, 11) and twice in the offering of Isaac (22:11, 15). The precise relationship between the “angel of the Lord” and God is puzzling. The angel is equated with the Lord in some texts and yet appears distinctive in others (e.g., 22:15–16; Exod 3:2–4 with Acts 7:30–32; Num 22:22, 31, 35, 38; Judg 6:11–18; 13:21–22; Zech 3:1, 5–7; 12:8; cf. also Exod 33:1–3, 5, 14). Chapter 16 illustrates the ambiguity of the angel's identity. He speaks in first person as God

himself (v. 10), and both the narrator and Hagar's speech identify the angel as the Lord God (v. 13). He also is identified as the Lord when he calls from heaven to rescue young Isaac (22:11, 15).⁸

Ishmael: in Hebrew means "God hears"

Hostility toward one's "brother" characterized the nonelect line in Genesis, beginning with Cain (4:8, 23–24); Esau, like Ishmael, is portrayed as a wild belligerent (27:39–40).⁹

¹³So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me."

¹⁴Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Genesis 16:13–16 (ESV)

You are El-Roi: The Hebrew phrase used here, *el ro'i*, can be translated as "God of seeing," referring to God's ability to see everything; "God of my seeing," a testimonial by Hagar that she has witnessed a divine being; or "God who sees me," a more personal version of the first translation. Hagar's remaining words suggest that the phrase deliberately expresses all of these.¹⁰

Hagar's explanation also has been variously construed, some interpreting it as a mere acknowledgment of having seen the Lord (NIV, NLT), others reading it as a rhetorical question expressing wonder at surviving the theophany, that is, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing him?" (NASB; also NRSV, NJB, GNB, NJPS; cp. 32:30[31]; Exod 33:20; Judg 6:22; 13:22; Isa 6:5). The Hebrew is very difficult and either rendering is defensible.³³⁸ The inclusion of "Lahai" (*lahay*), meaning "the Living (One)," for the name of the well (v. 14a) may be a reflection of what is subtly implied by v. 13b—she remained alive. T. H. Booij defends the MT and proposes a translation that takes into consideration the potential dual senses of the name *El rō'î* in v. 13a (see above).¹¹ *Beer-Lahai-Roi* This name means "well of the living one who sees me"¹²

First, Hagar was singled out by God as one who was very special to him. Two supernatural encounters were given to this one who in the biblical culture would have been classed as an unlikely recipient. Ancient readers could have listed three reasons potentially disqualifying Hagar: she was a servant, a woman and not part of Abraham's ethnic group. The divine visitations issue a clear message: God is at odds with the notion that gender, economic status or nationality may dispose him to disregard a person. Quite the opposite. As maker of all, God values all, in particular the downtrodden. Hagar further stands out as the only person in the Bible who deigns to assign a name to the deity (distinct from calling *on* the name of the deity; Tribble 1985, 229), and the only woman receiving a promise of numerous progeny.¹³

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- ¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Ge 16:2). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- ² Mathews, K. A. (2005). [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#) (Vol. 1B, p. 178). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ³ Mathews, K. A. (2005). [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#) (Vol. 1B, p. 185). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Ge 16:4). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- ⁵ Mathews, K. A. (2005). [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#) (Vol. 1B, p. 186). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ⁶ Wenham, G. J. (1994). [Genesis 16–50](#) (Vol. 2, p. 9). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
- ⁷ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Ge 16:7). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- ⁸ Mathews, K. A. (2005). [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#) (Vol. 1B, p. 188). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ⁹ Mathews, K. A. (2005). [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#) (Vol. 1B, p. 191). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ¹⁰ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Ge 16:13). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- ¹¹ Mathews, K. A. (2005). [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#) (Vol. 1B, p. 191). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ¹² Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Ge 16:14). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- ¹³ Overland, P. B. (2003). [Hagar](#). In T. D. Alexander & D. W. Baker (Eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (p. 378). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.