

Genesis 16

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 27 March 2015 10:35

“...Ishmael”

It is very easy to say that we love God, or that we obey Him. It is easy to claim that we live as we ought and are faithful. But, each of us knows that we are deceiving ourselves and others! There is often a huge gap between claim and reality.

Few Christians are honest with each other and do not realise that their two-facedness is a lie. How often do you meet a Christian and know that he dislikes you, yet he smiles at you and shakes your hand? How often do we continue in ‘fellowship’ with fellow Believers knowing that they have something against us, or we against them? It is a lie, is it not?

Do we not preach the goodness of God, yet fight against His interventions in our own lives? Do we not preach and say that we seek His face and wish to obey, yet when the opportunity arises we prefer to go the other way and resent being ‘manipulated’?

Is it not true that we do rather stupid things and even sinful things, deliberately, and then wonder why we are not moving forward in our faith? Abram was just like this – and so are we, every one of us!

Abram made some very big blunders and he sinned openly. Yet, God saw through his stupidity and blessed him mightily. Despite his failings, Abram’s *heart* was true. As I have repeatedly stated, God looks not at our failures or even our sins, but at the state of our hearts. If the ‘core’ is holy or desiring to be so, He will remain with us and bless us, even though we sin many times.

For this reason Abram was counted to be ‘righteous’ by God. This is important, for it shows that works cannot save us. Abram was elected to his heavenly place. God knew he would fail him many times, but it was God Who elected him to salvation. All of us fail, many times, but if our hearts are sound, so will be our claim to heaven.

Verses 1-3

1.

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“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.

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.”

Sarai was elderly and barren and this played on her mind greatly. No woman wants another woman to bear her children, but she wanted to please her husband, Abram. He wanted an heir, and knew that unless they had one, their steward would become heir. Yet, Abram knew, as did Sarai, that God had made a definite and great promise – that they *would* have a natural heir. But, like so many of us, they slid into doubt and forgetfulness. Today, many Christians try to ‘help God along’ to get His promises or blessings faster, instead of waiting with quiet certitude.

So it was that Sarai, probably thinking that she was now far too old to conceive (which, naturally, she was), gave her servant to Abram. She was an Egyptian named Hagar (‘flight’). Sarai said to Abram: ‘See how God has stopped me from having children. I urge you to now go in to my servant, Hagar, so that we can have children by her.’ So it was, that ten years after returning to Canaan from Egypt, Abram took Hagar, a servant they brought with them from that land, to be his concubine.

Verses 4-6

1.

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

2.

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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.

3.

But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand;

4.

do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.”

Hagar became pregnant and from the time she knew she had a child, Hagar started to hate Sarai. Hagar slighted her, *qalal*, and treated her as insignificant. Was this a pregnant woman who now wanted it all, to be the wife of a rich man? Did she want to be head of a powerful household? Or, was it much more basic – that, as a woman, she dearly wanted a family of her own? We do not know, but we do know that she began to abuse her mistress with insults and taunts. In those days barren women thought they were cursed.

When Sarai could not stand it any more she turned to Abram and told him how Hagar was treating her. She said, ‘I was wrong... it was me who insisted you took Hagar as your concubine, but now that she is pregnant she is treating me as second-class, to be despised. Let God bring His judgement upon this matter of our foolishness!’

Abram replied, ‘Hagar is your servant; do with her what you wish.’ From that time Sarai looked down upon Hagar and put her down (*anah*). The pressure Hagar put on Sarai was thus returned and Hagar no longer felt favoured by Abram. After a while she could stand it no longer and fled. This was in itself a dangerous thing to do, for she could have been put to death.

It is very true that violence begets violence. Similarly, victimisation leads to reciprocal oppression. If someone hates us, do we not hate back? Most do! Christians, who have long experience at hiding their true faces, often hate others but cover it with ‘love’! This duplicity harms both the Christian and others, and prevents a real state of holiness.

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Verses 7-16

1.

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

2.

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.

3.

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

4.

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

5.

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.

6.

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.

7.

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?

8.

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Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

9.

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

10.

And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.”

It seems that God did indeed judge between Sarai and Abram. Was this yet another silly error by Abram? Yes, it was! He had been given God's promises, by God Himself, repeatedly. Yet, he succumbed to his wife's offer in order to get himself an heir! Both of them were wrong. As a servant, Hagar had no real say in the matter. But, once she was pregnant, she started to abuse Sarai. It was a rather nasty business all round, a 'natural' result of not waiting for God to act in His own time.

Even so, God is not like us, and His purposes are beyond our understanding. He saw Hagar fleeing into the desert and though she was complicit in a wrong, He blessed her. God sent an angel, a *malak*, who found Hagar near a water spring in the Shur ('wall') desert toward Egypt, the area the Hebrews would later pass through when they escaped from Egypt. It would appear, then, that Hagar was trying to get back to her homeland, Egypt.

The angel spoke to Hagar – 'Hagar, Sarai's servant, why are you out here? Where are you going?' Obviously, the angel was in human form, for Hagar replied as she would have done to a man: 'I am running away from my mistress, Sarai.'

The angel responded: 'Go back to your mistress and obey her. I promise that your descendants will be vast in number. Look! You are pregnant with a son; his name will be Ishmael ('God will hear'). That will be his name, for God has heard your troubles.' (The vast number the angel referred to are the Arabic peoples and, later, Muslims. Ishmael is their earthly father).

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Why did God do this? Was it a lesson to Abram, that he could not continue in his wavering and doubt? That he could not have God's blessing and yet still do what was wrong? This might be the case, and that God provided Abram with a thorn in his flesh, a thorn that would continue to this very day, as true Muslims continually fight against the descendants of Abram.

This is borne out by the description the angel gave of Ishmael: he would be a 'wild man', *pere*, like a wild ass, uncontrollable and untamed; he would be continually fighting others, and others would continually fight him; but he would have many brethren to live amongst.

Hagar listened and called out loud God's name, *e!*: You see me, God ('thou God seest me')! 'Have I not, in this very place, looked to the God who sees me?' So it was that Hagar named the spring where God spoke to her 'Beerlahairoi' ('well of the Living One seeing me'). The well was between Kadesh and Bered... Kadesh ('holy'), a city in the southernmost part of Judah, and Bered ('hail'), also in the south not far from Kadesh. Thus, the well was between southern Judah and the border of Egypt.

Hagar returned to her mistress and had her son, Ishmael. To the time of his birth and for some years later, this was the only son Abram had, so he was the heir to his name and fortune. When Ishmael was born, Abram was 86 years old.

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