

Text: Gen 16.1-16

In the Bible story, we come to a truly remarkable incident that has implications and parallels stretching across the years from Creation to the present day.

You wouldn't think so, to read it, but it is truly so.

The story is the birth of Ishmael.

One the surface, it appears to simply be another instance of Abram's stumbling faith, but it is much more than that.

I. A human solution to a divine promise (1-6)**A. Abram listened to Sarai (as Adam listened to Eve) (1-4)**

"Sarai's suggestion was unobjectionable according to the customs of that time. But God often repudiates social customs."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

B. Abram heard Sarai's reproaches (5-6)

1. Sarai acknowledges that she gave Hagar into Abram's arms
2. Abram in turn gives Hagar into Sarai's hands

II. A divine provision for human problems (7-14)**A. The Angel of the Lord**

Ex 23.20-23 ¶ "Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared."²¹ "Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him."²² ¶

¹ Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 56.

² K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, vol. 1B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 178.

“But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. ²³ ¶ “For My angel will go before you and bring you in to *the land of* the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them.

1. The Angel of the Lord can “pardon your transgression”
2. Who can forgive sins but God alone?
3. Consequently, many, if not all references to the “Angel of the Lord” are taken to be pre-incarnate appearances of the Son

B. The Angel’s decrees

Where are you fleeing alone?

I am fleeing from Sarai, from her presence

Return to Sarai, submit to her authority

I will multiply your descendants

1. The blessings of Abram extend to Hagar’s children (but not the covenant)
2. The direct revelation
 - a. You shall name your son Ishmael (God hears)

Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction

b. He shall raise his hand against everyone

C. Hagar’s faith

1. You are a God who sees
2. Beer-lahairoi: “thou God seest me”

“When the way of faith (which involves patient waiting) was abandoned and the way of human calculation was taken, Abram was caught up in a chain of causes and effects that would trouble him for years to come. (Ishmael became the ancestor of the Arabs, who are still hostile to the Jews.)”³

³ Ross, “Genesis,” 57.

III. Abram's acceptance of God's plan (15-16)

1. Notice that it says "Hagar bore Abram a son" three times
2. Notice that Abram cooperates with God in accepting his son and the name

"The names provide the message: God spoke in direct revelation, and Hagar responded in faith. God *sees* distress and affliction, and He *hears*. Sarai should have known this. Since God knew Sarai was barren, she should have cried out to the Lord. Instead she had to learn a lesson the hard way—from the experience of a despised slave-wife who, ironically, came back with a faith experience. How **Abram** must have been rebuked when **Hagar** said God told her to name her son **Ishmael**, 'God hears.'"⁴

Conclusion:

We can make a basic application about faith — God calls us to trust him implicitly. God said to Abram, you will have a son. He didn't mean for Abram to figure out how to bring about fulfilment on his own, but for Abram to simply trust.

We can also gain reassurance that God will make something good out of our failures. God didn't abandon Abram or Ishmael despite Abram's failure and Ishmael's future.

And we can be certain that God's plan is working itself out:

- Ishmael's hand *is* against every man to this day.
- Yet Ishmael will not prevail: he will live to the east of his brothers, he will not drive them out of their place.

Interestingly, the only other times Beer-lahai-roi is mentioned in the Bible, it has to do with Isaac.

- Isaac passes through the place on his way to meet Rebekah
- Isaac settles down in the place after Abraham dies

In the end, God's plan will work itself out.

⁴ Ross, 57.