

The Lord Saw Abram Try to Fulfill the Plan of God

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that God gave an eternal promise to Abram about the land of Canaan and signed that promise with a blood covenant. In this topic, we will see that Abram and Sarai tried to fulfill this promise by human plans instead of waiting for the plan of God.

In Genesis 16:1-5, we read, “Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing *children*. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.’ And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. Then Sarai said to Abram, ‘My wrong *be* upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The Lord judge between you and me.’” Here, Sarai and Abram give us an example of the fact that many people try to fulfill the plan of God in their own way.

Sarai and Abram had lived in the land of Canaan for ten years and they did not have any children. This meant that Sarai was seventy-five years old and Abram was eighty-five years old. Sarai decided that they should help God fulfill His promise of a son. Sarai had an Egyptian maid-servant named Hagar. Sarai suggested that she and Abram get a son by Abram causing Hagar to become pregnant, so they could consider that child as their son. Abram agreed to the plan and got Hagar pregnant. However, that was not the plan of God and it has created conflict among the descendants of Abram right up to the present day. Many of the descendants of Ishmael are still in conflict with the Jews.

However, there was also an immediate conflict between Sarai and Hagar. When Hagar saw that she was pregnant, Sarai became despised in her eyes. The word translated “despised” means *to make light or to make lower*. This meant that Hagar no longer had the same respect toward Sarai because Hagar was able to get pregnant by Abram and Sarai had not been able to get pregnant. Sarai immediately felt slighted by this loss of esteem for her by Hagar. We see that Sarai felt hurt by this loss of esteem because she was no longer being shown respect by Hagar. As a result, Sarai complained to Abram. Sarai said that as soon as Hagar knew she had conceived, Sarai had become despised in her eyes. Then, Sarai blamed Abram for creating the problem and demanded that Abram judge Hagar for this lack of respect toward Sarai.

Abram did not feel that he had caused the problem, because Sarai was the one who had suggested that she have a son by her handmaid. Sarai did not expect this change in attitude. As a result, Abram gave Sarai permission to do what she chose to do with Hagar because of this lack of respect that she was showing. Genesis 16:6-10 says, “So Abram said to Sarai, ‘Indeed your maid *is* in your hand; do to her as you please.’ And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence. Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said, ‘Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?’ She said, ‘I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.’ The Angel of the Lord said to her, ‘Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand.’ Then the Angel of the Lord said to her, ‘I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.’” We see that Abram allowed Sarai to do what she wanted.

The word translated “dealt harshly with her” means *to force or to punish a person in order to get the person to obey*. This word is used twice in Exodus 22:22-24 where it warns against mistreating the widows and their children. Those verses say, “You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, *and* they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.” In these verses, the word is translated “afflict.” It is used in Exodus 1:11-12 to talk about the way that Pharaoh mistreated the descendants of Abraham in Egypt. Those verses say, “Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel.” In these verses, it spoke of severe punishment to get the people of Israel to work harder.

When Sarai treated Hagar with severe punishment, Hagar ran away and headed toward Egypt, as Shur was between the lands of Canaan and Egypt. When she got to Shur, Hagar found a spring of water and stopped by the spring. However, Hagar was not forgotten because we read that the Angel of the Lord found her by that spring. When the name “the Angel of the Lord” is used in the Old Testament, it is an Old Testament appearance of Christ. Exodus 3:2 says, “And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush *was* not consumed.” Then, Stephen explained this verse in Acts 7:30-33, where we read, “And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, *saying*, ‘I *am* the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and dared not look. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’” People do not seek for Christ but He seeks for us like a shepherd seeking lost sheep. That was also true in the Old Testament as Christ came to the place where Hagar was.

Christ asked Hagar where she had come from and where she was going. Hagar said that she was fleeing from her mistress Sarai. Christ answered Hagar, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand.” Here, we see the same word that was translated “afflict” in the earlier verses. However, in this verse, it is translated “submit yourself.” Many people have the same attitude as Sarai had. She thought that she could get Hagar to submit to her by punishing her severely. That just stirs up greater rebellion and a person will either fight, flee, or have great anger in his or her heart because someone is trying to force them to do something. In contrast, “submit” means *to place ourselves voluntarily under the leadership of another*. That is what Christ told Hagar to do and what He also tells us to do in Ephesians 5:21, where we read, “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Then, in Ephesians 5:22-6:9, we have six illustrations: wives to husbands; husbands to wives; children to parents; parents to children; slaves to masters; and finally, masters to slaves.

Christ also gave Hagar a promise in her suffering. Christ said that her descendants would multiply so greatly that they would not even be able to be counted. Then, Christ went on to explain, in Genesis 16:11-16, “And the Angel of the Lord said to her: ‘Behold, you *are* with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; his hand *shall* be against every man, and every man’s hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.’” Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, ‘Have I also here seen Him who sees me?’ Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, *it is* between Kadesh and Bered. So Hagar

bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram *was* eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.” Christ told Hagar that she would have a son. He also told her that her son would be named “Ishmael,” which means “God will hear.”

Ishmael became the father of the various Arab peoples. Christ went on to describe what Ishmael and his descendants would be like. First, Christ said that Ishmael would be a wild man. The word translated “wild” is translated “wild donkey” in the other nine places where it is used in the Old Testament. These wild donkeys are very independent and very aggressive. Many of the descendants of Ishmael still have these characteristics. Second, Christ said that the hand of Ishmael would be against every man and their hands would be against him. This continues to be true today of many of his descendants. Third, Christ said that he would dwell in the presence of all of his brethren. Here, we see that his descendants would live in the same general area where the other children born to Abram would live in the future.

Suddenly, Hagar realized that she had personally met God. As a result, she gave a name to Christ. She called Him, “You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees.” Hagar realized that she had met the true and living God because she could see Him and talk to Him. In addition, she knew that He also saw her, came seeking her and was now talking to her. That is why she named the well “Beer Lahai Roi,” which means “well of the Living One who sees me.” Hagar had met Christ and knew that He cared for her personally. That was what made it possible for her to return to Abram and Sarai and place herself in submission to Sarai again, even though Sarai had treated her harshly. This time she chose to submit herself to Sarai, instead of being in rebellion against any anger or harsh treatment she might receive from Sarai in the future.

Hagar did have a son and Abram called him by the name that Christ had told her that he would be named. That name probably had a very different meaning for Hagar than it did for Abram because of what had happened to her the day she met Christ. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that Christ is the One who can help each of us learn to become submissive to one another. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain what it means to submit to one another.