

Osaka International Church
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Title: Abraham and Ishmael
Scripture: Genesis 16
Key Verse: Genesis 21:11
Father's Day

I. Introduction

Good morning and Happy Father's Day! Today we are remembering fathers and their very important role. A strong father-child relationship is a wonderful thing and a great joy for the whole family. However, I am also very aware that many parents and children do not have the close relationship that they would like to have.



Instead of being filled with peace, love, and laughter, many homes are a little tense. Perhaps you can relate to this family photo from the movie, *"The Squid and the Whale."* There is a lot of tension in their New York home. They are having some serious trouble communicating with each other. Even the cat looks tense. If your home is a little tense, or even a lot tense, perhaps today's message will be helpful. But I should warn you, today's Bible passage does not give you a good example of how to build a happy family. On the contrary, it portrays a family making some very bad decisions. But we can learn from that; we can learn from other people's mistakes. Let's start by reading the story, Genesis 16:1-14.



II. Scripture: Genesis 16:1-14 (NIV)

[1] Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; [2] so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. [3] So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. [4] He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. [5] Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me." [6] "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. [7] The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. [8] And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. [9] Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." [10] The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." [11] The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. [12] He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." [13] She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." [14] That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

III. Teaching

When two people get married, they naturally expect that children will soon come. And in ancient cultures, this was far more important than it is today. But, although they had been married for many years, Abraham and Sarah did not yet have any children. Way back in **Genesis 11:30**, while they were still in Ur, the Scripture



told us, **“Now Sarai was barren; she had no children.”** Sarai, who is later renamed as Sarah, married Abraham in Ur, but years passed and she had no children. The family moved to Haran, time passed, and she had no children there either.

Finally, they moved to Canaan, the land that the Lord had promised to Abraham, but years passed, and still, no children. In that culture, a failure to have children was a serious issue. It was embarrassing. In today’s passage, we are told that ten years had passed since they settled in Canaan, and still they had no children. Sarah was no longer young. She was already old, and perhaps a little desperate.



What Sarah and Abraham did may seem a bit shocking to us today. But in that culture, it was probably not unusual. By the law of that time, the children of Sarah’s maidservant would be Sarah’s children. And, Sarah wanted children, so she did what she thought was necessary. **Genesis 16:3, “So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.”**

But after this came a whole bunch of problems. What makes sense by worldly wisdom is often the wrong answer. Back in Genesis 12, when there was a famine in Canaan, Abraham and his family went down to Egypt and fell into sin and trouble. With help from the Lord, they got back out of Egypt, but they brought back some souvenirs, apparently including Hagar the Egyptian maidservant. If you happen to be from Egypt, please do not be offended, this has nothing to do with modern Egypt. But in the Bible, Egypt is often a symbol for worldly thinking and worldly values. Going to Egypt to escape the famine was a bad idea. Giving the Egyptian girl to Abraham was a very bad idea.

Sarah was tired of waiting on the Lord’s timing, and perhaps Abraham felt the same way. In any case, when Sarah placed the temptation in front of Abraham, he did not resist. Wives, do not place temptations in front of your husbands. Husbands, most of us need to listen to our wives a lot more than we do, but we also need to be wise; not every idea is a good idea. And all of us, men and women, married and single, need to listen to the Lord and trust in Him. Don’t be impatient to make something happen. Wait on the Lord. Remember **Habakkuk 2:3, “For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”**

Genesis 16:4-5a, “He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. ”” Men, if you are ever tempted by the idea of having two wives, remember this, one man + two women = three wars. They will fight with each other and they will fight with you. And the fight will likely continue between their children. And regardless of how it started, they will say it is all your fault.



Rule #1 in marriage is to be faithful to your spouse. One man and one woman, faithful to one another in good times and bad, is the path of peace and happiness. A good and faithful relationship between a husband and wife will bring joy and refreshment like a drink of cool water. **Proverbs 5:15** puts it this way, **“Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.”** All other plans will bring big trouble, regardless of who came up with the idea.

The hostility that begins here between Sarah and Hagar has never ended. In Genesis 21, Sarah will give birth to Isaac, the father of Israel. And Hagar’s child, Ishmael, is the ancestor of the Arab tribes who make their home in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries, as the map shows. The conflict between Israel and the Arabs is a family fight which still continues today. When we see this, we realize that our choices have an influence, either for good or for bad, far greater than we imagine. We need to choose wisely.



While we are here, I want to clear up a common mistake. Many people confuse the Arab tribes with the Arab World. The Arab tribes live in a relatively small area. But they have influenced the language and culture of a



much larger area, which is often called the Arab World. The Arab World is defined by culture and language, not by genealogy.

And we definitely do not want to confuse the Arabs with the Muslim World, which consists of the nations where Islam is the major religion. The Arab tribes, the Arab World, and the Muslim World are three different things. And it is important to remember this because most Muslims do not speak Arabic, and most Arabic speakers do not belong to the Arab tribes. Furthermore, a sizable minority of both Arabic speakers and the Arab tribes are not Muslims. There are minority groups of Christians and Jews among the Arab tribes and throughout the Arab World. Let's get back to the Scripture.



Genesis 16:6-7, **“Your servant is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur.**” Abraham made a bad situation worse by leaving things to Sarah. If Abraham had interceded, a lot of trouble might have been avoided. But Abraham did nothing, and Hagar fled. Hagar must have felt rejected and alone. But God did not forget her. God loved her, and, “the angel of the Lord,” came to her in the desert. This is not an ordinary angel. Notice **Genesis 16:10**, an ordinary angel might say, *“The Lord will increase your descendants.”* But this angel speaks directly as God, saying, **“I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.”**

The angel of the Lord speaks as God, but as we know from, **John 1:18**, **“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.”** No one has seen the fullness of the Trinity God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But the One and Only Son, who is God, has made Him known. In Genesis 16, and in a number of other Old Testament passages, “the angel of the Lord,” seems to be Jesus Christ, appearing to people in ancient times. Hagar seems to have known that the angel of the Lord was God, because Genesis 16:13 says, **“She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.””**

Genesis 16:11, **“The angel of the Lord also said to her: “You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery.”** The name Ishmael means, *“God will hear.”* We are never really alone, because God is with us. He sees and hears all. Hagar must have remembered this truth every time she said her son's name, Ishmael. This must have given her strength to go on and to obey the Lord. And she needed strength, because the Lord had commanded a difficult thing. **Genesis 16:9**, **“Then the angel of the Lord told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.””**

“Submit.” Not an easy thing to do, submission is very difficult. But all of the Lord's commands are good, so when He says, “submit,” that is for our own good. By the way, the word, “Islam,” means, “submit,” and the central teaching of Islam is submission to the will of God. Not a bad thing; we would all do well to submit to the will of God. But we also desperately need the love, grace, and mercy of God. And these are found in Jesus Christ.

Hagar returned to Sarah and Abraham and continued with them until Sarah demanded that she and Ishmael be sent away after the birth of Isaac. This 1668 painting by Claude Lorrain captures the loneliness of that moment. Hagar and Ishmael were sent away, and this time they did not return. Abraham loved Ishmael and this was a hard thing for Abraham, **Genesis 21:11**, tells us, **“The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.”**



But when Hagar and Ishmael ran out of water in the desert, once again God listened and provided for them. Ishmael grew up in the desert and Scripture tells us that Hagar got a wife for him from Egypt, and later the Lord gave him 12 sons who became twelve tribes. These were the Ishmaelites who appear in the Old Testament from time to time, and who eventually become the Arab tribes. It is fascinating that the Lord, because of His love for Abraham, blessed both Isaac and Ishmael with twelve sons who became twelve tribes. But it is a strong



warning to us that these brothers are not able to get along with each other. Still, the two brothers both loved their father, Abraham and **Genesis 25:9** tells us that when he died, **“His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite.”** This is the same cave that Abraham had buried his wife Sara in earlier, and it is important because it is the establishment of a new family gravesite in the promised land.

IV. Conclusion

What are the lessons for us here? First of all, there is the strong warning in the disastrous results of Abraham’s and Sarah’s bad choices. Husbands and wives, if you want to build a happy home, be faithful to your spouses.



Second, fathers, spend time with your children. Find things to do together with them. Abraham loved Ishmael and probably spent a lot of time with him. Later, we are told, Ishmael became an archer, and it is likely that Abraham was his teacher.

Third, sons and daughters, don’t be angry with your parents for their mistakes. Maybe your father or mother really blew it. If so, you can learn from their mistakes and try to do better. And the best way to start is to learn forgiveness. Forgive your parents and seek healing in the relationship. Ishmael could have been angry and bitter toward his father, but although Ishmael was hostile to his brothers, I believe that he loved his father.



Fourth, if you have already blown it and are lonely and depressed about the mess, then remember that with the Lord there is always hope. Hagar was lonely and desperate on more than one occasion, but the Lord saw her situation and the Lord heard her cry. Abraham was distressed when he had to send Ishmael away, but the Lord watched over Ishmael. God is always watching over all of us and listening to our prayers. And at just the right time, He will come and comfort us. Trust in Him. Be patient. Wait on Him. And at the right time, He will lift you up and wipe away every tear. Let’s pray.



V. Closing Prayer