
GENESIS 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar.

Sarai, having no child, gives Hagar her maid to Abram for wife, Gen 16:1-3. She conceives and despises her mistress, Gen 16:4. Sarai is offended and upbraids Abram, Gen 16:5. Abram vindicates himself; and Hagar, being hardly used by her mistress, runs away, Gen 16:6. She is met by an angel, and counselled to return to her mistress, Gen 16:7-9. God promises greatly to multiply her seed, Gen 16:10. Gives the name of Ishmael to the child that should be born of her, Gen 16:11. Shows his disposition and character, Gen 16:12. Hagar calls the name of the Lord who spoke to her, Thou God seest me, Gen 16:13. She calls the name of the well at which the angel met her, Beer-laharoi, Gen 16:14. Ishmael is born in the 86th year of Abram's age, Gen 16:15, Gen 16:16.

Verse 1

She had a handmaid, an Egyptian - As Hagar was an Egyptian, St. Chrysostom's conjecture is very probable. that she was one of those female slaves which Pharaoh gave to Abram when he sojourned in Egypt; see Gen 12:16. Her name *הגֵר* hagar signifies a stranger or sojourner, and it is likely she got this name in the family of Abram, as the word is pure Hebrew.

GENESIS 16:2 Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing. Please go in to my handmaid. It may be that I will obtain children by her." Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

Verse 2

Go in unto my maid - It must not be forgotten that female slaves constituted a part of the private patrimony or possessions of a wife, and that she had a right, according to the usages of those times, to dispose of them as she pleased, the husband having no authority in the case.

I may obtain children by her - The slave being the absolute property of the mistress, not only her person, but the fruits of her labor, with all her children, were her owner's property also.

The children, therefore, which were born of the slave, were considered as the children of the mistress. It was on this ground that Sarai gave her slave to Abram; and we find, what must necessarily be the consequence in all cases of polygamy, that strifes and contentions took place.

GENESIS 16:3 Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife.

Verse 3

And Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar - and gave her to her husband - to be his wife - There are instances of Hindoo women, when barren, consenting to their husbands marrying a second wife for

the sake of children; and second marriages on this account, without consent, are very common -
Ward

GENESIS 16:4 He went in to Hagar, and she conceived. When she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.

GENESIS 16:5 Sarai said to Abram, "This wrong is your fault. I gave my handmaid into your bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between me and you."

Verse 5

My wrong be upon thee - This appears to be intended as a reproof to Abram, containing an insinuation that it was his fault that she herself had not been a mother, and that now he carried himself more affectionately towards Hagar than he did to her, in consequence of which conduct the slave became petulant. To remove all suspicion of this kind, Abram delivers up Hagar into her hand, who was certainly under his protection while his concubine or secondary wife; but this right given to him by Sarai he restores, to prevent her jealousy and uneasiness.

GENESIS 16:6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your hand. Do to her whatever is good in your eyes." Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face.

Verse 6

Sarah dealt hardly with her - תאנהה teanneha, she afflicted her; the term implying stripes and hard usage, to bring down the body and humble the mind. If the slave was to blame in this business the mistress is not less liable to censure. She alone had brought her into those circumstances, in which it was natural for her to value herself beyond her mistress.

GENESIS 16:7 the LORD's angel found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain on the way to Shur.

Verse 7

The angel of the Lord - That Jesus Christ, in a body suited to the dignity of his nature, frequently appeared to the patriarchs, has been already intimated. That the person mentioned here was greater than any created being is sufficiently evident from the following particulars: -

1. From his promising to perform what God alone could do, and foretelling what God alone could know; "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly," etc., Gen 16:10; "Thou art with child, and shalt bear a son," etc., Gen 16:11; "He will be a wild man," etc., Gen 16:12. All this shows a prescience which is proper to God alone.

2. Hagar considers the person who spoke to her as God, calls him אל El, and addresses him in the way of worship, which, had he been a created angel, he would have refused. See Rev 19:10; Rev 22:9.

3. Moses, who relates the transaction, calls this angel expressly Jehovah; for, says he, she called שם יהוה shem Yehovah, the Name of the Lord that spake to her, Gen 16:13. Now this is a name never given to any created being.

4. This person, who is here called מלאך יהוה malach Yehovah, the Angel of the Lord, is the same who is called המלאך הגאל dellac hammalach haggioel, the redeeming Angel or the Angel the Redeemer, Gen 48:16; מלאך פניו malach panaiv, the Angel of God's presence, Isa 63:9; and מלאך הברית malach habberith, the Angel of the Covenant, Mal 3:1; and is the same person which the Septuagint, Isa 9:6, term μεγαλης βουλης αγγελος, the Angel of the Great Counsel or Design, viz., of redeeming man, and filling the earth with righteousness.

5. These things cannot be spoken of any human or created being, for the knowledge, works, etc., attributed to this person are such as belong to God; and as in all these cases there is a most evident personal appearance, Jesus Christ alone can be meant; for of God the Father it has been ever true that no man hath at any time seen his shape, nor has he ever limited himself to any definable personal appearance.

In the way to Shur - As this was the road from Hebron to Egypt, it is probable she was now returning to her own country.

GENESIS 16:8 He said, "Hagar, Sarai's handmaid, where did you come from? Where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the face of my mistress Sarai."

Verse 8

Hagar, Sarai's maid - This mode of address is used to show her that she was known, and to remind her that she was the property of another.

GENESIS 16:9 the LORD's angel said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hands."

GENESIS 16:10 the LORD's angel said to her, "I will greatly multiply your seed, that they will not be numbered for multitude."

Verse 10

I will multiply thy seed exceedingly - Who says this? The person who is called the Angel of the Lord; and he certainly speaks with all the authority which is proper to God.

GENESIS 16:11 the LORD's angel said to her, "Behold, you are with child, and will bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has heard your affliction."

 Verse 11

And shalt call his name Ishmael - ישמעאל Yishmael, from שמע shama, he heard, and אל El, God; for, says the Angel, The Lord Hath Heard thy affliction. Thus the name of the child must ever keep the mother in remembrance of God's merciful interposition in her behalf, and remind the child and the man that he was an object of God's gracious and providential goodness. Afflictions and distresses have a voice in the ears of God, even when prayer is restrained; but how much more powerfully do they speak when endured in meekness of spirit, with confidence in and supplication to the Lord!

GENESIS 16:12 He will be like a wild donkey among men. His hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him. He will live opposite all of his brothers."

Verse 12

He will be a wild man - פרא אדם pere adam. As the root of this word does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, it is probably found in the Arabic farra, to run away, to run wild; and hence the wild ass, from its fleetness and its untamable nature. What is said of the wild ass, Job 39:5-8, affords the very best description that can be given of the Ishmaelites, (the Bedouins and wandering Arabs), the descendants of Ishmael: "Who hath sent out the wild ass (פרא pere) free? or who hath loosed the bands (ערוך arod) of the brayer? Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing." Nothing can be more descriptive of the wandering, lawless, freebooting life of the Arabs than this.

God himself has sent them out free - he has loosed them from all political restraint. The wilderness is their habitation; and in the parched land, where no other human beings could live, they have their dwellings. They scorn the city, and therefore have no fixed habitations; for their multitude, they are not afraid; for when they make depredations on cities and towns, they retire into the desert with so much precipitancy that all pursuit is eluded. In this respect the crying of the driver is disregarded. They may be said to have no lands, and yet the range of the mountains is their pasture - they pitch their tents and feed their flocks, wherever they please; and they search after every green thing - are continually looking after prey, and seize on every kind of property that comes in their way.

It is farther said, His hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him - Many potentates among the Abyssinians, Persians, Egyptians, and Turks, have endeavored to subjugate the wandering or wild Arabs; but, though they have had temporary triumphs, they have been ultimately unsuccessful. Sesostris, Cyrus, Pompey, and Trajan, all endeavored to conquer Arabia, but in vain. From the beginning to the present day they have maintained their independence, and God preserves them as a lasting monument of his providential care, and an incontestable argument of the truth of Divine Revelation. Had the Pentateuch no other argument to evince its Divine origin, the account of Ishmael and the prophecy concerning his descendants, collated with their history and manner of life during a period of nearly four thousand years, would be sufficient. Indeed the argument is so absolutely demonstrative, that the man who would attempt its refutation, in the sight of reason and common sense would stand convicted of the most ridiculous presumption and folly.

The country which these free descendants of Ishmael may be properly said to possess, stretches from Aleppo to the Arabian Sea, and from Egypt to the Persian Gulf; a tract of land not less than 1800 miles in length, by 900 in breadth; see Gen 17:20.

GENESIS 16:13 She called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees," for she said, "Have I even stayed alive after seeing him?"

Verse 13

And she called the name of the Lord - She invoked (וַתִּקְרָא vattikra) the name of Jehovah who spake unto her, thus: Thou God seest me! She found that the eye of a merciful God had been upon her in all her wanderings and afflictions; and her words seem to intimate that she had been seeking the Divine help and protection, for she says, Have I also (or have I not also) looked after him that seeth me? This last clause of the verse is very obscure and is rendered differently by all the versions. The general sense taken out of it is this, That Hagar was now convinced that God himself had appeared unto her, and was surprised to find that, notwithstanding this, she was still permitted to live; for it is generally supposed that if God appeared to any, they must be consumed by his glories. This is frequently alluded to in the sacred writings. As the word אַחֲרַי acharey, which we render simply after, in other places signifies the last days or after times, (see Exo 33:23), it may probably have a similar meaning here; and indeed this makes a consistent sense: Have I here also seen the Latter Purposes or Designs of him who seeth me? An exclamation which may be referred to that discovery which God made in the preceding verse of the future state of her descendants.

GENESIS 16:14 Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi. Behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

Verse 14

Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi - It appears, from Gen 16:7, that Hagar had sat down by a fountain or well of water in the wilderness of Shur, at which the Angel of the Lord found her; and, to commemorate the wonderful discovery which God had made of himself, she called the name of the well בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאֵי beer-lachai-roi, "A well to the Living One who seeth me." Two things seem implied here:

1. A dedication of the well to Him who had appeared to her; and,
 2. Faith in the promise: for he who is the Living One, existing in all generations, must have it ever in his power to accomplish promises which are to be fulfilled through the whole lapse of time.
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GENESIS 16:15 Hagar bore a son for Abram. Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.

Verse 15

And Hagar bare Abram a son, etc. - It appears, therefore, that Hagar returned at the command of the angel, believing the promise that God had made to her.

Called his son's name - Ishmael - Finding by the account of Hagar, that God had designed that he should be so called. "Ishmael," says Ainsworth, "is the first man in the world whose name was given him of God before he was born."

In the preceding chapter we have a very detailed account of the covenant which God made with Abram, which stated that his seed would possess Canaan; and this promise, on the Divine authority, he steadfastly believed, and in simplicity of heart waited for its accomplishment. Sarai was not like minded. As she had no child herself, and was now getting old, she thought it necessary to secure the inheritance by such means as were in her power; she therefore, as we have seen, gave her slave to Abram, that she might have children by her. We do not find Abram remonstrating on the subject; and why is he blamed? God had not as yet told him how he was to have an heir; the promise simply stated, He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir, Gen 15:4. Concubinage, under that dispensation, was perfectly lawful; therefore he could, with equal justice and innocence, when it was lawful in itself, and now urged by the express desire of Sarai, take Hagar to wife. And it is very likely that he might think that his posterity, whether by wife or concubine, as both were lawful, might be that intended by the promise.

It is very difficult to believe that a promise which refers to some natural event can possibly be fulfilled but through some natural means. And yet, what is nature but an instrument in God's hands? What we call natural effects are all performed by supernatural agency; for nature, that is, the whole system of inanimate things, is as inert as any of the particles of matter of the aggregate of which it is composed, and can be a cause to no effect but as it is excited by a sovereign power. This is a doctrine of sound philosophy, and should be carefully considered by all, that men may see that without an overruling and universally energetic providence, no effect whatever can be brought about. But besides these general influences of God in nature, which are all exhibited by what men call general laws, he chooses often to act supernaturally, i.e., independently of or against these general laws, that we may see that there is a God who does not confine himself to one way of working, but with means, without means, and even against natural means, accomplishes the gracious purposes of his mercy in the behalf of man. Where God has promised let him be implicitly credited, because he cannot lie; and let not hasty nature intermeddle with his work.

The omniscience of God is a subject on which we should often reflect, and we can never do it unfruitfully while we connect it, as we ever should, with infinite goodness and mercy. Every thing, person, and circumstance, is under its notice; and doth not the eye of God affect his heart? The poor slave, the stranger, the Egyptian, suffering under the severity of her hasty, unbelieving mistress, is seen by the all-wise and merciful God. He permits her to go to the desert, provides the spring to quench her thirst, and sends the Angel of the covenant to instruct and comfort her. How gracious is God! He permits us to get into distressing circumstances that he may give us effectual relief; and in such a way, too, that the excellence of the power may appear to be of him, and that we may learn to trust in him in all our distresses. God delights to do his creatures good.

In all transactions between God and man, mentioned in the sacred writings, we see one uniform agency; the great Mediator in all, and through all; God ever coming to man by him, and man having access to God through him. This was, is, and ever will be the economy of grace. "The Father hath sent me: - and no man cometh unto the Father but by me." God forbid that he should have cause to complain of us, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life."

GENESIS 16:16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.
