

## INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 16

Hagar is the person mostly concerned in the story of this chapter, an obscure Egyptian woman, whose name and story we never should have heard of if Providence had not brought her into the family of Abram. Probably she was one of those maid servants whom the king of Egypt, among other gifts, bestowed upon Abram #Ge 14:16. Concerning her, we have four things in this chapter:--

- I. Her marriage to Abram her master, #Ge 16:1-3.
- II. Her misbehaviour towards Sarai her mistress, #Ge 16:4-6.
- III. Her discourse with an angel that met her in her flight, #Ge 16:7-14.
- IV. Her delivery of a son, #Ge 16:15-16.

Ver. 1.

We have here the marriage of Abram to Hagar, who was his secondary wife. Herein, though some excuse may be made for him, he cannot be justified, for *from the beginning it was not so*; and, when it was so, it seems to have proceeded from an irregular desire to build up families for the speedier peopling of the world and the church. Certainly it must not be so now. Christ has reduced this matter to the first institution, and makes the marriage union to be between one man and one woman only. Now,

I. The maker of this match (would one think it?) was Sarai herself: she said to Abram, *I pray thee, go in unto my maid*, #Ge 16:2. Note,

1. It is the policy of Satan to tempt us by our nearest and dearest relations, or those friends that we have an opinion of and an affection for. The temptation is most dangerous when it is sent by a hand that is least suspected: it is our wisdom therefore to consider, not so much who speaks as what is spoken.
2. God's commands consult our comfort and honour much better than our own contrivances do. It would have been much more for Sarai's interest if Abram had kept to the rule of God's law instead of being guided by her foolish projects; but we often do ill for ourselves.

II. The inducement to it was Sarai's barrenness.

1. *Sarai bare Abram no children*. She was very fair (#Ge 12:14), was a very agreeable, dutiful wife, and a sharer with him in his large possessions; and yet written childless. Note,

(1.) God dispenses his gifts variously, loading us with benefits, but not overloading us: some cross or other is appointed to be an alloy to great enjoyments.

(2.) The mercy of children is often given to the poor and denied to the rich, given to the wicked and denied to good people, though the rich have most to leave them and good people would take most care of their education. God does herein as it has pleased him.

2. She owned God's providence in this affliction: *The Lord hath restrained me from bearing*. Note,

(1.) As, where children are, it is God that gives them (#Ge 33:5), so where they are wanted it is he that withholds them, #Ge 30:2. This evil is of the Lord.

(2.) It becomes us to acknowledge this, that we may bear it, and improve it, as an affliction of his ordering for wise and holy ends.

3. She used this as an argument with Abram to marry his maid; and he was prevailed upon by this argument to do it. Note,

(1.) When our hearts are too much set upon any creature-comfort, we are easily put upon the use of indirect methods for the obtaining of it. Inordinate desires commonly produce irregular endeavours. If our wishes be not kept in a submission to God's providence, our pursuits will scarcely be kept under the restraints of his precepts.

(2.) It is for want of a firm dependence upon God's promise, and a patient waiting for God's time, that we go out of the way of our duty to catch at expected mercy. *He that believes does not make haste.*

4. Abram's compliance with Sarai's proposal, we have reason to think, was from an earnest desire of the promised seed, on whom the covenant should be entailed. God had told him that his heir should be a son of his body, but had not yet told him that it should be a son by Sarai; therefore he thought,

"Why not by Hagar, since Sarai herself proposed it?"

Note,

(1.) Foul temptations may have very fair pretences, and be coloured with that which is very plausible.

(2.) Fleshly wisdom, as it anticipates God's time of mercy, so it puts us out of God's way.

(3.) This would be happily prevented if we would ask counsel of God by the word and by prayer, before we attempt that which is important and suspicious. Herein Abram was wanting; he married without God's consent. *This persuasion came not of him that called him.*

Ver. 4.

We have here the immediate bad consequences of Abram's unhappy marriage to Hagar. A great deal of mischief it made quickly. When we do not well both sin and trouble lie at the door; and we may thank ourselves for the guilt and grief that follow us when we go out of the way of our duty. See it in this story.

I. Sarai is despised, and thereby provoked and put into a passion, #Ge 16:4. Hagar no sooner perceives herself with child by her master than she looks scornfully upon her mistress, upbraids her perhaps with her barrenness, insults over her, to make her to fret (as #1Sa 1:6), and boasts of the prospect she had of bringing an heir to Abram, to that good land, and to the promise. Now she thinks herself a better woman than Sarai, more favoured by Heaven, and likely to be better beloved by Abram; and therefore she will not submit as she has done. Note,

1. Mean and servile spirits, when favoured and advanced either by God or man, are apt to grow haughty and insolent, and to forget their place and origin. See #Pr 29:21;

**30:21-23.** It is a hard thing to bear honour aright.

2. We justly suffer by those whom we have sinfully indulged, and it is a righteous thing with God to make those instruments of our trouble whom we have made instruments of our sin, and to ensnare us in our own evil counsels: this stone will return upon him that rolleth it.

**II.** Abram is clamoured upon, and cannot be easy while Sarai is out of humour; she upbraids him vehemently, and very unjustly charges him with the injury (**#Ge 16:5**): *My wrong be upon thee*, with a most unreasonable jealousy suspecting that he countenanced Hagar's insolence; and, as one not willing to hear what Abram had to say for the rectifying of the mistake and the clearing of himself, she rashly appeals to God in the case: *The Lord judge between me and thee*; as if Abram had refused to right her. Thus does Sarai, in her passion, speak as *one of the foolish women speaketh*. Note,

1. It is an absurdity which passionate people are often guilty of to quarrel with others for that of which they themselves must bear the blame. Sarai could not but own that she had given her maid to Abram, and yet she cries out, *My wrong be upon thee*, when she should have said, *What a fool was I to do so!* That is never said wisely which pride and anger have the inditing of; when passion is upon the throne, reason is out of doors, and is neither heard nor spoken.
2. Those are not always in the right who are most loud and forward in appealing to God. Rash and bold imprecations are commonly evidences of guilt and a bad cause.

**III.** Hagar is afflicted, and driven from the house, **#Ge 16:6**. Observe,

1. Abram's meekness resigns the matter of the maid-servant to Sarai, whose proper province it was to rule that part of the family: *Thy maid is in thy hand*. Though she was his wife, he would not countenance nor protect her in any thing that was disrespectful to Sarai, for whom he still retained the same affection that ever he had. Note, Those who would keep up peace and love must return soft answers to hard accusations. Husbands and wives particularly should agree, and endeavour not to be both angry together. *Yielding pacifies great offenses*. See **#Pr 15:1**.
2. Sarai's passion will be revenged upon Hagar: *She dealt hardly with her*, not only confining her to her usual place and work as a servant, but probably making her to serve with rigour. Note, God takes notice of, and is displeased with, the hardships which harsh masters unreasonably put upon their servants. They ought to forbear threatening, with Job's thought, *Did not he that made me make him?* **#Job 31:15**.
3. Hagar's pride cannot bear it, her high spirit having become impatient of rebuke: *She fled from her face*. She not only avoided her wrath for the present, as David did Saul's, but she totally deserted her service, and ran away from the house, forgetting,

(1.) What wrong she hereby did to her mistress, whose servant she was, and to her master, whose wife she was. Note, Pride will hardly be restrained by any bonds of duty, no, not by *many*.

(2.) That she herself had first given the provocation, by despising her mistress. Note, Those that suffer for their faults ought to bear their sufferings patiently, **#1Pe 2:20**.

Ver. 7.

Here is the first mention we have in scripture of an angel's appearance. Hagar was a type of the law, which was *given by the disposition of angels; but the world to come is not put in subjection to them*, #Heb 2:5. Observe,

I. How the angel arrested her in her flight, #Ge 16:7. It should seem, she was making towards her own country; for she was in the way to Shur, which lay towards Egypt. It were well if our afflictions would make us think of our home, the better country. But Hagar was now out of her place, and out of the way of her duty, and going further astray, when the angel found her. Note,

1. It is a great mercy to be stopped in a sinful way either by conscience or by Providence.
2. God suffers those that are out of the way to wander awhile, that when they see their folly, and what a loss they have brought themselves to, they may be the better disposed to return. Hagar was not stopped till she was in the wilderness, and had set down, weary enough, and glad of clear water to refresh herself with. God brings us into a wilderness, and there meets us, #Ho 2:14.

II. How he examined her, #Ge 16:8. Observe,

1. He called her *Hagar, Sarai's maid*,

(1.) As a check to her pride. Though she was Abram's wife, and, as such, was obliged to return, yet he calls her *Sarai's maid*, to humble her. Note, Though civility teaches us to call others by their highest titles, yet humility and wisdom teach us to call ourselves by the lowest.

(2.) As a rebuke to her flight. Sarai's maid ought to be in Sarai's tent, and not wandering in the wilderness and sauntering by a fountain of water. Note, It is good for us often to call to mind what our place and relation are. See #Ec 10:4.

2. The questions the angel put to her were proper and very pertinent.

(1.)

*"Whence comest thou? Consider that thou art running away both from the duty thou wast bound to and the privileges thou wast blessed with in Abram's tent."*

Note, It is a great advantage to live in a religious family, which those ought to consider who have that advantage, yet upon every slight inducement are forward to quit it.

(2.)

*"Whither wilt thou go? Thou art running thyself into sin, in Egypt" (if she return to that people, she will return to their gods), "and into danger, in the wilderness,"*

through which she must travel, #De 8:15. Note, Those who are forsaking God and their duty would do well to remember not only *whence they have fallen*, but *whither they are falling*. See #Jer 2:18, *What hast thou to do (with Hagar) in the way of Egypt? #Joh 6:68.*

3. Her answer was honest, and a fair confession: *I flee from the face of my mistress*. In this,

(1.) She acknowledges her fault in fleeing from her mistress, and yet,

(2.) Excuses it, that it was *from the face*, of displeasure, of her mistress. Note, Children and servants must be treated with mildness and gentleness, lest we provoke them to take any irregular courses and so become accessory to their sins, which will condemn us, though it will not justify them.

4. How he sent her back, with suitable and compassionate counsel:

*"Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hand, #Ge 16:9. Go home, and humble thyself for what thou hast done amiss, and beg pardon, and resolve for the future to behave thyself better."*

He makes no question but she would be welcome, though it does not appear that Abram sent after her. Note, Those that have gone away from their place and duty, when they are convinced of their error, must hasten their return and reformation, how mortifying soever it may be.

Ver. 10.

We may suppose that the angel having given Hagar that good counsel (**#Ge 16:9**) to *return to her mistress* she immediately promised to do so, and was setting her face homeward; and then the angel went on to encourage her with an assurance of the mercy God had in store for her and her seed: for God will meet those with mercy that are returning to their duty. *I said, I will confess, and thou forgavest, #Ps 32:5.* Here is,

I. A prediction concerning her posterity given her for her comfort in her present distress. Notice is taken of her condition: *Behold, thou art with child;* and therefore this is not a fit place for thee to be in. Note, It is a great comfort to women with child to think that they are under the particular cognizance and care of the divine Providence. God graciously considers their case and suits supports to it. Now,

1. The angel assures her of a safe delivery, and that of a *son*, which Abram desired. This fright and ramble of hers might have destroyed her hope of an offspring; but God dealt not with her according to her folly: *Thou shalt bear a son.* She was saved in child-bearing, not only by providence, but by promise.
2. He names her child, which was an honour both to her and it: Call him *Ishmael, God will hear;* and the reason is, because the Lord has heard; he has, and therefore he will. Note, The experience we have had of God's seasonable kindness to us in distress would encourage us to hope for similar help in similar exigencies, **#Ps 10:17.** He has *heard thy affliction, #Ge 16:11.* Note, Even where there is little cry of devotion, the God of pity sometimes graciously hears the cry of affliction. Tears speak as well as prayers. This speaks comfort to the afflicted, that God not only sees what their afflictions are, but hears what they say. Note further, Seasonable succours, in a day of affliction, ought always to be remembered with thankfulness to God. Such a time, in such a strait, *the Lord heard the voice of my affliction, and helped me.* See **#De 26:7; Ps 31:22.**
3. He promises her a numerous offspring, (**#Ge 16:10**): *I will multiply thy seed exceedingly,* Heb. *multiplying, I will multiply it,* that is, multiply it in every age, so as to perpetuate it. It is supposed that the Turks at this day descend from Ishmael; and they are a great people. This was in pursuance of the promise made to Abram: *I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, #Ge 13:16.* Note, Many that are children of

godly parents have, for their sakes, a very large share of outward common blessings, though, like Ishmael, they are not taken into covenant: many are multiplied that are not sanctified.

4. He gives a character of the child she should bear, which, however it may seem to us, perhaps was not very disagreeable to her (**#Ge 16:12**): *He will be a wild man; a wild ass of a man* (so the word is), rude, and bold, and fearing no man--untamed, untractable living at large, and impatient of service and restraint. Note, The children of the bondwoman, who are out of covenant with God, are, as they were born, like the wild ass's colt; it is grace that reclaims men, civilizes them, and makes them wise, and good for something. It is foretold,

(1.) That he should live in strife, and in a state of war: *His hand against every man*--this is his *sin*; and *every man's hand against him*--this is his *punishment*. Note, Those that have turbulent spirits have commonly troublesome lives; those that are provoking, vexatious, and injurious to others, must expect to be repaid in their own coin. He that has his hand and tongue against every man shall have every man's hand and tongue against him, and he has no reason to complain of it. And yet,

(2.) That he should live in safety, and hold his own against all the world: *He shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren*; though threatened and insulted by all his neighbours, yet he shall keep his ground, and for Abram's sake, more than his own, shall be able to make his part good with them. Accordingly we read (**#Ge 25:18**), that he *died*, as he lived, *in the presence of all his brethren*. Note, Many that are much exposed by their own imprudence are yet strangely preserved by the divine Providence, so much better is God to them than they deserve, when they not only forfeit their lives by sin, but hazard them.

**II. Hagar's pious reflection upon this gracious appearance of God to her, #Ge 16:13,14.** Observe in what she said,

1. Her awful adoration of God's omniscience and providence, with application of it to herself: *She called the name of the Lord that spoke unto her*, that is, thus she made confession of his name, this she said to his praise, *Thou God seest me*: this should be, with her, his name for ever, and this his memorial, by which she will know him and remember him while she lives, *Thou God seest me*. Note,

(1.) The God with whom we have to do is a seeing God, and all- seeing God. *God is* (as the ancients express it) *all eye*.

(2.) We ought to acknowledge this with application to ourselves. He that sees all sees me, as David (**#Ps 139:1**), *O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me*.

(3.) A believing regard to God, as a God that sees us, will be of great use to us in our returns to him. It is a proper word for a penitent:--

[1.]

"Thou seest my sin and folly."

I have *sinned before thee*, says the prodigal; *in thy sight*, says David.

[2.]

"Thou seest my sorrow and affliction;"

this Hagar especially refers to. When we have brought ourselves into distress by our own folly, yet God has not forsaken us.

[3.]

"Thou seest the sincerity and seriousness of my return and repentance. Thou seest my secret mournings for sin, and secret motions towards thee."

[4.]

"Thou seest me, if in any instance I depart from thee,"

**#Ps 44:20,21.** This thought should always restrain us from sin and excite us to duty: *Thou God seest me.*

2. Her humble admiration of God's favour to her:

*"Have I here also looked after him that seeth me? Have I here seen the back parts of him that seeth me?"*

so it might be read, for the word is much the same with that, **#Ex 33:23.** She saw not *face to face*, but as *through a glass darkly*, **#1Co 13:12.** Probably she knew not who it was that talked with her, till he was departing (as **#Jud 6:21,22; 13:21**), and then she looked after him, with a reflection like that of the two disciples, **#Lu 24:31,32.** Or, *Have I here seen him that sees me?* Note,

(1.) The communion which holy souls have with God consists in their having an eye of faith towards him, as a God that has an eye of favour towards them. The intercourse is kept up by the eye.

(2.) The privilege of our communion with God is to be looked upon with wonder and admiration,

[1.] Considering what we are who are admitted to this favour.

"Have I? I that am so mean, I that am so vile?"

**#2Sa 7:18.**

[2.] Considering the place where we are thus favoured--

*"here also? Not only in Abram's tent and at his altar, but here also, in this wilderness? Here, where I never expected it, where I was out of the way of my duty? Lord, how is it?"*

**#Joh 14:22.** Some make the answer to this question to be negative, and so look upon it as a penitent reflection;

*"Have I here also, in my distress and affliction, looked after God? No, I was a careless and unmindful of him as ever I used to be; and yet he has thus visited and regarded me:"*

for God often anticipates us with his favours, and is found of those that seek him not, **#Isa**

65:1.

III. The name which this gave to the place: *Beer-lahai-roi, The well of him that liveth and seeth me, #Ge 16:14*. It is probable that Hagar put this name upon it; and it was retained long after, *in perpetuum rei memoriam--a lasting memorial of this event*. This was a place where the God of glory manifested the special cognizance and care he took of a poor woman in distress. Note,

1. He that is all-seeing is ever-living; he lives and sees us.
2. Those that are graciously admitted into communion with God, and receive seasonable comforts from him, should tell others what he has done for their souls, that they also may be encouraged to seek him and trust in him.
3. God's gracious manifestations of himself to us are to be had in everlasting remembrance by us, and should never be forgotten.

Ver. 15.

It is here taken for granted, though not expressly recorded, that Hagar did as the angel commanded her, returning to her mistress and submitting herself; and then, in the fulness of time, she brought forth her son. Note, Those who obey divine precepts shall have the comfort of divine promises. This was the son of the bond-woman that was *born after the flesh (#Ga 4:23)*, representing the unbelieving Jews, *#Ga 4:25*. Note,

1. Many who can call Abraham father are yet *born after the flesh, #Mt 3:9*.
2. The carnal seed in the church are sooner brought forth than the spiritual. It is an easier thing to persuade men to assume the form of godliness than to submit to the power of godliness.