

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 16:1-16

Topic

Sarah calls upon her maidservant, Hagar,
to bear Abraham a son

Title

"Mammy Hagar"

Introduction

Singer songwriter Keith Green captures a sense of the misguided longing of God's wandering people to return to Egypt in his song, *So You Wanna Go Back To Egypt*.

*So you wanna go back to Egypt, where it's warm and secure
Are you sorry you bought the one-way ticket when you thought you were sure?*

*You wanted to live in the Land of Promise, but now it's getting so hard
Are you sorry you're out here in the desert, instead of your own backyard?*

*Eating leeks and onions by the Nile
Ooh what breath, but dining out in style
Ooh, my life's on the skids
Give me the pyramids*

Long after the children of Israel entered their Promised Land they still sometimes looked to Egypt as a solution to their perceived problems. It prompted God to say (in Isaiah 31:1),

Isaiah 31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, And rely on horses, Who trust in chariots because they are many, And in horsemen because they are very strong, But who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, Nor seek the Lord!

Although not explicitly stated in the Bible, Christians have long recognized Egypt as a type of the world we have been delivered out from, always

beckoning us to return to it's ways and often preying on our wants. C.I. Scofield noted, "the resort to Egypt... is typical of the tendency to substitute for lost spiritual power the fleshly resources of the world."

As we dig in to Genesis sixteen, this typical tendency to look to Egypt is going to play a prominent role. A childless Abraham and Sarah turn to an Egyptian servant seeking an Egyptian solution to their being childless.

It prompts us to consider how drawn away from the Lord **we** may be by the *ways* and the *wanting* of 'Egypt.'

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Ways Of Egypt Are Not Your Servant, and #2 The Wanting Of Egypt Is Not Your Solution.

#1 The Ways Of Egypt
Are Not Your Servant
(v1-5)

God had promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the sand of the sea and the stars in the sky and the dust of the earth. He, however, was childless and in his late eighties.

Abraham had suggested that perhaps Eliezar, a servant born in his household, could be his heir and fulfill God's promise.

God said "No" and told Abraham "one who will come from your own body shall be your heir" (14:5).

Evidently barren at age 76, Sarah took a stab at a possible solution. Maybe Abraham could produce an heir from *his* own body but not *hers* by using the body of another woman!

Genesis 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.

Genesis 16:2 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.

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Genesis 16:3 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.

I used to fault Sarah for her suggestion, largely based on her upcoming reaction to Hagar's pregnancy. Not so much anymore. Truth is, she was supporting her husband. Her suggestion was still wrong but her heart was to see God's promises fulfilled, to see her husband vindicated for following God into the unknown. She did it for Abraham, for his ministry, for his testimony.

When Sarah suggested Abraham take Hagar to bear him a child it was also "to be his wife." She was suggesting a marriage practice that was widely accepted. It was perfectly legal and it was even logical.

But it was not biblical! We know from the Garden of Eden that God's design for marriage is one man and one woman for life. Marriage is monogamous and heterosexual.

Abraham and Sarah were a monogamous heterosexual couple at a time when society around them was polygamous and homosexual.

1. We saw polygamy when Abraham and Sarah went down to Egypt and Sarah was taken by Pharaoh with the expectation she'd become one of his multiple wives.
2. We'll see the open acceptance of homosexuality in the upcoming episode in Sodom and Gomorrah.

In an effort to be accurate, allow me to make this clarification. "Polygamy" is a catch-all term and it is expressed in three specific ways:

1. Polygyny - wherein a man has multiple simultaneous wives.
2. Polyandry - wherein a woman has multiple simultaneous husbands.
3. Group marriage - wherein the family unit consists of multiple husbands and multiple wives.

Abraham and Sarah were living biblically separated lives in the midst of a culture given to unbiblical practices.

So are we! By definition, the Christian is **always** to be separated from the unbiblical practices of the culture - even if they are legal and seem logical.

Sarah sought to fulfill God's spiritual purposes by making 'Egypt' serve her presumed needs. It was wrong - disastrously wrong. The ways of Egypt cannot be your servant.

The ways of Egypt, or we could simply say the ways of the world, permeate our thinking. It's how we were raised and it's what we experience all around us day-in and day-out. Everything has a worldly spin, so to speak, so that it almost seems compatible with our walk with the Lord.

We must therefore make a concerted effort to recognize and to avoid the ways of the world.

How? Well, for one thing we must look to God for our contentment. Sarah said that it was God who had "restrained" her from bearing children but she refused to be content with the situation. Her discontent led her to take spiritual matters into worldly hands.

Then there's the fact we deplore waiting. God had promised a child but Abraham and Sarah grew tired of waiting and thought they could speed-up the process.

Then there's the truth that we don't believe God will fulfill His promises because they seem improbable or impossible to us. Much as we may hate to admit it, we don't really trust God to do the miraculous. We're more mechanical and want to figure things out ourselves.

Other times I'd have to say that it's just plain obvious that what we're doing has been borrowed from the world. That was certainly the case here.

The modern church's fascination with psychology is certainly borrowed from the world. One of the early proponents of the Christian psychology movement, Larry Crabb, went so far as to describe it as "spoiling the Egyptians." Just as the Israelites left Egypt with its spoil, so we, he said,

take the 'spoil' of what godless men like Freud, Jung, and Skinner have 'discovered' and use it ourselves.

Trouble is, the psychological theories we borrow from godless men are not spoil. They are foolishness.

Genesis 16:4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

Genesis 16:5 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."

Pardon the pun, but this was an **ill-conceived** plan. It brought nothing but bitterness, strife, and contention into the home and household.

Where there is bitterness, strife, and contention, it's pretty obvious folks are going the way of the world.

But it's also possible for things to seemingly be going great and yet the results are from some worldly plan. Worldliness can stir things up in a bad way, but it can also lead you to settle for less. I'd offer Abraham's nephew, Lot, as an example.

The ways of the world 'work' on a certain level. They can appear successful. We, however, are not just going for what seems successful but what is spiritual. Worldly methods cannot achieve spiritual ends.

You and I must honestly approach God wanting to be sure that we are not seeking the ways of the world to serve our perceived needs, or even to fulfill God's promises. Never *assume* your ways are free from the world's influence. **Be sure!**

#2 The Wanting Of Egypt
Is Not Your Solution
(v6-16)

Hagar was in a bad situation. She made it worse by despising Sarah. But then again, look at what Sarah did to her. Sure, Hagar was her

maidservant and, technically, a slave. But did Sarah have to treat her like a slave?

I mean, what must it have been like for Hagar to one day be going about her chores, maybe preparing a meal, and have Sarah send for her and say, "Right now you're going to have sex with my 86 year old husband because we want a child"?

I can cut Hagar some slack. Besides, until she sees the Lord she is not saved.

Genesis 16:6 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.

It was a desperate act. A pregnant slave woman, all by herself, traveling through a harsh wilderness. I have sympathy for her.

So did the Lord!

Genesis 16:7 Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur.

This is the first use of the phrase, "the Angel of the Lord." We believe it to be a pre-incarnation appearance on earth by Jesus Christ. The word "Angel" simply means *messenger*. It doesn't mean this was an angel - a created being. Besides, in a moment Hagar is going to call Him God.

"On the way to Shur" was on the way back to Egypt. It's believed by most reliable commentators that Hagar was acquired by Abraham and Sarah while they were down in Egypt some years before.

Hagar was wanting Egypt. She thought Egypt was the solution.

Genesis 16:8 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 Lord knew her by name. We take this for granted but it's really astonishing. I mean, for example, does anyone famous or powerful know

your name? Would they recognize you if they saw you? Let alone that they wouldn't be seeking you.

Genesis 16:9 The Angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand."

Man, everything was going so great until this! "Return" and "submit" are *not* the things we want to hear when we are on the run from our not-so-great circumstances.

The Lord referred to Hagar as "Sarai's maid." Why? To indicate that being Sarah's maid was, at that time in her life, Hagar's calling. It was to put her on notice that that's who she was, where she should be, what she should be doing. God didn't just see her by the well. He had seen her in Abraham's household, too. He'd been watching her; "Always watching her!"

Genesis 16:10 Then the Angel of the Lord said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude."

Genesis 16:11 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.

Genesis 16:12 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."

You can't believe how difficult it is to figure out who, exactly, are the modern-day descendants of Ishmael! Opinions range from **all** the Arab peoples in the Middle East to an argument that there are **no** living descendants of Ishmael.

Here is what I do know. There is a prophecy in Isaiah 60:6-7 that indicates Ishmaelites will minister to the Lord when He sets up His one thousand year kingdom on the earth. Isaiah mentions "all the flocks of Kedar," a son of Ishmael, and "the rams of Nebaioth" (another son of Ishmael).

We don't really need a 'who's-who' of the Middle East. Israel has her right to the land God promised and soon *every* nation of the world and *every* ethnicity will oppose her.

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Genesis 16:13 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?"

Genesis 16:14 Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

On the surface we might think that's nothing too amazing. I mean, after all, we know that God is omnipresent and omniscient.

We know it, but do we know it by experience? The only way to experience it is to be in a time of distress and 'see' the Lord in it.

One other thing. It's the small experiencing of things we already 'know' that really matter. Consider this:

Dr. Karl Barth was one of the most brilliant and complex intellectuals of the twentieth century. He wrote volume after massive volume on the meaning of life and faith. A reporter once asked Dr. Barth if he could summarize what he had said in all those volumes. Dr. Barth thought for a moment and then said: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Familiarity with simple Bible truths should continue to astonish you.

Genesis 16:15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.

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

Upon her return Hagar obviously related her encounter with Jesus to Abraham and Sarah. Otherwise how would Abraham know his name?

Hagar was wanting Egypt. It was her fall-back position, so to speak.

We sometimes have a fall-back position or plan when things aren't going as smoothly as we'd like. Truth is, we are fight-or-flight oriented and if the fight seems too great we flee.

We need to replace our fight-or-flight reaction with faithfulness and *endure* rather than *escape*.

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God sent Hagar back with nothing more than the theology of a children's hymn. It was enough to minister to Abraham and Sarah and to sustain Hagar until God would call her away from them.

Don't be so anxious to escape your situation. Now, listen, if you are being abused - really abused - I'm **not** telling you to stay. That's something very different.

I **am** telling you that, most likely, you are in the situation God has chosen for you. You've been strategically placed there so you can, like Hagar, reveal the fact that God sees and He saves.

