

THE SEQUEL WAS TERRIBLE!

GENESIS 16:1-16 JANUARY 5, 2022

You never know how a sequel will turn out. Every once in a while, a sequel turns out better than the original. *Paddington 2*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *The Wrath Of Khan*. More often, the sequels are a disgrace. You wish you had never seen it. The story is lame, the characters get ruined, they introduce new cast members that you're not interested in. In some cases they undo much of what you loved about the original. If you look up lists of the worst sequels, almost without exception *Superman IV: The Quest For Peace* is included. That movie was a *staple* during my childhood. I thought it was awesome, even if it is rated as one of the worst movies of all time.¹

When we were last in Genesis, we looked at one of the defining scenes of Abraham's life - him and God looking at the stars. That magnificent evening was followed up with God making a dramatic covenant, binding Himself to Abraham and his descendants forever.

Tonight, it's the sequel. And, if it weren't for the grace of God, this would've killed the franchise, like *Superman IV*. But, terrible groupthink and bad on-set behavior cannot stop the providence of God and it can't sour the grace of God. So, let's take a look, starting in verse 1.

Genesis 16:1 - Abram's wife, Sarai, had not borne any children for him, but she owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar.

Abraham and Sarah were *very* concerned about the fact that they had no children. They're at an age where it seemed more and more impossible that God's promise could come to pass.

We're left to assume that Hagar was one of the servants Pharaoh gave to Abraham back in chapter 12 when they had taken that ill-advised trip to Egypt. So, Hagar, though a real person, symbolizes for us the provision of the world.

We know that this scene speaks of the difference between the flesh and the Spirit because we're told as much in Galatians 4. This story also foreshadows the difference between the Old and New Covenants - one based on legalism there other on grace.

Your translation may call Hagar a "maidservant," but, scholars point out that is too genteel a word.² We'll see that Abraham and Sarah treat her with no respect, no dignity, no kindness. Until the close of the chapter, she's treated roughly - as a possession to be exploited.

Genesis 16:2 - ²Sarai said to Abram, "Since the Lord has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family." And Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_films_considered_the_worst#Superman_IV:_The_Quest_for_Peace_\(1987\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_films_considered_the_worst#Superman_IV:_The_Quest_for_Peace_(1987))

² Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

Sarah's end goal wasn't bad: She wanted a family. Wasn't that what God wanted, too? It was, but let's examine where her plan came from: She begins with a declaration that God had failed. Sarah blames Him for 'preventing' her from having children and assumes that none are forthcoming in the future. Of course, God had not failed, it just wasn't time. We've seen how carefully God plans things. He's does His work according to a specific timeline, motivated by His compassionate mercy.

Not only did Sarah go to the drawing board with bitterness in her heart, we see that she was drawing from the world's playbook. This scheme to use a slave girl as a surrogate was widely acceptable and even codified in the surrounding culture.³

Now, had Sarah gone to the Lord with her hurt and her earnest desire to see His promise fulfilled, we must conclude that she would've received comfort and direction from God because *that's what had happened to Abraham in the very last chapter!* Instead, we see Sarah using human math, human engineering, leaving God out of the equation altogether. And, scholars point out that, as she speaks, she uses the *language* of the world. She speaks pretty coarsely throughout this text.⁴

We can bring this up to date in lots of ways, but let's apply it to ministry work. We're meant to "make disciples" - to increase the family of faith. Often, though the end goal is worthy, churches turn to human methods, human means, human engineering to try to accomplish that goal. They use the world's culture to try to increase the size of the church. That's the same mindset Sarah had. But it leads to a *counterfeit* increase, with a bunch of troubles added in.

Be that as it may, Abraham agrees with his wife. The problem is, it was *not* how the Lord had led. Remember: God was a covenant partner in Abraham's life. Abraham should have gone to the Lord for approval, since it concerned the very thing God had spoken to him about more than once.

Genesis 16:3 - ³So Abram's wife, Sarai, took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband, Abram, as a wife for him. This happened after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan ten years.

They could try to justify it in their own minds, but Abraham and Sarah are making a huge mistake here. Hagar really had no say in it - she's a piece of property, legally speaking, and they're treating her as such. But, rather than trusting God, Abraham and Sarah are taking the reins of their lives into their own hands, *and* they're failing to protect their marriage. This same type of mistake had been Abraham's idea back in chapter 12. So, they are *both* playing fast and loose with their marriage.

The marriage relationship is meant to be the closest human relationship you have. You are one flesh with your spouse. It is meant to be unique and consecrated. If you are married, you are not to allow *anyone else* to occupy that place of closeness or intimacy or connection that you pledged to your spouse. And you should *help* your spouse avoid mistakes like this, so that you are strengthening each other and your oneness at the same time.

³ John Van Seterss *The Problem Of Childlessness In Near Eastern Law And The Patriarchs Of Israel*

⁴ See *Alter*

Genesis 16:4 - ⁴He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she saw that she was pregnant, her mistress became contemptible to her.

Until this point, Hagar isn't to be blamed. But now her heart fills up with pride and she begins to show contempt to Sarah. In the eyes of society, Hagar would be seen as the primary wife now that she was with child and Sarah was barren,⁵ and Hagar let her know it.

Success is not always a mark of God's approval or favor. This was the *last* thing God wanted for this family. I'm sure they were celebrating at first, but that quickly turned to resentment and discord.

Genesis 16:5 - ⁵Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and when she saw that she was pregnant, I became contemptible to her. May the Lord judge between me and you."

Now that things have turned out terribly Sarah is ready to involve the Lord! We're eavesdropping on a bad argument in the family tent, but the truth is, Abraham *should have* put a stop to Sarah's idea right away. Instead, he went along and now they are reaping the crop of carnal choices.

Genesis 16:6 - ⁶Abram replied to Sarai, "Here, your slave is in your power; do whatever you want with her." Then Sarai mistreated her so much that she ran away from her.

This is an absolute scandal. We are talking about the first family of faith! Sarah wasn't just a little rude. The term used for 'mistreated' is the same one Moses uses to describe how the Egyptians *oppressed* the Israelites in Exodus.⁶

Just as it was culturally acceptable to use Hagar as a surrogate, it was also *culturally* acceptable to treat her harshly.⁷ But this was totally outside what was acceptable to the Lord. Our God is tender and gracious and long-suffering and meek. We are to be conformed to *that* image, not the image of the harsh and brutal world.

As far as sequels go, this is as bad as it gets. Luckily, a surprise cameo will redeem this picture.

Directors like Alfred Hitchcock, Peter Jackson, and Martin Scorsese are known for showing up in their films. People loved seeing Stan Lee, the creator of all those wonderful comics, in the MCU. We cut to Hagar in the desert. Desperate, alone, unprotected, no supplies, pregnant, and suddenly the Creator makes a cameo.

Genesis 16:7 - ⁷The angel of the Lord found her by a spring in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.

⁵ NET Study Bible Notes

⁶ Bible Knowledge Commentary

⁷ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

How do we know this is God? Well, she will identify Him as God in verse 13 and He makes an “I will” promise to her. Some say this is just an angel, not God, but that isn’t consistent with what we read. No, this is what we call a Theophany (or sometimes a Christophany), which is a Pre-Incarnate appearance of Jesus on the earth. And here we have the very first reference to the Angel of the Lord. He’s come to find a hopeless, sinful, Egyptian slave girl. She didn’t find Him, He found her.

Genesis 16:8 - ⁸He said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She replied, “I’m running away from my mistress Sarai.”

We sense the tenderness not only by what He said, but by how she responded. Alone in the desert is no place for a woman in her condition. The approach of a strange man should have been scary. Yet, she did not recoil at His presence - she doesn’t try to hide away. There must have been something deeply comforting about Him.

When He speaks, He calls her by name. One scholar points out that this is the only known instance in ancient Near Eastern literature where a Deity addresses a woman directly by name.⁸ But, he does not coddle her. He identifies her as a *slave* to Sarah. And she admits that she has abandoned her duty. She speaks humbly and truthfully. She doesn’t bring up the mistreatment she had endured. Perhaps she realized He already knew all about it.

Genesis 16:9 - ⁹The angel of the Lord said to her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her authority.”

“Go back? But I was suffering! I was mistreated! I was a slave!” And the Lord said, “That’s right. Go back.” You see, God wasn’t *happy* about her affliction - He was responding because He *heard* her cries -but He had something greater planned for her life than simply avoiding suffering. Hagar’s plan was, “Let’s avoid suffering. It probably means I’ll starve in the desert, but at least I won’t suffer under Sarah.” Meanwhile, God had a great and awesome plan for her life that, yes, included some difficulty, but was a much better alternative than she had planned for herself. What was His plan?

Genesis 16:10 - ¹⁰The angel of the Lord said to her, “I will greatly multiply your offspring, and they will be too many to count.”

This Gentile was going to get in on God’s incredible promise and provision. Was that end result worth the price of admission? It seems that Hagar was shocked at what God was saying, both the promise and His directive to *go back* to that terrible job.⁹ So the Lord continues.

Genesis 16:11 - ¹¹The angel of the Lord said to her, “You have conceived and will have a son. You will name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard your cry of affliction.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ See *Alter*

The name Ishmael means, "God hears," or, "may God hear."¹⁰ So, in this short scene we learn a lot about God. We learn that He sees you and He hears you. We learn He knows what's going on in your mind and your body (He knew she was pregnant). He knows your past and He knows your future. He knows the struggles you're dealing with and the hurts deep in your heart. And He moves on your behalf, to give you life more abundantly if you will believe Him and obey.

Genesis 16:12 - ¹²This man will be like a wild donkey. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; he will settle near all his relatives."

Ishmael and his descendants would be strong, independent - living outside of civilized society.¹¹ The Lord compares him to a breed of donkey called the Syrian Onager. It was known for great beauty and strength. It was compared to thoroughbred horses. In fact, one Greek historian reports that they were able to outrun horses, and would often taunt their pursuers.¹² The prophecy in verse 12 has continued to be true of Ishmael's descendants, which include some of the Arab people, who still live in opposition to the sons of Israel.

Genesis 16:13-14 - ¹³So she named the Lord who spoke to her: "You are El-roi," for she said, "In this place, have I actually seen the one who sees me?" ¹⁴That is why the well is called Beer-lahai-roi. It is between Kadesh and Bered.

This is an amazing turn of events. *She* gives *God* a name, and He accepts it! I don't think 'Gene' is that obscure a name, but historically, any time I've gone to Starbucks, they give me *some other* name and, frankly, it's not appreciated. The best one was, *Chi*.

Some linguists believe that Hagar is saying something like, "Wait, I saw God and I didn't die?" She's in shock. You see, that was what people thought would happen if God showed up. Think of Samson's parents in Judges 13. But here Hagar starts to think that she might not understand as much about God as she thought. She expected crushing. Instead she discovered that this God is not only a real, living Person, but He sees and He hears. He comes in search and He speaks and He directs and He protects and He provides and He intends and He comforts and He helps.

Genesis 16:15-16 - ¹⁵So Hagar gave birth to Abram's son, and Abram named his son (whom Hagar bore) Ishmael. ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

This is a very unexpected conclusion. We see significant growth here. The family of faith is finally back on track and making progress. Hagar returned, without any guarantee that her day-to-day would improve, and we see that when she told Abraham what had happened, he not only believed her, but he humbled himself under the word of God and submitted accordingly. He named the boy Ishmael - *God hears*. As in, "God hears how you've been afflicting Hagar." But what a great moment this is for us to witness. God's people aren't perfect. It's unreasonable to expect that believers won't

¹⁰ See *NET Study Bible Notes*, *CSB Study Bible Notes*, *Kidner*

¹¹ *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_wild_ass

make mistakes. The question is: Are we being conformed into God's image? Are we progressing in our walk of faith? In our submission to God's word? Are we decreasing so that the Lord might increase in us?

Abraham would have to wait *another* 14 years before the son of promise finally arrived. Hagar would live a long time as a servant. It wasn't going to be easy. But, they were moving forward in God's plan and provision, and that was a good thing. So much better than the alternative.

People love film franchises. The Marvel Cinematic Universe currently holds the title for most movies - 27 to date. James Bond is number 2 with 25 movies. But the *oldest* movie franchise has been around for 90 years. It's the Mummy, with 19 films, starting all the way back in 1932.¹³

Your life is the next sequel in God's Marvelous Charismatic Universe. Broken down the word charismatic simply means "gifts of grace."¹⁴ God still intends to lead you forward by His generous grace, into new growth of love, compassion, activity, and submission to His word. Let Him have creative control so that your sequel is as good as the original. Recognize that your role is of a beloved servant, sent to endure whatever is required in order to accomplish the Director's creative vision. If we go His way, rather than our own, the story will be a triumph and we will be glorified as we bring Him glory and praise.

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_series

¹⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Charismatic-movement.html>