

The Family of Abraham - Part 6—Hagar and a New Fall

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. Today we're looking at chapter 16 of the book of Genesis, the story of Abraham, Sarai and Hagar. This story is the sixth in the series that I'm doing on the history of Abraham's family that will take us through to the end of the book of Genesis.

Chapter 16 of Genesis is a very difficult and challenging passage in many ways. It's a story that is unsettling in the way that Hagar is treated in the actions of Abraham and Sarai.

And it's going to take us some while to get into the depths of this passage. There are a lot of things going on here. First thing to notice is that Hagar is introduced as an Egyptian maidservant.

Now, we've already had an Egyptian experience in the story of Abraham. If we go back to chapter 12, we read of Abraham's time in Egypt when he flees from a famine in the land.

And Sarai is taken into the house of Pharaoh. During that period, Pharaoh treats Abraham very well for the sake of Sarai. It says, He treated Abraham well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys and camels.

[1 : 07] But the Lord plagued Pharaoh in his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abraham's wife. So, already an Egyptian experience. But now we have, presumably, one of the maidservants that was received during that period in Egypt is one of the main players within this particular chapter.

It's the story of Hagar. And Hagar, as an Egyptian maidservant, that nationality is significant. Where she comes from. First of all, it's an after effect of this particular time in Egypt.

And the damage that that caused. That particular event was a very bad one in many respects. It led to Sarai being taken. And almost, were it not for God's intervention, being taken completely by Pharaoh and Abraham being killed even.

But God intervened with plagues. Sarai was released. And now we have something of an after effect of that. That this Egyptian maidservant that was taken into the house is now someone who's going to bring added complexity to the story of Abraham and Sarah.

Someone who's going to bring another rift, another problem across the path. The story is also something that takes the background of the previous account that we just studied.

[2 : 32] What do we notice about that previous account? I didn't comment upon it at the time. But if you're paying attention, you should have noticed. I've already mentioned in passing some of the details.

But let's consider what happens. In that story, we have animals brought together. And then those animals are placed before Abraham.

And then Abraham is placed into a deep sleep. And then he has this vision as part of that deep sleep. And then the next scene we have. Now Sarai, Abraham's wife, had borne him no children.

What do you notice there? Well, it's a pattern that we should be familiar with. That there is a pattern that reminds us there of the story of Adam and Eve.

In the Garden of Eden, God brings animals to Adam. Adam names the animals. And then he is placed into a deep sleep.

[3 : 37] And the woman is taken from his side and brought to him. Now we have this word for deep sleep is a rare one. We don't find it elsewhere in Genesis, except in Genesis chapter 2.

This is a significant event that should remind us of what happened back there. And the question is, who is the woman who is being brought to Adam?

Who is the woman who is being brought to Abraham? Is it Sarai, his wife? Or is it Hagar, the maidservant? And if you look more closely, you'll notice a number of further things.

The words within the account echo the account of the fall. Sarai said to Abraham, See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please go into my maid. Perhaps I shall obtain children by her. Or be built up from her, literally. And Abraham heeded the voice of Sarai.

[4 : 38] Then Sarai, Abraham's wife, took Hagar, her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abraham to be his wife. Now what's happening there?

This is a familiar story. It's the story of, first of all, the woman is brought to the man. Is it Sarai or is it Hagar? And this question is at the back of the text.

And Sarai brings Hagar to Abraham. It's a forbidden fruit story. Abraham listens to the voice of Sarai, his wife.

This is exactly what we hear in the story of Genesis chapter 3. And the way it's described, Sarai, Abraham's wife, took Hagar and gave her to her husband Abraham.

The taking and the giving and the heeding the voice of the wife in this situation. It's the forbidden fruit story all over again. It's a familiar story and we should have our minds ringing this alarm bell.

[5 : 40] We've heard this story before. Warning sign, warning sign, warning sign. Something's wrong. We've had this event where the man is placed into a deep sleep. There's animals. There's all these other things that remind us of Genesis chapter 2.

And now we have the woman being deceived and the woman taking and giving to her husband of the forbidden fruit. There's something going wrong and the alarm bell should be ringing.

When we read through biblical stories, the way biblical stories mean, the way they describe, they expose the truth that they have at the heart of them is often through these sorts of parallels.

It's as you know the text more widely that you'll listen to a story like this and you'll hear those alarm bells ringing. You know this story. You've heard this. Something's going wrong. Something's gone awry.

It should have gone differently. But what we're seeing is the full story play out again. The woman takes and she gives to her husband and husband heeds her voice.

[6 : 39] And what happens next? Eyes are opened. So he went into Hagar and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived the fruit, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

Then Sarai said to Abraham, 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 judged between you and me.

So Hagar's eyes are opened. What does this mean? That it's interesting if you look at the text more carefully. It says, gave Hagar to be his wife.

Now I'm not sure that that was Sarai's intention. She very much wanted to maintain the relationship of mistress, maid servant within this relationship with Hagar.

She hoped that she would be built up through Hagar. And that's interesting. She's not expecting that Hagar will be an equal wife alongside her.

[7 : 45] She wants to be built up through Hagar. And that language of being built up, that's significant language. It's a language that we find for the formation of Eve. Eve is built out of the side of the man.

It's a building up. And she wants to be, Sarai wants to be built up through Hagar. Hagar is given to her husband. And then there's a sense of, this is not what I wanted.

It's all gone wrong. And there's a sense of nakedness that this, the eyes of Hagar have been opened. She looks differently at her mistress, no longer as her mistress.

But now she feels, I'm not going to be under my mistress's thumb. I'm equal to my mistress. And I have a child as well. I'm a wife. I'm not just a maid servant.

I'm a wife of Abraham. And the text would seem to back that up. That there is a validation of Hagar's new status. That she's not just a maid servant.

[8 : 44] Now she's the wife of Abraham. And that shift is one that's quite critical for understanding what's happening here. There is a forbidden fruit story.

And then there's the recognition of the wife that this was not what she intended. She feels deceived. She does not know that this was what was going to happen.

And yet it has happened this way. And eyes are opened. And as the eyes are opened, she feels naked. She feels judged. She feels that she no longer has the same place that she did.

Now this child is going to be raised by this independent woman who was once her maid servant. And Hagar is going to stand independently of her.

Raise that child. And she's going to be a rival to her. It's a very different sort of situation from what she first intended. Abraham's response is to the question.

[9 : 43] Is the Lord judge between you and me? So there's a movement now into the judgment scene. Abraham gives over into the hands of Sarai Hagar and says, You do to your maid what is pleasing in your sight, essentially.

And Hagar deals harshly with her and she fled from her presence. Now, what do we notice here? That there is, first of all, look throughout this passage.

There's a constant play upon the theme of sight. That there is a seeing. And it's something that we see within the story of Genesis chapter 3.

Seeing that the fruit is good. And eyes being opened. And seeing that they are naked. And then hiding from sight.

We see a number of these different themes. And these themes reappear here. There's the seeing the maid servant. There's the eyes of Hagar being opened.

[10 : 53] And her mistress being despised in her eyes. And then, as it were, Sarai's eyes being opened to the situation. That she is despised in Hagar's eyes.

And then Hagar being handed over to Sarai to do what is pleasing in her eyes. And then Hagar flees. She flees from the sight of her mistress.

And the angel of the Lord finds her by a spring. Or literally an eye of water in the wilderness. By the eye on the way to shore. And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid.

Where have you come from? And where are you going? And she said, I'm fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai. And what you see there is more sight themes coming to the surface. What happened after the fall? They hide. They hide from God's presence. And there is a judgment that occurs at that point. That God comes and says, Where are you, Adam?

[11 : 57] And Adam is hiding. Because he's naked. And who told you that you were naked? Here we have a similar thing. Hagar flees from the presence of her mistress.

And as she flees, the angel of the Lord comes. And the angel of the Lord asks essentially the same question as God asked to Adam. Where are you?

And why are you here? From where are you going? Why have you hidden? Why have you fled? And then the angel of the Lord instructs her to return to her mistress and submit herself unto her hand.

This is a similar account to what we see in the judgment upon the woman in the end of the story of the fall.

That the woman is told that her desire will be for her husband and her husband will rule over her. There is this breaking down of that reciprocity in that relationship. It will become fraught and it will become one of subjugation often rather than a healthy one.

[13 : 02] And what she's told to do is to return to that relationship at this point. And this is not what we'd expect. Another thing to notice about the theme of sight is that that is interrupted.

We have this theme of sight and eyes being opened, the eye of the spring, God coming and seeing and all these sorts of things. It's interrupted by God hearing.

That God has heard your reflection and that's surprising we'd expect. God has seen your reflection but here it's heard. Hearing interrupts the seeing. The returning to the mistress is again associated with these greater themes of the judgment upon Eve.

But with a redemptive tone here. So she's told to return to her mistress. And she's told, I will multiply your descendants exceedingly so that they shall not be counted for multitude.

And in Genesis chapter 3, I will multiply your conceptions. There is this sense of the pain of conception in that context. But also the numbers of childbirth perhaps as well is included there.

[14 : 13] Here we have the same notes being struck. But there's a different tone that comes. That there is a returning to the mistress. There's a dysfunctional relationship but she's told to be faithful in that.

And then God will multiply. But that multiplication will not be a negative one. And there's a series of statements of the angel of the Lord here. It says, so the angel of the Lord said.

So the angel of the Lord said. So the angel of the Lord said. In 9, 10 and 11. It's successive speeches. And the question is. Is this just one speech and just constantly interrupted by this

formula?

Or is there a sense in which Hagar is answering with silence? That there is a successive inducement as it were to return. Return to your mistress and submit under her hands.

Silence. Response. Silence. And then. Behold you are with child.

[15:15] And you shall bear a son. And you shall call his name Ishmael. Because the Lord has heard your affliction. And that means literally God hears. 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. And here we see that this is the point at which she then responds.

Now this suggestion of three responses of silence. Two responses of silence is something I got from Rabbi David Formal. Which I found a very helpful insight into how to read this perhaps.

It's not something I put too much weight on. But it's an interesting possible reading. And her response again draws upon the theme of sight. You are the God who sees.

And she calls the name of. That's what she calls the name of the Lord. For she said. Have I also here seen him who sees me. So the theme of sight is being played out throughout this.

[16:12] There's this theme of sight being repeated. And here we find it being brought to a redemptive resolution. That God has seen the oppression. The mistreatment. The subjugation of this woman.

Her affliction. And she has not been unnoticed. And you see the earlier statements don't mention that God has heard her affliction. But here we have that.

All the I themes being interrupted by God hearing. And then also the fact that God has recognised. Has registered. And has heard her affliction. And is intervening within that situation.

And she returns. And she names the well. She names the well. And then she bears Abram a son. And Abram is 86 years old.

When Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. What we see in this story is that again. Is a story that's connected with the broader themes of the text.

[17:17] The broader themes of the text that bring us back to the story of the fall. There's a repetition of the fall here. And there are two Eve characters. There's Sarai as the Eve character. Who takes of the forbidden fruit.

And gives it to her husband. And then there's a sense of nakedness. And shame. And a loss of glory. And then. There is also another woman.

Another Eve character. And that's Hagar. Hagar who is expelled. Hagar who is. Experiences this divine judgement. Between. This divine judgement that occurs.

And this divine judgement is a more positive thing. That God has heard her affliction. And God will bless her. But those blessings are. Spins upon those curses or judgments.

That we see upon Eve. In Genesis chapter 3. What else is going on here? And here we come back to the key theme. Which I introduced at the beginning.

[18:15] That Hagar is associated with Egypt. What do we see taking place here? What we see taking place. Is a story that reminds us.

Of the Exodus narrative. But all the parts are reversed. What we have is. A servant. In the house of Abraham and Sarai.

Abraham and Sarai. The chosen people of God. And they are mistreating. This Egyptian maidservant. And this Egyptian maidservant.

Is sorely mistreated. And as she is sorely mistreated. There is an oppression. That is very much instigated by Sarai towards her.

And she flees. And God meets her in the wilderness. And God acts in her situation. God has heard her affliction. What does Hagar's name mean? Hagar's name might be associated with.

[19:11] The name of the stranger. Hagar. What has God just said to Abraham. That your descendants will be strangers in the land not their own.

And they will be afflicted. For 400 years. And they will serve them. And they will afflict them 400 years. And this is a story immediately following.

We see the stranger figure. Someone who is associated with that word for the stranger. Hagar. And she is afflicted in the house of Abraham. There are all these themes of Exodus.

But Exodus perverted. Exodus twisted. The people being oppressed are the Egyptians. And the people doing the oppression are Israelites. As we read through the story of Genesis.

I think one of the things that we are seeing. Is gathering storm clouds. That there is a sense. That there is something about this event. That is twisting.

[20 : 13] And that has ramifications for the later destiny. Of the descendants of Abraham. That what they do in relationship to Hagar. And God has seen her affliction.

Will later on occur to them. There is a poetic justice here. That what happens to the Egyptian maidservant. Whom God hears. Will later happen to the descendants of Abraham and Sarai themselves.

And Abraham has had an account. A vision of all of this beforehand. He has been told that his descendants will be strangers. That they will be afflicted.

That they will be servants. That they will be in a situation. Where they are afflicted by a nation not their own. And then. What happens.

In his own household. The same thing. Happens in the immediately succeeding story. There is something that has gone rotten here. And the calling back to the story of the fall.

[21 : 13] Helps us to see a bit more of what is taking place. The woman. And her husband. The judgement that occurs. The expulsion. And all these themes.

The way that they play out in a way that juxtaposes the characters of Hagar and Sarai. That there is now a rivalry between the two of them. And that rivalry is one that has later consequences for the people of Israel.

It's not something that they can escape. It's something that will have ramifications down the line.

But at this point. What we need to notice. Is the way that it plays out ongoing stories.

Within the narrative. It's another fall. There are another judgments that take place here. There are also events that remind us. Of the previous sojourn in Egypt.

She is an Egyptian maidservant. It's a ramification of that particular period of time in Egypt. And there are anticipations. Of what is going to come in the future. Anticipations that have already been given in the previous chapter.

[22 : 15] Abraham should have been warned about this. Now he awakes from the deep sleep. What we have is the end of the vision. At the end of chapter 20.

Of verse 21. At the end of chapter 15. And what happens immediately after that. We read about the woman. We read about Sarai. His wife. Who is the woman that's being brought to him.

By whom his descendants will be made great. By whom he will become a mighty nation. The person from his own. The person who will mean that from his own body. This seed will be raised.

Sarai is the person that we meet immediately afterwards. She's the woman that's brought to Adam. To Abram. After he awakens from the deep sleep. But no. What we see is that Sarai believes that she will be built up.

The way that Eve was created. Through Hagar. And through giving Hagar to her husband. She gives the forbidden fruit. And ends up with pain for all parties.

[23 : 14] But yet the judgments are tinged with grace. Particularly as Hagar is told to return to the house of her mistress. That there will be slavery there.

But there will also be multiplication. There will be a multiplication that harkens back to the experience of Eve. And the judgment upon Eve.

But also a positive multiplication. And that Ishmael will become a wild man. A great. He will become great. God has heard her affliction.

God has recognized what has happened. Now there's a lot more that can be said about this. And this story is one that we'll return to at various points. Particularly in chapter 21.

But for now. I hope this has been helpful. Lord willing. If you have any further questions. I'll be able to answer them in future podcasts on this subject.

[24 : 10] Please leave them in my Curious Cat account. Or if you have questions on completely unrelated issues. Leave them there as well. If you'd like to support this and other videos like it. And podcasts.

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