

Genesis 16B (2011)

- Remember in Chapter 15 we witnessed the Lord take upon Himself a covenant with Abram
 - In that covenant ceremony, the Lord appeared in the form of fire and smoke while Abram was in a deep sleep
 - When the moment for the agreement to the covenant came, only God acted
 - He proceeded through the bloody animals, thus binding Himself to His vows to Abram
 - And the vows God made included not only the words spoken in that moment
 - They also included the words God spoke to Abram in all three of the appearances God makes to Abram
 - God promised to make Abram a great nation, to grant him descendants, an inheritance, and to bless those who bless him while cursing his enemies
 - These promises were affirmed in Chapter 15, and they were a one-way, suzerainty grant without condition
 - Abram need do no more to keep these promises than he did to obtain them in the first place
 - They depended on God's faithfulness, not Abram's
 - Because they reflected glory upon God and not Abram
- Now in Chapter 16, we've witnessed a great sin in Abram's life, a sin of faithlessness
 - Sarai was unwilling to wait on God for a son, while Abram was unwilling to act to correct his wife
 - The results of their sin are profound, both in the immediate moment and over the course of centuries and millennia
 - The second half of the chapter examines those consequences
 - But above it all, it highlights God's faithfulness

- When we ended last week, Sarai's handmaiden Hagar had become pregnant with Abram's first son
 - The confirmation of Hagar's pregnancy had created a new and dangerous dynamic in the family
 - The slave now had the upper hand on her owner
 - Scripture said that Hagar showed contempt for Sarai
 - And Sarai, knowing that Hagar couldn't be sold now that she was Abram's wife, is at a loss for what to do next
 - So she protested to Abram and demanded he come to her protection
 - Abram for his part as husband is lying down on the job, so to speak
 - He fails in correcting his wife and now he fails in supporting his wife
 - His only response for Sarai was to state the obvious: Hagar was Sarai's slave, do what you want with her
 - How can we imagine the pain Sarai felt in her situation?
 - She thought she was doing the right thing by her husband in sacrificing her position as wife when she gave Hagar
 - She wanted to give her husband a child, and she made a mistake in how she tried to solve the problem
 - Now Sarai could appreciate her mistake, and she comes to Abram looking for support and concern and she gets it thrown back in her face
- Left with no other options, Sarai treats Hagar harshly hoping to drive her away - and it works
 - In v.16 we're told that Hagar flees from Sarai
 - This entire episode has been a disaster for everyone
 - Abram lost a servant in his home
 - Sarai lost her handmaiden

- And Hagar has lost a home and is now on the run in the middle of a pregnancy
 - Hagar's flight amounts to theft and kidnapping
 - Running away as a slave was stealing from Abram
 - And taking the unborn child was kidnapping, since the child belonged to Abram and Sarai
- Then the Lord stepped in...

Gen. 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.

Gen. 16:8 He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."

Gen. 16:9 Then the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority."

- For the first time in Scripture, we're introduced to the angel of the Lord
 - The term angel of the Lord is an important character in the Old Testament
 - It occurs 58 times in Scripture
 - Despite the use of the word angel, this is no ordinary angel
 - The word angel itself in Hebrew actually means messenger or ambassador
 - And when this word is combined with the name for God, Yahweh, it always refers to the Second Person of the Godhead
 - The Person Who is eventually revealed as the incarnate Jesus
 - But prior to His incarnation, the Second Person of God appears as a messenger or ambassador of the Father
 - We can know that this term is a reference to God Himself by looking at the context in which it appears
 - In every context where He appears, there is also a reference to God in the same text

- For example, later in this text we will find Hagar addressing the “angel” as God in v.13
 - Certainly, Hagar came to recognize this Messenger as Someone more than an angel
- When the Lord appears before Hagar, He finds her by a spring of water in the desert, on a road leading to Shur
 - Shur is a wilderness bordering the Negev, which means Hagar is likely headed to Egypt
 - This makes perfect sense
 - Hagar is going home
 - Where else would she go at this point?
 - Since she is moving through a desert, water is a crucial resource, so she has stopped by a spring
 - As the Lord appears to her, He asks two questions:
 - Where have you come from and where are you going?
 - Here we find another example of God asking questions when we know He already has all the answers
 - Why does the Lord ask a question of any kind?
 - When He wants to trigger new thinking and understanding
 - He wants Hagar to think twice about what she’s doing
 - Hagar may have been heading south toward Egypt, but she probably didn’t know her final destination
 - It was simply fleeing, as her name means
 - If you notice, the Lord began by identifying Hagar as Sarai’s maid
 - The Hebrew word for maid literally means slave girl
 - The Lord plainly calls Hagar Sarai’s slave girl
 - He seems to be reminding Hagar right from the start where she belongs

- Hagar answers plainly
 - She says she is fleeing from the presence of her master Sarai
 - Hagar makes no attempt to deny the truth: she was wrong
- Hagar is the true victim in this entire episode
 - Hagar was pressed into slavery to support Abram's family
 - She was pressed again into marrying Abram and giving him a child
 - Then she was hated by her own mistress who made these decisions
 - More importantly, Hagar had no knowledge of the Living God
 - She had no promises from God, unlike Sarai and Abram
- She was just a Gentile suffering under the sin of her Hebrew masters
 - But as she was committing this sin, the Lord stepped in and turned her around
 - In v.9 the Lord says, return to your owner and submit to her authority
 - Does the Lord's command surprise you?
 - Let me ask you what else can a holy and perfect God say?
 - Hagar's flight was breaking the law and depriving Abram of his child
 - How could God approve of that behavior?
 - It mattered not the reason for her sin...sin is sin
 - And two wrongs don't make a right
- The Lord needs Hagar to stay with Abram because it suits His purposes for Abram and Sarai
 - As you may know, God will direct Abram and Sarai to send Hagar away in a future day
 - But for now, God wants Hagar to remain in the household

- There are two reasons for this delayed departure
 - First, God wants Hagar's departure to teach a lesson for the future Israel
 - Hagar and her son will form an important picture for God in telling the story of Israel
 - There will be a seed to rule the world and save men from their sins
 - But that seed will find its source in God's promises, not in the works of men
 - In order to tell that story fully, God needed not only a son by His promise, but He also needed a son by human effort
 - Then God could contrast the outcomes of each, thereby teaching how only God's promises lead to glory
 - We'll study more about this contrast in the next chapter
 - Secondly, Abram's sin must bear consequences for himself and his nation
 - Remember I mentioned that Abram's unique position in God's plan for the world means that both his faithfulness and his sin carry great consequences
 - When Abram is strong, the world benefits
 - And when Abram is weak, the world suffers
 - All this is according to God's plan
 - The child that will come from Abram's sin must dwell near the sons of promise, because God will use one to chastise the other
 - The offspring of Hagar will eventually become enemies of Israel
 - And God will use these enemies to discipline His children in Israel
 - For God works all things to good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose

- So the Lord tells Hagar to return, submit to authority, do the right thing
 - And then God proceeds to show her how her obedience will lead to blessing

Gen. 16:10 Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count."

Gen. 16:11 The angel of the LORD said to her further,

"Behold, you are with child,
And you will bear a son;
And you shall call his name Ishmael,
Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction.

Gen. 16:12 "He will be a wild donkey of a man,
His hand will be against everyone,
And everyone's hand will be against him;
And he will live to the east of all his brothers."

- The Lord assures Hagar that her child will yield an uncountable number of descendants
 - Notice the text says "I" will...
 - The angel is speaking as God Himself, as He truly is
 - This promise is exactly the same one that God made to Abram
 - Why would God give the same promise to Hagar's child?
 - Because this child is also Abram's child
 - And the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable
 - Because God promised that Abram's seed would fill the world, so it must be with his child of Hagar
 - This child will eventually become the father of all Arab nations
 - What an amazing testimony to God's faithfulness
 - God is so faithful, His promises so sure, that not even God Himself can ignore them or change them
 - God promised Abram that his seed would be uncountable, and so it must be

- And though God's promise was directed toward a certain son yet to come, nevertheless it was spoken to Abram
 - Therefore God's word will reign true regardless of how many sons Abram conceives
- Now we are starting to understand the power of that earlier covenant moment in Chapter 15
 - It means something when God makes a promise
 - It will stand and nothing can change it
 - God made promises to you when He called you into faith
 - And those promises were spoken through His Word
 - He said He would never leave us nor forsake us
 - He will prepare a place for us
 - He will confess us before His Father
 - We will reign with Him in His kingdom
 - We will receive an inheritance in that kingdom
 - Those promises can't be changed, not by the world, not by you, not by God Himself
 - We will sin, though God desires we live holy and pleasing lives
 - But our sin will not change these promises
 - We will fail, but God will not
 - This is why Paul can say:

[Rom. 8:38](#) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

[Rom. 8:39](#) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- This son, however, is not the one of God's design when He gave His promises to Abram

- So, even though Hagar will have the benefit of many descendants, she is not the direct recipient of all the other promises
 - Remember, the promises were spoken to Abram not to Hagar
 - So she is benefiting from her association with Abram
 - She is not herself receiving those same promises
- Therefore her family has a different fate than does Abram's
 - And God shares those details with her
- Hagar learns what is in store for her pregnancy
 - First, she will have a son
 - God gives the first sonogram
 - And God gives her the name, Ishmael
 - The name Ishmael means "God hears"
 - Because God heard her affliction and visited her
 - There is great irony here, because God rescues an Egyptian after he hears her affliction at the hands of Hebrews
 - Later, God will rescue the Hebrews when he hears their affliction at the hands of the Egyptians
 - Both times, God hears because He is bound by his own word to hear
 - By announcing the name of the child, God is making a prophetic statement
 - As a slave mother, Hagar will have nothing to do with naming the child
 - Abram will name the child
 - So the only way the child's name will be Ishmael is if Abram selects this name on his own
 - And what do you think Hagar will think when she hears Abram announce the name of the child?

- Do you think she will be encouraged to witness God's word coming to reality before her eyes?
 - God is good to show Himself faithful in these ways
 - Next, God tells Hagar her son will be a wild donkey (or ass) of a man
 - His hand will be against everyone and everyone against him
 - These are proverbial statements that carry much meaning
 - Being a donkey reflects both his personality and his lifestyle
 - The people from Ishmael will be roamers in the same way that wild herds of donkeys roam the desert in Abram's day
 - Wild donkeys are particularly unruly, independent and nomadic
 - Such are the Arab peoples
 - Historically nomadic, hot blooded, and rarely given to submit to the authority of non-Arabs
 - Secondly, God says they will be a warring people
 - More importantly, they will be aggressors by nature, provoking conflict with their neighbors
 - This prophecy has proven true over the centuries
 - And his aggression will result in others retaliating
- Why does the Lord determine this kind of future for the descendants of Ishmael?
 - The answer comes in the last line of v.12
 - Ishmael will settle east of all his brothers
 - We all know the significance of east by now
 - He will represent the sin and rebellion of the world
 - And geographically, Ishmael will settle directly next to his brothers, the nation of Israel

- This explains why God has chosen to make Ishmael the man he becomes
- He will be a thorn in Israel's side, by design
- He will be a cause for Israel's chastisement in the days when God determines to send Israel a message
- Here we see the full implications of Abram's sin
 - By choosing to act outside God's will Abram has set in motion a world of enmity between the seed of flesh and the seed of promise
 - But this is always the pattern
 - When Adam sinned, he set in motion a battle between the sons of the enemy and the sons of God
 - The struggle between spirit and flesh will continue until God puts an end to all flesh
 - And here we see it again, Abram's child of flesh set to war with the child of promise
 - We might ask ourselves at this point why God intervened to stop Hagar's sin of running away, yet God didn't stop Abram and Sarai from sinning in the first place
 - The answer is that Abram and Sarai knew better
 - They had God's promises and knew Him through faith
 - They were already in a position to obey properly
 - And yet they didn't
 - When God's people sin despite having the word of truth, then we face consequences
 - But Hagar knew none of these things
 - So only now God appears and reveals Himself
 - And by that revelation, God brings understanding leading to obedience
 - Look at Hagar's response and what follows

[Gen. 16:13](#) Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God who sees”; for she said, “Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?”

[Gen. 16:14](#) Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

- Hagar’s first response is to declare that this angel is God Himself
 - This is a statement of faith similar to the one Paul makes on the road to Damascus
 - In both cases a traveler is arrested on a desert road by the Lord, who appears to correct the person’s sinful direction
 - And in both cases the appearance results in a changed life, one that follows the Lord’s leading and receives the Lord’s blessing
 - Here we have evidence that Hagar has received salvation as a result of this experience
 - She may remain a slave and she may have a son destined to torment Israel
 - But she has been called to become a child of God
 - And what led God to bring Hagar into the family of God?
 - Nothing more than her association with Abram, a man who has received God’s promises
 - A promise to bless all the nations of the Earth
 - And in response to that call she will return to Abram and submit to Sarai’s authority, as her Lord has asked her to do
 - She may be a slave to Sarai, but her true Master is now the Lord – and Hagar is obeying Him now
- This is a beautiful picture of how we too share in the blessing to Abram
 - Like Hagar, we are Gentiles who have been arrested in our normal course of sinful life
 - We encountered the Lord, Jesus
 - And by that encounter, our life of obedience began

- And we are receiving the blessings of promises made to Abram and Israel
- We are grafted into the promises, and so we share in the blessings