

Genesis 16 – Hagar and Ishmael

After facing many trials, Abram now faced another. The life of a Christian is a life of being tested, and purified. Abram had left his own people, and faced famine, and war among others. Now came another test.

Abram and Sarai make a plan (v1-3)

There was still no son. What could they do? Sarai had a plan – she would give her maid to her husband. She would have a son through Hagar. It seemed they had waited too long – perhaps God needed their help! This went against God's plan for marriage. God does not need this “help”. Abram foolishly listened to his wife. Instead of seeking God's will and waiting for God's answer, he went ahead; just like Adam, who listened to Eve instead of showing her a better way. Luke 14:26 says that God's word must come before even family. Sometimes tests come to us from those who are very near to us. Sometimes, impatience defeats us after we have defeated outside enemies. We must always be careful.

The plan turns out badly (v4-6)

The plan went wrong. When Hagar saw she was with child, she began to despise her mistress. She saw herself above Sarai. When we make our own plans outside of God's will, then trouble will come. Sarai became angry and blamed Abram instead of blaming her own mistake. This was not her usual way (1 Peter 3:5-6); but even the best of God's servants are weak and need a Saviour. If we make a mistake we should repent, not try to blame another. Abram also failed to confess his responsibility, and left the matter to Sarai. Hagar fled. All three of them were now unhappy.

Hagar meets the Lord (v7-14)

Hagar's mistress had rejected her – but God had not forgotten her. She was an Egyptian, yet God cared for her. God dealt gently with her, yet showed her that she was wrong to run away. In the wilderness, she saw her mistake and was turned back. Sometimes we also need to be brought into a “wilderness” so that we can hear God's voice. God gave Hagar a large promise (v10-12). Her son would also become a great people. She called God “the one who sees me”. She agreed to go back – when someone is truly sorry for their sin, they will have a heart to put it right again.

A son is born (v15-16)

Ishmael was born. God's ways are often surprising. The promised mother – Sarai – was barren; but the plan that was not from God had produced a son! We must not judge according to what we see. Ishmael was produced through human effort, not by God's promise. Galatians 4:21-31 explains some of this. Ishmael was a sign of the Jews who tried to earn salvation by their own law-keeping. Isaac, the coming son, was a sign of free salvation by God's grace. We should not make our decisions by our eyes and feelings, but simply trust God's word and obey it. Salvation does not come by our own efforts, but through the gift of Jesus Christ. Our place is not to “help God” by going a different way, but to faithfully follow him.