

Helping God Out 3-18-07

Genesis 16:1-16 (NIV)

¹ Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me." ⁶ "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best."

Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. ⁷ The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. ⁹ Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." ¹⁰ The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." ¹¹ The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. ¹² He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

¹³ She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." ¹⁴ That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵ So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

During our time in Israel, the Lord gave us a very clear picture of how the Lord had blessed the world through Abram. We saw with our own eyes the fulfillment of Genesis 12:3 "...all the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you." We met believers from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. As we worshipped together, we felt as if we were getting a little taste of heaven in which every tribe, nation, and language will worship around the throne. (Revelation 7:9) The world has indeed been blessed through the seed of Abram, Christ Jesus! (Galatians 3:16)

In our passage today, we see a painful detour in the journey of faith. In that detour we can see how gracious God is when we express our lack of faith by helping God out. Sarai was about 75 years old. She had given up on seeing the promise of a child fulfilled through her. God had already told Abram the promised child would be his own son (Genesis 15:4), but God had not told him that Sarai would be the mother. So Sarai made a suggestion, a suggestion that was a common practice in the world at that time. "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Commented [notes1]: 9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.
Rev 7:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.
Gal 3:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."
Gen 15:4 (NIV)

First, I want you to notice there is a problem with her attitude. Having children in those days gave a woman a sense of significance. To Sarai, bareness was a painful thing to live with. She blamed God for it. Ultimately, everything is permitted or not by God's will. His permissive will allows us to choose evil. This doesn't mean that God prefers that the world sin and face the consequences of their sin but that He allows us that freedom. Then we must face the consequences. The deterioration of man's physical condition is the result of sin. Even if God supernaturally kept her from having children, there was a reason for it. Sarai simply blamed God as if God was some mean ogre withholding His goodness from us. We have a tendency to do the same thing. We ask God why He has allowed this illness or that broken relationship forgetting that so much of what we face is the natural outcome of man's rebellion towards God. Then we blame God for the fruit of evil, or at least for allowing it to touch our lives. That is the first clue that her suggestion is completely out of line with God's intended will.

Remember, Hagar probably joined them during the Egypt fiasco in which Abram deceived the Pharaoh and got into some trouble. She was a Hamite. She was probably given to Sarai as a young servant girl when Pharaoh tried to add Sarai to his harem. One mistake is about to multiply. The fiasco in Egypt is about to cause more bad fruit. Abram agreed that perhaps this suggestion from Sarai was God's plan all along and took Hagar as a wife. Was it Hagar's desire to be a birthing instrument for this 85 year-old man? I doubt it. Hagar is being used as a surrogate mother. It was culturally acceptable, but God had already said to the first couple that two shall be one. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5) Did he give in to Sarai's suggestion so readily because of his lust for a younger woman? If you don't think lust was involved, consider that after Sarai died, Abram married a woman half his age and had 6 sons after the age of 137! Perhaps his desire to have an heir was so strong that he ignored what was right to compromise with societal norms and have his way?

We are often faced with this temptation. The world offers us a solution to our problem that is perfectly acceptable by the world's standards. It may seem reasonable. It may be acceptable, and it may even be a temptation to give in to our fleshly desires, but it will end in agony of the soul. Whether it is a shortcut in your work, or relationships, or whatever the case may be, is it God honoring? Abram had just come from this revelation of a covenant with God. He had seen the theophany ablaze as it passed through the torn animals. (Genesis 15:17) He was assured he would have a son and the land would belong to his descendants, (Genesis 15:18) but then he sinks to this compromise. Our roller coaster has hit a new low.

Consider for a moment the parallels with the first fall. Abram listened to his wife just as Adam listened to Eve. (Genesis 3:17) Sarai took Hagar, just as Eve took the fruit. (Genesis 3:6a) Sarai gave her to her husband, just as Eve gave the fruit to her husband. (Genesis 3:6b) Both men willingly took what was offered to them.

What should Abram have done? He should have sought God! Jesus showed us how to deal with the shortcuts that are offered to us. Every thing the devil tempted Jesus with in the wilderness was a shortcut to where Jesus was going. The bread was a shortcut to feeding the multitudes. (Matthew 4:3) The throwing himself down from

Commented [notes4]: 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.
Gen 2:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ?
Matt 19:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.
Gen 15:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--
Gen 15:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.
Gen 3:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.
Gen 3:6a (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.
Gen 3:6b (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."
Matt 4:3 (NIV)

the pinnacle was a way to force people to recognize Him as Messiah, but God wants us to come to Him through faith. (Matthew 4:6) The rule of the world was coming anyway, it was just that the path Satan offered would end in a different kind of rule. (Matthew 4:9) To all these shortcuts, Jesus responded with God's word. If Abram had done the same, we would live in a much different world. What will you do when faced with tempting shortcuts?

Commented [notes12]: 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Matt 4:6 (NIV)

As soon as Hagar became pregnant, she wanted a higher status in the family. She was tired of being the servant and decided the pregnancy now made her wife number one. (Proverbs 30:21-23) This was so common that there were laws addressing the issue. Sarai could legally demote her to servant again and take the baby as her own. In other words, she could use her as a surrogate mother against her will and return her to the status of servant.

Commented [notes13]: 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Matt 4:9 (NIV)

Hagar's attitude irked Sarai who was used to having her servant submit to her. She blamed Abram for Hagar's new attitude. *"You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."* Human nature is so clearly visible in her argument. She admits she was the one who put Hagar in Abram's arms, but says he is responsible for Hagar's attitude, and even asks for the LORD to judge which one of them is right. It seems rather irrational, but then, when are women rational when their place in the home is threatened? If it were not such a heartbreaking situation, you might find it humorous, but there is a lot of heartache for everyone involved. Sarai is mad at Abram for treating Hagar like a wife; Hagar is angry with Sarai for wanting to keep her as a slave; and Abram is no doubt heartbroken over both women's attitudes, and perhaps over his own weakness at giving in to the suggestion. There is enough blame to go around for all three of them. What a mess! (Romans 3:10)

Commented [notes14]: 21 "Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: 22 a servant who becomes king, a fool who is full of food, 23 an unloved woman who is married, and a maidservant who displaces her mistress. Prov 30:21-23 (NIV)

Seeing no other way out, he put Sarai first and said, *"Your servant is in your hands...Do with her whatever you think best."* He could have been a man and assured Sarai of his love for her while exhorting Hagar to treat Sarai with more respect, but that would be a long and painful process. Polygamy is bound to create problems like this. There is no easy solution. Everyone is going to end up hurt. Relationships will never be quite the same again. The same is true with unfaithfulness; when it is discovered, hearts will be scarred and wounded for life.

Commented [notes15]: 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; Romans 3:10 (NIV)

This situation is something we face all the time. At first we imagine some compromise and how it is going to all work out just wonderful. After all, the world says its OK. We imagine that it is God's will, though we often have a lack of peace in our heart about it. (Colossians 3:15) But we go ahead and plunge into something we think will make our situation better. Then reality hits us in the face. It isn't working out like we planned. Now what? We often make a second mistake by trying to act as if we didn't make the first one. We still refuse to ask God what He would have us do. Now frustrated by the impossible situation we have put our self in, we start to act impatient with others, only making matters worse. Now our situation is such a mess we can't see any way out. It all started when we dreamed up a compromise to help God out instead of patiently waiting on Him. (Psalm 37:7)

Commented [notes16]: 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Col 3:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Psalms 37:7 (NIV)

Sarai mistreated Hagar until Hagar finally fled the camp. This word, "mistreated" is the same word that will describe how the Egyptians dealt with the Israelites that were slaves in Egypt. (Numbers 20:15) For a pregnant woman to flee into desert was almost saying she would rather die than continue to take the abuse. A woman would be lucky to survive on her own without becoming someone else's slave, and who would take in a pregnant woman? Hagar isn't innocent, but it was her master and his wife who threw her into this situation. Though Abram couldn't comfort her without making matters worse, she was not alone in her misery, and neither are you or I. (Matthew 28:20)

Commented [notes18]: 15 Our forefathers went down into Egypt, and we lived there many years. The Egyptians mistreated us and our fathers, Num 20:15 (NIV)

⁷ The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She was on her way back to Egypt. There by a spring of water, Jesus met her. Yes, the Angel of the LORD is none other than Jesus. He is God manifest in a way that people can see and understand. The rest of the passage acknowledges that this is the LORD that she has met with. (See verse 13)

Commented [notes19]: 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matt 28:20 (NIV)

There is a wonderful comfort for all of us when we realize what is taking place. Here is this Hamite slave, pregnant by Abram, at her wits end, risking her life to return to her homeland. She is the lowest wrung on society's ladder. She finally had an opportunity to rise out of her lowly place but instead, life became even more intolerable. Pregnant, alone, sitting by this spring that at least gave her water, she probably wondered if things could get any worse. She may have wondered if her baby would even survive. That is when the Lord met her. It is in those lowest of times when we open ourselves up to the Lord. You see, until we get to the bottom, we tend to cling to our own will, our own plans and desires, and block out any intrusion of the Spirit of God into our lives. But at the bottom, we have nothing to lose. That is when we finally allow ourselves to hear the voice of God. (2Samuel 22:7) That is when we come face to face with Jesus and the wonder of grace.

Commented [notes20]: 13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." Gen 16:13 (NIV)

Throughout Scripture we find this common question by the Spirit of God. What are you doing? God asked Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) He asked Cain, "Where is your brother?" (Genesis 4:9) He asked Saul of Tarsus, "Why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4) Tradition tells us He asked Peter as Peter fled Rome, "Where are you going?" I know the Spirit of God often checks me with the question, "What are you doing?" It was the same in this story of Hagar. "Where did you come from, and where are you going? It is a chance to reconsider our actions. Will you allow the Spirit of God to ask you today, "Where are you going? What are you doing?"

Commented [notes21]: 7 In my distress I called to the LORD; I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears. 2 Sam 22:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" Gen 3:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Gen 4:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Acts 9:4 (NIV)

She had a plan to return to Egypt. She imagined she would find some kind of mercy there. Mercy comes from the Lord. If we need mercy, we should run to the Lord, not man. (Psalm 6:2) ⁹ Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." ¹⁰ The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." He told her what she didn't want to hear, but then He encouraged her with what she needed to hear. That is often how He responds to us

Commented [notes25]: 2 Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony. Psalms 6:2 (NIV)

as well. He tells us where we must correct our actions, but then He encourages us with promises. This encouragement was similar to the promise given to Abram. He promised her descendents would be too many to count. If she was worried about the survival of her baby, this was the promise she needed to hear to endure the abuse from Sarai.

¹¹ *The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery.* This baby will be born. To encourage her even further, He told her to name him, "God hears". What a glorious name! That is the one thing you and I need to know in our hour of need. When pain fills our hearts, we need to know God hears. (Psalm 49:1-3) There is nothing more comforting to my heart than to know God, the Almighty Creator of Heaven and earth hears my heart cry. (James 5:11) Do you know today, brother or sister in Christ, that God hears? No matter how low you have sunk or what you have done, Ishmael! (yish-maw-ale') Say it with me. "Ishmael!" The Lord has heard of your misery.

¹² *He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."* The LORD also added a word for future generations. The descendents Ishmael are the Arab people. We have seen their history match the words of this prophecy. Even today we see this prophecy being lived out. Shia can't get along with Sunni. Palestinian PLO fights with Palestinian Hamas and both live in hostility toward Jews. Al Qaeda is against all Muslims who are not fighting for Sharia Law. If you want a one-sentence explanation for what is happening in the world today, you can look to this prophecy given by God to a slave named Hagar. Of course in Christ we are all new creations. Abram's indiscretion affected the world from that time onward. (Genesis 25:18)

¹³ *She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."* God had given her son the name "God hears". Then she gave God a name, El Roiy, The God Who Sees. God declared that He hears us in our misery. Hagar declared that God sees us when we think we are alone. She called the well Beerlahairoi, well of the living One seeing me. When God sent Moses to free Israel from Egypt, He told Moses to tell them God heard their cries, saw their misery, and was concerned. (Exodus 4:31)

Hagar was obedient to the Angel of the Lord and returned to Abram's camp and bore him a son. Abram listened to the revelation she had received and named him Ishmael. The temporary peace in the home would only last for 13 years. Once Sarai's son was born, she would be forced to leave again, that time to never return. Ishmael would father 12 tribes that would be a thorn in the sides of the 12 tribes of Israel and future generations.

Lessons to live by:

1. Don't be tempted by shortcuts that rely on man rather than God. Go to the word of God to find the right response. Don't risk the consequences of sin.

Commented [notes26]: 1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.
2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.
3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.
Psalms 40:1-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
James 5:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 18 His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.
Gen 25:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: 31 and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.
Ex 4:31 (NIV)

2. We often have to get to the end of our ability before we hear God. Why wait till you get there. Come to Jesus today!
3. God hears. No matter what we are going through, you can be sure that God hears our misery.
4. God sees. Your plight is not hidden from God. Whether you are trying to hide your sin from God, or think your plight is somehow hidden from our gracious God, the living God sees and is concerned.