

## **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 in 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
    - Lord plainly calls Hagar Sarai's slave girl
    - He seems to be reminding Hagar right form 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 important, 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 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 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,

I     “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,  
I     And everyone’s hand will be against him;  
I     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 can 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
        - 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
      - These prophecy has proven truly 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
  - 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