

St Thomas' Home Group Study Notes

ABRAHAM

Week 3 - Hagar and Ishmael

Read: Genesis 16:1-10, 15-16

The Lord's promise - still unfulfilled!

After formally establishing his covenant promises with Abraham in the previous chapter, the Lord has still not given Abram and Sarai the child he promised them. Sarai convinces Abram to take Hagar, her Egyptian slave girl, as a wife in the hope of getting a child that way. Abram agrees and pregnancy soon follows; but so does conflict. Sarai, in her jealousy of Hagar becoming pregnant, treats her so harshly that the girl runs off alone into the wilderness. The Lord finds her and commands her to return and to submit to Sarai. He also reveals to Hagar that her child, who is to be named Ishmael, will become the father of a great people who will live in conflict with everyone.

Q. Do you ever think that God might need some help in keeping his promises? Have you ever trusted God to answer your prayers - and then, like Sarai, taken matters into your own hands?

Female slaves constituted a part of the private endowment, or possessions, of a wife, and she had the right to use or dispose of them as she pleased; her husband had no authority in the case. A female slave, being the absolute property of the mistress was not her own person. The fruits of her labour and all her children were her owner's property also. The children, therefore, which were born of the slave, were considered as the children of the mistress.

It was on this ground that Sarai gave her slave to Abram.

Q. How do you think Hagar might have felt about being used in this way? Was it a privilege, or was it abuse?



Why does Hagar matter?

Hagar is the first person in the biblical account to name God. She calls him 'El Roi', "*the God who sees.*" Hagar is a foreigner, and of low status as a servant or slave. She doesn't have power over her own life and she suffers abuse from Sarai/Sarah, and is eventually cast out by Abraham. She is referred to by Sarai and Abram only ever as Sarai's "slave girl," never by her own name. But when the angel of the Lord encounters her, she is called by her name, Hagar. God looks at her as a person, a woman whom he has called for his divine purposes; and in turn, Hagar calls God by a name - 'El Roi'. There is power in being named and being recognized as a person.

Q. How do you think Hagar might have felt when God called her by name?

Q. Remembering Hagar's position in Abram's household, what would it cost her to obey the angel's instruction?

Q. Why does the angel ask Hagar something that the angel already knows? "Where have you come from, and where are you going?" (Gen 16:8) Why does he send her back to Sarai?

The God who sees me

Instead of reacting to the content of the angel's message, Hagar marvels that God knows about her and cares about her. In her joy she becomes the only person in the Bible to actually name God.

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)

Q. What is the significance of Hagar's name for God - 'El Roi', 'The God Who Sees Me' ?

Q. What might it mean to a person who is discouraged or losing hope?

Q. What does it mean to you personally?