

Sarai's Impatient Problem-Solving Device & Abram's Impatient Submittal, Gen 16:1-5; Prevailing Public Opinion Should Never Trump Doctrine; Ishmael's Progeny: the 12 Princes & the 12 Tribes of Arabia, Gen 25:12-18

Genesis 16:1 - Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not given birth to any children, but she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar.

The most likely scenario that brought Hagar into Sarah's employ is that she became Sarah's servant while she and Abraham were in Egypt.

Genesis 16:2 - So Sarai said to Abram, "Since the Lord has prevented me from having children, have sexual relations with my servant. Perhaps I can have a family by her. Abram did what Sarai told him.

One of the greatest tests of faith is when divine timing does not line up with human impatience; sin results when human energy trumps divine omnipotence. God promised Abraham an heir in Genesis 15:4: "This man (Eliezer of Damascus) will not be your heir, but instead a son who comes from your own body will be your heir." Both Abraham and Sarah became impatient over the delay and Sarah devised a plot that has had ramifications down to this very hour. Her motivation was distrust and disbelief regarding God's promise. Her suggestion being readily accepted by Abraham betrays the fact he entertained these same doubts himself.

Although what Sarah suggested and Abraham executed was a common cultural practice in that day, it was still a sinful idea, a sinful suggestion, and a sinful act.

Knowing that it was humanly impossible for (Sarah) to have children by Abraham, she gave her handmaid to him, that she might have children by her—a custom consistent with moral standards prevailing at that time. Abraham reminded Sarah that her word was law to her own slave and that he had no choice in the matter. Under Sumero-Babylonian law there is this clause in Hammurabi's Code—¹

If she has given a maid to her husband and she has borne children and afterwards that maid has made herself equal with her mistress, because she has borne children her mistress shall not sell her for money, she shall reduce her to bondage and count her among the female slaves.

But Sarah ran ahead of God in giving a Gentile idolater from a pagan country to Abraham to bear the promised seed. Poor Hagar—she became the helpless victim of Sarah's scheming! The whole affair was a sin before God.²

Genesis 16:3 - So after Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years, Sarai, Abram's wife, gave Hagar, her Egyptian servant, to her husband to be his wife.

¹ "The most complete and perfect extant collection of Babylonian laws, developed during the reign of Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.) of the 1st dynasty of Babylon. It consists of his legal decisions that were collected toward the end of his reign and inscribed on a diorite stela set up in Babylon's temple of Marduk, the national god of Babylonia. These 282 case laws include economic provisions, family law (marriage and divorce), criminal and civil law. The background of the code is a body of Sumerian law under which civilized communities had lived for many centuries ("Hammurabi, Code of," in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1979], 4:878).

² Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Books, nd), 62.

PRINCIPLE: Custom does not excuse sin and ignorance is no excuse. In this case, although Sarah viewed this idea in accordance with accepted social customs, she and Abraham were aware of the divine promise of an heir through Sarah. By suggesting that Abraham procreate with Hagar and for Abraham to follow suit resulted in the spawning of Isaac's assassins.

Hagar became a slave wife, not on equal standing with Sarai. However, if Hagar produced the heir, she would be the primary wife in the eyes of society. When this eventually happened, Hagar becomes insolent, prompting Sarai's anger.³

All of this could have been prevented had Abraham told Sarah what she could do with her "social customs" problem-solving device. His failure not only resulted in producing the patriarch of the twelve tribes of Arabia it resulted in creating the bloodline of the founder of Islam which set the stage for the internecine warfare between the sons of bondwoman and the sons of the freewoman.

Genesis 16:4 - He had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. Once Hagar realized she was pregnant, she despised Sarai.

This is the beginning of a cat fight involving "one-upwomanship" between Hagar and Sarah. Once pregnant, according to "social custom," Hagar demotes Sarah. Hagar enters into the arrogance complex and "despises" Sarah. The word is the Qal imperfect of the verb **קָלַל qalal**. The Qal imperfect denotes habitual or customary action. In the mind of the speaker or writer its conclusion is not in view, therefore, it is contemplated as an incomplete action.⁴

Hagar developed a habitual wheel-track of despisement toward Sarah. *Qalal* can be translated in this context: "to treat with contempt," "to diminish," "to treat as an inferior." Sarah was not going to take this without recourse and it is possibly from this incident that Solomon was influenced to write:

Proverbs 21:19 - It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and easily provoked woman.

Sarah did not take lightly the idea that her slave girl considered herself to be First Wife. She entered into the cosmic systems, first into psychopathic arrogance by projecting the cause of Hagar's disposition on Abraham and, second, through antagonism, sought God's judgment on him:

Genesis 16:5 - Sarai said to Abram, "You have brought this wrong on me! I allowed my servant to have sexual relations with you but when she realized that she was pregnant, she despised me. May the Lord judge between you and me!"

Sarai is accusing Abraham of encouraging Hagar's contemptuous attitude. But Hagar is responsible for her own sins; Sarah and Abraham are responsible for theirs. Hagar bore a son whose lineage introduced into history a constant source of hatred for the Jewish people:

³ "Genesis 16:3," in *The NET Bible*, 1st Beta ed. (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 59, sn11.

⁴ Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 165.

Genesis 16:11 - The Lord's angel said to Hagar, "You are now pregnant and are about to give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard your painful groans.

v. 12 - He will be a wild ass of a man. He will be hostile to everyone, and everyone will be hostile to him.

Ishmael will be a nomad. He will live by his own standards and he and his progeny will buck the cultural, establishment, and moral standards of the societies they encounter. Ishmael was the progenitor of the twelve tribes of Arabia identified in:

Genesis 25:12 - This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham.

v. 13 - These are the names of Ishmael's sons, by their names according to their records: Nebaioth (Ishmael's firstborn), Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam,

v. 14 - Mishma, Dumah, Massa,

v. 15 - Hadad, Temah, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah.

v. 16 - These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names by their settlements and their camps—twelve princes according to their clans.

v. 18 - His descendants settled from Havilah to Shur, which runs next to Egypt all the way to Asshur. They settled away from all their relatives.

The territory described in verse 18 is believed to encompass the general area of what we know today as Arabia which stretches from the border of Egypt to the Persian Gulf. Their progeny are classified by Paul in Genesis 4:30 as the "sons of the bondwoman." They are classified today religiously as Islam, their two major "tribes" being Sunni and Shia. The two fight among themselves but their common enemy is always Israel.

1. Our Romans passage reads this way:

Romans 4:19 - And so, not becoming weak in faith, he completely understood his own body which had received sexual death when he was about 100 years old and likewise the deadness of Sarah's womb.

2. What was it that caused Abraham to become sterile? His dalliance with Hagar and her resultant pregnancy. Abraham's impatience caused him to resort to human-viewpoint problem-solving devices. Adultery is one of these and it was encouraged by his wife Sarah's suggestion, to which he, as paterfamilias of his household, submitted, obeyed her tawdry suggestion, and knew Hagar in the biblical sense.
3. The arrival of Ishmael meant that he was Abraham's responsibility. God would not allow Abraham to be distracted by rearing the little bastard and at the same time properly care for the true heir to the promise, Isaac.
4. Consequently, Abraham was struck sterile until Ishmael was 14 years of age and able to care for himself. This resulted in the Lord enabling Abraham to successfully procreate with his wife Sarah whose issue was Isaac whom Paul refers to in Galatians 4:30 as the "son of the free woman."

Genesis 21:2 - Sarah became pregnant and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the appointed time that God had told him.

v. 3 - Abraham named his son—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac.