Genesis 16- Sarai and Hagar

Anchor passage-

Genesis 16?

Helpful passages-

Themes

- What the Lord promises will come to pass (Gen 16:16).

- Outside of God, human plans and decisions come to ruin (Gen 16:6).

- The Lord gives grace for difficult circumstances (Gen 16:9)

- The Lord is a God who sees (Gen 16:13).

Questions

1. Look back at the previous chapter (specifically 15:4-6) and remember the promise God made. The chapter ends with God sealing His promise- miraculously signaling that it was as good as done. Who did He make the promise to?
2. In chapter 16, the Lord’s grace now comes after Abram’s household. In His kindness, the Lord begins to bring them into His story- even those who might question their belonging in it.

Though the Lord has made promises to Abram, the roles and responsibilities of the rest of the family have been left in question. While Sarai’s role isn’t established until chapter 17, the Lord validates an unlikely family member here in chapter 16. As an Egyptian (possibly [ironically] a gift from Pharaoh) (Mathews 178), Hagar is thrown into an already unfolding storyline and into submission to a family in crisis.

As you look at verse 1, what thoughts do you have about the lasting consequences of Abram and Sarai’s time in Egypt (Gen 12:10-20)?

1. In verse 2, Sarai suggests a solution to her devastating circumstances.

Consider the fact that it was fairly common in that culture for a servant to be offered in this way and was not considered an illegitimate means of having children (Steinmann 173). Also consider the fact that the Lord had not yet directly said that Sarai would be mother of the promised child (Hughes 238). Finally, consider that bareness was grounds for divorce after 10 years (Mathews 185).

Culture had provided a solution for Sarai’s problem.

But the solution was Hagar, who also found herself in devastating circumstances. She was given as a slave and would spend her life at the mercy of those who owned her. Her provision and protection would depend on their will and whim.

Culture’s solutions often force a choice of one over another. Some lose for others to gain. Power and self-preservation create terrifying cultural ultimatums.

How does that stand in stark contrast to the solutions the Lord provides?

How does that context compel mercy and yet still offer challenge?

1. Read verses 3-6. List where you can see the brokenness of human solutions?
2. The text now takes a turn (Goldingay 266). Just as each party has lost what they most needed, what they had hoped for, we come to verse 7. Read verses 7-8. Find 3-4 examples of the Lord’s personal and specific kindness to Hagar.
3. Now look at verse 9. Surprising as it might seem to be sent back into hardship, the Lord has protection and provision appointed for Hagar in that difficult setting (Mathews 189). Have you ever found yourself in a hard place because it truly was the best place for you to be?
4. Read verses 10-12. Here the Lord envisions Hagar with the future He has for her. He promises innumerable descendants, He reveals that the child she is carrying is a boy, and for the first time in Scripture, the baby is named before he is born (Goldingay 268). How might this encounter change her perspective on returning? How does an encounter with the Lord or His word change your perspective on difficult things?
5. Read verse 13. What has the Lord revealed to Hagar about His character? How does Hagar’s story resonate with your story?
6. The chapter ends with a mention of both place and event. Stating the location grounds the experience. The Lord met Hagar in a particular place at a specific time. The encounter was real and personal, and the place serves as a reminder to God’s people of His seeing of even the lowliest. How do you remind yourself of God’s goodness to you? What reminds you to tell stories of His faithfulness to you?

The chapter concludes with an event. The birth of Ishmael. Exactly as the Lord had foretold. How would this have built Hagar’s faith? How does it build yours?