



## TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

### Talk Genesis 16:1-6: Abram and Sarai Take God's Promise into their Own Hands

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#### Lesson 34

*"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. 3 Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. 4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me." 6 So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence."*

#### Background Notes

In Genesis 12 God promised Abraham that he would become a great nation, and that through his line all the families of the earth would be blessed. At that time Abram was 75 years old, and Sarai was 65. In Genesis 13 God confirmed these promises to Abram and said that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. In Genesis 15 God again confirmed his promise to Abram in a covenant ceremony, and promised that his descendants would be like the stars of the heaven in number. (By the way, when God told Abram to look up into the heavens and count the stars, there was no big-city pollution obscuring a lot of the stars in that Middle Eastern sky !)

When we come to Genesis 16, ten years had passed since God made the original promises in Genesis 12 -- but still Abram had no children. He was 85 years old now, and Sarai was 75. Sarai was beyond child bearing years, naturally speaking. So Sarai and Abram decided to help God out. In line with the social customs of that day, Sarai gave her Egyptian maid, Hagar, to Abram as a concubine. Under this arrangement, an accepted practice of the time, the child born would not only be the heir of Abram, but legally considered the child of Sarai. This practice is confirmed in both the ancient code of Hammurabi and the Nuzi tablets, which date to patriarchal times. These ancient documents really do refute the critic who likes to say that a lot of the stories in Genesis are only "Jewish legend," or something like that. No, from all that archaeology has uncovered, these customs are confirmed by the ancient tablets.

Their plan worked all too well. Hagar conceived. Perhaps Sarai was secretly hoping that the plan would fail. If the plan failed, that would prove that Abram was "the problem," and not Sarai, as to why they did not have children. In any case, Hagar conceived, and it led to a strained relationship between Sarai and Hagar. Hagar despised Sarai because she was barren. Sarai was jealous of Hagar and treated her harshly, reminding her that she

was only a slave. As a result, Hagar ran away into the wilderness, probably with the intent of returning to Egypt. What is the God teaching us in this sad portion of His Word?

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. Biblical "ends" never justify using unbiblical "means."**

Abram and Sarai wanted to accomplish a "biblical end" to the problem of not having a son. God had promised Abraham a line of descendants, so why not help God out? After all, up to this point, God had not said who the mother would be, so it appears that the motive behind the plan was noble, and the promised son as an "end" was biblical. What was wrong with trying to help God fulfill his promise?

Everything was wrong -- because unbiblical means were being used. Biblical results never justify unbiblical means. Even though such a practice was socially acceptable in that day, it was out of line with the Word of God. God had declared, right from the beginning, that there should be only one man and one woman in marriage. No concubines, even to obtain heirs! The long waiting period was a test of faith for Abram and Sarai, and they failed at this point. God never directs us to use unbiblical ways to accomplish His purposes. **Never!**

If you have an unhappy marriage, you don't start over again by getting a divorce. This is unbiblical. If your ministry is in financial need, you don't use unbiblical fundraising techniques to get the ministry back on its feet. (In fact, maybe God wants to end that particular ministry and start a new one!) Biblical ends never justify unbiblical means. Many more examples could be given, but let's move to doctrinal point number two.

### **2. Unbiblical means always result in bad fallout.**

Because Abram and Sarai departed from the Word of God and used an unbiblical means to reach their desired result, there were very sad consequences. Bad fallout. There was family friction.

Look at what Sarai said to Abram: "*Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me"*(v5). I can imagine Abraham saying at this point, "Well Sarai, what a minute, whose idea was this? I didn't come up with this plan; you came up with the plan. I only went along with it!" Whatever may have been said, there was a breakdown in the relationship between Abram and Sarai.

Besides that friction, Hagar was lifted up with pride because she was carrying Abram's child, and she despised Sarai. Sarai was jealous and apparently reduced her maidservant to slave status, then abused her to the point that Hagar fled into the wilderness. Maybe Sarai was even hoping for a miscarriage to occur.

Not only was there the bad fallout of family friction, but also we don't read of any communication between Abram and God for the next 14 years -- another part of the bad fallout of using unbiblical means.

The bad fallout of Abram and Sarai's mistake continues to this day. Hagar's child, Ishmael, is the "father" of many of the Arab peoples. Think of the friction between Jews

and Arabs through the centuries and in this present time. Muhammad was in the line of Ishmael. Think of the bad fallout down through the years because of the religion of Islam. You can be sure that using unbiblical means will always result in bad fallout, whether it be in your family life or church life, whether it be immediate or long range. Unbiblical means always result in bad fallout.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Don't blame others when you are frustrated.**

Sarai was obviously frustrated. She didn't have any children, and in that day it was quite a stigma for a married woman to have no children. And now Sarai was 75 years old. She was frustrated, and she tried to shift the blame of her problems onto others. We have seen how she blamed Abram in verse 5. She lashed out against Hagar, forcing her to leave and try to go home. In fact, she even blamed God for her problems: "*So Sarai said to Abram, 'See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children.'*" (v2). "The Lord has restrained me from bearing children" -- that was true enough. In God's sovereign plan He had indeed restrained Sarah from having children, but it seems that Sarah here was finding fault with God because she was barren.

Do you blame others when you are frustrated? Shifting blame has become a way of life in our culture. My parents are to blame. My husband is to blame. My wife is to blame. My environment is to blame. My genetic makeup is to blame. (You have all heard that, right?) Satan is to blame. My circumstances are to blame. Even God is to blame. Those who are frustrated with their lot in life have used all of these excuses -- and we are talking about believers here, too. Now these factors may have something to do with our situation, but they are not valid reasons for our frustrations and bitterness. We need to turn to the Lord with our frustrations, not blaming Him, but trusting Him to work out the situation, and to give us strength to face what is bothering us. Don't blame others when you are frustrated.

### **2. Don't rush ahead of God!**

God's timetable is not our timetable. God had made a promise to Abram and Sarai, and He intended to keep it. But Abram and Sarai rushed ahead of God. Yes, ten years had gone by already, and fifteen more years would go by before the promise was fulfilled -- a total of twenty-five years! Abraham would be 100 years old and Sarah 90 years old when the child of promise, Isaac, would be born. Twenty-five years! But God fulfilled His promise right on schedule -- **His** schedule.

Abram and Sarai were wrong to rush ahead of God, and we, too, are wrong if we rush ahead of God. Did you ever try to rush ahead of God? It's wrong! You might say, "Why the long delay here? Twenty-five years!" Well, God had reasons. He wanted to teach them lessons of patience. (And that's just one of many things we all need to learn!)

God may want to teach us lessons in patience and trust as well. Be careful about rushing into big changes that will affect your family and church commitments. Be careful about rushing into big changes in reference to new ministries, which may be your own ideas, but not God's!

Isaiah 28:16 says: "*Whoever believes will not act hastily.*" Recently I was talking with a Christian who wants to start a new church. His motives are right on, but his timing must also be **God's** timing for him to be in the will of the Lord. It is possible to rush ahead of God. Don't rush ahead of God!