

Sarah and Hagar

The background of this story is found in Genesis 15:1-6, God promises Abram a child, Abram believes and it's credited him for righteousness.

When you read Genesis chapter 16, you can only have pity on poor Hagar. She was Sarai's maid. Sarai was in her seventies, childless and infertile; her husband was 85.

V1-4. The couple, 10 years before had been promised a son by God but it didn't seem to be happening, so Sarai decided to take matters into her own hands and ordered Hagar to have sex with Abram. Hagar was an Egyptian maid NKJV / slave NIV. Slavery was common and socially acceptable in those days, before God gave His law. Even afterwards, such an arrangement would still be OK, Leviticus 25:45-46.

The Bible doesn't say how old Hagar was, but she had to be somewhere between a teenager and 40. Nor are Hagar's feelings about her mistress's orders recorded. However, Hagar obeys her mistress, it's likely she had no choice. The power imbalance makes this arrangement pretty close to rape so you can excuse Hagar for having a bad attitude towards her mistress? Or is her bad attitude caused by her having one up on her mistress; she'd achieved something that Sarai failed to do, despite years of trying?

V5-6. Hagar's pregnancy causes a jealous rage to fall on Sarai and she treats Hagar badly, which in the end causes the relationship between them to fracture. Sarai shares her regrets with her husband, but she blames Hagar's attitude and blames her husband; 'my wrong be upon you.' She confesses they have upset God. Abram shows little regard for the mother of his child or any empathy for Sarai. He seems to wash his hands of the problem, delegating it to Sarai.

Sarai takes it that she has a free hand to do what she wants and so she 'treats Hagar harshly', whatever that means. In the end Hagar is forced to flee into the desert so given the two options of staying or running into the desert whilst pregnant, you can imagine that, for Hagar to choose the latter, Sarai must have been pretty awful to her.

V7-8. God has compassion on this poor unfortunate girl. He sends the Angel of the Lord, who finds her by a spring of water. This is the first angelic appearance in the Bible. The Angel calls Hagar and asks her plans. Hagar is instructed to go back to Sarai. Can this instruction be extended to all victims of domestic violence?

Question. Who is this Angel of the Lord (Capital A in NKJV)? It doesn't look like it's one of 'God's minion angels'. The clue is in verse 10. This 'Angel' takes ownership of the promise: 'I will multiply ...' He's not passing on a message, God will multiply ... No, I will.

This can't be God, no one has seen God and lived, John 1:18. So if not God, who?

Compare with Genesis 21:17, God's angel is sent and this angel delivers a message. He's telling her God will make Ishmael a great nation.

Here's what Hagar believes she's seen. Look at verse chapter 16:13, Hagar's statement -Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" The Angel doesn't correct her, calling Him, the God who sees.

Where else do we meet this Angel of the Lord? Genesis 22:11-12 and more clearly verses 15-22, Genesis 31:11, Exodus 3:1-2, Joshua 5:13-15 and more besides.

So did God come down to comfort this badly treated, lost Egyptian? God cares not only about the descendants of Abraham, Luke 4:25-27.

It should be noted that some think that this Angel is a senior Angel, such as Gabriel or Michael.

V9-12. Does this description ring true of any particular race of people?

V15-16. Hagar returns, has the baby and Abram names him Ishmael, which indicates that Hagar had shared her experience with the Angel of the Lord, with Abram.