

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 16

16:1-2 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar [^{flight}]; so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her" [TAN: "I shall have a son"]. **Abram agreed to what Sarai said.** (NIV)

Sarai's Actions

Sarai was doing what was expected of a barren wife in that culture. A similar situation would occur later with Rachel and her maid Bilhah. Since this was a normal practice, Abram apparently did not question whether or not he should do what Sarai encouraged.

16:3-4 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife [TAN: "concubine"]. **He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.** (NIV)

Hagar's Position

The social custom of that time gave the surrogate mother the right to remain in the household with a very high status, since the heir of the patriarch was her physical child [although it legally belonged to her mistress]. With this high status, Hagar undoubtedly would not perform the menial tasks Sarai demanded of her.

16:5-6 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me." "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated [TAN: "treated her harshly"] Hagar; so she fled from her. (NIV)

By this action Hagar fulfilled the meaning of her name; she took "flight" from her mistress.

16:7-10 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur [which led back to Egypt]. **And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."** (NIV)

Conditional Blessing

The blessing of Hagar's son was based on Hagar's obedience to Sarai. Ishmael would become the fourth patriarch with at least 12 peoples springing from him (25:16). Japheth and Nahor each had 12, and Joktan had 13.

16:11-12 *The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael ["God does hear"], for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward [NKJ: "in the presence of"] all his brothers [Isaac, Hagar's other children (the Hagarenes), Lot's sons (Moab and Ammon), Esau, and the six sons of Keturah: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, Shuah (25:2)]."* (NIV)

Ishmael's Descendants

The descendants of Ishmael would be like a wild horse: roaming everywhere and finding it difficult to settle down. They are not a people with whom it is easy to reason or get along.

16:13-16 *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." That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi ; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.* (NIV)

Ishmael was born in 1890 B.C.