

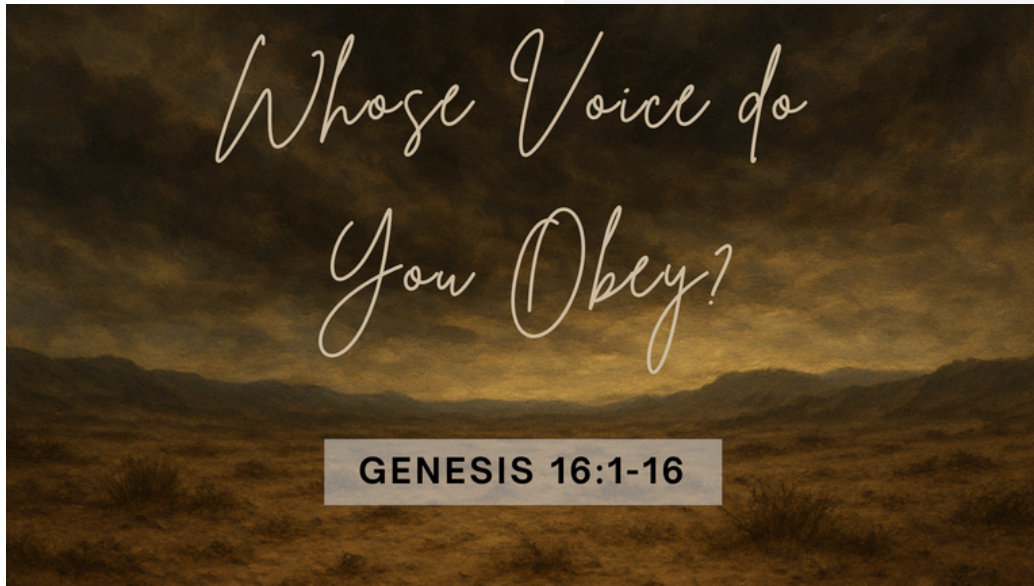
CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY AUGUST 10, 2025
GENESIS 16:1-16

PASTOR DUANE MILLER

WHOSE VOICE DO YOU OBEY?



Two Areas of Focus

The futility of human efforts
to achieve God's blessing

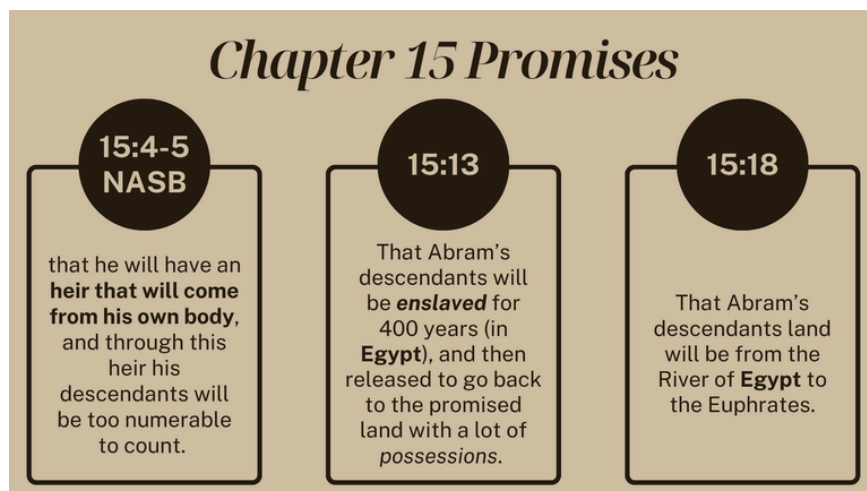
The dangers of emotion
influenced decision making

Two areas of focus: The futility of human efforts to achieve God's blessing and the dangers of emotion influenced decision making. Opening question: What influences your decision making?

*What influences your
decision making?*

Now the immediate context for our story today is that the Abram returned victorious from defeating the great Babylonian King Chedorlaomer. In that victory Abram liberated his captive nephew Lot, and Abram returned to Salem with all the battle plunder. And Abram, rather than keeping the plunder that was rightfully his according to the worldly war code of the kings and empires, Abram chose to trust the LORD for all his material needs. After that choice to trust the LORD, the LORD appeared to Abram in **Chapter 15** and gave Abram several covenantal promises.

A few of the covenantal promises were:




The first scene in **Chapter 16:1** opens up with full irony – the futile human solution to eighty-fiveish year old Abram finally having an heir from his own body is a slave from Egypt. (I know, you're probably not as excited about that irony as I am).

And as you should expect by now, there is much context to this story including meaning of names in verse one that add texture to our story.

“Sarai” is Abram’s wife, and her name means “my princess”

Sarai comes from the root word “sar” which means “to rule”.



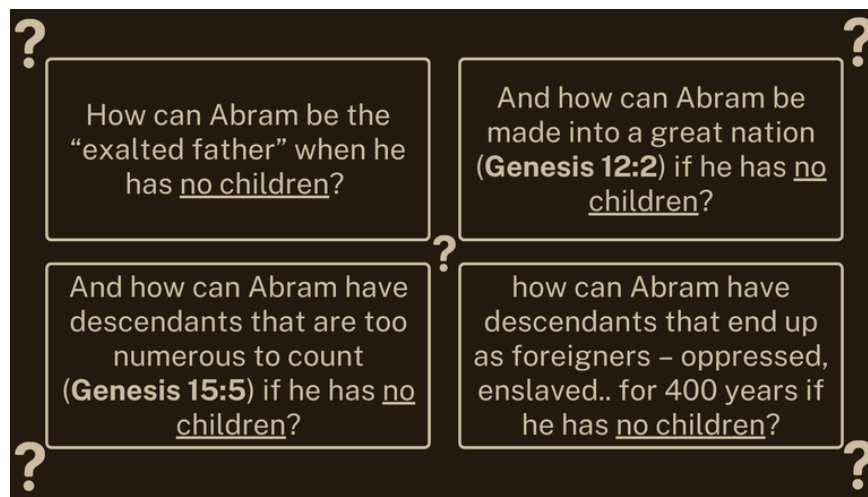
“Sarai” is Abram’s wife, and her name – means “my princess” – Sarai comes from the root word “sar” which means “to rule”. And “Sarai” we know from **Genesis 11:30** “was unable to become pregnant and had no children”.

“Abram” means “exalted father”. Emphasis on “father” as in “father” of children. We know from **Genesis 15:2** that Abram not only has no children through Sarai, but the author also makes it clear to us that Abram has no children period.



“Abram” means “exalted father”

Abram having no children brings up several problems and questions:



The futile human solution presented by Sarai to those questions was the Egyptian slave Hagar.

Who is Hagar? We know from **verse 1** that Hagar was an Egyptian slave. Her name "Hagar" means "immigrant / foreigner." So she is a foreigner from Egypt. Egypt being the place where things already went bad for Abram because he didn't trust the LORD. So Hagar being from Egypt is a subtle warning for us: "Uh oh, there's Abram trusting in "Egypt" again!"

What else do we know about Hagar? **16:1** Not only is Hagar Egyptian but she is also a "slave". Some translations say "maidservant". To be clear what "slave" meant in Hebrew – In the Hebrew word for slave there is no illusion to Hagar being a paid servant, as in paid British royalty servants like in the TV show Downton Abbey. Rather the Hebrew word implies that Hagar was a slave and considered property of her mistress Sarai – property for Sarai to do with as Sarai pleases.

Let me pause and say that a person owning another person as property was never part of God's design. Owning another person is wrong! All people are created in God's image – and have infinite value and worth, and belong to God. So why does Sarah – the wife of the great patriarch and father of our faith have "servants as property"? The bible is best read as a report of what was or what happened, not read necessarily as an endorsement of behavior. The bible only sometimes comments on whether the actions of it's characters are good or bad. As in the phrase used to describes the Kings of Israel "...did evil in eyes of the LORD." (**2 Kings 17:2**) That phrase with some variation only occurs about 50x in the Old Testament where it could have been used many many more than 50x. So unless the bible tells us the LORD's perspective on a biblical character's behavior, we as the readers are responsible for evaluating the characters ourselves using God's word and Gods character.

Back to our text - now we have identified all the characters from verse one, Sarai – Abram's wife whose name means "my princess" who is barren. Abram whose name means "father" but doesn't have any children. And Hagar, the Egyptian slave of Sarai who becomes the human solution to Sarai's bareness and Father Abram having no children.

Verse 2 picks up mid story with Sarai and Abram talking about Abram not having an heir from his own body and what they should do about it. **Verse 2 NASB**

Now there is a clue in the verse that indicates that this whole conversation is seriously wrong and will have dire consequences. It's the phrase, Abram "listened to the voice of Sarai". "Listened to the voice" is a Hebrew idiom for obedience. We know this phrase already from **Genesis 3:17 NASB**. When Eve was deceived by the serpent she offered the forbidden fruit to Adam – and he ate. Later when the LORD confronts Adam, the LORDs confrontation is based on Adam listening to the voice of Eve rather than listening or obeying the voice of the LORD.

“Listened to the voice” is a Hebrew idiom for obedience.

Now the contrast here in the Adam & Eve story and the Abram & Sarai story is the contrast of “listening to the voice of their wives” vs “listening to the voice of the LORD. First let me say that **Genesis 3:17** and **Genesis 16:2** are not written to demonize the voice of wives. That’s not the intended message of this passage.

My wife Sheri is a great source of wisdom for me, she is my partner in trusting God. And because she loves me she uses her voice when my thinking may not be best. And I have learned to value her voice. That’s how marriage should be, husbands listening to the voice of their wives because it may save their lives or prevent disaster. But husbands only listening to their wives when the voice of their wife is consistent with the voice of God. And that works both ways...wives listening to the voice of their husbands when their husbands voice is consistent with the voice of God. Again the imagery of marriage - the ideal - is husband and wife in humility both listening the voice of the GOD and together - being partners in trusting God!

Now in reference Abram listening to the voice of Sarai, this story comes after **Chapter 15** where the voice of the LORD speaking to Abram is prominent ... 7x the LORD spoke to Abram in **Chapter 15** - seven which should get our attention.



In Hebrew the predominant verb used for the LORD speaking in **Genesis 15** indicates “divine speech”. In contrast, in **Genesis 16:2** the word for “voice” in Hebrew indicates “human speech”. We as children of God need to be discerning on what is “divine speech”, God speaking, and what is “human speech” - the “world” speaking. Both are competing for our choice. In this story Abram chose “human speech” over “divine speech”.

At this point in the story I despair and “I sigh”... Abram was on a roll.. Yes, he had made bad choices in disobeying God and bringing his dad and Lot along with him.. and Abram made a bad choice going to Egypt instead of trusting God, lying about his wife.. BUT in **chapter 14** Abram made a great choice, he had not accepted the offer of King Bara from Sodom in keeping all the spoils of his victory over the king of Babylon,

which would have enslaved Abram to the world. That was a great choice! And in **Chapter 15** when God gave Abram all the covenant promises it tells us Abram made another great choice **Genesis 15:6**... He believed God! Two great choices in a row by Abram... Abram is learning, he's growing... like you and I... onward and upward.

But then **chapter 16:2** hits, and I sigh "C'mon Abram.. you know better!" "Abram, be the husband that God wants you to be for your "princess"! Protect her by listening to the voice of the LORD!" Husbands protect their wives and family by listening to the voice of the LORD.

Now it's easy to judge Abram from our objective position isn't it? But what happens when we step into their shoes and look at life from their perspective? So let's step into their shoes for a moment. Abram and Sarai are 85 and 75 respectively, too old for child bearing from the world's perspective. They have no children.. none. No heirs whatsoever. This is a harsh harsh reality for them that comes with shame, sadness, disappointment. To have children to continue your family name and keep the land was a high honor, to not have children was shame. To have children was to have the blessing of God, to not have children was believed to not have God's blessing... "God, why don't I have children? Did I do something wrong? Am I being punished?"

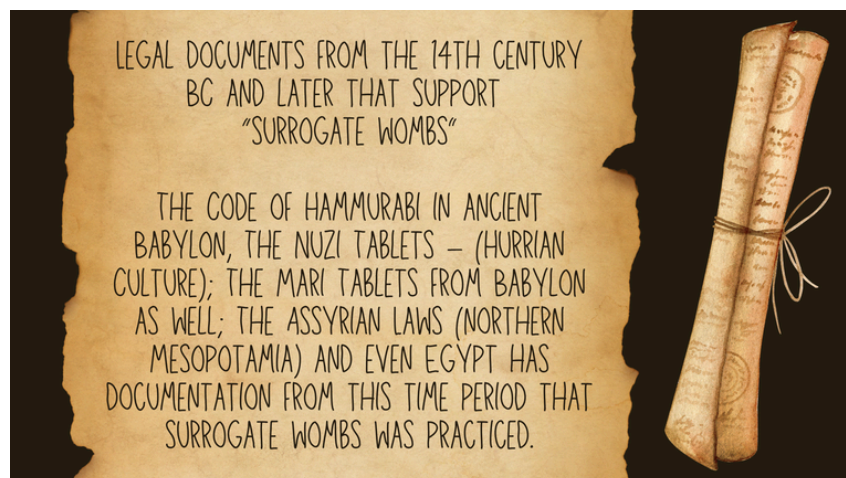
I can't imagine the pain of not being able to have children. And I won't pretend to understand that pain; Sheri and I have never experienced that. Some of you have.

Here are a few quotes from adults unable to have children. Tia said, "You feel less than a woman. You feel broken. You feel like it's your fault". John said "you feel alone, ashamed. Brooke "I failed my husband, my body, and my dream".

Feeling shame, feeling broken, feeling alone, feeling like a failure to your spouse... those are powerful emotions! How far are you willing to go to change those feelings? To change shame for honor? How far are you willing to go to change feeling like you are broken to feeling whole? Change feeling alone to feeling like you belong? Change feeling like a failure to feeling like a success? Are those emotions powerful enough to not listen voice of the LORD and rather pursue the voice of the world? So it seems was the case for Sarai and Abram.

In **verse 2** Sarai - seemingly motivated by desperation - exasperation.. whatever.. offers her Egyptian slave Hagar to Abram as the solution and Abram accepts. Now there may be some other emotions involved here for Abram accepting her offer in addition to what we already discussed pertaining to human passion and pleasure that also blind Abram to the voice of the LORD.

What Sarai offered Abram was essentially a "surrogate womb". This was common and accepted in their day. Archeologist have found five different legal writings from the 14th century BC and earlier that support "surrogate wombs". The Code of Hammurabi in ancient Babylon, The Nuzi Tablets - (Hurrian Culture); The Mari Tablets from Babylon as well; The Assyrian Laws (northern Mesopotamia) and even Egypt has writings from this time period that surrogate wombs was practiced.



So this was not a crazy idea from Sarai... rather this was more like Abram and Sarai both giving into the rationalization, giving into the temptation, giving into the lie that the world has the answers. Have you ever rationalized decisions based on worldly answers that everyone around trusts? Run from that - it leads to pain.

And so as we read , Sarai in (**verse 3**) takes Hagar, treats Hagar like property, gives her to Abram as “a wife”.

Not only is that wrong, but wrong has consequences. The first consequence is that Hagar is now raised in status from “slave” to “wife” – “isha”. In the language and custom of the day – the law of the world - Hagar is raised to the status of “2nd wife” – And 2nd wife has legal status, still lower in rank than “first wife” Sarai, but 2nd wife nonetheless. As second wife, Hagar would have power enough to cause problems for Sarai, after all Hagar is now a “wife” of the powerful, wealthy and famous clan leader, Abram. What does that mean for Abram? Two women with power and voice in Abram’s house. “Oh Abram, silly boy, what trouble and sorrow have you brought into your house?”

After Abram and Hagar come together Hagar becomes pregnant. This quickly multiplies layers of bad for Sarai. Commentator Guzik says that Hagar being pregnant by Abram is proof that Sarai is the reason that her and Abram were unable to get pregnant, not Abram. It was her body that failed them, not Abram’s. That would feel awful! And 2nd problem is that , Sarai’s slave Hagar – now wife and carrying Abram’s child, looks on Sarai with contempt, despising Sarai.

Well it doesn’t take long for Sarai to have enough of being treated with conempt and she pins her distress with Hagar on Abram in **verse 5**.

The phrase “I put her into your arms”, in Hebrew is actually “I put her into your bosom or your lap”. The exact same word “lap” is in **Proverbs 6:27** which is telling.

Abram in **Verse 6** is now “feeling the coals”- getting burnt by his choice to accept Hagar into his lap ... and now Abram seemingly does whatever he needs to do to stop the burning and return marital peace with Sarai. This feels really soap-opera-ish at this point. Here Abram seems to be acting more like a “baby daddy” and being irresponsible, than taking responsibility. And thus, Abram in desperation, tells Sarai to do with Hagar whatever Sarai sees fit.

In the Hebrew there is emphasis on how Sarai sees Hagar – and Hagar is given permission to do to Hagar whatever is good in Sarai’s sight. So **verse 6** tells us Sarai does what she sees as good and treats pregnant immigrant Hagar so harshly that Hagar flees and heads home in the direction of Egypt. That’s the end of scene one.

Let’s pause between scenes here – Hagar, the Egyptian slave, is treated harshly by Abram’s wife with Abram’s approval. Abram’s descendants later become slaves in Egypt and are treated harshly. Hrrmmm...?

Verse 7 opens the next scene – and now we have mistreated, pregnant, runaway Egyptian slave Hagar in a wilderness by a well. And who finds Hagar there? The Angel of the LORD.

The Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament is believed to be the pre-incarnate Jesus. What throws people off is the word “Angel”.

The Hebrew word for “angel” simply means “messenger or one who carries out a task”.

*The Hebrew word for
“angel” means
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carries out a task”.*

Let's see how this scene unfolds. It says the Angel of the LORD found Hagar.. I love how this verse depicts Jesus pursuing – looking for Hagar – in my head this is a picture of a lost lamb being found by a shepherd.

And when the AOTL finds Hagar in the wilderness – the AOTL asks Hagar two very interesting questions in **verse 8** “Where have you come from and where are you going?

[Does that “where” question remind you of a “where” question that the LORD previously asked in **Genesis**? Go back to **Genesis 3:8-9**.. Adam also chose to run and hide and the LORD calls out “where are you”? The “where” question is not to about Adam's location, of course God knew where Adam was – he's God! Rather the “where are you” was to express dismay / grief that Adam was not where God wanted him to be – God wanted Adam at his side walking with him in the garden].

Likewise the “where” questions in **Genesis 16:8** that LORD asks Hagar are not to find out where Hagar came from and where she was going – but rather for Hagar to stop and consider her choice to also run and hide... See, LORD has the same goal for Hagar as he did for Adam... that is the LORD also wants Hagar to be at His side, with him... trusting him – even when Hagar has to be under the heavy hand of Sarai.

Something beautiful and transformative happens in Hagar in this few moments of conversation between Hagar and the Angel of the LORD – Jesus. This is the miraculous touch of the master.

In **verse 9** the Angel of the LORD tells Hagar to return to Sarai and submit to her. The Hebrew here seems to be saying to Hagar to “Humble yourself under Sarai's hand and allow yourself to be afflicted”. Imagine that, the LORD telling Hagar to go back to where she was mistreated. Sound ridiculous? But isn't that what Jesus did in the garden the night before he was crucified? Jesus humbled himself under the heavy hand of the Romans and religious leaders and allowed himself to be afflicted. Why? Perfect obedience to the Father and love .

*“Humble yourself under
Sarai's hand and allow
yourself to be afflicted”*

Verse 10 tells us then that if Hagar does in fact humble herself and listen to the LORD's voice even in the face of affliction, that the LORD would bless Hagar tremendously. And this promised blessing in verse ten is amazing. This blessing is in part an echo of the blessing the LORD gave to Abram in **Genesis 15:5**. In essence then, Hagar, the Egyptian immigrant, the slave, will now have a blessing from the LORD on the scale of the blessing Abram received from the LORD. That's amazing!

And then in **verse 11** Hagar is given both a prophecy and instruction. The prophecy is that she will have a son... which ups her social value even more. A male firstborn was the most desired in their culture. And the instruction from the AOTL was to name him Ishmael. "Ishmael" in Hebrew means "God has heard".

"Ishmael"
means "God has heard"

In **verse 12** there is another prophecy about Ishmael given to Hagar and this one is not positive.

Ishmael would be "a wild donkey of a man" has a lot of implications. This statement according to other Old Testament depictions of wild donkeys implies that Ishmael will be: stubborn, independent, refusing to be domesticated, untamed, restless, driven by wild lust, driven by instinct, live in isolation, and live in wastelands and other uninhabitable places.

Job 35:5-8, Jeremiah 2:24,
Hosea 8:9, Isaiah 32:14.



The next three lines in **verse 12** prophetically describe Ishmael as a person of conflict and hostility – Ishmael's hand against everyone, their hands against him, living in hostility. Ishmael fighting everyone, even his own brothers.

Hagar in **verse 13** seems unfazed by what is prophetically said about Ishmael and rather appears to be in awe that the LORD pursued her, valued her enough to pursue her, and saw her. The LORD saw her... an Egyptian runaway slave woman. Hagar is so amazed she gives the LORD a name. "El Ro'i" means "the God (El) who sees me". How God sees and treats her is in contrast to how Sarai saw Hagar – and mistreated her!

“El Ro’i”

*means “the God (El)
who sees me”*

And in addition, the last line of **verse 13** indicates that Hagar is also surprised and amazed at the mercy and intimacy shown to her by the LORD.. she survived a face to face encounter with the LORD.

In **verse 14** to memorialize God’s mercy shown to her.. the well where the LORD found Hagar was named Beer-lahai-roi meaning - “The Well of the Living One Who Saw Me”



Beer-lahai-roi

meaning -

*“The well of
the Living One
who saw me”*

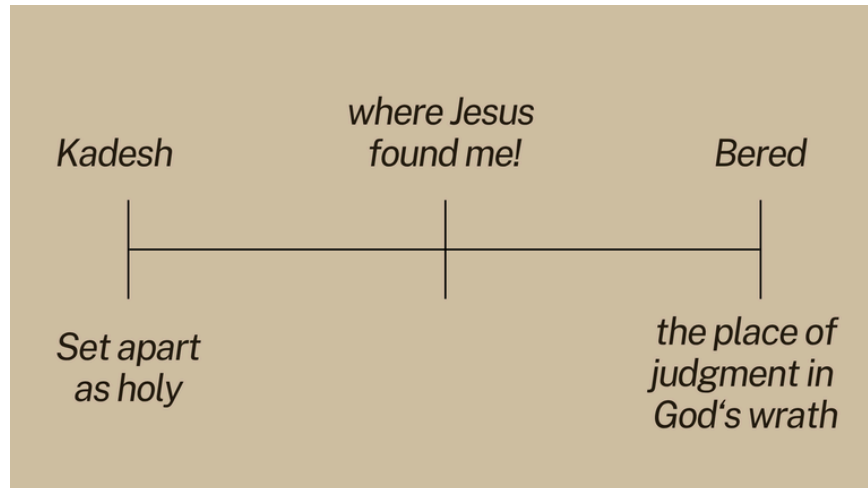
And don’t miss that the author tells us where this “well of the living one who saw Hagar was”, between Kadesh and Bered, and yes those names have meaning adding texture to the story.

“Kadesh” means “set apart, sanctified, as holy”. “Bered” means “hail” – as in hailstone, hailstones being a metaphor of judgement, or God’s wrath breaking human pride”. Where did the Living one who saw her - that is Jesus -find Hagar, and value Hagar, and see Hagar and speak words of life to her? Between the place meaning “set apart as holy” and “the place of hailstones – judgement and God’s wrath”.

“Kadesh”

*means “set apart, sanctified, as holy”.
“Bered” means “hail” – as in hailstone,
hailstones being a metaphor of judgement,
God’s wrath breaking human pride”*

It seems to me that if one is between being “set apart as holy” and “the place of judgement and Gods wrath”, that perhaps one’s destiny of either location is not determined. Isn’t that where Jesus finds all of us on the day of our salvation? Which means that if one is still between “set apart as holy” and “place of judgment and wrath” then there is still time to chose.



In the end of this story, Hagar is obedient to the LORD’s voice, she humbles herself, returns to Sarai – puts herself back under the hand of affliction of Sarai – and Abram at age 86 becomes a daddy – the daddy of a first born male, son of a slave woman, not the son of the promise.



Thoughts for meditation and application:

1. Two areas of focus: The dangers of emotions influencing decision making, and the futility of human efforts to achieve God’s blessing.

Abram and Sarai allowed themselves to be in a place where their negative emotions influenced their decisions to attempt to achieve God’s blessing of a son by their own effort. It was disastrous.. both Abram & Sarai, and all the descendants paid and continue to pay a heavy price for that choice.

Be mindful of emotions affecting your decisions, and be mindful of your efforts to achieve God’s blessing by your own efforts.

2. In this story Abram chose to listen to “human speech” over “divine speech”. We as children of God need to be discerning on what is “divine speech”, God speaking, and what is “human speech” – the “world” speaking. Both are competing for our choice.

3. Jesus humbled himself under the heavy hand of the Romans and religious leaders and allowed himself to be afflicted. We are disciples of the master to be learning his ways.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

16:1 Hagar from Egypt That Hagar is from Egypt is almost certainly tied to the gifts Pharaoh gave to Abram for Sarai to be in Pharaoh's harem. The gifts included from **Genesis 12:16** a whole lot of livestock and note "male and female servants". Most likely that is how Sarai acquired Hagar.

16:2 Sarai's solution: This futile human solution is the 7th human plan in Genesis that ended in failure. The futile human plans ending in failure in Genesis up to our chapter today: **Genesis 3:6-8; 4:3-7; 11:1-9; 12:10-20; 13:1-12; 14:21-24**

Sarai's bareness: Jewish tradition is that Abram knew that Sarai was barren and married her anyway out of love and compassion. And they teach that God chose Abram because of that compassion, knowing that God would have to work with Abram on trusting him.

16:2 listened to the voice..What if you and your wife disagree on what the voice of the LORD is? Never move forward without unity... ever.

Genesis 16:2 and **Genesis 3:17** are not written to demonize the voice of wives. "Demonize" meaning that there will be dire consequences for listening to your wife's voice on the scale of "working a cursed land and being exiled from the garden and" or "having descendants that will become your enemy for millenia." That's not the intended message of the passage.

16:3 "... as a wife". The word "wife" is the same Hebrew word "isha" as in **Genesis 2:24** Note here **verse 24** doesn't say united into "three" Abram, Sarai and Hagar - it says "united into one". This "threesome" in **Genesis 16:5** is clearly not God's design.

16:7 "wilderness by a well". This is almost the exact same scenario presented later again with Hagar in **Genesis 21:19**

16:7 Is the Angel of the LORD Jesus? The support from this passage for the Angel of the LORD being the pre-incarnate Jesus in **verse 10** is that the Angel restates the promise God made to Abram in **chapter 15** in the first person. Other "angels" would not have used the first person "I", they probably would have said "The LORD will give...".

16:10 "greatly multiply". The phrase "greatly multiply" literally means "multiply - multiply"- implying God's blessings have a compounded effect.

16:11 Ishmael - The LORD has heard. In **Genesis 15:6** Abram, Ishmael's father, believes the LORD and it was credited to him as righteousness. Which means than.. that any descendant of Abram who believes - trusts the LORD will also be credited as righteousness.

Ishmael's name means "the LORD has heard". Likewise, any descendant of Ishmael who cries out to the LORD in faith will also be heard. This is true for every Muslim today. Guzik said, the LORD is not finished with the Muslims yet...he's just waiting for them to cry out to him in faith for salvation - and God will hear that cry.

16:12 Ishmael's hand against everyone. This seems to have certainly played out in history. While this verse may be a reference to the descendants of Ishmael in conflict with the descendants of his brother Isaac (Jews), it is also a reference to the conflict that the descendants of Ishmael had with other descendants of Ishmael. To this day, it seems that majority violence that happens involving the descendants of Ishmael is violence against other descendants of Ishmael.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

16:13 Imagine Hagar hearing all the hard things about Ishmael. I wonder how Hagar processed hearing all of these things said about her son Ishmael. Where Mary the mother of Jesus pondered in her heart all the amazing things that were said about her son Jesus, there is no indication in the text that Hagar was affected by anything she heard about her son.