

God Found Hagar

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[0:00] Please take your Bibles and turn to Genesis 16. Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children,¹ But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar.

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. Abram agreed to do what Sarai said.

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.

He slept with Hagar and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 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.

[1:08] Do with her whatever you think best. Then Sarai mistreated Hagar. So she fled from her. The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert.

It was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?

I am 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. 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. For the Lord has heard your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him.

[2:10] And he will live in hostility to all his brothers. 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 Bir Lahai Roy. 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 born. Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Genesis 16 is a wonderful illustration of Psalm 139. As I've read this passage again and again, Psalm 139 kept on echoing in my head.

Let me just read it to you. Psalm 139, not the whole thing, but just the beginning. Oh Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise.

[3:24] You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down before a word is on my tongue. You know it completely.

Oh Lord, such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me.

Your right hand will hold me fast. God found Hagar. And I'm so glad that he found me.

Genesis 16 records the story of a powerless, mistreated slave girl from Egypt.

[4:28] and how she couldn't escape God's loving grasp. She found, or rather she was found, by a compassionate God who saw her, who loved her, who heard her, who knew her.

The hero of Genesis 16 is the angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord. That's the pre-incarnate son of God. And Genesis 16, it's not all about Abram and Sarai and how they, their lack of faith.

It has something to say about that. But that's not what it's about. Genesis 16 is not about the origins of the Arab people. As I was researching this, that's what a lot of people like to talk about and why

there's conflict in the Middle East to this day.

In Genesis 16, God, it's about how God loves the weak. And how he's going to have mercy on all the peoples of the earth. And Genesis 16 reveals to us a God whose heart is much bigger than ours is.

And he has a way of tearing apart, tearing open the seams of our small heart and really leaving us grasping with just how great and generous his love is.

[6:03] And we're left saying with the psalmist, how precious are your thoughts, O God. How vast the sum of them. Well, so brothers and sisters, as we read this chapter, or as we go through this chapter, as we look at it, I want you to be encouraged because this is your God.

He hasn't changed from that day to this. This is your God. And who he was for Hagar, he is for you. And so we're going to look at this chapter under three headings. The first is the anatomy of temptation.

The second is the anatomy of a mess. And the third is the anatomy of grace. Now the first two points are going to be shorter and the third is going to be longer. And so let's talk about the anatomy of a temptation.

Now when I say anatomy, what I have in mind are those health books from third grade. So if you can remember back that far, or if you are in third grade, you'll know what I'm talking about.

There was always a picture in the health book of a human body and it was always like this. It was always like that. And along the edges, you saw different words.

[7:12] And so there was stomach. And there was a line from the word stomach to the stomach and liver and an arrow pointing to the liver on this anatomy. And in Genesis 16, you have laid out before you a temptation.

And you're going to see the different parts that goes into a temptation. what we face and what Abram and Sarai faced. So, how does the story get started?

Well, it started when Sarai became impatient. Verse 1 says, Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. It had been 10 years since they had been in Canaan and Sarai's patience was wearing thin and I think Abram's probably was too.

And that's not to belittle or demean them because 10 years is a long time to wait. And so they're becoming, they're wondering, how is God going to fulfill this promise? When is this going to happen?

And the thought started swirling in Sarai's mind, maybe what God wants is for someone else to bear Abram's child.

[8:28] Nowhere yet has it been said that Sarai is going to be the mother of the child. And so, maybe it's going to be someone else. And as summer followed spring and autumn followed summer and season after season went by, they grew impatient.

And that's the first part of a temptation. Time. Time. We're all like children, small children in some way. We're like that a little girl who asked, when is my birthday?

And the parent says, well, it's next month. And the next morning they wake up and say, is it my birthday yet? No, it's coming. Just wait. But a month is forever when you're a small child, isn't it? And we can grow impatient. That's us. When God makes you wait, beware. When God makes you wait, beware.

It's easy to lose perspective. It's easy to be like that five-year-old child who for them a month is forever. And from an adult's perspective, a month is not very long.

[9:37] It's easy to grow impatient. And then you start trying to help God out. And I think that's where Sarai is. She's getting impatient. She doesn't think that God could possibly do anything with her.

And so she's going to come up with her own way of doing this, of helping God out. And verse 2 says, perhaps I can build a family through Hagar, through her.

So the emphasis is on what Sarai can do. Perhaps I can do this. And so this was something that she needed to do. I will do this. I will build a family through her.

She isn't so much looking at God. She's looking at herself. She's measuring all things by her ability and her timetable. And it's convenient.

And it's always convenient. Right there was a perfectly good solution. She has a maidservant named Hagar. Now it's perfectly normal in that time.

[10:40] It seems very strange to us, but it was perfectly normal for a maidservant to bear a child for a woman in that culture. That was completely normal. There was lots of laws and rules governing how those things worked.

And so that's the second part of a temptation. It's culturally acceptable. So not only is there time involved, this is culturally acceptable for Hagar to bear a child. Everyone is doing it. Everyone's doing it. And then it's possibly okay. Maybe. Kind of. God hadn't said for sure that it was going to be Sarai.

And so maybe this is what he meant. You know, an argument could be made that this is possibly okay. It's definitely plausible, right? Satan likes to hide the hook with a lot of fuzzy thinking. A lot of maybes. Maybe this is what God wants after all. Just perhaps it's okay. And then for Abram, the temptation comes from someone close to him.

[11:47] So we have time. We have socially acceptable. We have, well, maybe it's okay. Maybe it's right. And then it's coming from someone close to Abram.

This is déjà vu all over again because if you go back 13 chapters, you're going to read something that sounds like verse 3.

So after Abram had been living in Canaan for 10 years, Sarai, his wife, took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband.

So are you hearing echoes of anything? Was there ever a woman who took something and gave it to her husband?

So what made that temptation so strong? What made it so tempting? Because it came from someone close. It came from Eve.

[12:45] It came from Sarai. Ian Dugood said this, we expect the devil to assault us like a roaring lion, as ugly and as fearsome as can be.

We don't expect him to be dressed up like an angel of light speaking in the sweet honey tones of the one we love. Isn't that sad?

Isn't that scary? The most dangerous person to me very well might be the one that I love most. And it's sad and it's very scary because the other is true too.

I could be the most dangerous and scary temptation for the one that I love. So how careful we should be.

How careful we should be about watching ourselves and watching out for temptation even from the ones that we love. So that's the anatomy of a temptation.

[13:47] There's time there. It's possibly right. It's socially acceptable. It's coming from someone we love. And Abram gave in. And verse 4 says, He slept with Hagar and she conceived.

Now let's go to the second point. The anatomy of a mess. Do you want to know how to make a big mess in your family? Well, this will tell you how to do it.

Here's how. That's the next few verses. Hagar conceives and immediately everything begins to fall apart. The whole dynamic of the relationships that they've had start to come apart.

Hagar, because she is pregnant and Sarai isn't suddenly now has what she thinks in her mind is the upper place. The predominant place in the family.

The favored one. The favored wife. And so she's probably thinking, I can't believe that I've made it. I went from slave. Now I'm a wife.

[14:47] And now I'm the favored wife of a very important man. I've made it. I won't be pushed around anymore. And she began to despise her mistress.

Sarai. But Sarai is not going to take that lying down. And so she's not having any of that. So she goes to Abram and she blames the mess on him.

Remember this morning in Sunday school, we talked about getting the log out of your own eye.

Well, Sarai didn't do that. You are responsible for the wrong eye I am suffering. And then she says, may the Lord judge between you and me.

Don't you want to ask, Sarah, are you crazy? Are you crazy? This was your idea. And then you're ready to call in the judgment day.

You're ready to drag this whole mess before the Lord. Lord, are you crazy? Well, no more crazy than we are.

[15:58] Because sin blinds us. It's your fault. Not my fault. The easiest words to say because it lies closest to our heart.

It's not my fault. Sin has this amazing ability to justify itself. Sin blinds us to reality that the biggest problem, the two by four, is in my eye and the speck is in your eye.

It's us. So Sarai is blind. Sarai is blind and Abram is weak. Abram is so passive in this whole situation. Sarai gets a bad idea and he says, okay.

And Sarah blames him and he says, okay. Verse 6, your servant is in your hands. You want to say, Abram, what are you doing?

What are you doing? You're just going to say do whatever you want with her? Where's that man who chased an army and rescued Lot? Where's that man?

[17:03] Where's that courageous man? And in this section, he's missing in action. Do with her whatever you want. What does Sarah do?

She mistreats Hagar. The word is, she dealt hardly with her. She pressed her down. You think you're something?

You're nothing. You think you're something? You are nothing. You think you can look down on me? I will teach you a lesson. And she treated her like that. How's that for grace?

So it's a mess. Pride is all over the place. Blindness and sin are all over the place. And all I can say is, thank God that he's not like us.

He's not like us. He's not like his people sometimes. Hagar says, I've had enough. I'm out of here. And she fled from Sarah.

[18:10] And that brings us to the third movement. The third anatomy. The anatomy of grace. What does grace look like? That's what this chapter is about. What does God's grace look like in Hagar's life?

What does God's grace look like in your life? Well, it looks like this. Look at verse 7. First, God finds us. God finds us.

Verse 7. The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert. It was the spring that is beside the road to shore. Now, the angel of the Lord.

It's a pre-incarnate son of God on a mission. Angel, in both Greek and Hebrew, it means messenger. And so when God takes this form, when the angel of the Lord shows up in the Old Testament, it's God on a mission.

It's God with a message. We're going to run into him again in another few chapters. And so, it's not talking about his nature. Jesus, at this point, did not become an angel.

[19:19] But instead, he took on the appearance of a man and he went on a mission. He's on a saving, he's a saving messenger. So what you have here is the Son of God coming to earth in the appearance of a man, but he's not a man completely.

That will be later. And he comes to Hagar. And Jesus sought her. And he found her.

That doesn't mean he didn't know where she was. It just means that he went after her. And he found her beside a spring, beside the well, on the road to Shur.

Now, if you want to look afterward, you can look in the map in the back of your Bibles, and Shur is down by Egypt. It's the desert that's right on the other side, so to speak, on the other side of the Nile.

And so you have the Nile here, and Shur is right here. So Hagar is on the way to Egypt. Hagar was an Egyptian. So she's going home.

[20:27] She's going back to where she came from. And again, I've said this before, but there's a theme in Genesis, and there's a theme in Exodus about going back to Egypt.

About going back to Egypt. Egypt is the way of self-salvation. It's the way Hagar is going to take care of this problem. It's the way Hagar is going to escape. It's the way of human power.

It's the way of the world. So Egypt is living by sight. It's not by living by faith. And that's where Hagar is going. She's on the road home to Egypt.

But the Lord finds her first. He finds her on the way from God, and He has mercy on her. That's what grace looks like.

Grace is God finding His people while they're on their way to Egypt, while they're living in Egypt.

[21:28] Now, Egypt looks different for different people. But it's always self-salvation. It's always human effort. You remember in John chapter 4, Jesus met another woman.

And He was beside a well. He said He had to go through Samaria. He has to. He has to go that way. He's traveling.

He stops at a well, and there He meets a woman. And she is as lost as can be. She's as lost as Hagar. But that's why He's come. To seek and to save the lost. Well, where did He find her? Well, He found her in the arms of another man. She had been married five times. And now this one is not even her husband. So what was her Egypt? What was her way of self-salvation? Her way of escaping and rescuing herself? Well, her Egypt was romantic sexual relationships. And so she's a broken woman, and she knows that. [22 : 33] And she's always thinking, maybe the next one will be it. Okay, that one didn't work out. Maybe this one will be the one that, you know, takes care of me and can save me and give me peace and give me hope and joy.

Maybe if this one. And Jesus found her. And Jesus found Hagar near the spring, near the well, on the road to Egypt.

And that's where He found you, brother, sister. That's where He found me, trying to do it ourselves, trying to make life work on our own, and our lives are broken.

And all of the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put it back together again. We were broken, and it wasn't for lack of trying. You know, we filled up our lives with all sorts of stuff. And money, and romance, and boyfriends, and girlfriends, and popularity. And sometimes it was good works and church attendance. But all of it was Egypt.

[23 : 37] All of it was self-salvation. All of it was me trying to make this work on my own. All of it, idolatry. All of it, self-sufficient independence. And He found us.

That's where He found you. And He tracked you down. And that's what grace looks like. Grace is about Jesus finding sinners. It's not about sinners finding Him.

It's not about turning over a new leaf. It's not about, oh, I'm going to get right, get back to God. It's about Jesus finding us and Jesus having mercy on us. So what does grace look like?

Well, it's something that searches for us and finds us. And then secondly, He knows us. He knows us. Look at verse 8.

Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from? Where are you going? He doesn't ask her name.

[24 : 37] He tells her who she is. He's saying, Hagar, I know you. I know where you came from. I know where you're going.

He doesn't ask her name. He says it. And with a question, He stopped Hagar in her tracks and then made her look at herself. The Lord knew where she was coming from and where she was going. But He was saying, I know who you are. So confess. I know all about you. And that's grace too. The Lord comes to sinners and the Spirit of God says, I know all about you. I know where you've been. I know where you're going. I know all about you.

Confess. In salvation, God doesn't come to know who we are. We come to know who we are. In salvation, God doesn't come to terms with who we are.

[25 : 45] We come to terms with who we are. And God's Spirit shines into our sinful souls. He shows us what we are. And He tells us and He asks us, come, come out into the light.

Tell me who you are. And we come. And we say, I'm a wretch. I'm a sinner. We don't hide. We don't pretend. We walk into the light.

And that's what Hagar does. She says, I'm running away from my mistress. She walks into the light. And He gives her a command.

And this is grace too. He gives her a command. Turn around. Go back. To your mistress. And submit to her. Now why did He give her that hard command?

Not because He didn't know what was waiting for her. Not because He didn't know what she was leaving behind. Because that's where life was. Life wasn't in Egypt.

[26 : 47] Salvation wasn't in Egypt. It was coming from Abraham's family. It was coming out of him. Life was there. That's where salvation was.

And so He sends her back. He says, repent, turn around, and go back. But He doesn't send her without hope. God never tells us to repent without giving us a sweet promise for doing so.

And He didn't send her back without hope. And I think this is so, this is where God's heart is so beautiful and clear. He gives her a promise.

You're going to have so many descendants that they're going to be too numerous to count. So where was Hagar? What condition was she in?

She's hot. She's sunburned. She's pregnant. She's all alone. She has no one to take care of her.

[27 : 45] She has no future. No prospects. Can you imagine, ladies, how she felt? You're carrying a child.

And you're out in the middle of a desert. And there's nothing behind you and nothing in front of you. Well, would she survive? Would her baby survive?

And then what? Then what? Well, God knew that. God sees that. God hears that. And He hears the misery of her heart.

And He speaks the words of hope and life. Don't worry about your baby. He's going to survive. And don't worry about your future. You're going to have descendants.

Too numerous to count. They're in my hands. You're in my hands. If no one else will care about you, Hagar, I'll care about you. I'll do this for you.

[28 : 45] But then there's more. Not only will her baby be fine and her future is going to be fine, but her baby is going to be free.

He will be free. Look at verse 11. 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. What does that mean? God hears. For the Lord has heard of your misery.

God has ears that reach into our hearts. I've heard your misery. And 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 all of his brothers. Now, we're going to talk later, because it comes up later in these accounts of Abraham, about the relationship that Ishmael is going to have with Isaac.

[29 : 48] But I don't want you to miss this. You can't read this passage without seeing just how pushed around Hagar is.

She's a slave. And Sarah puts her in Abram's hands. I give her to you. I put her in your arms. Abram does the exact same thing.

She puts him. Abram puts her into Sarah's hands. And she's a tool. Passed back and forth. Pushed around. Helpless in the hands of others.

And now here she is with no prospects, really. And God is saying, go back. But along with that, go back and submit, is this promise that things are going to change.

Things are going to change. Your son won't be a slave. He says, he's going to be a wild donkey of a man. Now, I don't know if anyone would want, or I don't think I would want anyone to say that about my son.

[30 : 47] But for Hagar, this is good news, believe it or not. That's not saying he's going to be a madman. You're not supposed to think of like some, you know, crazy hillbilly in the backwoods of West Virginia or something.

He's not mad. He's free. He's free. Remember when the Lord answered Job. And he started telling Job about all the things that are stronger than Job is.

And freer and bigger than Job was. Well, in the middle of that, as God is saying, look at this animal. Look at that. Look at this. Look at that. He says, who let the wild donkey go?

Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes? God is saying, that's me. I freed him. And I love his freedom. I gave him the wasteland as his home. The salt flats as his habitat.

He laughs at the commotion in the town. He does not hear a driver shout. He ranges the hills for his pasture and searches for any green thing. He has no fence. He has no master.

[31 : 51] He is free. The wild donkey was free. No one told him what to do. No one yelled giddy up to him. And he had to go. Do you see what God is saying to Hagar?

Hagar, you've been pushed around. Passed from hand to hand. But your son won't be. Instead, his hand will be raised against everyone. And everyone will be against him.

No one will tell him what to do. And if they do, he will not listen. Ishmael would be nobody's tool. And that's good news if you're a slave.

And that's grace, too. Grace sets us free. Sets us free. Jesus said, if the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed.

Paul wrote, it's for freedom that Christ has set us free. Why did Christ set you free? So that you could be free? For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freed man.

[33 : 02] No matter what place you have in society, if you're a slave, when you come to Jesus, you become a free man. So young believers, older believers, God set you free.

Don't let yourself be enslaved again. Not to the ways of this world. Not to the opinions of others. Don't let their opinions of you and the world's ideas throw chains on you. Christ has set you free. So don't let yourself be enslaved again.

So God spoke freedom to Hagar. And then Hagar said, Oh God, you're the God that sees me. He saw our heart.

He saw our need. He saw our sin. But in grace and in love, he gave her hope and a future. And brothers and sisters, that's your God.

[34 : 05] He does this for sinners. He does this for you. Doesn't that make you love him? He found you. He knew you. He knew where you were.

He knew where you were going. He gave you a gracious command to repent. And he gave you a promise. He gave you a promise. But someone might say, But Ishmael wasn't the promised son. He wasn't the promised son. He grew up and he went away. Just like it was prophesied. God, as far as we can tell, God didn't save Ishmael.

And so what's the point? Why promise these things? God didn't bring blessing to the nations through Ishmael. It was going to be through Isaac.

Well, no, he didn't. He didn't bless the nations through Ishmael. But for Abraham's sake, he blessed Ishmael. And for Jesus' sake, God is going to bless all the nations of the world.

[35 : 10] See, this chapter shows us that his heart is wide open. God is not a racist. And he's no nationalist either. For this country or for any other country.

Whenever an Old Testament Jew looked back on this passage, there was no denying the fact that God cared for the Gentiles.

It wasn't an afterthought. It was right from the very beginning. Even Abraham's son, Ishmael. And that's grace too.

He finds us. He knows us. He loves us. But not only us, but people everywhere. The gospel is being announced to all the world.

Jesus saves. He died for sinners. He rose again. And now the command is to repent. Turn from your Egypt.

[36 : 09] From your ideas of self-salvation. Your ideas of how you're going to make this life work. And return. Come back. Go to the Lord Jesus. And he will freely save you.

Grace is available. For those who will repent. And believe. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that.

In your word, you reveal yourself. And we thank you that in your word, you reveal yourself to be good. And wise. You have a plan.

And you are carrying it out. And you are full of grace for sinners like us.

And though you are rightfully angry at our sins. Yet you hold back your anger.

[37 : 11] And you hold forth a pardon. And it's a blood sealed pardon. And it's in Jesus' hands. And you command us.

To stop going the way of destruction. And come to where there is life. I pray that you would open the eyes of the blind.

Give them eyes to see Jesus. And that he is enough. And he is perfect. And his salvation. And his righteousness. Is all that they need.

Give them grace to turn. And I pray for my brothers and sisters here. That you would encourage them. With this picture again.

Of who you are. And who you are for us. If there is any here that have been running away from you. And in darkness.

[38 : 10] I pray that you would go and find them. Find my brothers and sisters this evening. Wherever they are. And do them good. Recover them. And teach them your commands.

Write those on their heart. And give them grace upon grace. To obey. And to so honor you. We love you Lord. We love you for being so patient with us.

Pray that you would bless us as we go on our way. In Jesus name. Amen.