

Genesis Chapters 16-17 Summary - John Karmelich

The first thing that popped in my head as I was studying these chapters was, "It's about time God dealt with women in a positive light!" If you consider this book so far, it's pretty much all dealing with men, with women basically as background characters. The only exception was when God "chewed out" Eve for eating bad fruit to put it simply. In these two chapters: God deals with Abraham's wife Sarah (Yes, I know I'm using the new names God gave each of them in these chapters)! Speaking of which, God is going to deal directly with a woman who was a servant of Sarah named Hagar. This woman did marry Abraham with Sarah's permission and they had a child! I'll deal with this story in these chapters. What keep hitting me was unless we saw God interacting with women in Genesis, we could ponder if He did care about women's salvation? I figured that's important to point that out before we go any further. For my male readers, there's more dealings with Abraham, but a lot of the focus is on these two women.

First let me say something about the "Second wife" aspect in that culture. Both Abraham and Sarah got word from God that they will have children. Sarah got tired of waiting and told Abraham in effect, "Go take my servant as your second wife and get her pregnant for us!" I picture Abraham thinking, if that's what you want, who am I to argue? There was no prayer to God about it, just what we assume is some sort of vow ceremony and Abraham and Hagar (again the servant) went at it! The text does not say if it was ok with Hagar. Since she was a servant, she just went along with the program! My guess is Hagar was aware of God's promise to Abraham and then "rubbed it in Sarah's face" when she got pregnant! All of that ticked Sarah off, so Hagar decided to flee back to Egypt where she was from! On the way there, going through the desert, God spoke to Hagar about the son she'd have. God said he'd be the leader of a lot of people who regularly fight amongst each other. Hagar was just happy that God spoke to her as it was her life in danger in the middle of the desert. She ends up returning to Abraham and the baby boy's name in effect was, "God hears" (Ishmael in ancient Hebrew).

Meanwhile Abraham thought he finally had the son he wanted but God said in effect, "Not so fast, that is not what I meant!" You and Sarah will have many children. I am renaming both of you so that your new names will reflect the "plural" of the multitude of descendants you'll get. The boy Ishmael was 13 when God gave this promise to Abraham and Sarah. At that point he was 99 and she was about 90. The next thing I pondered is if menopause was the same then as today? Bottom line is they believed God so all of this must have shocked them. All that I know is they named their son Isaac which means laughter. Yes, there's more to the story, and it includes a lot of dialogue between God with Sarah and Hagar. OK then, time to get into some of the details and see what it teaches us about our walks with God today!

Let us begin with where we left off: In Chapter 15, God told Abraham he'd have lots of sons. To prove His point, God put Abraham in a deep sleep and God held a demonstration of Him walking through the animals Abraham cut up as a sign that God by Himself will honor that contract. Now we are in Chapter 16 and I'm sure some time past. I picture Abraham's wife frustrated and thinking, "This is my fault, as I can't seem to get pregnant!" Instead of praying, Sarah thought, "I got an idea how we can help! Honey, you take my servant Hagar, marry her and have children!" The text tells us Hagar's from Egypt as that's important as she'll try to run there when Sarah was upset that "She's pregnant and I'm not!" Again I see Abraham thinking, "If you want me to have sex with that young girl, I'll do it just to make you happy!"

Once Hagar "missed her period" she probably started thinking she was the solution to what God said to Abraham. At that point, Sarah got tough on Hagar, so she's now fleeing back home to Egypt pregnant. In the wilderness we get the first appearance of "the" angel of the Lord (which a lot of Christians argue

is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus). The angel told Hagar to go back to Abraham and Sarah. He also told her that her son would be leader of multitudes of people. She names the baby Ishmael. That means "God hears". Verse 13 states she believes the angel. She names the spot where all this occurred based on the two nearest cities to the well where it happened. To me the underlying point is, God speaks to a non-Israelite woman and said she's blessed by God and to submit to Abraham and Sarah and to trust in God's promise to her! We also find out the age of Abraham (not Sarah or Hagar) here and he was 86 at that point!

It's important because the first thing we read in Chapter 17's Abraham was 99 the next time God spoke to him. And we worry if God isn't guiding us daily! The next thing God says to Abraham, is to repeat His promise that Abraham will be the leader of many nations! God promises that within a year, Sarah (here is where her name was changed) will have a son and she will be happy. The baby named Isaac, is the Hebrew word for happy. Abraham laughed at the thought of having a baby at 99! Sarah was 90 at this point. Again, I don't know about menopause in those days, but with God nothing's impossible.

Back to the scene. Abraham didn't think it was possible given the fact she hasn't been pregnant to date! That's when Abraham thought he'd "help God" (always a mistake) and say, "Here's Ishmael"! Then we get God saying in effect, "Shut up and listen Abraham! You and Sarah will have a baby in a year, so I'd get used to it, as nothing's too hard for me!" I must admit I pictured Sarah going to a "mommy and me" church function at 90! Before God wrapped up, He also said in effect, "Don't worry about Ishmael, he's also telling Abraham Ishmael will be the father of 12 princes!" We get a brief mention of that family in the story of Joseph many chapters from now. Of course, God says what He means and means what He says, so Abraham figured that out and accepted it!

Of all things, before we get back to the story of Abraham and his two wives, God said it's time for you to grasp circumcision! Realize the Israelites were not the first to do that! Doing it on the 8th day of the baby's life was God saying here's how you will be different from other nations. (I also believe there are health benefits as no disease can be stuck in there, but that's besides the point!) On a related point, I've always wondered why Moses did not have the generation going into Israel circumcised! Joshua had to do that, but I'll leave that question for another study! Bottom line God tells Abraham that all the males in his household and any baby when he is exactly 8 days old or older to get that surgery! As opposed to Moses, Abraham obeyed as fast as possible! The baby story will continue in the next lesson!

OK enough of babies and circumcising them! Most of us accept this as fact! What does any of this got to do with our lives today? Besides the fact we learn that God does communicate directly with women in a positive light (as opposed to chewing out Eve!), we are reminded that God is interesting in guiding our lives for His glory! But John, God has never communicated to me like he did to these people! Yes, but he speaks to us through his Word. Christians are not required to be circumcised (Galatians 1 makes that clear), but I am still in favor of it for health reasons only! For example, His command in Genesis to "be fruitful and multiply" does apply today! My point is simply that God gave us His word but we're to use both common sense and the entire of His word to determine how to live. I'd argue for a decision that no answer is clear in His word, we're free to do what we want! At the same time, I'd argue each of us have gifts that we can use to benefit the church and we're to use them. (Then as I always joke, there isn't any specified spiritual gift to take the trash out, but someone has to do it!)

My takeaway from these chapters is not only that God does work through both men and women that do obey His word, but the reminder that He wants to guide us for His glory. Did Abraham and Sarah mess up with Hagar? Yes, but God still worked through their mistakes and use them for His glory! We need

to remember that when we make mistakes. Not to encourage them, but to realize God still wants to use us in spite of mistakes!

On the same page as this study is a more detailed study I wrote many years back. You are welcome to email me if you want or join my list to the get the latest lesson. Thanks for reading. John