

Genesis 16-18

An Overview of Chapter 16

Sarai decides she wants some children and is willing to go to any length to get them. She asks Abram to have sex with her servant Hagar. Abram does what his wife tells him and has sex with Hagar. The encounter was successful and Hagar gets pregnant.

As often happens when one man is sleeping with two women, the women don't like each other. Abram sides with his wife rather than his mistress, and allows Sarai to do what she thinks is right. Sarai begins treating Hagar harshly. Hagar decides she will not put up with this mistreatment, so she runs away.

The Lord sees Hagar by a spring of water in the wilderness and tells her to go back and submit to Sarai. The Lord also promises Hagar she will have many descendants and instructs her to name her son Ishmael, meaning "God hears." Hagar calls God Elroi, "God sees," because God saw her in her distress.

Hagar returns to Sarai and has a son whom she calls Ishmael as God had instructed her. Abram is 86 at this point.

An overview of Chapter 17

When Abram is 99 years old the Lord appears to him and Abram falls on his face in respect. God reminds Abram of the promised descendants and tells Abram ("exalted father") that his name will be changed to Abraham ("father of a multitude"). God also informs Abraham that the land promised to Abraham (Canaan) will also be promised to his descendants.

God instructs Abraham in a new covenant: circumcision. All the males born in Abraham's house will be circumcised eight days after they are born, and all the current uncircumcised men will be circumcised now.

God gives Sarai a new name as well; she is now Sarah ("princess"). God also tells Abraham the Sarah will have a child of her own. When Abraham hears this he falls on his face again, this time laughing. Abraham pulls himself together and asks whether Ishmael might be the one that God chooses as his descendant. God says no, Sarah will give birth in one year, then He instructs Abraham to name the child Isaac ("he laughs").

Abraham then has the painful task of making all the men of his household get circumcised as well as himself and his 13 year old son Ishmael.

An overview of Chapter 18

Abraham sees the Lord, and two other fellows out walking and Abraham invites them to stop in for a foot bath and some dinner. They agree, and Abraham treats them to bread, veal, cheese and milk. As they are talking over dinner, the Lord reminds Abraham that he will have a son next year. Sarah overhears this and laughs. Hearing her laugh the Lord asks her whether anything is too hard for the Lord.

The Lord and the men with him are getting ready to leave when the Lord asks a rhetorical question, "*Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?*" Then the Lord answers Him-

self and has decided to use this as an opportunity to teach Abraham about justice and righteousness.

The Lord tells Abraham that He has heard an outcry (possibly from Lot?) that Sodom and Gomorrah is full of great sin. Abraham, knowing that his nephew Lot is in Sodom, asks whether the righteous will be destroyed with the wicked. Abraham bargains with the Lord, *“Will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of 50 righteous ... 45 ... 40 ... 30 ... 20 ... ten righteous?”* The Lord says, *“I will not destroy it on account of the ten.”* Abraham learns the lesson that God will not destroy the righteous with the wicked, just as God had not destroyed righteous Noah with the wicked world, and later God will rapture His righteous church before he destroys the wicked world.

Reflection

Do you ever try to fulfill God’s promises for him, rather than wait for His timing? Is God requiring you to be submissive to people who have been harsh to you? Do you try to run away from your problems? Are you willing to do the will of God even if it is painful to you? Do you cry out to God when you see wickedness? Do you trust God to judge righteously?

For Further Study

Submission: Hebrews 13:17, James 4:7, 1Peter 2:13-25, 1Peter 3:1-6

Circumcision: Leviticus 12:3, Deuteronomy 30:6, Jeremiah 9:25, Romans 2:25-29, Galatians 5:2-12, Philippians 3:2-3

Righteousness: Genesis 15:6, Psalm 1:5-6, Proverbs 10, Romans 1:17, Galatians 2:21

Justice: Psalm 37:28, Proverbs 29:26, Luke 11:42