

A summary of Genesis 16:1-6

- 1. It is very difficult to gain Christ (symbolized by the good land) (Genesis 16:2-3;15:19-21).** Genesis 15 concludes with God's covenant with Abraham in which He promises to give Abraham's seed the land, inhabited at the time by ten tribes (vv.19-21). These ten tribes, as we saw in our summary of Genesis 15:7-21, represent our flesh and our natural life with its good intentions and natural ability, without dependence on God. These tribes are not people outside us but represent rather things inside us that God cannot use and that need to be crucified and driven out. Otherwise, they will frustrate us from gaining Christ and giving ourselves to Christ and His church. Genesis 16, a continuation of chapter 15, demonstrates these tribes in action in someone with whom God had recently made a covenant. Shortly after the covenant was made, Sarah proposed to Abraham that he take Hagar her Egyptian servant in order to produce an heir that was apparently not forthcoming. Such a proposition reflects some of the characteristics of the ten tribes within this precious household (Abraham and Sarah and those living with them), demonstrated by natural ability in order to "help God out" since no offspring was imminent. Yet, lest we think that we may be better than Abraham, Genesis 16:3 tells us that Abraham and Sarah had already lived ten years in Canaan (the good land, for us a picture of Christ and the church life). Their spiritual life was already very high, much higher, we must admit, than ours, as we have seen in tracing Abraham's growth during his sojourning, represented by the altars, his calling on the name of the Lord, his raising up a service team and fighting for his brother Lot, his financial grace offering, and his offerings to God. Yet he still allowed the ten tribes in him to manifest themselves by listening to Sarah's proposal. How many more mistakes do we make, even if we may have been in the church life for a longer period of time? We should never criticize or blame Abraham, for we ourselves are guilty of much more deviation from God's will and purpose. All this should show us how hard and challenging it is to follow Christ and gain Christ as the good land.
- 2. Do we fellowship not only with brothers and sisters, our companions and our service team, but also with the Lord individually (16:2)?** In chapter 15, as we have seen, Abraham fellowshiped with the Lord and asked two questions. He truly enjoyed a period of intimate fellowship. However, in chapter 16, he listened to the voice of Sarah his wife without fellowshiping with the Lord. What about us? Again, may we not criticize Abraham. We also are prone to making the same mistakes, and even more than Abraham. Especially in these days, we do emphasize the need to be in a service team and to have a service team and to listen to the Christ in the brothers and sisters, which may be the Lord's speaking to us. Such an emphasis is healthy and much needed but should never preclude individual fellowship with the Lord. Abraham fellowshiped with a family member (his wife), and he needed to. Sarah, as we will see in the next point, also had grown in the divine life and her level of life, like her husband's, was high. We also may fellowship with brothers and sisters, older and younger, whose life level is quite high, yet neglect our individual fellowship with the Lord. The two go hand in hand. None should be without the other. For example, if we are serving the 8-12 year olds, we surely need prayer and fellowship with our serving team, yet we also must carefully pray to the Lord individually concerning many aspects of the service. Actually, such a careful and detailed prayer and fellowship with the Lord will guide us in our fellowship with our service team and even give meaning to the fellowship that we may have with and receive from them. To give another example, now we are having the Lord's day gathering electronically. How can we carry this out? How can we be involved? How can we bring other saints, perhaps those who have not been coming to the gatherings, to participate? Individual prayer to the Lord is so much needed for us to understand the Lord's purpose and operation. Abraham had listened and responded to God's speaking concerning the promise of an offspring, yet he still did not understand, neither did his wife. How much less do we understand, if we do not engage not only in the corporate prayers of the church and our service team but also in our individual prayers to the Lord.
- 3. Without coming to the Lord in prayer, with companions and individually, we may blame the Lord when things do not work out even according to God's promise (Genesis 16:2;30:23).** Sarah is an interesting and somewhat mysterious person in the Old Testament because we do not know her feelings or emotions during the first ten years or more from the time that God called Abraham to leave Ur of Chaldea. What was her reaction? What did she say? Did she right away respond positively to Abraham's response to obey God? The Bible is silent in this matter, though we do know through her actions that she was very submissive (1 Peter 3:6). She followed her husband, even during the traumatic experience with Pharaoh in Egypt (Genesis 12), and later in Gerar (chapter 20). Chapter 16:2 records her first words, which express a disappointment and a frustration with the Lord for having prevented her from bearing children. Thus, interestingly, her first words constitute a complaint! Was she justified? Genesis 30:23 may shed some light on this matter concerning Rachel's reaction to her bearing of Joseph: "She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." This was according to the Jewish concept that if a woman was barren (could not bear children), it was a reproach or a shame, and that somehow God was to blame. It is clear that Sarah's growth in life was healthy and quite high. She, like her husband Abraham, had heard God's speaking and desired an offspring. Yet there was none forthcoming. Hence the cry from within her was verbalized by her in a spontaneous blaming of

God and an articulation of a plan to remedy that situation and echoed by Abraham's apparently ready acceptance of such a proposal. Was Sarah justified in her reproach of God? In a sense, we may say she was. It is indeed hard to follow the Lord. We can check with our own experience. When we do not have a job, or when we fall ill, we easily blame the Lord, especially if we are following the Lord. We may even hold the Lord to His promise, for example, of never leaving us or forsaking us (Hebrews 13:5). Yet many servants of the Lord apparently have been "forsaken" by the Lord and their living situation is quite hard. We cannot blame Sarah, nor can we blame saints (including ourselves) when things do not go the way we want them to. Yet, in all this, we can come to the Lord and fellowship with the Lord and tell Him our real feelings. Apparently, Sarah did not do this, but she had a design to remedy the situation. Do we come to the Lord in prayer, both individually and with our companions? Do we tell Him everything?

4. **Do we really love and care for the saints, and do we preach the gospel? God really loved Hagar (Genesis 16:1-6).** Who is Hagar? We do not know too much about her from Genesis, except that she was an Egyptian and Sarah's maid, probably acquired when Abraham and Sarah were in Egypt (Genesis 12). Thus, she was a Gentile living in a Hebrew family, a type of an unbeliever living in a Christian family, or, to apply it to the church life, an unbeliever or a gospel friend living among the brothers and sisters in the church. Here we see God's marvelous love and care for Hagar. He brought her from her homeland into an unknown land to be with an unknown family to serve them, and in all that, God was minutely caring for her, as we will see in the later section of chapter 16 and chapter 21. How about us? Do we have such a love? It is not easy. Sarah dealt harshly with Hagar, causing her to run away (16:6). We may be like Sarah. We may be very small. We do not have the capacity to love as we should. For example, how many saints have we contacted this week? Have we preached the gospel this week? Abraham, Sarah and Hagar are a good example of saints caring for a younger one and being cared for in the church life. Sarah and Hagar were so close. Otherwise, Sarah would not have chosen Hagar to conceive. They loved one another. Yet, Sarah dealt harshly with Hagar when her pride and her self-esteem were injured. How much more do we lack in real love and care for people. Again, we should never despise Abraham, Sarah and Hagar and criticize them. We are far more lacking. The main point here is that even though we are lacking, God demonstrates His immense love for one young in life, even when our love is short
5. **Do we despise others or look down on them, as Hagar despised Sarah (Genesis 16:4; Galatians 4:21-31)?** According to Paul's allegorical interpretation in Galatians 4 in the New Testament, Sarah and Hagar represent two covenants and two women, the covenant of grace and the covenant of law, and the free woman and the slave woman. Hagar was a slave of the law. The effect of the law is that we are brought into slavery, into a living that may be of Christ but without Christ Himself. For example, we encourage many saints to participate in the corporate prayers. Last Tuesday, there were 65 who participated, and this past Thursday night 21. This is very encouraging and we exercise to lead the brothers and sisters to participate in such a grace to bless the church. Yet such a result may cause us to become proud and even look down at other churches that do not have such an exercise or that many saints in the corporate prayers. If that is our attitude, we are Hagar, a slave to the law. Being under law can make us proud. Something of Christ and even initiated by Christ may now have become devoid of Christ. Another example is how we teach our children. We may unintentionally want our children to become doctors or lawyers, to become rich and successful in life. We may despise other children or families who are not as successful, according to our eyes. Again, this could be an example of Hagar.
6. **How do we treat the brothers and sisters (Genesis 16:6)?** Abraham told Sarah that her servant (Hagar) was in her power and to do to her as she pleased (16:6). In the Old Testament, a servant was actually a slave. The master or mistress owned the slave and could do whatever they wanted to the slave. The slave had no rights. This is a good example of the church life. How do we treat the brothers and sisters? Do we love them or do we treat them as slaves or our possession. For example, we may think that we love the saints by doing something for them, by giving them a gift. Do we pray for them? Do we come to the church meetings? Do we participate in the corporate prayers? If not, we don't really care for the saints. We may think we do but that kind of love may be a natural or a social love. The Lord cares for the saints much more than we do. When Sarah treated Hagar harshly, God really cared for Hagar, as we saw in point 4.
7. **We tend to blame the serving ones if the younger ones are not served and do not grow well (Genesis 16:5).** Sarah, a type of a saint, blamed Abraham, a type of a serving one in 16:5: "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" Sometimes, we are like this. When we do not see younger brothers and sisters grow well, or no one caring for them, we tend to blame the serving ones. Was Sarah justified? In a sense she was, but this was still a fleshly reaction. When there is a deficiency in the church life, we like to blame others, not ourselves. Either we criticize the serving ones if there is a lack, or we are jealous if they are accomplishing something which we are not able to do. Criticism and jealousy are two major characteristics of the ten tribes in us that need to be dealt with.