

Genesis 16:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.

Analysis

And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land... This passage is part of the Abrahamic narratives which shift from universal human history to God's particular covenant people. The Abraham cycle (Genesis 12-25) demonstrates God's sovereign election, covenant faithfulness, and the development of faith through testing and promise fulfillment.

Central themes include God's unconditional covenant promises (land, descendants, blessing to nations), the call to faith and obedience, the testing of faith through delays and impossibilities, the contrast between divine promises and human schemes, and God's gracious persistence despite human failures. Abraham emerges as the father of faith whose trust in God's promises becomes the model for all believers (Romans 4, Galatians 3, Hebrews 11).

Theologically, these narratives establish:

1. salvation by grace through faith rather than works
2. covenant as God's gracious initiative binding Himself to His people
3. the necessity of patient trust when promises seem impossible
4. the consequences of attempting to fulfill God's promises through human effort
5. the pattern of divine testing producing mature faith.

The Abraham cycle foreshadows Christ as the ultimate seed through whom blessing extends to all nations (Galatians 3:16).

Historical Context

The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
2. How should this truth about Divine Compassion shape our daily decisions and priorities?
3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

Interlinear Text

בְּמִצְרַיִם	בָּגָר	אֶת	לְאַבְּךָ	מִלְאָשָׁה:	שָׁבָי	וַתַּקְרֵב	חַ
took	And Sarai	to be his wife	Abram		H853	Hagar	the Egyptian
H3947	H8297	H802	H87		H1904		H4713
בְּאַרְצָה	לְאַבְּךָ	מִלְשָׁבֵת	שָׁבָי	עַשְׂרֵה	מֵקֵץ	שָׁפְחַת	הַ
her maid	after	ten	years	had dwelt	Abram	in the land	
H8198	H7093	H6235	H8141	H3427	H87		H776
לְאַשְׁהָה:	לְזִ	אִישׁ	הָ	לְאַבְּךָ	מִלְאָתָה	וַתִּתְחַתֵּן	כִּי עֲ
of Canaan	and gave			Abram		to be his wife	
H3667	H5414			H87		H802	

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 16:5 (Parallel theme): And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee.