

# Genesis 16:1-16

by John Calvin

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*The sermon explores Sarai's impatience and the consequences of deviating from God's plan in the story of Hagar and Abram.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 16:1-13

**Topics:** "Faith And Patience", "Gods Sovereignty"

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## Description

John Calvin preaches on the story of Sarai, Abram, and Hagar, highlighting the impatience and lack of faith displayed by Sarai in resorting to a method contrary to God's word to obtain offspring. Despite the good intention of wanting children, Sarai's impatience led her to take matters into her own hands, deviating from God's plan. Abram, though wavering in faith, yielded to Sarai's suggestion, showing the consequences of not waiting on God's timing. The story serves as a cautionary tale against impatience and the dangers of deviating from God's ordained path.

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## Transcript

1. Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar.

1. Porro Sarai uxor Abram non pepererat ei: erat autem ei ancilla Aegyptia, et nomen ejus Hagar.

2. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

2. Et dixit Sarai ad Abram, Ecce, nunc conclusit me Jehova, ne parerem: ingredere nunc ad ancillam meam, si forte aedificer ex ea: et paruit Abram voci Sarai.

3. 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.

3. Et tulit Sarai uxor Abram, Hagar Aegyptiam ancillam suam in fine decem annorum, quibus habitavit Abram in terra Chanaan, et dedit eam Abram viro suo in uxorem.

4. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.

4. Et ingressus est ad Hagar, et concepit: et videns quod concepisset, despectui habuit dominam suam in oculis suis.

5. 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.

5. Tunc dixit Sarai ad Abram, Injuria mea super to: ego dedi ancillam meam in sinu tuo, et ubi vidit quod concepisset, despectui sum in oculis ejus: judicet Jehova inter me et to.

6. But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

6. Et dixit Abram ad Sarai, Ecce, ancilla tua in manu tua, fac ei quod bonum est in oculis tuis: et afflixit eam Sarai, et fugit a facie ejus.

7. And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.

7. Et invenit eam Angelus Jehovae juxta fontem aquae in deserto, juxta fontem in via Sur.

8. And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.

8. Et dixit, Hagar ancilla Sarai, unde venis, et quo vadis? Et dixit, A facie Sarai dominae meae ego fugio.

9. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

9. Et dixit ei Angelus Jehovae, Revertere ad dominam tuam, et humilia to sub manibus ejus.

10. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

10. Adhaec dixit ei Angelus Jehovae, Multiplicando multiplicabo semen tuum, et non numerabitur prae multitudine.

11. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.

11. Praeterea dixit ei Angelus Jehovae, Ecce, es praegnans, et paries filium, et vocabis nomen ejus Ismael: quia audivit Jehova afflictionem tuam.

12. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

12. Et ipse erit ferus homo, manus ejus in omnes, et manus omnium in eum: et coram omnibus fratribus suis habitabit.

13. And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?

13. Et vocavit nomen Jehovae qui loquebatur sibi, Tu Deus videns me: quia dixit, Nonne etiam hie vidi post videntem me?

14. Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

14. Idcirco vocavit puteum, Puteum viventis videntis me. Ecce, est inter Cades et Bared.

15. And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael.

15. Et peperit Hagar ipsi Abram filium: et vocavit Abram nomen filii sui, quem peperit Hagar, Ismael.

16. And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.

16. Abram autem erat octoginta annorum et sex annorum, quando peperit Hagar Ismael ipsi Abram.

1. Now Sarai , Abram's wife . Moses here recites a new history, namely, that Sarai, through the impatience of long delay, resorted to a method of obtaining seed by her husband, at variance with the word of God. She saw that she was barren, and had passed the age of bearing. And she inferred the necessity of a new remedy, in order that Abram might obtain the promised blessing. Moses expressly relates, that the design of marrying a second wife did not originate with Abram himself, but with Sarai, to teach us that the holy man was not impelled by lust to these nuptials; but that when he was thinking of no such thing, he was induced to engage in them, by the exhortation of his wife.

It is, however, asked, whether Sarai substituted her handmaid in her place, through the mere desire of having offspring? So it seems to some; yet to me it is incredible, that the pious matron should not have been cognizant of those promises, which had been so often repeated to her husband. Yea, it ought to be fully taken for granted, among all pious persons, that the mother of the people of God, was a participator of the same grace with her husband. Sarai, therefore, does not desire offspring (as is usual) from a merely natural impulse; but she yields her conjugal rights to another, through a wish to obtain that benediction, which she knew was divinely promised: not that she makes a divorce from her husband, but assigns him another wife, from whom he might receive children.

And certainly if she had desired offspring in the ordinary manner, it would rather have come into her mind to do it by the adoption of a son, than by giving place to a second wife. For we know the vehemence of female jealousy. Therefore, while contemplating the promise, she becomes forgetful of her own right, and thinks of nothing but the bringing forth of children to Abram. A memorable example, from which no small profit accrues to us. For however laudable was Sarai's wish, as regards the end, or the scope to which it tended; nevertheless, in the pursuit of it, she was guilty of no light sin, by impatiently departing from the word of God, for the purpose of enjoying the effect of that word.

While she rejects upon her own barrenness and old age, she begins to despair of offspring, unless Abram should have children from some other quarter; in this there is already some fault. Yet, however desperate the affair might be, still she ought not to have attempted anything at variance with the will of God and the legitimate order of nature. God designed that the human race should be propagated by sacred marriage. Sarai perverts the law of marriage, by defiling the conjugal bed, which was appointed only for two persons.

Nor is it an available excuse, that she wished Abram to have a concubine and not a wife; since it ought to have been regarded as a settled point, that the woman is joined to the man, 'that they two should be one flesh.' And though polygamy had already prevailed among many; yet it was never left to the will of man, to

abrogate that divine law by which two persons were mutually bound together. Nor was even Abram free from fault, in following the foolish and preposterous counsel of his wife.

Therefore, as the precipitancy of Sarai was culpable, so the facility with which Abram yielded to her wish was worthy of reprehension. The faith of both of them was defective; not indeed with regard to the substance of the promise, but with regard to the method in which they proceeded; 383 since they hastened to acquire the offspring which was to be expected from God, without observing the legitimate ordinance of God. Whence also we are taught that God does not in vain command his people to be quiet, and to wait with patience, whenever he defers or suspends the accomplishment of their wishes.

For they who hasten before the time, not only anticipate the providence of God, but being discontented with his word, precipitate themselves beyond their proper bounds. But it seems that Sarai had something further in view; for she not only wished that Abram should become a father, but would fain acquire to herself maternal rights and honors. I answer, since she knew that all nations were to be blessed in the seed of Abram, it is no wonder that she should be unwilling to be deprived of participation in his honor; lest she should be cut off, as a putrid member, from the body which had received the blessing, and should also become an alien from the promised salvation.

Bare him no children . This seems added as an excuse. And truly Moses intimates that she did not seek help from the womb of her maid, before necessity compelled her to do so. Her own words also show, that she had patiently and modestly waited to see what God would do, until hope was entirely cut off, when she says, that she was restrained from bearing by the Lord. (Ge 16:2.) What fault then shall we find in her? Surely, that she did not, as she ought, cast this care into the bosom of God, without binding his power to the order of nature, or restraining it to her own sense. And then, by neglecting to infer from the past what would take place in future, she did not regard herself as in the hand of God, who could again open the womb which he had closed.

2. That I may obtain children by her 384 This is a Hebrew phrase, which signifies to become a mother. Some however, expound the word as simply meaning, to have a son . And certainly ■■ ( ben ,) which, among the Hebrews, signifies son, corresponds with the verb here used. 385 But since sons are so called metaphorically as being the maintainers of the race, and thus building up the family, therefore the primary signification of the word is to be retained. But Sarai claims for herself by right of dominion, the child which Hagar shall bring forth: because handmaids do not bring forth for themselves, since they have not power over their own body. By first speaking to her husband, she does not barely allow of a concubine, who should be as a harlot; but introduces and obtrudes one. And hence it appears, that when persons are wiser in their own eyes than they ought to be, they easily fall into the snare of trying illicit means. The desire of Sarai proceeds from the zeal of faith; but because it is not so subjected to God as to wait his time, she immediately has recourse to polygamy, which is nothing else than the corruption of lawful marriage. Moreover, since Sarai, that holy woman, yet fanned in her husband the same flame of impatience with which she burned, we may hence learn, how diligently we ought to be on our guard, lest Satan should surprise us by any secret fraud. For not only does he induce wicked and ungodly men openly to oppose our faith; but sometimes, privately and by stealth, he assails us through the medium of good and simple men, that he may overcome us unawares. On every side, therefore, we must be on our guard against his wiles; lest by any means he should undermine us.

And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai . Truly the faith of Abram wavers, when he deviates from the word of God, and suffers himself to be borne away by the persuasion of his wife, to seek a remedy which

was divinely prohibited. He, however, retains the foundation, because he does not doubt that he shall, at length, perceive that God is true. By which example we are taught, that there is no reason why we should despond, if, at any time, Satan should shake our faith; provided that the truth of God be not overthrown in our hearts. Meanwhile, when we see Abram, who, through so many years, had bravely contended like an invincible combatant, and had surmounted so many obstacles, now yielding, in a single moment, to temptation; who among us will not fear for himself in similar danger? Therefore, although we may have stood long and firmly in the faith, we must daily pray, that God would not lead us into temptation.

3. And gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife . Moses states what was the design of Sarai; for neither did she intend to make her house a brothel, nor to be the betrayer of her maid's chastity, nor a pander for her husband. Yet Hagar is improperly called a wife; because she was brought into another person's bed, against the law of God. Wherefore, let us know that this connection was so far illicit, as to be something between fornication and marriage. The same thing takes place with all those inventions which are appended to the word of God. For with whatever fair pretext they may be covered, there is an inherent corruption, which degenerates from the purity of the word, and vitiates the whole.

4. Her mistress was despised in her eyes . Here Moses relates that the punishment of excessive precipitancy quickly followed. The chief blame, indeed, rested with Sarai; yet because Abram had proved himself too credulous, God chastises both as they deserve. Sarai is grievously and bitterly tried, by the proud contempt of her handmaid; Abram is harassed by unjust complaints; thus we see that both pay the penalty of their levity, and that the contrivance devised by Sarai, and too eagerly embraced by Abram, fails of success. Meanwhile, in Hagar, an instance of ingratitude is set before us; because she, having been treated with singular kindness and honor, begins to hold her mistress in contempt. Since, however, this is an exceedingly common disease of the mind, let the faithful accustom themselves to the endurance of it; if, at any time, a return so unjust be made to them, for their acts of kindness. But especially, let the infirmity of Sarai move us thus to act, since she was unable to bear the contempt of her maid.

5. My wrong be upon thee . This also was a part of her punishment, that Sarai was brought so low as to forget herself for a while; and being vehemently excited, conducted herself with so much weakness. Certainly, to the utmost of her power, she had impelled her husband to act rashly; and now she petulantly insults him, although innocent. For she adduces nothing for which Abram was to be blamed. She reproaches him with the fact, that she had given her maid into his bosom; and complains that she is condemned by this maid, without having first ascertained, whether he intended to assist the bad cause, by his countenance, or not. Thus blind is the assault of anger; it rushes impetuously hither and thither; and condemns, without inquiry, those who are entirely free from blame. If ever any woman was of a meek and gentle spirit, Sarai excelled in that virtue. Whereas, therefore, we see that her patience was violently shaken by a single offense, let every one of us be so much the more resolved to govern his own passions.

The Lord judge between me and thee . She makes improper use of the name of God, and almost forgets that due reverence, which is so strongly enforced on those who are godly. She makes her appeal to the judgment of God. What else is this, than to call down destruction on her own head? For if God had interposed as judge, he must of necessity have executed punishment upon one or other of them. But Abram had done no injury. It remains, therefore, that she must have felt the vengeance of God, whose anger she had so rashly imprecated upon herself, or her husband. Had Moses spoken this of any heathen woman, it might have been passed over as a common thing. But now, the Lord shows us, in the person of the mother of the faithful; first, how vehement is the flame of anger, and to what lengths it will hurry men; then, how greatly they are blinded who, in their own affairs, are too indulgent to themselves; whence we

should learn to suspect ourselves, whenever our own concerns are treated of. Another thing also is here chiefly worthy of remark; namely, that the best ordered families are sometimes not free from contentions; nay, that this evil reaches even to the Church of God; for we know that the family of Abram, which was disturbed with strifes, was the living representation of the Church. As to domestic broils, we know that the principal part of social life, which God hallowed among men, is spent in marriage; and yet various inconveniences intervene, which defile that good state, as with spots. It behoves the faithful to prepare themselves to cut off these occasions of trouble. For this end, it is of great importance to reflect on the origin of the evil; for all the troubles men find in marriage, they ought to impute to sin.

6. Behold , thy maid is in thy hand . The greatness of Abram's humanity and modesty appears from his answer. He does not quarrel with his wife; and though he has the best cause, yet he does not pertinaciously defend it, but voluntarily dismisses the wife who had been given him. In short, for the sake of restoring peace, he does violence to his feelings, both as a husband, and a father. For, in leaving Hagar to the will of her enraged mistress, he does not treat her as his wife; he also, in a certain way, undervalues that object of his hope which was conceived in her womb. And it is not to be doubted that he was thus calm and placid in bearing the vehemence of his wife; because, throughout her whole life, he had found her to be obedient. Still it was a great excellence, to restrain his temper under an indignity so great. It may, however, here be asked, how it was that his care for the blessed seed had then vanished from his mind? Hagar is great with child; he hopes that the seed through which the salvation of the world was promised, is about to proceed from her. Why then does he not set Sarai aside, and turn his love and desire still more to Hagar? Truly we hence infer, that all human contrivances pass away and vanish in smoke, as soon as any grievous temptation is presented. Having taken a wife against the divine command, he thinks the matter is succeeding well, when he sees her pregnant, and pleases himself in foolish confidence; but when contention suddenly arises, he is at his wit's end, and rejects all hope, or, at least, forgets it. The same thing must necessarily happen to us, as often as we attempt anything contrary to the word of God. Our minds will fail at the very first blast of temptation; 386 since our only ground of stability is, to have the authority of God for what we do. In the meantime, God purifies the faith of his servant from its rust; for by mixing his own and his wife's imagination with the word of God, he, in a sense, had stifled his faith; wherefore, to restore its brightness, that which was superfluous is cut of. God, by opposing himself in this manner to our sinful designs, recalls us from our stupidity to a sound mind. A simple promise had been given 'I will bless thy seed.' Sarai's gloss supervened, 387 namely, that she could have no seed but a supposititious one by Hagar: this mire of human imagination, with which the promise had been defiled must be purged away, that Abram might derive his knowledge from no other source, than the pure word of God.

And Sarai dealt hardly with her 388 The word ■■■■ ( anah , ) which Moses uses, signifies to afflict and to humble. I therefore explain it as being put for reducing Hagar to submission. But it was difficult for an angry woman to keep within bounds, in repressing the insolence of her maid. Wherefore, it is possible that she became immoderately enraged against her; not so much considering her own duty as revolving the means of being avenged for the offenses committed. Since Moses brings no heavier charge, I confine myself to what is certain; that Sarai made use of her proper authority in restraining the insolence of her maid. And, doubtless, from the event, we may form a judgments that Hagar was impelled to flee, not so much by the cruelty of her mistress, as by her own contumacy. Her own conscience accused her; and it is improbable that Sarai should have been so greatly incensed, except by many, and, indeed atrocious offenses. Therefore, the woman being of servile temper, and of indomitable ferocity, chose rather to flee, than to return to favor, through the humble acknowledgment of her fault.

7. And the angel of the Lord found her . We are here taught with what clemency the Lord acts towards his own people, although they have deserved severe punishment. As he had previously mitigated the punishment of Abram and Sarai, so now he casts a paternal look upon Hagar, so that his favor is extended to the whole family. He does not indeed altogether spare them, lest he should cherish their vices; but he corrects them with gentle remedies. It is indeed probable, that Hagar, in going to the desert of Sur, meditated a return to her own country. Yet mention seems to be made of the desert and the wilderness, to show that she, being miserably afflicted, wandered from the presence of men, till the angel met her. Although Moses does not describe the form of the vision, yet I do not doubt, that it was clothed in a human body; in which, nevertheless, manifest tokens of celestial glory were conspicuous.

8. And he said , Hagar , Sarai's maid . By the use of this epithet, the angel declares, that she still remained a servant, though she had escaped the hands of her mistress; because liberty is not to be obtained by stealth, nor by flight, but by manumission. Moreover, by this expression, God shows that he approves of civil government, and that the violation of it is inexcusable. The condition of servitude was then hard; and thanks are to be given to the Lord, that this barbarity has been abolished; yet God has declared from heaven his pleasure, that servants should bear the yoke; as also by the mouth of Paul, he does not give servants their freedom, nor deprive their masters of their use; but only commands them to be kindly and liberally treated. (Eph 6:5.) It is to be inferred also, from the circumstance of the time, not only that civil government is to be maintained, as matter of necessity, but that lawful authorities are to be obeyed, for conscience' sake. For although the fugitive Hagar could no longer be compelled to obedience by force, yet her condition was not changed in the sight of God. By the same argument it is proved, that if masters at any time deal too hardly with their servants, or if rulers treat their subjects with unjust asperity, their rigour is still to be endured, nor is there just cause for shaking off the yoke, although they may exercise their power too imperiously. In short, whenever it comes into our mind to defraud any one of his right, or to seek exemption from our proper calling, let the voice of the angel sound in our ears, as if God would draw us back, by putting his own hand upon us. They who have proudly and tyrannically governed shall one day render their account to God; meanwhile, their asperity is to be borne by their subjects, till God, whose prerogative it is to raise the abject and to relieve the oppressed, shall give them succor. If a comparison be made, the power of magistrates is far more tolerable, than that ancient dominion was. 389 The paternal authority is in its very nature amiable, and worthy of regard. If the flight of Hagar was prohibited by the command of God, much less will he bear with the licentiousness of a people, who rebel against their prince; or with the contumacy of children, who withdraw themselves from obedience to their parents.

Whence camest thou ? He does not inquire, as concerning a doubtful matter, but knowing that no place for subterfuge is left to Hagar, he peremptorily reproves her for her flight; as if he had said, 'Having deserted thy station, thou shalt profit nothing by thy wandering, since thou canst not escape the hand of God, which had placed thee there.' It might also be, that he censured her departure from that house, which was then the earthly sanctuary of God. For she was not ignorant that God was there worshipped in a peculiar manner. And although she indirectly charges her mistress with cruelty, by saying that she had fled from her presence; still the angel, to cut off all subterfuges, commands her to return and to humble herself. By which words he first intimates, that the bond of subjection is not dissolved either by the too austere, or by the impotent dominion of rulers; he then retorts the blame of the evil upon Hagar herself, because she had obstinately placed herself in opposition to her mistress, and, forgetful of her own condition, had exalted herself more insolently and boldly than became a handmaid. In short, as she is justly punished for her faults, he commands her to seek a remedy by correcting them. And truly, since nothing is better than, by obedience and patience, to appease the severity of those who are in authority over us; we must more

especially labor to bend them to mildness by our humiliation, when we have offended them by our pride.

10. I will multiply thy seed exceedingly For the purpose of mitigating the offense, and of alleviating what was severe in the precept, by some consolation, he promises a blessing in the child which she should bear. God might indeed, by his own authority, have strictly enjoined what was right; but in order that Hagar might the more cheerfully do what she knew to be her duty, he allures her, as by blandishments, to obedience. And to this point those promises tend, by which he invites us to voluntary submission. For he would not draw us by servile methods, so that we should obey his commands by constraint; and therefore he mingles mild and paternal invitations with his commands, dealing with us liberally, as with sons. That the angel here promises to do what is peculiar to God alone, involves no absurdity, for it is sufficiently usual with God to invest his ministers whom he sends with his own character, that the authority of their word may appear the greater. I do not, however, disapprove the opinion of most of the ancients; that Christ the Mediator was always present in all the oracles, and that this is the cause why the majesty of God is ascribed to angels. 390 On which subject I have already touched and shall have occasion to say more elsewhere.

11. And shalt bear a son . The angel explains what he had briefly said respecting her seed; namely, that it should not be capable of being numbered on account of its multitude; and he commences with Ishmael, who was to be its head and origin. Although we shall afterwards see that he was a reprobate, yet an honorable name is granted to him, to mark the temporal benefit of which Ishmael became a partakers as being a son of Abram. For I thus explain the passage, God intended that a monument of the paternal kindness, with which he embraced the whole house of Abram, should endure to posterity. For although the covenant of eternal life did not belong to Ishmael; yet, that he might not be entirely without favor, God constituted him the father of a great and famous people. And thus we see that, with respect to this present life, the goodness of God extended itself to the seed of Abram according to the flesh. But if God intended the name of Ishmael (which signifies God will hear) to be a perpetual memorial of his temporal benefits; he will by no means bear with our ingratitude, if we do not celebrate his celestial and everlasting mercies, even unto death.

The Lord has heard thy affliction . We do not read that Hagar, in her difficulties, had recourse to prayer; and we are rather left to conjecture, from the words of Moses, that when she was stupefied by her sufferings, the angel came of his own accord. It is therefore to be observed, that there are two ways in which God looks down upon men, for the purpose of helping them; either when they, as suppliants, implore his aid; or when he, even unasked, succours them in their afflictions. He is indeed especially said to hearken to them who, by prayers, invoke him as their Deliverer. Yet, sometimes, when men lie mute, and because of their stupor, do not direct their wishes to him, he is said to listen to their miseries. That this latter mode of hearing was fulfilled towards Hagar, is probable, because God freely met her wandering through the desert. Moreover, because God frequently deprives unbelievers of his help, until they are worn away with slow disease, or else suffers them to be suddenly destroyed; let none of us give indulgence to our own sloth; but being admonished by the sense of our evils, let us seek him without delay. In the meantime, however, it is of no small avail to the confirmation of our faith, that our prayers will never be despised by the Lord, seeing that he anticipates even the slothful and the stupid, with his help; and if he is present to those who seek him not, much more will he be propitious to the pious desires of his own people.

12. And he will be a wild man . The angel declares what kind of person Ishmael will be. The simple meaning is, (in my judgment,) that he will be a warlike man, and so formidable to his enemies, that none

shall injure him with impunity. Some expound the word ■■■ ( perēh ) to mean a forester, and one addicted to the hunting of wild beasts. But the explanation must not, it seems, be sought elsewhere than in the context; for it follows immediately after, 'His hand shall be against all men, and the hand of all men against him.' It is however asked, whether this ought to be reckoned among benefits conferred by God, that he is to preserve his rank in life by force of arms; seeing that nothing is, in itself, more desirable than peace. The difficulty may be thus solved; that Ishmael, although all his neighbors should make war upon him, and should, on every side, conspire to destroy him; shall yet though alone, be endued with sufficient power to repel all their attacks. I think, however, that the angel, by no means, promises Ishmael complete favor, but only that which is limited. Among our chief blessings, we must desire to have peace with all men. Now, since this is denied to Ishmael, that blessing which is next in order is granted to him; namely, that he shall not be overcome by his enemies; but shall be brave and powerful to resist their force. He does not, however, speak of Ishmael's person, but of his whole progeny; for what follows is not strictly suitable to one man. Should this exposition be approved, no simple or unmixed blessing is here promised; but only a tolerable or moderate condition; so that Ishmael and his posterity might perceive that something was divinely granted to them, for the sake of their father Abram. Therefore, it is, by no means, to be reckoned among the benefits given by God, that he shall have all around him as enemies, and shall resist them all by violence: but this is added as a remedy and an alleviation of the evil; that he, who would have many enemies, should be equal to bear up against them.

And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren . As this is properly applicable only to a nation, we hence the more easily perceive, that they are deceived who restrict the passage to the person of Ishmael. Again, others understand, that the posterity of Ishmael was to have a fixed habitation in the presence of their brethren, who would be unwilling to allow it; as if it were said, that they should forcibly occupy the land they inhabit, although their brethren might attempt to resist them. Others adduce a contrary opinion; namely, that the Ishmaelites, though living among a great number of enemies, should yet not be destitute of friends and brethren. I approve, however, of neither opinion: for the angel rather intimates, that this people should be separate from others; as if he would say, 'They shall not form a part or member of any one nation; but shall be a complete body, having a distinct and special name.'

13. And she called the name of the Lord . Moses, I have no doubt, implies that Hagar, after she was admonished by the angel, changed her mind: and being thus subdued, retook herself to prayer; unless, perhaps, here the confession of the tongue, rather than change of mind, is denoted. I rather incline, however, to the opinion, that Hagar, who had before been of a wild and intractable temper, begins now at length to acknowledge the providence of God. Moreover, as to that which some suppose; namely, that God is called 'the God of vision, 391 because he appears and manifests himself to men, it is a forced interpretation. Rather let us understand that Hagar, who before had appeared to herself to be carried away by chance, through the desert; now perceives and acknowledges that human affairs are under divine government. And whoever is persuaded that he is looked upon by God, must of necessity walk as in his sight.

Have I also here seen after him that seeth me ? 392 Some translate this, 'Have I not seen after the vision?' 393 But it really is as I have rendered it. Moreover, the obscurity of the sentence has procured for us various interpretations. Some among the Hebrews say that Hagar was astonished at the sight of the angel; because she thought that God was nowhere seen but in the house of Abram. But this is frigid, and in this way the ambition of the Jews often compels them to trifle; seeing that they apply their whole study to boasting on the glory of their race. Others so understand the passage, 'Have I seen after my vision?'

that is, so late, that during the vision I was blind? 394 According to these interpreters, the vision of Hagar was twofold: the former erroneous; since she perceived nothing celestial in the angel; but the other true, after she had been affected with a sense of the divine nature of the vision. To some it seems that a negative answer is implied; as if she would say, I did not see him departing; and then from his sudden disappearance, she collects that he must have been an angel of God.

Also, on the second member of the sentence, interpreters disagree. Jerome renders it, 'the back parts of him that seeth me:' 395 which many refer to an obscure vision, so that the phrase is deemed metaphorical. For as we do not plainly perceive men from behind; so they are said to see the back parts of God, to whom he does not openly nor clearly manifest himself; and this opinion is commonly received. Others think that Moses used a different figure; for they take the seeing of the back parts of God, for the sense of his anger; just as his face is said to shine upon us, when he shows himself propitious and favorable. Therefore, according to them, the sense is, 'I thought that I had escaped, so that I should no more be obnoxious to the rod or chastening of God; but here also I perceive that he is angry with me.' So far I have briefly related the opinion of others. 396 And although I have no intention to pause for the purpose of refuting each of these expositions; I yet freely declare, that not one of these interpreters has apprehended the meaning of Moses. I willingly accept what some adduce, that Hagar wondered at the goodness of God, by whom she had been regarded even in the desert: but this, though something, is not the whole. In the first place, Hagar chides herself, because, as she had before been too blind, she even now opened her eyes too slowly and indolently to perceive God. For she aggravates the guilt of her torpor by the circumstance both of place and time. She had frequently found, by many proofs, that she was regarded by the Lord; yet becoming blind, she had despised his providence, as if, with closed eyes, she had passed by him when he presented himself before her. She now accuses herself for not having more quickly awoke when the angel appeared. The consideration of place is also of great weight, 397 because God, who had always testified that he was present with her in the house of Abram, now pursued her as a fugitive, even into the desert. It implied, indeed, a base ingratitude on her part, to be blind to the presence of God; so that even when she knew he was looking upon her, she did not, in return, raise her eyes to behold him. But it was a still more shameful blindness, that she, being regarded by the Lord, although a wanderer and an exile, paying the just penalty of her perverseness, still would not even acknowledge him as present. We now see the point to which her self-reproach tends; 'Hitherto I have not sought God, nor had respect to him, except by constraint; whereas, he had before deigned to look down upon me: even now in the desert, where being afflicted with evils, I ought immediately to have roused myself, I have, according to my custom, been stupefied: nor should I ever have raised my eyes towards heaven, unless I had first been looked upon by the Lord.'

14. Wherefore the well was called 398 I subscribe to the opinion of those who take the word יַקְרָא (yekra ,) indefinitely, which is usual enough in the Hebrew language. In order that the sense may be the clearer it is capable of being resolved into the passive voice, that 'the well was called.' 399 Yet I think this common appellation originated with Hagar, who, not content with one simple confession, wished that the mercy of God should be attested in time to come; and therefore she transmitted her testimony, as from hand to hand. Hence we infer how useful it is, that they who do not freely humble themselves, should be subdued by stripes. Hagar, who had always been wild and rebellious, and who had, at length, entirely shaken off the yoke; now, when the hardness of her heart was broken by afflictions, appears altogether another person. She was not, however, reduced to order by stripes only; but a celestial vision was also added, which thoroughly arrested her. And the same thing is necessary for us; namely, that God, while chastising us with his hand, should also bring us into a state of submissive meekness by his Spirit. Some

among the Hebrews say that the name of the well was given to it, as being a testimony of a twofold favor, because Ishmael was revived from death, and God had respect to Hagar, his mother. But they foolishly mutilate things joined together: for Hagar wished to testify that she had been favourably regarded by Him who was the Living God, or the Author of life.

15. And Abram called Hagar had been commanded to give that name to her son; but Moses follows the order of nature; because fathers, by the imposition of the name, declare the power which they have over their sons. We may easily gather, that Hagar, when she returned home, related the events which had occurred. Therefore, Abram shows himself to be obedient and grateful to God: because he both names his son according to the command of the angel, and celebrates the goodness of God in having hearkened to the miseries of Hagar.

Footnotes

383

"Sed in medio ipso (ut loquunter) vel agendi ratione." -- "Mais au moyen, et en la facon de proceder." -- French Tr

384

"Si forte aedificer ex ea." "If perhaps I may be built up by her." See margin of English version.

385

■■■■

386

"Ventum trepidationis." -- "Wind of trembling."

387

"Additamentum Sarai supervenerat." -- "L'addition ou glose de Sarai estoit survenue." -- French Tr

388

"Et afflixit eam Sarai." "And Sarah afflicted her." See margin of English version.

389

For this ancient dominion implied slavery. The French translation has it, "Le droit des magistrats est bien plus tolerable, que n'a point este ceste ancienne domination sur les serfs." -- Ed.

390

See on this subject, Smith's Scripture Testimony to the Messiah, Book 2 Chap. 4 Sect. 33. -- Ed.

391

"Deum visionis." Though Calvin regards this interpretation as forced, it must not be denied that it has the sanction of the highest literary authorities. Le Clerc, Peter Martyr, Rosenmuller, Dathe, Gesenius, Lee,

Professor Bush, and many others, all regard the word ■■■■, (roi,) as a substantive, not as a participle, -- and consequently God is here spoken of as the God who reveals himself, not as the God who sees. -- Ed

392

"Nonne etiam hic vidi post videntem me?" "Have I not also here looked after him who seeth me?"

393

"Annon video, (h. e. vivo,) post videntem me, i.e., post visionem divinam, vel post visionem videntis me?" Do I not see, (that is, live,) after him who seeth me? that is, after the divine vision, or after the vision of him that seeth me. -- Junius , Piscator , etc., in Poli Syn. Ainsworth gives this version, 'Have I also here seen after him that seeth me?' Where stress is laid on the word here, as is done by Calvin, for the purpose of contrasting the desert with Abram's house. The opinion, also, that the term 'see' is equivalent to 'live,' is supported by high authority. The meaning of the passage would then be, 'Do I see, that is, live, after having beheld such a vision?' -- Ed

394

Vatablus in Poli Syn. Perhaps the following paraphrase may bring out the sense of this obscure interpretation. We may suppose Hagar to exclaim: 'Have I indeed seen at last? yet, not till after the vision itself had passed away; so that when I saw it literally, I was mentally blind, and did not know what I was looking at.' -- Ed.

395

See Vulgate.

396

These different interpretations, with others, may be seen in Poole's Synopsis. -- Ed.

397

"Loci enim notatio," is in the French translation rendered, "Le changement du lieu." The change of place, as if it had been mutatio. -- Ed

398

"Idcirco vocavit puteum, Puteum viventis videntis me." "Therefore she called the well, The well of him who liveth and seeth me."

399

As in the English version.

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