

Choices in Life

How do we make choices?

What is the right choice?

How do we make the right choice?



Three scenarios:

Adam and Eve Given an instruction:

Genesis 2:15-17 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Abram and Sarai Given a promise:

Genesis 15:5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ... 16:1a Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

You and I Given God's Word:

Matthew 22:36-40 Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Main Focus: In dealing with choices and decisions in our lives, including issues of faith:

How did Adam and Eve make their choice? Was it the right choice? What direction/guidance did they have to make that choice?

How did Abram and Sarai make their choice? Was it the right choice? What direction/guidance did they have to make that choice?

How did you and I make a choice? Is it the right choice? What direction/guidance did we have to make a choice?

Abram, Sarai, Hagar and Ishmael Genesis 16

16:1-3 *Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.”*

Abram was now eighty-five years old. He had been walking with the Lord for ten years and had learned some valuable lessons about faith. God had promised Abram and Sarai a child but had not told them when the child would be born. It was a period of waiting, and most people don’t like to wait. But it is through “faith and patience [that we] inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12).

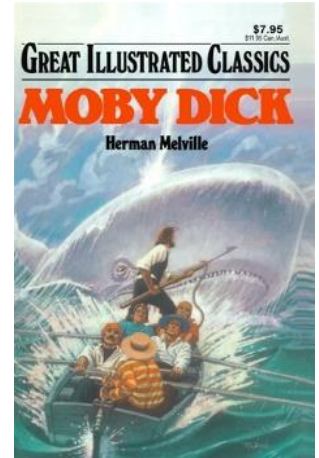
God has a perfect timetable for all that He wants to do. After all, this event was not the birth of just another baby: It was part of God’s great plan of salvation for the whole world. However, as Sarai waited for something to happen, she became impatient.

Why did God wait so long? He wanted Abram and Sarai to be physically “as good as dead” (Heb. 11:12) so that God alone would get the glory. At age eighty-five, Abram was still virile enough to father a child by Hagar; so the time for the miracle baby had not yet arrived. Whatever is truly done by faith is done for the glory of God (Rom. 4:20) and not for the praise of man.

Some time had passed since the revelation of Genesis 15:4, and Sarai impatiently implied that God was not keeping his promise. The solution proposed by Sarai is not as shocking or outlandish as it would seem to us today. In the ancient world, barrenness was a catastrophe because one of the primary roles of the family was to produce the next generation. The survival of the family line was of the highest value, and it depended on producing progeny, especially males. In the legal custom of that day a barren woman could give her maid to her husband as a wife, and the child born of that union was regarded as the first wife’s child. If the husband said to the slave-wife’s son, “You are my son,” then he was the adopted son and heir. Whatever threat a second wife might pose to harmony in the family paled in comparison to the necessity of an heir being produced.

Marriage contracts of the ancient world, therefore, anticipated the possibility of barrenness and at times specifically dictated a course of action. Solutions ranged from serial monogamy (divorcing the barren wife to take another, presumably fertile, bride), to polygyny (taking a second wife of equal status), to polycoity (the addition of handmaids or concubines for the purpose of producing an heir), to adoption. The third option was often more attractive because if the wife were divorced, there would be an economic impact on the family (she took her marriage fund/dowry with her). Concubines bring no dowry, only their fertility, to the family. An Old Assyrian marriage contract closer to the time of the patriarchs reflects a similar solution to infertility. It is therefore plausible that Sarai is simply invoking the terms of their marriage contract.

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.



Group Discussion: Did Abram sin? (three questions)

As Abram's faith was developed and tested, delay was seen in the fulfilling of God's promise. In moments of weakness there are suggestions of alternative plans—plans not characterized by faith. Human efforts to assist in the fulfilling of divine promises complicated the matter.

Four Evidences/Tests of Faith decisions:

Whatever is truly done by faith is done for the glory of God (Rom. 4:20) and not for the praise of man.

A willingness to wait on the Lord is another evidence that you are walking by faith. "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16). Whenever we stop trusting God, we start to "make haste" in the wrong direction and we end up being ashamed.

Third is that you are acting on the authority of God's Word. "So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). You can act by faith, and know that God will bless, if you are obeying what He says in His Word.

Finally, God will give joy and peace in your life. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Rom. 15:13). Conflict may surround you, but you will have God's peace and joy within you.

These, then, are four evidences of true biblical faith: (1) you are willing to wait; (2) you are concerned only for the glory of God; (3) you are obeying God's Word; and (4) you have God's joy and peace within. While Abram and Sarai were waiting, God was increasing their faith and patience and building character. Then something happened that put Abram and Sarai on a painful detour.

4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me."

6 "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

Abram, Sarai, and Hagar were at war with each other because they were warring within their own hearts. The blame game began and instead of facing their sins honestly, each of the persons involved took a different course; this only made things worse. Sarai's solution was to blame her husband and mistreat her servant as she vented her anger. She seems to have forgotten that she was the one who had made the marriage suggestion in the first place. Abram's solution was to give in to his wife and abdicate spiritual headship in the home. He should have had pity for a helpless servant who was pregnant, but he allowed Sarai to mistreat her. Hagar's solution was to run away from the problem, a tactic we all learned from Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8). However, you soon discover that you cannot solve problems by running away.

The first thing they should have done was build an altar, worship the Lord, and tell Him their problems. They should have confessed their sins and received His gracious forgiveness. Once you stop

fighting with God and with yourself, you will have an easier time not fighting with others. The first step toward reconciliation with others is getting right with God.

7-16 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Hagar had to submit to God. This is the first appearance in Scripture of the Angel of the Lord, who is generally identified as our Lord Jesus Christ. The angel promised to do what only God can do; and in 16:13, Hagar called the angel "God." These pre-Incarnation visits of Jesus Christ to the earth were to meet special needs and to accomplish special tasks. The fact that the Son of God took on a temporary body, left heaven, and came down to help a rejected servant-girl surely reveals His grace and love.

Hagar's wilderness experience brought her face-to-face with God and taught her some important truths about Him. She learned that He is the living God who sees us and hears our cries when we hurt. The name of the well means "The well of One who lives and sees me." He is a personal God, concerned about abused people and unborn babies. He knows the future and cares for those who will trust Him.

Hagar did return and submit herself to Sarai. To accept the promises of God for her and her son she would have had to obey the Angel of the Lord and apologize for being arrogant, for despising her mistress, and for running away. She trusted God to protect her and her son and to care for them in the years to come. We never solve life's problems by running away. Submit to God and trust Him to work things out for your good and His glory. Romans 8:28.

SUMMARY:

Abram's taking Hagar as a second wife was perfectly legal according to the marriage code of that day. Moreover, the plan seemed to be successful, for Hagar conceived a child. Perhaps Sarai was right after all.

But not everything that is legal or that appears to be successful is approved by the will of God. They were unwilling to wait on the Lord but rushed ahead with their own plans. They acted only to please themselves and not to glorify God. What they did certainly did not bring joy and peace to their hearts or their home. God never accepted Hagar as Abram's wife; the Angel of the Lord called her

“Sarai’s maid” (16:8). Later she was called “this bondwoman and her son” (21:10), not “Abraham’s wife and son.” God rejected the whole endeavor because He had something far better in mind for Abraham and Sarah.

Be sure that your plans and procedures can pass the four “tests of faith” outlined above. People may agree with you, and the law may defend you; but if God cannot bless you, don’t do it! Let God accomplish His will in His way and in His time. Sarai tried to run ahead of God, and she created problems that are with us yet today.

This account is much more than ancient history with modern consequences. It’s a good lesson for God’s people about walking by faith and waiting for God to fulfill His promises in His way and in His time.

Group Discussion:

How did you and I make a choice? Is it the right choice? What direction/guidance did we have to make a choice?

How does God tell us what He wants us to do? Does He speak to you audibly? Does He send you an Angel of the Lord? Does He use circumstances around you to guide and direct you?

Six principals for guidance through life’s normal circumstances:

The moral and ethical code of the Bible.

A great desire to serve His purpose with my life, rather than my own.

The wise counsel of fellow Christians.

A daily abiding in Him.

A constant listening for His whisper.

A trust that He will turn me if I take a wrong step.

Romans 12:1-3 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.