

# The God Who Sees

## *And the Fall of Abram*

- <sup>1</sup> Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.
- <sup>2</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.
- <sup>3</sup> So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife.
- <sup>4</sup> And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.
- <sup>5</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, "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!"
- <sup>6</sup> But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.
- <sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.
- <sup>8</sup> 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."
- <sup>9</sup> The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her."
- <sup>10</sup> The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude."
- <sup>11</sup> 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.
- <sup>12</sup> 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."
- <sup>13</sup> 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."
- <sup>14</sup> Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.
- <sup>15</sup> And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.
- <sup>16</sup> Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Genesis 16:1-16

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## The god Who Sees You

I wonder just how many people have a view of God like the one depicted in this famous song:

He's making a list,  
And checking it twice;  
Gonna find out Who's naughty and nice.  
Santa Claus is coming to town

He sees you when you're sleeping  
He knows when you're awake  
He knows if you've been bad or good  
So be good for goodness sake!

It really is remarkable how a Christian born in a small town in Western Turkey in 270 AD, who simply cared about poor people enough to put coins in the shoes of those who left them out for him, could turn into an **all-seeing god**, capable of putting presents in the houses of every boy and girl in the whole world in a night. But even more remarkable is how this reflects a theology that we can please the god with our works, that the god only gives presents when you're nice, and that he knows everything about you, everything you do, whether sleeping or waking. Perhaps what Santa Claus represents more than anything else is the great human tendency to create God in our image and man in God's image.

I thought of this song because of a couple of things from our story today. **One** is how it seems to me that we have this tendency, especially with biblical heroes, to almost idolize them. Consider Abraham. We teach that he is the father of the Faith, but was he ever “naughty.” Were you ever taught that he was growing up in Sunday School? Were any of the Bible heroes? How often? I've pointed this out before in how many interpret the story of Abraham going into Egypt, which actually has a relationship to our story today. It has to do with a woman who came out of Egypt and became the servant of Abram's wife Sarai.

The **other reason** is what happens to this servant because of great sin on the part of all three persons in the early part of the story. She ends up being cast out, she goes into the wilderness, where she is met by a very mysterious person—a person who “sees” her. But unlike Santa, this person's reaction to her is very different from the one in the song. So let us turn to our story.

### **The Fall of Abram**

Today we are looking at all of Genesis 16. The story takes place in two scenes. The first looks at man (**Gen 16:1-6**). The second looks at God (**Gen 16:7-16**). The first scene has three characters: **Abram**, **Sarai**, and **Hagar**. The second also has three characters: **Hagar**, **Ishmael**, and **the Angel of the LORD**. In light of making both man and God after our own image, I wonder in what ways many of us have read this chapter?

Before moving into the first scene, let us consider the context. This is always important so that we will not take a story *out* of context. Like many of these stories with Abram, we must not forget the very beginning back in ch. 12, especially since the story alludes to this more than once. This chapter took place about eleven years

earlier.<sup>1</sup> Recall that God had made him a couple of promises. 1. He **promised him offspring** (12:2, 7). 2. He promised that **those who dishonor (*qala*) him will be dishonored** (12:3). Remember also from chapter 15 that the Word of the LORD has just re-sworn this promise of offspring with profound covenant oath, a covenant of pure grace, while adding to the promise that the offspring would come from Abram's ***own body*** (15:4).

The story picks up with Sarai, Abram's wife (*ishshah*) continuing to be barren. She has had no children (Gen 16:1). And remember, her name means "contentious" "queen." But suddenly, a new character in Genesis appears. It is a female and her name is **Hagar**. Hagar means "flight" (from the root "to flee"). **Hagar is an Egyptian**. How did she get into this family?

Remember that as soon as God had given Abram that first great promise, he *immediately* went like a faithless man into the bosom of Egypt where he had given his wife-sister Sarah to the Pharaoh in an act of sin. But God blessed Abram, and in a foreshadowing of the Exodus, brought Abram out of Egypt with great possessions. Thus we read that Hagar is also a "servant" (*shiphchah*). The word may also be translated as a **servant-girl** or a **hand-maiden**. The Apostle Paul calls her a "bondwoman" (*paidiske*; see LXX and Gal 4:22, 23) and a "slave" (*douleia*). You get the point.

Whose slave or servant girl was she? She belonged to Sarai. Gen 16:2 says that Sarai came to Abram and said, "The LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant." Take careful note of what Sarai is doing. At one and the same time she is **acknowledging God's sovereignty** over her life while simultaneously **blaming God**. What a terrible trap God's sovereignty and predestination can be for some people. They see that if God is all-powerful that he must also be to blame for anything that does not go my way. I dare say that it was Sarai's acknowledging that God is sovereign combined with her misappropriation, her mishandling of it that led to the terrible moral events that we will see in the next few verses. We must never use God's sovereignty for any other reason than to comfort us in times of difficulty, acknowledging like Job did that both good and bad come from the LORD, and blessed be the name of the LORD. For when we blame God for his sovereignty, bad things happen at our hand. For this is great sin that causes us to think unclearly, thereby leading us to do things we ought not do, thereby stirring up even greater sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen 16:16 has Abram at 86 years old when Ishmael is born. Gen 12:4 has him at 75 when he departs for Haran out of Ur. This gives him about a year to be in Haran, since 16:3 has him living in Canaan for ten years (which probably includes his short stint in Egypt, where he picked up Hagar).

Why does Sarai come to Abram like this? Because she is **impatient with God's promise**. God is sovereign, and she doesn't want to wait anymore. So she starts to doubt him. She doubts his timing. She doubts his goodness. She is **not content** in the place God has her at this moment. **"But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content"** (1Tim 6:8). **"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'"** (Heb 13:5). **"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content"** (Php 4:11). Lack of contentment is great ungodliness and sin. It comes from impatience with God's sovereignty. How ironic when we Reformed people display it, for we like to brag about how we believe in God's sovereignty. Yet, when we complain about situations we are in (jobs, trials, churches, friendships, or whatever), the ultimate cause is *a lack of faith in God's sovereignty* and pure impatience with him.

Sarai decides to take matters into her own hands. She is the first Frank Sinatra, **"I did it my way."** **"Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her"** (Gen 16:2). Sin always finds sneaky ways of justifying itself. Recall that God had promised Abram that the seed would come from his body, but he said nothing about Sarah's! She has found **a loophole** in the promise, and surely she is trying to justify her actions on God's silence. **"Has God really said,"** asked the serpent? **"I'm not entirely sure, come to think of it,"** replied the woman. **"He said do not even touch it."** The spiritual memory grows dim. God's clear word suddenly becomes fuzzy, hard to remember correctly. Oh the troubles we make for everyone when we add or subtract from God's law or his promises. Why can't we just let them be and trust him in his timing on his terms?

### *Like Adam*

Is Sarai the only problem here? No, but her lack of faith becomes an instrument for her husband to do the same. When you and I lack faith, it rarely if ever stays confined to ourselves. We inevitably pull the ones we love down with it. **"And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai"** (Gen 16:2). Sin is an extremely contagious disease. Why? In this case, Sarai is what, 80 years old? Hagar is probably 20. You do the math. Listening to the voice of his wife is a very suggestive phrase that we have seen before. What it portends is ominous. **"And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife (ishshah)...'"** (Gen 3:17). Abram should not be listening to such counsel as this. Why? Because it is what Adam did, and it is wrong.

**Genesis 16:3** gives us the time frame that all of this occurs. He had lived in Canaan for ten years and then **"Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and**

she conceived.” Consider how this is the identical sequence of nouns and verbs that we find in **Genesis 3:6**, “The woman [wife] ... took ... gave it to her husband.” God had told Adam that he should not have listened to his wife’s voice, for he was the one charged with protecting her! Abram is not protecting Sarai or helping her, he is destroying her! In our story, we see the exact same pattern of how both men listened to their wives’ voices.

There’s more correspondence with Eden. As one commentator writes:

The actors correspond: in **Gen 16:3** the woman takes the initiative as she does in **3:6b**. The recipient of the gift is in both texts the man, in **Gen 16:3** the husband, in **Gen 3:6b** the man for whom the woman was created as partner. In both stories the man reacts appropriately to the woman’s action. In **3:6b** he eats the proffered fruit: in **16:4a** he goes in to the offered Hagar. The means (of sin), the fruit/Hagar, is accepted by the man. The sequence of events is similar in both cases: the woman takes something and gives it to her husband, who accepts it.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, what we are seeing here is **the Fall of Abram**. Of course, Abram was conceived in sin, born a sinner, and has sinned prior to this. And so he is different from Adam in Genesis 3. But both stories recount a terrible lack of faith (and this is vital to catch) *immediately* after God had just sworn a mighty covenant promise. Consider the kindness of God in the midst of this. Who is this man that God is calling? Who is this man that God will make into a mighty nation? He is someone who has done the exact same thing as Adam. Yet God still calls him.

### *Like Lamech*

But there is yet more. Do you remember the descendant of Adam named **Lamech**? Lamech said the same thing God said to Noah, “**Listen to my voice, You wives of Lamech**” (**Gen 4:23** NAS). Did you catch that? *Wives*. Lamech was a polygamist, and nothing good ever comes from that in the Bible. Well, this is exactly what Abram and Sarai have now done with Hagar. Sarai “**gave [Hagar] to Abram her husband as a wife (ishshah)**” (**Gen 16:3**). This makes *Abram* the second polygamist in the Bible, following after the way of Lamech.<sup>3</sup>

### *Like Noah*

It gets worse still. Perhaps you will recall **the Fall of Noah (Gen 9:20ff)**. *Immediately* after *he* is given a covenant, Noah goes to a garden, gets drunk, naked,

<sup>2</sup> Berg, W. “Der Sündenfall Abrahams und Saras nach Gen 16:1–6.” *Biblische Notizen* 19 (1982) 7–14 (10). Cited in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Pharaoh was a polygamist, but we are not told for sure. Clearly, it was already being practiced throughout the Ancient Near East.

and unable to prevent his son Ham from taking his wife who conceives and gives birth to Canaan. There were all sorts of literary parallels between that story and the Garden of Eden, just as there are here. And what we find out is that, like the fall of Noah, we have sexual perversion that results in a child that is not the child God had promised. Abram went in to Hagar, not Sarai (vs. 4). Hagar conceived, not Sarai.

Do you think God does not know about the character of these two people? Do you think this fall of Abram catches the LORD off guard? Of course not. And so what kind of a God is it that we find in the story of Abram? Is he like Santa Claus? We'll see more later. But you can be rest assured that God knows exactly who Abram is, just like he knows who you are.

### *Escalation and Hopelessness*

So what happens next? It goes from worse to horrible. Not only does Sarai conceive an evil plot in the name of religious freedom in a way similar to Satan, but like Adam and Eve, she then **blames Abram**, like the whole thing is his fault (It is his fault, of course, but it is also hers). But why does she make such a quick about face? She seemed so excited about her grand idea to help God. Then suddenly, she is full of contempt. Why? It is because her sin now spills over to Hagar.

As soon as Hagar “saw”<sup>4</sup> that she had conceived, it says that she “**looked with contempt (*qala*) on her mistress [Sarai].**” This is the word used for anyone who dishonors Abram—they will be dishonored (*qala*). But Hagar’s contempt is not directed at Abram. It is directed at his free-wife. The sin hatched here will crack wide open later in Genesis in the jealousy and contempt that will be shown between Leah and Rachel.

You can almost imagine what was going through her head. Unlike our culture which is hell bent on murdering 50,000,000 unborn babies in America alone, viewing them as non-human distractions to our own personal happiness, in the ancient world, there was no greater honor (and no greater curse) than to have a baby or to be barren. If Rachel and Leah are any indication, the thought is probably something like, “**God had promised Abram a child, and now I will have that child. I was the slave-woman. Now Abram will treat me as the free-woman. I will be exalted, not Sarai. I will be the one he loves, not Sarai. What a fool that Sarai was to do this for me. Ha! I’ve shown her.**”

Sarai’s response is mind-numbingly frightening in its absolute inability to look inward. “**May the wrong done to me be on you!**” (Gen 16:5), she screams at Abram. Do you think the “conversation” might have gone something like this: “**The wrong done to YOU? It was YOUR idea, wife! As I recall, when the preacher**

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<sup>4</sup> “Seeing” results in sin throughout Genesis (Gen 3:6; 6:2; 9:22; 12:14; etc).

asked, ‘Who gives this woman to be married to this man?’ it was you that said, ‘I do.’ I give her to be married to my husband.’” Do you see the absurdity of it all? Can you see how blind sin makes people, how unable it causes them to see that they are the root of the problem?

It is a return back to the Garden again. “The woman, she gave it to me.” “The serpent, he deceived me.” It’s never *my* fault, is it? It is always your fault. Do you want to know why so many marriages break up, so many friends, so many churches and denominations, all claiming to be Christians? Do you want to know why nations go to war? Most of the time it is someone else’s fault. God knows I wouldn’t do something wrong.

Not only is it blaming. She actually *curses* her husband. More Eden. “Because you have done this, cursed are you...” God said. “May the wrong done to me be on you!” Sarai says. Now *she gets to play God*. “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!” (Gen 16:5). Really Sarai? You really think that you are of such lily-white, pure spotless lamb of innocence here that you are ready for God to judge between the two of you? What a sick thing this is to say. People who are quick to divvy out judgment do not understand judgment!

But, again, far be it from me to imply that Sarai is the only guilty party in this affair. Hagar’s look of disdain is pure evil. Fire was shooting out of those eyes. And what about Abram? We have already seen that the passage actually views this as his fall. And why? Perhaps because he commits the same exact sin that his forefather committed, which is ultimately not taking up his God-given authority to say, “This is wrong.” Instead, he just goes along with it. “Yes dear. Whatever you say.”

What Abram does next is just frightening. “But Abram said to Sarai, ‘Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please’” (Gen 16:6). I wash my hands of this, dear wife. Pilate. I won’t do a thing to her. If you are so angry, you go deal with it. And what happens to Hagar? She earns her name. “Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her” (Gen 16:6). Hagar means “to flee.”

Before moving on to scene two, let us think one last moment about this first scene. Abram was not furious at Hagar, Sarai was. Because Abram abdicated his role of authority, giving it to the one who was full of rage, he not only harmed himself in the eyes of God, he ends up harming the woman that was—yes, sinful—but also completely caught in the middle of two people, two Christians, who were having a difficult time believing and trusting in God. For Sarai’s evil plotting, her whispering words of faithlessness to her husband, for Abram’s complete willingness to go along with it, for Sarai’s wrath, and Abram’s wimpiness, Hagar gets dealt with harshly, so harshly that she fled for her life.

Is this not exactly what any two or three people or groups do when the same kinds of things happen today? They **plot** evil schemes. They **sin** against one another. They get **angry**. They begin to get the **facts all wrong**. They try to **run** away. They try to **pretend** nothing has happened. They **empower** those already full of rage to carry out their wrath on another. Their actions cause those caught in the cross-fire to have their own sin **aroused**, when they were just minding their own business. This causes more anger, more rage. People begin harming one another with words, with hate, with violence. People flee. The anger writhes like foam on an angry sea. It stews below the surface like lava waiting to bubble over. It grows hotter and hotter as the months and years pass. Then it erupts with **fresh filth** and renewed wrath, and the whole process escalates, again and again. There is no end to it. Children grow up, and learn the ways of their parents, except without having ever known what it was like not to be angry. Generations pass and things only get worse and worse and worse.

All you need to do is think about the Middle East to this day. Or think about families that you know, churches, friends. What is the hope in this? It is in justice? Retribution? Payback? Does this end the hostility? Does this sooth the spirit? Does this bring forgiveness, restoration? Think long and hard on those questions, for I tell you that you already know the answers. And yet, when caught up ourselves in such passions, we find ourselves like these three people, unable to overcome our sin. We do the very things we know we shouldn't. We even begin to ignore the sin. Sometimes we even revel in it. Friends, you and I are not capable of doing a single thing to overcome such Powers of Evil. We are helpless and hopeless in the face of ourselves.

### And Then God Comes...

And then God comes.

But how does he come?

Scene two is as dramatic for its grace as the first scene was for its sheer depravity. “The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness” (Gen 16:7) Hagar has fled the wrath of Sarai. She has run to the desert, the lonely, hot, waterless, cheerless land between Egypt and Canaan. She found a spring (“the spring on the way to Shur”). “Surely” no one will find her. She must be terrified. She is, after all, a **slave** girl. She is also **pregnant**. She has morning sickness, cravings that can't be satisfied. She must be **worried** about her child. She is also **alone**. She is probably **young**. Imagine yourself being her after such great wrath had come upon you, all because two people were complete idiots and because you yourself acted like a fool. She is not innocent. None are.



A woman by a place of water. Does that sound like anything in the NT, perhaps John 4? She has found water in the hot, arid land. She has taken shelter there. And the Angel of the LORD found her. He found her? To be found, someone must be seeking. “Adam, where are you?” said the LORD as he walked in the Garden.

What LORD? A disembodied voice? Abram has just seen the “Word” (Gen 15:1). Who is this “angel?” Is it just some angel, like the those at the empty tomb? Luther<sup>5</sup> and Calvin<sup>6</sup> seemed to think so, though they both seem to admit that the Second Person of the Trinity is involved somehow. Why would they think this is just some angel? Let’s see what happens in this story and find out.

“He said, ‘Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going’ (Gen 16:8)? “Adam, where are you?” “Cain, where is Abel?” Satan, “From where have you come?” (Job 1:7).

“How could this person know my name? How does he know Sarai?” “She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.” A fine answer. Truthful.

“The angel of the LORD said to her, ‘Return to your mistress and submit to her’” (Gen 16:9). He commands. “I can’t do that. Doesn’t he know how angry she is? Doesn’t he know that’s the reason I’m all the way out here, by myself, in this desert? He knows my name, but doesn’t know that? What kind of a command is this? Who is this man to tell me I must submit to her? Doesn’t he know that she will probably kill me?”

“The Angel of the LORD also said to her, ‘I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude’” (16:10). He promises. “Trust me, Hagar.” “What kind of an angel can promise something like that? Wait, isn’t that what the LORD had said to my master Abram? Didn’t he say that Abram would have seed as numerous as the stars? Isn’t this why I’m in this whole mess in the first place? Who is this man?”

“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’” (16:11). He predicts the future. “What, you mean *you*? Who is this LORD? Yahweh? Is that you?”

My made up rhetorical questions asked by Hagar have served the point of telling you who I think this “angel” is. At this verse, your mind might have gone

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<sup>5</sup> “I nevertheless think that this angel had assumed the appearance of a human being; for when angels appear before people, they assume the form of the body in which they appear.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 3: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 3 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 61.

<sup>6</sup> “Although Moses does not describe the form of the vision, yet I do not doubt, that it was clothed in a human body ... 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.” John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 430.

straight to the NT, when someone who is clearly just an angel said, “**She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus**” (Matt 1:21).<sup>7</sup> This is a fascinating parallel. But notice how the language of the former made by the Angel of the LORD turns into the birth of the Lord (Jesus) in the later.

Let’s return to our text and recap. **Four** times in five verses the phrase “**Angel of the LORD**” has been used. These are the first four occurrences of this phrase in the Bible. With all parallels to the Garden story, this leads us to think that this is the same person who spoke to Adam. There are also parallels with the Abram stories before this that make us think this is the same person that speaks to Abram. This person has the power to multiply seed. He knows exactly where Hagar is, who she is, and who her mistress is. All of these certainly point in the direction that this is no ordinary angel.

What I suggest, and I’ll say more about this in a moment, is that this Angel is in fact the LORD himself, even as the Word of the LORD is the LORD (and possibly Melchizedek). I want you to first see why this is so important, before I confirm who Hagar understood him to be, and why, and also show you how some of the Father’s thought about him.

I left off scene one in the absolute worst place imaginable. We are doomed in our sin. **We need God to come to us**, not just an angel. But suddenly God came—to *Hagar*. This is most unexpected. He has only come to Abram in this narrative, and before pretty much only to men (though he did speak with Eve). Why would the Angel of the LORD come to Hagar of all people? I suggest it is because *she was the needy one*, she is the poor one, she is the one in need of salvation now. And God comes to those who are needy. He came to her because she was afflicted. He says so.

Now, it isn’t *all* good news. The Angel of the LORD prophecies about this child. His name will be Ishmael (Gen 16:11), which means “**God Hears.**” But “**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**” (16:12). Ishmael as a “wild donkey” is set in contrast to Hagar who is to resubmit. These donkeys looked more like horses, and became used as images of individualistic lifestyles, unfettered by the bonds of social convention. Think of movies like **Braveheart** or **King Arthur** where the cry for “freedom” rings loudly, and you get the picture. Ishmael will be free, the very thing Hagar must have yearned for.

But he will also be wild and against many people. He will become a source of great hostility in future generations. As Wenham says, his dwelling “apart from” or “against” his brothers “**suggests the haughty, defiant attitude of Ishmael toward**

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<sup>7</sup> It is also similar to when the same Angel of the LORD appeared to the mother of Samson and said, “Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son” (Jdg 13:7). There are also certain affinities with the conception and birth and young life of Samuel (1 Sam 1-3).

those caught up in a more conventional way of life.”<sup>8</sup> It seems he will bear the very look his mother gave to Sarai. The sins of the parents reach down to their children.

But what do you suppose Hagar’s response would be? It is most likely a statement of faith. Look carefully at the language. “So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her...” She will give this person a name. However, the text says that this person is “the LORD.” The text, as it does so many times, calls this person “Yahweh.” She also calls this person “a God.” She recognizes that he is an *elohim*. This angel is a god.

But other angels get this title in the OT. So what name does she give this *elohim*? “El-Roi.” Now, this is not the little boy whose father is George Jetson. This is God “who sees.” This is the All-Seeing God. Santa doesn’t see everything. But God does. This God found her in the desert, knew all about her, knew the future, and as she said, “looks after me” (13).

It astonishes me that people don’t want to read the passage more carefully. This is not a mere angel coming to Hagar. It is God, and God needed to come to Hagar. The Angel of the LORD is God. It is the Second Person of the Trinity. Again, the targums call him the Memra. They also assign faith to Hagar: “She prayed in the name of the Memra of the Lord who was revealed to her: “You are the God who sustains all ages”; for she said: “Behold also now he has been revealed to me after he has been revealed to my mistress Sarai” (Tg. Neofiti Gen 16:13). “She gave thanks before the Lord whose Memra had spoken to her, and she spoke thus, “You are the Living and Enduring One, who sees but is not seen”; for she said, “Behold, here indeed the Glory of the Shekinah of the Lord was revealed, vision<sup>1</sup> after vision” (Tg. Ps.Jon).

And it is not just the Jews who saw this as God. Early Christians did too. As Luther knew full well, Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315–367) said, “The Angel of God speaks to Hagar; and this same Angel is God” (Hilary, *On the Trinity* 5.11). He got this from even older Christians:

Scripture sets forth this angel as both Lord and God—for He would not have promised the blessing of seed unless the angel had also been God. Let them ask what the heretics can make of this present passage. Was that the Father that was seen by Hagar or not? For He is declared to be God. But far be it from us to call God the Father an angel, lest He should be subordinate to another whose angel He would be. But they will say that it was an angel. How then shall He be God if He was an angel? ... We ought to understand it to have been God the Son, who, because He is of God, is rightly called God, because He is the Son of God.

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<sup>8</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 11.

But, because He is subjected to the Father, and the Announcer of the Father's will, He is declared to be the Angel of Great Counsel [Isa 9:6 LXX]. Therefore ... this passage ... is suited to ... the person of Christ that He should be both God because He is the Son of God, and should be an angel because He is the Announcer of the Father's mind.

(Novatian of Rome [d. 258 AD], *On the Trinity* 18)<sup>9</sup>

But why should I care so greatly about this? Why does it matter? It is, again, because I want you to see that **the object of their faith was living in their day**. He was right there. She saw him. She talked to him. And ... he saw her. But unlike Santa, he does not come with good tidings only when she is good. In fact, as we have seen, Hagar has been quite bad. And that's the point.

Hagar needed God to come to her, in grace. If he doesn't do that, she dies. But he did, and she was given a mighty covenant promise, and she responded, I believe, by faith. She saw that this God knew all about her. She was not able to hide. She couldn't even go to the desert and a well without him seeing. It is like another woman at a well. **"He told me everything I ever did."** And Jesus gave her living water to drink.

This is the power and purpose of the gospel. It is announced in order that people who have been torn apart by the law, seen their sin, and find themselves helpless to it can be **rescued**. It is the power and joy of God to save. Today, God has come in the flesh and taken upon himself all that we deserve for our sins, bearing the very penalty of death and being forsaken by God, all so that he might bring salvation to those in need.

Do you see yourself in need? Are you alone? Do you recognize your sin? Have you paid dearly for your own sin and that of others? Are you at the end? Where have you come from and where are you going? Believe in God anew this day.

But then remember that salvation does not mean—yet—the end of all trouble. This story with Abram, Sarai, Hagar, and Ishmael is just beginning. Think about how God commanded Hagar to go back and do something extremely

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<sup>9</sup> This Novatian became the second "anti-Pope" in the early church (though we should be careful about reading all that the Pope is today into what the office was almost 1,800 years ago). This treatise *On The Trinity* became a standard in the early church for orthodoxy. However, this same Novatian also refused to readmit Christians who had renounced their faith in times of great persecution. This became a heresy known as Novatianism. Novatianism does not make Novatian's views on the Trinity or the Angel wrong.

Justin Martyr (100-165 AD) also viewed this Angel as Christ. "I shall attempt to persuade you, since you have understood the Scriptures, [of the truth] of what I say, that there is, and that there is said to be, another God and Lord subject to<sup>3</sup> the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel, because He announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things—above whom there is no other God—wishes to announce to them." ... "I replied again, 'If I could not have proved to you from the Scriptures that one of those three [men who met Abram at the Oaks of Mamre in Gen 18] is God, and is called Angel<sup>(note added below)</sup>, because, as I already said, He brings messages to those to whom God the Maker of all things wishes [messages to be brought]' (*Dialogue with Trypho* 56). The note in the edition cited after "Angel" has, "'Messenger.' [The 'Jehovah-angel' of the Pentateuch, *passim*.] In the various passages in which Justin assigns the reason for Christ being called angel or messenger, Justin uses also the verb ἀγγέλλω, to convey messages, to announce. The similarity between ἄγγελος and ἀγγέλλω cannot be retained in English, and therefore the point of Justin's remarks is lost to the English reader." See ANF1, 223, n. 7.

difficult—submit to Sarai her master who wanted to kill her. How could she go? Because she had the promise that she would live, for how else could this baby be born? And see? It came to pass. She obeyed the LORD. “Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael” (Gen 16:15). This happened when Abram was 86 years old.

He must have heard the story of the angel from this woman. The place was even named after this amazing place of God’s coming to the woman (14). This story is put into God’s holy word for all time, so that by it you might see how God has responded to those whom he has called. Consider yourselves in the light of the word. And call upon the Name of the LORD, the God Who Sees, the God who saves. “Behold, you will conceive ... and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.”

### **Two Powers Books:**

Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord, New Edition: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (New York City: T&T Clark, 2003)

Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (New York: Brill, 1998).

Kari Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God: Augustine's Transformation of Early Christian Theophany Interpretation* (New York: Brill, 2010)