

PRAYER: Begin with a few moments of sharing thanks and praises in prayer.

Leaders, it's your call; you may choose to incorporate more information/scriptures as time allows for your small group lesson.

Reflecting: The actions of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar could be considered as the starting point for the Muslim/Jewish conflict continuing today. If there is an explicit biblical explanation for this animosity, it goes all the way back to this incident. The Jews are descendants of Abraham's son Isaac. The Arabs are descendants of Abraham's son Ishmael. With Ishmael being the son of a slave woman (Genesis 16:1-16) and Isaac being the promised son who would inherit the blessings of Abraham (Genesis 21:1-3), obviously there would be some animosity between the two sons. As a result of Ishmael's mocking Isaac (Genesis 21:9), Sarah talked Abraham into sending Hagar and Ishmael away (Genesis 21:11-21). Likely, this caused even more contempt in Ishmael's heart towards Isaac. An angel prophesied to Hagar that Ishmael would "live in hostility toward all his brothers" (Genesis 16:11-12).

The religion of Islam, to which a majority of Arabs are adherents, has made this hostility more profound. The Qur'an contains somewhat contradictory instructions for Muslims regarding Jews. At one point it instructs Muslims to treat Jews as brothers and at another point commands Muslims to attack Jews who refuse to convert to Islam. The Qur'an also introduces a conflict as to which son of Abraham was truly the son of promise. The Bible says it was Isaac. The Qur'an says it was Ishmael. The Qur'an teaches that it was Ishmael whom Abraham almost sacrificed to the Lord, not Isaac (in contradiction to Genesis chapter 22). This debate over who was the son of promise contributes to the hostility today. (from <http://www.gotquestions.org/Jews-Arabs.html>)

In Genesis 12 and 15, God continued to encourage Abraham and promise him incredible blessings. However, Sarah chose to follow a cultural practice whereby a wife can allow a particular concubine with which her husband can produce children on the wife's behalf. Rather than waiting on the promise, they took matters, literally, into their own hands. This decision reverberates through our culture today, over 3000 years later.

OPENER: When you were a kid, what's something you did that got you into big trouble? Growing up, who "wore the pants" in your family: Mom? Dad? Kids? Or was decision-making mutual?

Though God had promised Abram a son, Abram and Sarai were now 85 and 75 years old respectively. In this story, they decided to practice a common custom of their time in order to have a child.

Read: Genesis 16:1-16

DISCUSS:

What did Sarai accuse the LORD of in verse 2? What do you think drove Sarai to this course of action? (She was tired of waiting; her longing for a child; a lack of faith; social pressure; other: _____)

After that accusation, what did Sarai propose to Abram?

What kind of argument did Abram give Sarai? (None reported) How would you describe the communication between Sarai and Abram? (What communication?; Abram always got in the last word: "Yes, dear."; they accepted each other's words too quickly, without any discussion; they both spoke and acted before thinking things through)

From verses 4 & 5, how would you describe behavior that “despises”?

How did God intervene in this story? Why did the Lord give Hagar direction, hope and promise? (God felt sorry for her; God loved her and her son – like He loves everyone; God turns a bad idea into something good; other: _____)

How could Abraham have avoided this situation? (e.g., listened to God more than his wife or culture, waited for the promise, etc.)

What promises of God do we “get ahead of” or “rush past”?

In what ways can we wait on God? (Seek Godly counsel, look in the Bible for answers, pray, etc.)

PLAN for ACTION:

What do you feel is the central lesson in this passage? (You can't rush God; if God has promised you something, be patient; resist the urge to fulfill God's will on your own; other: _____?)

In what area of your life are you most tempted to be impatient? (At home; at church; with friends; at work; other: _____)

How can this group pray for you this week?

To view the complete teaching from the Sunday services go to www.centralcommunity.org/media/index.html