**Characterization and Plot(s) in Genesis 16: A Narrative-Critical Analysis**

***ABSTRACT***

 *A narrative analysis of the plot(s) of Genesis 16 brings to the fore the motifs of barrenness, wilderness and divine encounter, and indicates that the text presupposes God’s choice of Isaac over Ishmael, which was more clearly emphasised in Genesis 17 and 21. At any rate, one of the major tasks facing a narrative-critical reader of Genesis 16 is to account for the author’s special concentration on the characters of Hagar and Ishmael in a narrative that basically concerns Abraham and his household. Does this concentration suggest divine election of Hagar and Ishmael**? In this article, my aim is to demonstrate that the motifs of barrenness, wilderness, and divine encounter are narrative devices used by the narrator to underline in advance the ‘theology of separation’, and God’s compassion for and salvation of the afflicted. It also offers an analysis of how some factors in the narrative portray God’s and the narrator’s disapproval of the involvement of Hagar in the marital lives of Abraham and Sarah. This shows that Abraham and Sarah tried to bring about the fulfilment of God’s promise in their own way which is contrary to the plan of YHWH who had plans (of election) for Isaac. This implies that the concentration on Hagar and Ishmael does not presuppose divine election of them, it rather prefigures, among other things, that the place of Ishmael would be in the wilderness.*

**KEYWORDS:** Genesis 16; Plot; Characterization; Narrative Analysis

1. **Introduction**

Over the years, an enormous amount of research has been undertaken on Genesis 16. However, the characterization and plot(s) of the narrative deserves more attention. Among other things, a narrative-critical analysis of these narrative elements bring to the fore the motifs of barrenness, wilderness, and divine encounter. These motifs, especially the last two, have been alluded to by some scholars to argue that Genesis 16 emphasises more the characters (and ‘election’) of Hagar and Ishmael, than it accentuates the search for progeny on the part of Abraham and Sarah, and the narrator’s presupposition of the election of Isaac (Dozeman, 1998: 23‒43; Nikaido, 2001:219‒242). Be that as it may, the narrative plot(s) of the narrative, and the way the narrator presents the characters show that the text presupposes God’s choice of Isaac over Ishmael which was more clearly emphasised in Genesis 17 and 21. In any case, one of the major tasks facing a narrative critic of Genesis 16 is to account for the author’s special interest on the characters of Hagar and Ishmael in a narrative that basically concerns Abraham and Sarah’s search for a child. By analysing the plots and the role of the characters of the narrative, my aim is to demonstrate that the motifs of barrenness, wilderness and divine encounter are narrative devices used by the narrator to underline in advance the ‘theology of separation’ and God’s compassion for, and the salvation of the afflicted. I shall also offer an analysis of how some factors in the narrative portray God’s and the narrator’s disapproval of the involvement of Hagar in the marital lives of Abraham and Sarah. This implies that Abraham and Sarah tried to bring about the fulfilment of God’s promise in their own way which was contrary to the plan of YHWH who had plans (of election) for Isaac.

This article is divided into three major parts. In the first part, I shall briefly discuss the meaning or/ and importance of characters and plots in biblical narratives. This will include briefly explaining the five stages of plot in biblical narratives. I will dedicate the second part to the analysis of the various stages of plot as they apply to Genesis 16. In the course of this analysis, the motifs of barrenness, wilderness and divine encounter as it applies to the various characters of the narrative will be discussed. Finally, I will explore the narrator’s perspective in the narrative. This is aimed at arguing that there are reasons to think that the plan of Abraham and Sarah to have a child through Hagar as it is presented in the narrative, neither enjoys the narrator’s approval nor God’s endorsement. In other words, the concentration on Hagar and Ishmael does not presuppose divine election of Hagar or Ishmael, it rather prefigures, among other things, that the place of Ishmael would be in the wilderness.

1. **Characterization and Plot(S) in Biblical Narrative**

Characterization and plot are two important factors in Narrative Criticism. It is through the characters that the views of the narrator are expressed. In the words of Bar-Efrat (1989),

Not only do the characters serve as the narrator's mouthpiece, but also what is and is not related about them, which of their characteristics are emphasized and which are not, which of their conversations and actions in the past are recorded and which are not, all reveal the values and norms within the narrative, and in this respect it makes no difference whether the characters are imaginary or whether they actually existed. The decisions they are called upon to make when confronted with different alternatives, and the results of these decisions, provide undisputable evidence of the narrative's ethical dimension. The characters can also transmit the significance and values of the narrative to the reader, since they usually constitute the focal point of interest (Bar-Efrat, 1989: 47).

From the above quotation one observes the indispensability of characters in biblical narratives, especially in ‘third person narratives’.[[1]](#footnote-1) Whether they are fictional or historical characters, it is through them that the narrators communicate to their readers. They present the characters’ point of views with reference to the major issues in the narratives. In Genesis 21, for instance, one observes that the various characters have their various impressions about Ishmael. In verse 9, which begins a new narrative line, one discovers that the narrator refers to him as ‘the son of Hagar the Egyptian’ (את־בן־הגר המצרית). From the perspective of Abraham, this boy is his son (בנו,v. 11). But from Sarah’s perspective, Ishmael was not just a son, he is also ‘the son of the slave woman’ (בן־האמה הזא ,v. 10). By analyzing the characters’ assessment of the status of Ishmael, the narrative critic can understand better the point that the narrator wants the readers to understand.

Furthermore, every narrative that involves the narrator’s interaction with the characters requires narrative plots which facilitate the flow of the story. A plot is a systematic and a well-thought-out plan through which the intentions of the narrator or the writer can be communicated. “If the characters are the soul of the narrative, the plot is the body” (Bar-Efrat, 1989: 93). The plot of any given narrative “consists of an organized and orderly system of events, arranged in temporal sequence…constructed as a meaningful chain of interconnected events” (Bar-Efrat, 1989: 93). Hence, the writers or redactors,[[2]](#footnote-2) who are represented by narrators, carefully choose what to include or what to exclude in the development of their story. They may have got their story from different conflicting sources, but their intention is to make (as much as possible) a logical sense of the sources they use.

The events in any given narrative is structured to take place in time and space. This is what Berlin (1983:56) refers to as “the spatial and temporal levels” of point of views in biblical narrative. “The narrative needs the time which is outside it in order to unravel itself by stages before the reader” (Bar-Efrat, 1989: 141). This is because “the narrative cannot be absorbed all at once and is communicated through a process which continues in time...” (Bar-Efrat, 1989: 141). Furthermore, “the narrative also requires internal time, because the characters and the incidents exist within time…” (Bar-Efrat, 1989: 141). An example of timing in Genesis 16 is the reference to the time when Abraham went in to Hagar (after he had lived for ten years in Canaan), and his age when Ishmael was born, 86 years. Biblical narratives also occur in space. In most cases they tell the story of movements of people from one location to another and the importance of these movements. For instance, there are two major narrative locations in Genesis 16, the household of Abraham and the wilderness. All these factors indicate the planning of the flow of a narrative.

Gunn and Fewell (1993: 102) and Marguerat and Bourquin, (1999: 43‒45) note that five major stages of plots can be identified in biblical narratives: Exposition (initial situation), conflict (or complication), transforming action, *dénouement* (resolution) and final situation. A brief explanation of these stages is very necessary, since I shall apply them in my analysis of Genesis 16.

As the name implies, *exposition* reveals the initial situation that yawns for attention or solution. It could be an unfulfilled desire or a lack. It initiates the major series of events in narratives, and prepares the minds of readers to understand that there is a situation that needs to be taken care of. By so doing, the reading appetite of the reader is triggered. This initial situation identifies the who, what, and sometimes how (Marguerat and Bourquin, 1999: 43). Who are the characters involved? What is the major problem? And how did this problem come about?

*Conflict* or *complication* has to do with the problem that arises as a result of the attempt to solve the problem pointed out in the initial situation. Here the tension in the narrative unfolds. In the words of Abasili (2016: 28), “it is at this stage of the narrative that the reader’s interests is given the greatest boost.” The expectation becomes higher and the reader wonders how the problem could be solved.

The *transforming action* is the turning point of the story. It includes the attempt or the series of attempts to bring a solution to the problem evident in the narrative, a problem which triggers tension as discussed in complication. The difference between complication and transforming action is minimal. This explains why Gunn and Fewell (1993) do not make any distinction between the two. The aim of transforming action is, according to Marguerat and Bourquin (1999: 44) to remove the difficulty announced by the story, while the aim of complication is to trigger off the action and bring about a dramatic tension.

The *resolution* stage talks about the solution to the problem, which has been raised in the stages of complication and transforming action. Here the consequence of the transforming action and the series of transforming actions on the character or characters involved is/are described. It also describes how serenity is restored. It has to do with removal of complication.

The *final situation* is the conclusion of the narrative. It has to do with a new situation which has been brought about as a result of the sequence of words and deeds in the narrative. In the story of the disobedience of Adam and Eve for instance, the final situation was that after the long course of events, they were driven away from the garden of Eden as punishment for their disobedience (cf. Genesis 3). In what follows, we discuss how these five stages of plot apply in our chosen narrative.

1. **The Plot(s) of Genesis 16**

Here we shall discuss the five different stages of plot‒ exposition, complication, transforming action, resolution and conclusion‒ as they apply to Genesis 16. In the course of our discussion, we shall also address the motifs of barrenness and childlessness, wilderness, God’s compassion for the afflicted, noting the purpose they serve in the narrative.

* 1. ***Exposition (v. 1): Barrenness and Childlessness***

Sarah’s[[3]](#footnote-3) barrenness is the problem introduced in the first verse of Genesis 16. Although Sarah was Abraham’s wife, she had not given birth to any child for Abraham. These are two realities that are incompatible, at least in ancient Israel. “In the ANE context, a ‘real’ wife was by definition, a woman who bore children for the perpetuation of her husband’s lineage” (De-Whyte, 2018: 82). This is in line with Naomi Steinberg’s view that the barrenness of Sarah has the function of informing the readers about the crisis facing Abraham (lack of heir) and the need to determine and search for this heir (Steinberg, 1993: 44). This lack presupposes the uniqueness of the birth of Isaac (cf. 21:1‒7); a special birth of a special child. The major characters include Sarah, who was referred to as the wife of Abraham (אשת אברם), Abraham, who was the husband of Sarah, and Hagar the Egyptian[[4]](#footnote-4) (שפחה מצרית), the maiden of Sarah. Drey (2002:186) suggests that in Gen. 16:1, “the biblical writer portrays the polarity between Sarai and Hagar. Sarai is from the family of Abram, while Hagar is from Egypt. Sarai is the wife of Abram, while Hagar is the maidservant of Sarai. The biblical writer inserts Abram between these two women.” Sarah, the wife of Abraham, would naturally be expected to give birth to children for the genealogical continuity of the family. She also holds the privilege of power over Hagar who was only a maidservant accountable to Sarah her mistress, and not to Abraham (Westermann 1985: 238), since “the maiden attended primarily to the personal needs of her mistress and was not the common property of husband and wife” (Sarna 1989: 119). More so, the Hebrew rendering ולה, which expresses the idea of possession, indicates Sarah’s right and authority over Hagar.

Sarah had no son and seems to have lost hope of giving birth to a son who would become the heir of Abraham. This situation is captured by the statement לא ילדה לו (bore him no child). This is a repetition of the genealogical gap which was introduced in Gen. 11:30. This genealogical gap brought about by the barrenness of the wife of Abraham, presupposes the need to seek for the solution to this situation.[[5]](#footnote-5) Note the expression that begins the narrative: ושרי אשת אברם לא ילדה לו (Sarai the wife of Abram bore him no child). As has been observed by many scholars, in Hebrew syntax, the verb-subject-object (VSO) word-order enjoys an overwhelming statistical dominance over the subject-verb-object (SVO) word-order, and is often referred to as the basic Hebrew word order (Moshavi, 2010: 10‒17).[[6]](#footnote-6) One, however, clearly observes that Genesis 16: 1 begins instead with the subject. This ‘unusual’ syntactic structure of the sentence could be explained on the basis of the intention of the writer to emphasise the identity of the subject, Sarah. In other words, the statement ושרי אשת אברם (Sarai the wife of Abram), underscores the identity of Sarah who is the subject of the sentence. While Genesis 15 focuses on Abraham and his lack of progeny, from the outset of Genesis 16, the emphasis shifts from Abraham to Sarah. This seems to show that the narrator does not only call attention to her actions expressed by the verbs attributed to her, but also her personality. In Genesis 16:1, Abraham is only mentioned in a genitive clause attached to Sarah’s name. The major issue of the narrative is centred around Sarah whose situation of barrenness must have been a situation of great concern. It is, therefore, necessary that she had to look for a solution to her problem of barrenness. But she had to plan along with her husband Abraham. This brings us to the next level of the plots of Genesis 16.

* 1. ***Complication (vv. 2‒5): Hagar Looked Down on Sarah***

Verses 2‒5 are very crucial in the analysis of Genesis 16 in that they play a great role in the development of the story. They show the effort of Sarah to bring solution to her problem of barrenness and childlessness by involving Hagar, and how this plan leads to a more complicated tension. Sarah’s assessment of her situation of barrenness is that it was YHWH who prevented her from bearing children (v. 2). She, therefore, suggested to Abraham to go in to Hagar to have a child through her. The notion that YHWH prevents people from giving birth is also attested in Gen 30: 2; and 1 Sam. 1:6 where Rebecca’s and Hannah’s barrenness and childlessness were understood in terms of YHWH closing their wombs. These three women would later give birth to special Children that played a role either in the salvation or genealogical continuity of the people of Israel.

As an attempt to bring solution to her barrenness, Sarah suggested to Abraham, ‘Go in to my maiden’ (בא נא אל שפחתי). It is clear that the above statement has something to do with sexual intercourse between Abraham and Hagar, since the latter conceived after Abraham went in to her (ויבא אל הגר) in v.4. However, the frequency of the activities involved in Abraham’s going in to Hagar is not stated. A Jewish legend gives the impression that Hagar became pregnant after her first ‘lovemaking’ with Abraham (Ginzberg, 1969: 238). Westermann (1985: 238‒239) rather opines that the statementבא נא אל שפחתי implies that, “Abraham is to turn to Hagar, spend part of his time with her so that there arises a mutual understanding between them.” This, for him, means that Sarah’s suggestion indicates her readiness to share her husband with Hagar. This seems to be the case since Hagar was given to Abraham as אשה.

Why did Sarah want a child through Hagar? Was this desire connected with the genealogical continuity of Abraham and Sarah’s family, in which case YHWH’s promise is given consideration, or was she acting in order to raise her status as a married woman? These questions arise because of the statement which the narrator presents as Sarah’s motive for her action– אבנה, which has been translated as ‘that I may obtain children’ by many English Bible versions.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Many scholars opine that the above Hebrew expression should be understood against the background of Sarah’s desire to bring to fulfilment God’s promise to Abraham (von Rad, 1963:186; Speiser, 1964: 120; Neufeld, 2006: 137). Neufeld in particular is of the opinion that Sarah was “aware that if she were to remain passive, Abram would, in the end, seek to provide the child of promise through another channel” (Neufeld, 2006: 137). On the contrary, Drey (2002) argues that Sarah’s intention to be built up has nothing to do with the promise made to Abraham. He presents two major reasons for this position. According to him,

Two issues regarding Sarai’s words must be understood. First, the biblical writer implies that Sarai’s concern for an heir is selfish... Sarai’s want of an heir is self-motivated. Her desire for an heir is juxtaposed against God’s covenant promise to Abram... She gives the reason for her plan as, “so I can be built up from her.” Thus,… the intent of Sarai’s words [is] not to provide an heir for her husband... Instead, it is to provide herself with an heir... The second issue is the gender of the child… One would [expect] that a child should be mentioned and that the said child would be a male to fulfil the covenant. However, only Sarai's concern for a descendant is voiced... By these two issues, the biblical writer hints that this child conceived through the union of Hagar and Abram will have nothing to do with the covenants mentioned in chapters 15 and 17. The child is planned by Sarai (not God) and will be conceived through Hagar... (Drey, 2002: 186‒187).

The verbal form אבנה (first person singular of בנה) excludes Abraham’s need for a child, and clearly suggests that Sarah was more preoccupied with her personal desire to be built up than she was with bringing about the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham. In line with this argument, Fewell and Gunn (1993: 45) maintain that Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham, not for Abraham’s sake, but to consolidate her self-worth and security as a woman.[[8]](#footnote-8) This idea is further strengthened by the fact that the same expression occurs in Gen. 30:1‒3, when Rachael handed over her maid to Jacob to be ‘built up’, even when her husband Jacob already had sons. According to Teubal (1984: 33), אבנה was used in Gen 16:2 to denote the desire for lineage or succession. She maintains that in the translation ‘that I may be built up’, “Sarah is not necessarily hoping to have a son; and she is indicating that her intention is to regard the maid’s child as her offspring, not her husband’s” (Teubal, 1984: 33). This argument is not in line with the textual witness of the LXX of the translation of MT’s אבנה.

The LXX’s τεκνοποιήσῃς (that you may have a child) shifts the subject of the verb from first person singular to second person singular. In this case, the emphasis is on Abraham becoming a father and not on Sarah being built up. Hence, while the LXX’s translation could be connected to the desire to fulfil God’s promise of progeny, MT concentrates on Sarah being built up. Whatever be the case, even though there is nothing in MT of Genesis 16 to suggest that it was Sarah’s desire to bring about God’s fulfilment that led to her plan of having a child through Hagar, the impression that this desire of hers was tied to the desire of Abraham to have an heir should not be excluded. The situation of Sarah is unique when compared with that of Rachael: both Abraham and Sarah were childless. On this basis, the second argument of Drey is not convincing. Even though the gender of the child is not mentioned, ‘being built up’ here presupposes, among other things, a desire for genealogical continuity. Speiser (1964: 120) and Zucker and Reiss (2009: 3) endorse this line of thought when they state that אבנה is a word-play on בנ (son). Thus, in the context of Genesis 16:2, אבנה could mean ‘that I may have a son’. Nevertheless, this does not imply an objection to the argument that Sarah’s expression of her desire to have a child through Hagar was egocentric. Whether the desire of Sarah was tied up to Abraham’s search for an heir or not, he had to play a role in Sarah’s desire to be built up. And his response to the suggestion of Sarah is evident in the statement וישמע אברם לקול שרי (and Abram listened to the voice of Sarai).

The expression וישמע אברם לקול שריrequires special attention. The Hebrew verb שמע is semantically complex, and would later become a keyword in Israel’s relationship with God‒ a word which expressed their choice to follow the dictates of YHWH and reject other gods (cf. Deut. 6:4‒9). Among other things, it implies, ‘to heed the voice of someone’, ‘to fulfil a request’, ‘to follow one’s advice’, ‘to obey an order or command’, ‘to consent to a suggestion’ et cetera (Schult, 1971: 1704‒1711; Schoville, 1997: 175‒184). Abraham’s listening to Sarah in Genesis 16 is reminiscent of the creation narrative in which Adam listened to the voice of his wife (Gen. 3:17).

By stating that Abraham listened to the voice of Sarah, the narrator seems to prepare the reader to keep in mind how listening to the voice of Sarah is in conflict with harkening to God’s plan. Even though this is not definitely stated in this narrative, YHWH’s appearance to Abraham, after the birth of Ishmael (Gen. 17), in which YHWH talks about the birth of Isaac, seems to suggest God’s disapproval of the way Abraham had gone about his search for a child. Thus, God says to him in 17:1,“I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.” The term, אל שדי (God almighty), here implies a sense of the supremacy of God and His plan over the human plan. According to Herbert Lockyer, it highlights God’s “power to fulfil every promise He had made His people” (Lockyer, 1975: 12‒13). Abraham wanted to bring about the fulfilment of God’s promise of an heir in his own way, and not in God’s way. He had carried out a plan which God did not approve of, and he was informed that God is the almighty whom he should walk before and be blameless (התהלך לפני והיה תמים). The expression, ‘work before me and be blameless’, among other things, denotes a “devotion of a faithful servant to his king” (Hamilton, 1990: 451‒452). Abraham should be blamed for not being patient with God, and for accepting to go in to Hagar. Moreover, things did not get rosier after Hagar conceived.

Abraham went in to Hagar (ויבא אל הגר) as was suggested by Sarah, and she conceived (ותהר). One would have expected that the statement, “and she conceived” (ותהר), made with reference to Hagar, would imply that Sarah’s plan to have a child through Hagar would be a perfect solution to her problem of childlessness. On the contrary, Hagar looked down (ותקל) on her. The text is silent about what was the exact action or attitude of Hagar towards Sarah. Westermann (1989: 240) and Wenham (1994: 8) are of the opinion that ותקל,which was used to portray the action of Hagar does not imply that Hagar behaved insolently towards Sarah. Westermann in particular, thinks that “the change in Hagar’s attitude arises out of the situation: “Natural maternal pride is stronger than legal status” (Westermann 1989: 240). In other words, this attitude of Hagar threatened the legal status of Sarah, and provoked so much jealousy and bitterness in her. This is expressed in Genesis 16:5 which contains a statement of one who is embittered and full of regrets. In this verse, Sarah expresses her pain and frustration, and accuses Abraham of being culpable (חמסי עליך) for Hagar’s disdaining action towards her, and appeals to YHWH whom she blamed for her childlessness to be the judge (ישפט יהוה) between her and Abraham (ביני וביניך). According to von Rad (1963: 186‒187), the giving of Hagar as wife to Abraham meant that she had lost her authority as a mistress over Hagar and had transferred this authority over to Abraham whose wife Hagar had become. More so, the pregnancy of Hagar worsened Sarah’s pain. Sarah’s status which she wanted to enhance by giving Hagar her maiden to Abraham was threatened the more by her conception. In Sarah’s expression, one clearly sees some elements of regret. She does not refer to Hagar by her new status (a wife of Abraham) but calls her שפחתי (my maiden). She seems to regret that she had given Hagar to Abraham as a wife. This expression of regret captures the narrator’s disapproval of the involvement of Hagar. Abraham in turn, gives a response that allows Sarah to handle the situation her own way. “Then Sarai dealt harshly with her and she ran away from her” (16:6 ).

* 1. ***Transforming Action (v. 6): Sarah Oppressed Hagar and She Flee***

In Genesis 16: 6, Sarah responded to the disdaining attitude of Hagar by oppressing her. Since the plan of Sarah to have a child through Hagar brought more worries than solution‒ the threat to her social status as the mistress and the main wife of Abraham‒, she had to take some measures to solve the problem. After she had expressed her pain and regrets, and got the approval of Abraham, she dealt harshly with Hagar and she ran away (ברח). It is noteworthy that in Genesis 16, Abraham speaks for the first time in v. 6. The words that he spoke, הנה שפחתך בידך עשי לה הטוב בעיניך (“Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her as you please”, RSV) suggests that the narrator presents him as being ready to act according to the desires of Sarah, without considering how Hagar would feel. This is also in line with his listening to Sarah in v. 2. Furthermore, while Sarah handed Hagar over to Abraham as a wife (אשה), and not as a maiden (שפחה), Abraham refers to Hagar as the maiden of Sarah, telling her (Sarah) that her maiden was at her disposal to do with her what was good in her eyes. The phrase הטוב בעיניך (what is good in your eyes) plays upon the attitude of Hagar whose mistress was slight in her eyes (גברתה בעיניה) (Trible, 1984: 13). In other words, Abraham suggested to Sarah: ‘since you have become slight in the *eyes of your maiden* whose mistress you are, you should also do to her what is good in *your own eyes’* (not in the eyes of Abraham her husband nor in the eyes of YHWH). Sarah, who was the determinant of what was good in her eyes, treated Hagar harshly and she ran away.

The statement, ותענה שרי (and Sarah oppressed her) and its resultant effect (flight of Hagar), depict a relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Hagar may have departed out of her own volition (Exum, 2019: 74), but she must have been harshly dealt with. Whatever was Sarah’s action or attitude towards her, it must have been extremely severe to make Hagar run away into the wilderness, in spite of her pregnancy. The Hebrew term ותענה, which captures the action or series of actions of Sarah towards Hagar, and which made the latter to flee, was also used to express the oppression of the Hebrews by the Egyptians (Ex. 1:11‒12). In Exodus 1:11, it is clear that what the Egyptians did to oppress the Hebrews was forced labour ( בסבלתם). But the reader is not informed about the exact thing Sarah did to Hagar in Gen. 16. Whatever be the case, the Hebrew expressions גברתה בעיניה (which refers to the action of Hagar towards her mistress) and ותענה שרי (which captures what Sarah did to oppress Hagar), bring to the fore the aftermath of the Sarah and Abraham’s involvement of Hagar to solve their problem of childlessness. While Sarah became slight in the sight of Hagar (גברתה בעיניה ), Hagar was harshly dealt with by Sarah (ותענה שרי) that she had to flee to the wilderness where she encountered the angel of YHWH, who instructed her to return to her mistress.

* 1. ***Resolution (vv. 7‒14): Divine Intervention in the Wilderness***

The conflict between Sarah and Hagar, which led to the flight of Hagar into the wilderness was resolved by the angel of YHWH who told Hagar to go back to her mistress and submit herself to her. The narrative location in vv. 7‒14 changed from the house of Abraham and Sarah to the wilderness. The narrator introduced another character, the angel of YHWH (מלאך יהוה), who played an important role in the narrative. In vv. 1‒6, the angel of YHWH neither acted nor spoke. He speaks for the first time in his encounter with Hagar when he found her.

The syntactic presentation of the finding of Hagar by the angel of the Lord, וימצאה מלאך יהוה, does not only emphasise the character and function of the angel of the Lord, it also shows the implication of the Hebrew word מצא in the verse. The object of the verb (her) is not separated from the verb (מצא) itself. The verb מצא is often used to describe God’s discovery of evil or disobedience in the lives of a person or a people. For instance, in Gen. 44: 16, the verb מצא is used when Judah refers to the awareness of God with reference to the evil he and his brothers did against Joseph‒ האלהים מצא את עון עבדיך (God has found out the guilt of your servants). This usage of מצא is in line with Hamilton’s statement that “when God is the subject [of מצא], and the following object is impersonal, the reference is normally to God’s discovery of evil or sin in somebody” (see also, Ps. 10:15; 17:13, Jer. 2:34; 23:11) (Hamilton, 1990, 451). With reference to the use of מצא in Gen. 16, Hamilton opines that when the object of מצא is personal and the subject is God (or the angel of YHWH in this case), then the term carries a more technical meaning– divine encounter and divine election.

The incident in Gen. 16: 7‒14 is clearly a story of the divine encounter of Hagar. The story is so dramatic that Hagar, in her excitement, named the Lord who spoke to her. But this does not in any way suggest any notion of either the election of Hagar or that of her unborn child Ishmael. One may suggest that the statement, “I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude (v. 10),” which was made to Hagar, and which seems to parallel God’s promise to Abraham (see 12:2; 15:5; 17:8), shows some elements of divine election. But the announcement of the identity of the first offspring of Hagar, “he shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin”, challenges the above view. The expression, ‘a wild ass of a man’ depicts that the place of Ishmael is in the wilderness, not in the household of Abraham. The biblical statement, “a wild ass at home in the wilderness…” (Jer. 2:24), confirms this view. Ishmael was not only destined to be a wild ass, but would also live at odds with all his kin; an indication that he would be a social deviant. This is similar to the experience of Cain, of whom it was announced that he will be a fugitive and vagabond (cf. Gen. 4: 10-12). These qualities do not give any impression of divine election.

From the foregoing, one can observe a seeming ‘double standard’ on the part of YHWH– the message of the angel of YHWH to Hagar (and to her unborn son) has both positive and negative implications. But the functions of both the positive and negative sides of the message will become clearer if one takes into consideration that an aspect of the message directly concerned Hagar while the other shows what would become of Ishmael:

10The angel of the LORD also said to her, “I will so greatly multiply *your* offspring [הרבה ארבה] that they cannot be counted for multitude.” 11 And the angel of the LORD said to her, “Now *you* have conceived and shall bear a son [הרה וילדת בן]; *you* shall call him [וקראת שמו] Ishmael, for the LORD has given heed to *your* affliction.

12 *He* [והוא] shall be a wild ass of a man [פרא אדם], with *his* hand [ידו] against everyone, and everyone's hand against *him* [בו]; and *he* shall live at odds with all *his* kin [ועל פני כל אחיו ישכן]” (NRSV).

A close look at the above verses reveals that the part of the message addressed to Hagar (vv. 10‒11), which is indicated by the use of the second person singular pronoun is  positive. But the part of the message referring to Ishmael, which is indicated by the use of the third person singular (v. 12), is somewhat negative. From the perspective of Hagar, YHWH shows compassion by giving heed to her affliction; but Ishmael, would have no place in the house of Abraham whose heir will be Isaac. His place would be in the wilderness (Gen. 21: 21).

In a recent article, Pigott (2018) challenges the above English translation of Gen. 16: 12, and accuses it of presenting a negative image of Ishmael in a narrative that presents him positively. He prefers the following translation: “And he himself will be a wild-stallion-man. His hand with everyone, and the hand of everyone with him. And before the presence of all his brothers he will dwell securely” (Pigott, 2018: 519). By the above translation, Pigott suggests that the two sons shall dwell in harmony. He translates פרא as wild-stallion in order to free the text from every implication of stubbornness and social deviance on the part of Ishmael. Furthermore, by translation בכל as ‘with all’ instead of ‘against all’, Pigott claims that Genesis 16:12 “could be understood positively in the sense that Ishmael would be an equal power alongside everyone else” (Pigott, 2018: 518-519). But what he did not consider very well is what the adjective ‘wild’ designates in this verse. This shows that the place of Ishmael was not in Abraham’s household but in the wilderness. This is in line with Jeremiah’s statement, ‒פרה למד מדבר “a wild ass at home in the wilderness…”– (Jer. 2:24). The point that Ishmael found a home in the wilderness is also expressed in Gen. 21:20‒21: “God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the *wilderness*, and became an expert *with the bow*. 21 He lived in the *wilderness of Paran;* and his mother got a wife for him from the *land of Egypt*. Pigott’s translation and interpretation of v.12 fails to portray the image of separation between the two sons which the narrator seems to emphasize in advance.

Having found Hagar in the wilderness, the angel of YHWH addressed her with the same title by which the narrator had referred to her at the beginning of the narrative– הגר שפחת שרי (Hagar the maiden of Sarai). In other words, the angel of YHWH knew her name, her position in the household of Abraham, and the identity of her mistress. As rightly pointed out by Hamilton, “the impression given by all this is that the whole episode is under Yahweh’s control and vigilance” (Hamilton, 1990: 452). Furthermore, the angel did not address Hagar in connection with Abraham, an indication that the role she had played in bearing the child of Abraham was not part of her role. The angel of Yahweh also inquired about the where about of Hagar: where have you come from and where are you going? Hagar responded that she was running away from her mistress. She answered only the first question. She seemed not to know where she was heading to. At this point, the angel of YHWH resolved the conflict between her and her mistress by instructing her as follows: שובי אל גברתך והתעני תחת ידיה (Return to your mistress and submit to her power, v. 9).

The words and deeds of Yahweh or/and the angel of Yahweh in Genesis 16 show that God took note of the miserable situation of Hagar without supporting her involvement in Abraham and Sarah’s search for a child. The story of Hagar’s encounter with Yahweh also portrays two of the major functions of an angel: announcement of the birth of a child and (announcement of) deliverance, which portrays the notion of God’s compassion for the afflicted (Ficker, 1997: 667‒672; Reinhartz, 1998: 155‒160). In some biblical instances, the announcement of the birth of a child was tied with deliverance, as in the case of Judg. 13, in which Samson was born of the barren wife of Manoah. In such situations, the angel announced the deliverance of the mother of the child from the distress of childlessness and barrenness, and the greatness of the child, including how the child has been chosen for a special purpose. Although there was a nativity statement by the angel in the case of Hagar, the issue of barrenness which was often tied with the greatness of the child to be born is lacking. This challenges the notion that Hagar’s encounter with the angel points to the divine election of either Hagar or Ishmael. On the contrary, the birth announcements of Isaac, and his eventual birth, brings to the fore the relationship between barrenness and the greatness or election of the child to be given birth to by the former barren woman (17:15‒19; 18:9‒10). Hence, it is the announcement of the birth of Isaac (cf. Gen. 21:1‒7), which expresses the deliverance of Sarah from barrenness, that should be cited as an example of the relationship between barrenness and election of the child given birth to by the former barren woman. The narrator’s emphasis on the barrenness of Sarah can therefore be linked to the fact that she would give birth to a son who has been elected to maintain the generational continuity of the household of Abraham.

The narrative does not inform us about whether Hagar returned to her mistress or not. But it has to be presumed that she did so since she eventually gave birth to a son who was named by Abraham– an indication that the child was given birth to in the house of Abraham.

* 1. ***Final Situation (vv. 15‒16): The Birth and Naming of Ishmael***

The narrative concludes with the birth and naming of Ishmael. This includes a statement about the ownership of the child and an emphasis on the age of Abraham when Ishmael was born. At any rate, two major issues arise from the way the story ends. First, no reference is made to Sarah whose intention it was to have a legal right of ownership over the son of Hagar (v. 2). A narrative which begins with an emphasis on Sarah, ends without bringing her into the picture. Second, Hagar did not name the child according to the instruction of the angel of YHWH (v. 12), Abraham did.

From a source-critical perspective, many scholars claim that the above situation– the naming of Ishmael by Abraham and not Hagar– could be explained on the basis of the combination of sources in the narrative, in which the naming of Ishmael by Abraham could be attributed to P. For instance, von Rad (1963: 186‒191) and Westermann (1989: 237) argue that vv. 1a, 3, 15‒16 belong to P. Based on this line of argument, the text would read:

1a Now Sarai, Abram's wife bore him no children.3 So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. 15 Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

There is no doubt that the narrative flows when the above three verses are combined. But the issue that needs clarification is the repetition of the names of the characters without using pronouns to refer to them. For this same reason, source critics attribute vv. 9‒10, which repeatedly and consecutively use the expression ‘angel of YHWH’ as the subject of the sentences, to a later addition (Campbell and O’Brien, 1993: 21‒202). Many feminist critics, while accepting the above source-critical analysis, think that all “the biblical editors– J, E, P, and R– were united on the patriarchal plotline” (Meyers, 1978: 92; Trible, 1984: 19; Teubal, 1990: 20; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1998, 51‒52).[[9]](#footnote-9) This implies that they (the biblical editors) intended to draw the attention of the reader to the male characters of the narrative (Teubal, 1990: 20). This argument is also applied to Genesis 16: 15-16, which according to Trible, undercuts Sarah. Going further, she states that even though the name of Hagar is mentioned, what is stressed is not the motherhood of Hagar but the fatherhood of Abraham who named the child of Hagar and by so doing “strips Hagar of the power that God gave her” (Trible, 1984: 19). The text may have been oppressive to Hagar by not allowing her to name her son according to the instruction of the angel of YHWH, at least the narrative states her ownership of the child as against the intention of Sarah to make the son that Hagar would bear hers. She neither names the child nor owns the child. Why this conspicuous shift of attention from Sarah to Hagar? This question becomes more crucial when we compare this situation with those of Leah and Rachel who both named and owned the children born by their maidens (cf. Gen. 30: 6‒8, 11,13).[[10]](#footnote-10) By denying Sarah the legal right of ownership over Ishmael, the narrator informs readers that, after all, the plan of Sarah to have a son through Hagar was a failed plan, a plan which is not in line with that of YHWH, who would later bring Isaac into the picture. On the part of Sarah, there is no indication in the narrative that she recognised the child; she neither recognised the child nor sought for any other means of fulfilling her desperate desire for a child. This indicates that she may have accepted Ishmael or her childlessness (Brewer-Boydston, 2018: 504). But according to Genesis 21, she did not acknowledge Ishmael as her child. She rather saw her as the child of the slave woman (21: 9). In what follows, we shall analyse the narrator’s perspective and demonstrate his disapproval of how Abraham and Sarah had gone about their search for progeny.

1. **The Narrator’s Point of View**

Biblical stories are often told from narrators’ point of views, which are often put in the voice of characters, or expressed in the background information that they give (Berlin, 1983: 57). One may argue that in Genesis 16, it is difficult to ascertain what the major concern is: Which character wins the sympathy of the narrator?[[11]](#footnote-11) Was the narrator in support of the involvement of Hagar in the search for progeny? What image did he or she present about the various characters? Do these images suggest any element of ‘election’ on the part of Hagar or Ishmael? From the narrator’s perspective, does the action of Sarah, especially the involvement of Hagar, enjoy God’s approval? Whatever questions one may have, there are reasons to think that the plan of Abraham and Sarah to have a child through Hagar neither enjoys the narrator’s approval nor God’s endorsement. First, the narrative, in which Sarah rather than God, interacts with Abraham, is placed between two narratives (Gen. 16 and 17), in which God interacts with Abraham. Second, the emphasis on the identity of Sarah and Hagar, third, the aftermaths of the involvement of Hagar in the marital life of Abraham and Sarah, fourth, the identity of Ishmael and finally, the conclusion of the narrative in connection with the beginning.

* 1. ***The Structural Placement of Genesis 16***

As has been rightly noted by George W. Coats, the story of Genesis 16 is separated from 15 and 17, “not only by the style of the exposition, but also by the content” (Coats, 1983: 130). While the preceding and subsequent chapters begin with Yahweh’s statement to Abraham, in Genesis 16, it is Sarah who speaks to Abraham. From the above structural location of Genesis 16, the narrator seems to draw the readers’ attention to the fact that while Abraham listens to God in Genesis 15 and 17, it is to Sarah that he listens in Genesis 16.[[12]](#footnote-12) Hence, there is no instruction of Yahweh towards Abraham.[[13]](#footnote-13) And as we have noted, listening to Sarah seems to suggest not listening to God, an impression that is also evident in Genesis 3. According to Sailhamer, by placing Genesis 16 immediately after Gen 15, which presents “the establishment of a covenant to affirm the promise of a child”…, the author suggests that Sarai’s scheme was intended to head off that divine promise by supplying it with a human solution” (Sailhamer, 1990: 135). This human solution did not provide a long-term solution to the problem of barrenness and childlessness in the family of Abraham and Sarah. As noted by De-Whyte, this suggests a theological motif: “The divine promise will be fulfilled when all human possibilities have been exhausted” (De-Whyte, 2018: 274). The arguments of Sailhamer and De-Whyte can be supported by the appearance of God to Abraham in Genesis 17, in which God shows His disapproval of Sarah’s plan by insisting that it is through the unborn Isaac that His covenant with Abraham would be established. Genesis 16 falls within the category of the narratives that express God’s disapproval of human actions of disobedience and their efforts to bring about a human solution to their desires and the fulfilment of God’s promise (cf. Gen. 3:1-19; 4: 3‒14; 6:1‒7; 11:1‒9). One can therefore argue that, according to the narrative of Genesis 16, the involvement of Hagar in the marital life of Abraham and Sarah does not enjoy God’s and the narrator’s approval.

* 1. ***The Emphasis on the Identities of Sarah and Hagar***

In Genesis 16, one observes the continuous and sometimes ‘unnecessary’ emphasis on the identities of Sarah and Hagar. With reference to Abraham, Sarah is referred to as the wife of Abraham (אשת אברם vv. 2, 3) in contradistinction to Hagar, an Egyptian maiden (שפחה מצרית) in vv. 2‒3. In relation to Hagar, Sarah is a mistress (גברה) of Hagar her maidservant (שפחה). Note also that the narrator and all the characters in the narrative– Sarah, Abraham, and Yahweh (angel of Yahweh)– identified Hagar as a שפחה ( maiden, cf. vv. 2, 3, 6, 8). This shows that the narrator employs all the means available to portray to readers the status of Hagar as a maiden and not a wife. This seems to be a way of getting the attention of readers to the situation on ground– the woman who would hand over her maiden to her husband is a wife who should not have involved her maiden in her situation of barrenness. It was only Sarah who gave Hagar to Abraham as a wife (אשה), a title which Abraham never acknowledged; for he referred to Hagar as Sarah’s maiden and not ‘my wife’ even after she had been given to him as אשה. On the contrary, he said of Sarah, “Your maiden in in your hands” (הנה שפחתך בידך). Apart from the title אשה, which Abraham did not acknowledge, no title of Hagar is mentioned in relation to Abraham; an indication that Hagar’s activities in the household of Abraham should have been limited to her service to Sarah and not to Abraham. In other words, from the perspective of the narrator, the service of Hagar to Sarah should not have included sharing her husband with her in order to have a son through Hagar. Could this be the reason why the narrator ‘denies’ Sarah access to the child?

* 1. ***The Regret of Sarah and the Aftereffect of Her Action***

Sarah’s goal for giving her maiden to Abraham was not achieved. Even though Hagar did conceive and bear a son, Sarah was not built up as a result of the conception of Hagar as she expected. On the contrary, her status was threatened the more; for her maiden treated her with disrespect. This situation must have been frustrating for Sarah who, on the basis of her regrets, accused Abraham of being responsible for Hagar’s disrespectful attitude towards her. More so, the involvement of Hagar in Abraham and Sarah’s search for an heir had some negative effects on Hagar. She was maltreated by Sarah to the point that she fled. By calling the attention of readers to the negative effects of Sarah’s plan to be built up through Hagar, the narrator seems to emphasise that Sarah’s plan and Abraham’s consent to it were futile. This expresses some elements of disapproval on the part of the narrator.

* 1. ***The Identity of Ishmael***

I reiterate that the identity of the son of Hagar (the fruit of Sarah’s plan to have children), which was expressed in the statement of the angel of Yahweh about him (cf. Gen. 16:12), shows that he would not have a place in the household of Abraham. והוא יהיה פרא אדם ידו בכל ויד כל בו ועל פני כל אחיו ישכן “He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin”[[14]](#footnote-14). The LXX translates the Hebrew פרא אדם as ἄγροικος ἄνθρωπος (a man of the field). Wevers (1993: 224) points out that the above translation compares the situation of Ishmael with that of Esau. “When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents” (25:27). The designations, ‘a man of the field’, and ‘a quiet man living in tents’, seem to be employed by the narrator to show who has been chosen for the continuity of the family lineage. Based on this argument, one could also say that the presentation of Ishmael as a wild ass or a man of the field indicates that his position would be in the wilderness, outside the household of Abraham.

* 1. ***The Conclusion of the Narrative***

As has been noted earlier, the ending of the story seems to be inconsistent with the beginning. Wenham captures this observation as follows: “The absence of Sarai is noteworthy. The child was intended to be Sarai’s, but three times the text says “Hagar gave birth to a son for Abram… Therefore, although Sarai’s scheme finally succeeded, she seems to have been shut out from enjoying its success” (Wenham, 1994: 11). In other words, while it was Sarah who needed to have a child for Abraham (in order to be built up) at the beginning of the narrative, the narrator denies Sarah access to the child born by Hagar in the conclusion. By taking Sarah out of the picture, the narrator seems to be preparing the minds of his or her readers about how Sarah would give birth to her own son. Even though Hagar had given birth to a son for Abraham, Sarah would also give birth to a son to Abraham, a son who would be elected by God over Ishmael, as a son of inheritance through whom God would establish His covenant with Abraham (cf. 17:17-21; 21:9‒10).

1. **Conclusion**

Our analysis of the characterization and plot(s) of Genesis 16 reveals that, to a great extent, the narrative presupposes the election of Isaac over Ishmael. In the course of our analysis, the following motifs, which are recurrent in the Hebrew Bible, came into play: barrenness and childlessness, wilderness and divine encounter. Other themes associated with the second and third motifs which are often connected are: birth announcement by the angel of Yahweh, God’s compassion for and deliverance of the marginalised and oppressed.

Making reference to the motif of childlessness and barrenness which is frequent in the Hebrew Bible, we argued that Genesis 16 could be understood and interpreted in the light of the biblical situation, in which barrenness eventually preceded the miraculous birth of a ‘special son’ (Gen. 21: 1-7; 30:22‒25; Judg. 13: 3‒5, 24‒25; 1Sam. 1:1‒6, 19‒28). This special son enjoyed exceptional preference by God and was chosen by Him for a special purpose connected with the deliverance and/or generational continuity of the people of Israel. In some situations, God’s election of a particular son was to the detriment of another person or other persons, usually the brothers or relatives of the favoured son.[[15]](#footnote-15) This situation often led to conflict between the two parties, in which case they were separated by different factors.

Based on the motif of wilderness, which is often linked to divine encounter and ‘deliverance’ motif, one may argue that Hagar and Ishmael were heroic characters in the narratives, or that their role in the narrative prefigures God’s deliverance of Israel. This line of argument has been endorsed by Dozeman (1998: 23) and Reis (2002: 103) who, from different perspectives, compare Hagar’s experience in the wilderness with the experiences of the heroic figures like Moses and Elijah, and the people of Israel, God’s chosen people. Be that as it may, while we accept that the scene in the wilderness portrays God’s deliverance of, and compassion for Hagar the oppressed, we also maintain that the words used for the birth announcement of Ishmael, prefigures that his place would not be in the household of Abraham but in the wilderness. In line with the above claim, Steinberg (1993: 81) refers to Hagar and Ishmael as wilderness people, a reference that distinguishes and distances Ishmael from Isaac.

Finally, our analysis shows that the plan of Abraham and Sarah to have a child through Hagar neither enjoys the narrator’s approval nor God’s endorsement. This implies that the concentration on Hagar and Ishmael does not presuppose divine election of Hagar or Ishmael, it rather prefigures, among other things that the place of Ishmael would be in the wilderness.

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1. It must be noted that there are narratives in which the narrator is also the character. This is found in the ‘I narratives’ in which the narrator speaks in first person singular. Examples of this type of narrative is the prophetic books ( Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, etc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is applicable in cases where a narrative comprises a combination of sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Note that Abraham and Sarah came to be known by these names only in chapter 17:5 when their names were respectively changed from Abram to Abraham and from Sarai to Sarah . For the purpose of this research and for the sake of consistency, we shall refer to them as ‘Abraham’ and ‘Sarah’ respectively. However, we shall retain the preference of scholars in this regard when we directly quote their work. This is also applicable when we quote directly from the biblical texts (Gen. 11‒21) where their names are mentioned. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The designation שפחה מצרית has often been linked to the incident in Gen. 12 where, for the sake of Sarah, Abraham was given gifts, including male and female slaves. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The genealogical notes often begin with אלה תולדת (these are the generations) as in the case of Shem and Terrah in Genesis 11:10, 27. But in the case of Abraham, the barrenness of his wife meant a break in the genealogical note, and presupposed a special attention on him. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Adina Moshavi gives a detailed discussion on the views of biblical scholars on the basic Hebrew word-order. While some scholars argue that the basic word-order is the VSO pattern, others think that SVO is the normal word-order. In any case, it is noteworthy that the former enjoys statistical supremacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The KJV, RSV, NRSV, and NET have this translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. They liken this action of Sarah to that of Abraham in Genesis 12. They both offer the women in their possession for the sake of their security. According to them, Abraham traded sexuality of Sarah for the sake of the security of his life, while Sarah traded the sexuality of Hagar to ensure that her place as the wife of Abram is secure. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This is an impression common to most feminist critics. Schüssler Fiorenza mentions three points that are common to all feminist critics and which is in line with the above statement of Teubal. The first point is that the Bible is written in an androcentric language and serves a patriarchal interest. Secondly, the Bible was written in the context of patriarchal cultures and religion. Thirdly, the Bible is still proclaimed and taught today in patriarchal societies and religions. Meyers argues that women were conditioned to three thousand years of male dominance. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. From the biblical record of child naming in the Hebrew Bible, it was not the exclusive reserve of any of the parents to name the child. In some cases, mothers named their children (Gen. 4: 1; 29:32‒35; 30:18,20, 24; Judg. 13:24; 1 Sam. 1:20; Is. 7:14), while in other cases fathers did so (cf. Gen. 16:15; 21:3; Ex. 2:22; 2 Sam. 12:24; Is. 8:3). In some other cases, both parents gave the same name to their children or each parent gave different names (Gen. 4:25; 5:3; 35:18). From the above statistic, one may deduce that in most cases, the naming of a child was the mothers responsibility to their children. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The narrator, through the character of the angel of Yahweh, comforts Hagar and at the same time asks her to go back to her mistress. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This is actually the first time that a statement of Sarah is recorded in the Hebrew Bible. in the preceding chapters (chapter 11 where her name was first mentioned to 15, where Abraham complains of his childlessness), she had been silent while Abraham had been active. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In the entire narrative of Genesis 16, Yahweh never addressed Abraham and Sarah. He only addressed Hagar the maiden. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The LXX English translation (Brenton) has this translation: “He shall be a wild man, his hands against all, and the hands of all against him, and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren”. The last aspect of the translation, “he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren”, challenges the NRSV’s translation. The former suggests a friendly relationship between Ishmael and his kin while the latter suggests the contrary. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For example, Cane and Abel (Gen. 4), Esau and Jacob (Gen. 27), Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 39‒47). In the case of Cane and Abel, even though Abel did not live to maintain the genealogical continuity of his father, his replacement Seth did (cf. Gen. 5: 3‒8). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)