

WHEN GOD NEEDS A HELPING HAND

The Story of Abram, Sarai, Hagar and Ishmael

TEXT

Genesis 16:1-15 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me." 6 "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. 7 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. 9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." 11 The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." 13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." 14 That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Genesis 17:18-25 And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" 19 Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. 21 But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year." 22 When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him. 23 On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. 24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, 25 and his son Ishmael was thirteen ...

Genesis 21:9-21 But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, 10 and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." 11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. 12 But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. 13 I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring." 14 Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba. 15 When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob. 17 God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. 18 Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation." 19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. 20 God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. 21 While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

Genesis 25:9-17 His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, 10 the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. 11 After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi. 12 This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Sarah's maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham. 13 These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15 Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. 16 These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps. 17 Altogether, Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people.

Genesis 28:8 Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; 9 so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had.

Genesis 37:25-28 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. 26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come, let's

sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. 28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

When God needs a helping hand, make sure to give it to Him.

There is nothing theologically wrong with that statement.

When God needs a helping hand, make sure to give it to Him.

But allow me to complete this almost blasphemous-sounding statement by assuring you that God never needs a helping hand.

We know that God is sovereign and has the world under control.

We start singing of God's sovereignty as little children when we sing, "He's got the whole world, in his hands."

We continue singing phrases like "Under the shadow of your throne, your saints have dwelt secure, sufficient is your arm alone and our defense is sure." (Our God, Our Help in Ages Past)

We have been taught, and will continue to be taught from this pulpit that God is completely sovereign over all the world He has made.

We know that God does not need glasses to help Him see our need.

We know that God needs no hearing aid to assist Him in hearing our cries.

And neither does God need our helping hand.

But this is what comes from our lips.

Do we trust God with our actions?

Do we trust God in our decisions, or do we simply claim to trust him.

Do we trust in the God we claim is sovereign?

The answer is "yes, for a while."

But our faith and our patience often fail, and then what do we do?

We take matters into our own hands.

We concoct an unbiblical solution to our intolerable difficulty.

And when all is said and done, we have proclaimed faith from our lips, while displaying faithlessness by our lives.

We say we trust God when we prove to only trust ourselves.

Here is the thesis statement or main point I trust you will latch on to this morning...

It is always wrong to do wrong while waiting for God to make right on His promises.

Those claiming to be a person of faith must prove this claim by living a life of faith.

Those singing that God is sovereign must evidence this by their life.

And those whose faith and patience fail and strive to give God a helping hand, they will find that they have never solved the problem and have only complicated matters ever further.

Here is an equation for those mathematically inclined: *Good Theology + Difficult Circumstances + Poor Decisions = A Heartbreaking Experience*

It is always wrong to do wrong while waiting for God to make right on His promises.

1. GOOD THEOLOGY

Abram and Sarai believed in God.

As a family, they used to be idol worshipers.

Formerly, they lived in an idol-worshipping community.

But Abram met God and his life was radically changed.

Everywhere they went, they set up altars to worship Yahweh.

Now they were living their life as practicing Yahweh worshipers.

Abram and Sarai believed in Christ.

Abram and Sarai realized that a promised Seed was coming one day.

They understood the hope that Eve had as she waited for the supernatural seed to come.

They heard and believed the promises God made of Abram having offspring.

They heard and believed the promises God made of Abram becoming a great nation.

They heard and believed the promises God made of Abram's children being as numerous as stars and dust.

Abram and Sarai understood God's Sovereignty.

Sarai had seen God's sovereign care and protection while she spent those nights untouched in Pharaoh's harem.

Abram had seen God's sovereign care and protection as he and his 318 men defeated the four kings of Mesopotamia.

And Sarai clearly sees God's sovereign hand in her own infertility. (Genesis 16:2)

It is true that God is the opener and closer of wombs.

Abram and Sarai had great faith.

They left their home land.

They have inhabited a not-so-fertile region. (famine)

They have given the best of the land to their nephew Lot.

They are still trying to have children.

Give them some credit here.

Most of us would have abandoned hope in having children decades sooner, but not Abram and Sarai

Even though God's timing appeared to be slow, they still trusted God

Application: Abram and Sarai were a lot like us.

Believing in God

Trusting in Christ

Coming to worship

Quoting our catechism

Learning our memorization verses

Striving to trust God even in life's tough circumstances and situation.

2. DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

It is easy to have great faith in the great times.

It is easy to have great faith in the tough times when they are short and solved rather quickly.

But to have great faith in times of great difficulty that seemingly have no end, that seems almost impossible.

Abram and Sarai's situation had been ongoing.

It had been ten years from the time God had called Abram until this time.

They had waited, and waited, and waited, and waited, and tried, and tried, and tried, and tried, but still no child.

Their patience and trust in God was being tested.

Abram and Sarai's situation appeared incurable.

Do you ever feel old? Maybe you can sympathize with Mary.

Mary was waiting for her first appointment in the reception room of a new dentist. While waiting, she noticed his certificate, which bore his full name. Suddenly, she remembered a tall, handsome boy with the same name who had been in her high school class some 40+ years ago. When she finally saw the dentist, however, she quickly discarded any such thought. This balding, gray-haired, hunched-over, hobbling man with the deeply lined face was far too old to have been her classmate. After her teeth had been examined, she asked him if he had attended the local high school. "Yes," he replied. "When did you graduate?" she asked. He answered, "In 1954." "Why, you were in my class" she exclaimed. He looked closely and sheepishly and then asked, "Which class did you teach?"

Mary was thinking of many things after this comment, but one was not when she would have her next child.

Sarai too felt old She was old

But she still hoped to have a child.

Chapter 11 introduces us to Sarai, the childless wife of Abram.

If there was a problem of her having a child in chapter 11, what about now in chapter 16

They were waiting in what seemed impossible.

And Abram is no spry kid any longer.

He too is a very old man.

Abram and Sarai's situation appeared to be getting worse.

Abram and Sarai were getting Older

Circumstances were getting worse, not better.

The cure for their problem seemed less likely to happen in the future than at the present time.

Having and parenting a child is not going to get easier in the next decade of life.

They were heading in the wrong direction.

There was no light at the end of this tunnel except for the bright lights ushering one into the presence of God.

Application: Abram and Sarai were a lot like us

We are suffering with various trials and difficulties.

We have been struggling for some time.

We begin to believe that our situation is hopeless, there is no way out.

We see no hope in the future.

3. POOR DECISIONS

Abram and Sarai were in some predicament.

It is at this point in life that men so often take spiritual short-cuts.

Abram and Sarai were impatient

If it doesn't happen now, it will never happen

There is a time to be patient and there is a time to action

Abram and Sarai were creative.

Hey Abram, let's try Hagar.

Take, marry and sleep with my maidservant

She's 24, tan skinned from Egypt, in great shape and never been married.

After all, we don't want to have an ugly kid, do we?

And so Abram thought, "90 year old Sarah, or 24 year old Hagar."

"OK"

I think this shows here legitimate desire to see the promised seed of God

God will then have His promise to us fulfilled

Abram and Sarai were followers.

It was an accepted custom.

They followed culture.

But even though this may be customary, it is not natural or normal to give your husband to another woman

And even though it was customary, it was not godly.

Abram should not have allowed culture to define his practice.

Abram and Sarai were faithless.

While they proclaimed sovereignty from their lips, they proclaim self-reliance in their actions.

This is what their actions proclaimed:

God has lost control of the situation

This just might be the first problem that God cannot solve on His own

The Lord might need our help this time

Let's take matters into our own hands

God helps those who help themselves

While she stated that she trusted in the sovereignty of God, her actions proved otherwise.

So they developed their own solution.

Abram and Sarai were adulterous.

Sarai's plan would involve polygamy.

Monogamy was God's will in the garden

Never did God ordain a man to find more than one wife

Many times we see this occurrence in Scripture, but never without disastrous consequences

One man, One woman, One life

Sarai's plan would involve adultery

Once again, never can a man unite himself with a woman outside of the marriage institution ... not even to bring forth a promised seed

Abram and Sarai were vulnerable.

Part of the Christian's responsibility is to protect one another.

Part of the spouses responsibility is to protect one another.

Sarai actually was used by Satan to tempt Abram

She actually brought up the idea

She actually brought this young Egyptian girl to Abram

She would be used by Satan to lead her husband into sin

Abram should have been the priest and spiritual father of the home.

He should have protected his wife.

He should have brought the matter before God.

The husband is to be involved in the sanctifying and the spiritually beautifying of his wife.

But Abram did not lead Sarai.

Abram was Sarai's absent leader and protector

Just like Adam listened to the voice of Eve, so Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

Abram listens and does not object and he listens to Sarai

This happens immediately after the covenant ceremony of chapter 15

Once again the faithful one is faithless

Just like Adam was silent regarding God's revelation, so too was Abram silent. (Gen. 3:17; Gen. 16:2)

Abram should have known better - it was he who had the visions and had received the covenant from God

Application: Abram and Sarai were a lot like us

We are impatient too.

We are very, very vulnerable on our own.

We are by nature followers of Culture

So often we who have the divine revelation allow ourselves to be led by the world

We are too creative for our own good.

We need to be aware of our own great ideas.

Sinful warped people come up with sinful warped plans.

Too often we excuse our own “great ideas” by using the phrase, “God helps those who help themselves.”

It is never right to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right.

It is never right to construct a sinful way to accomplish a good end

Faithless

What you believe under pressure shows what you truly believe

The man of God believes the promises of faith.

The man of God watches for the God of the promises to fulfill the promises of faith.

Adulterous

We end up creating an adulterous or sinful plan in order to obtain what we need from God.

4. HEARTBREAKING EXPERIENCE

Did they solve their problem?

Sarai's plan worked to perfection ... and it was absolutely catastrophic.

Everything went according to plan ... and nothing worked out as she had planned.

The one problem of infertility now explodes into numerous problems.

The faith problem in one area of life eventually spread to encompass many areas of life.

Problems between Abram, Sarai and God

This is not absolutely stated, but it is explicitly stated in other Scriptures.

Problems between Sarai and Abram

Sarai then complains to Abram and blames Abram

You are responsible (Could it be that she blames Abram's covenant thinking for her sin?)

You made her pregnant

She is despising me.

You will be judged by God

This is often the case when we continue in sin ... it is never our fault ... it is always God's or someone else's.

Problems between Sarai and Hagar

The young Egyptian girl begins to mock her mistress.

It appears that Hagar begins to mock Sarai for her infertility.

Heh, heh, I guess it's not your husband's fault.

Sarai ends up making Hagar so miserable that she flees the locale while being pregnant

Problems between Abram and Hagar

Genesis 21:11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. 12 But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. 13 I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring." 14 Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.

It is here that we see God's covenant interaction with Hagar. (The exact same three steps as with Abram in chapter 12)

1. God calls or initiates the conversation.
2. God commands.

Hagar is commanded to return by the Angel of the Lord

God commands that she return to her mistress – this would require great faith. (16:8-9)

3. God commits himself.

Here she meets the “God who sees me.”

Not just the angel, but the Angel of the Lord (Messenger above messengers.)

Hagar receives promises from the Angel of the Lord

The Biblical writers call the Angel of the Lord “Yahweh” numerous times

Preincarnate manifestation of Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity.

She is commanded to name her child Ishmael which means, “God hears.”

Psalm 139:9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

Innocent victims are hurt

Genesis 21:15 When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob.

Problems between Ishmael and Isaac

At Birth

Genesis 21:9 But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, 10 and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

It appears that Ishmael mocks the birth of Isaac, while everyone else is rejoicing with laughter.

Remember that Ishmael is at least 13-14 years of age at this point.

Ishmael is viewed as a threat to Isaac's inheritance

Later with Children

Isaac has a son named Esau.

After a family squabble, Esau hoping to hurt his father, goes to Ishmael to find a wife.

Genesis 28:8 Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; 9 so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had.

Ishmael helps Esau, Isaac's son marry a Canaanite woman (28:8-9; 36:1)

Problems between Ishmaelites and Israelites

Joseph's brothers sold Joseph to a caravan of Ishmaelites, traveling from Gilead to Egypt.

Genesis 37:25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. 26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. 28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Midianites and Ishmaelites are one and the same group – Midianites being a geographic term and Ishmaelite an ethnic one.

The term "Ishmaelite" came to mean anyone who had hostility towards another.

David prays for the destruction of God's enemies, included in the list are the Ishmaelites. (83)

Application: Abram and Sarai's consequences are a lot like ours

The effects of sin affect our relationships.

The effects of sin affect our spiritual communion with God.

The effects of sin affect innocent victims.

The effects of sin compound and multiply.

The effects of sin do continue from one generation to another

What you sow, that shall you reap, and your children.

You need to realize the consequences of taking matters into your own hands

5. THE GOSPEL

Galatians 4:28 Now you, (*Gentile*) brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time (*back then*) the son (*Ishmael*) born in the ordinary way persecuted the son (*Isaac*) born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

The conflict between Ishmael and Isaac continues to this day.

There is conflict between the two seeds.

Ishmael and Isaac symbolize Christ and Satan

On the great day of celebration regarding the promised one's birth, the opponent is laughing and mocking.

The competition for the inheritance had been born. (Isaac vs. Ishmael)

The stronger is the one mocking the weaker.

Once again, the tale of the two seeds.

Only one seed is blessed, and it is those who are the seed of the free woman.

How do you become a child of Abraham and Isaac, and not Abraham and Ishmael?

By faith.

Practical Application

Have Patience

God's timing is never late and rarely early

Remember God's Glory

Why did God use 10 plagues with Pharaoh in Egypt?

To bring Him glory.

Why was God having Abram and Sarai wait for so long?

To bring Him glory.

Notice the barren woman theme throughout Scripture.

To show the need for divine intervention.

Hagar's child represents what human beings can produce in an effort to please God in their own strength and wisdom, using man's own natural resources.

Isaac represents the effect of divine intervention in behalf of fallen humanity.

Isaiah 54:1 "Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the LORD. 2 "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. 3 For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.

Be always in the Word of God

The Bible reminds us of God's promises.

The Bible reminds us of God's power.

The Bible reminds us of God's timing.

The Bible reminds us of our own foolishness.

The Bible instructs our minds.

The Bible shows the dead-end of culture.

The Bible shows us what is good and acceptable, what that perfect will of God is.