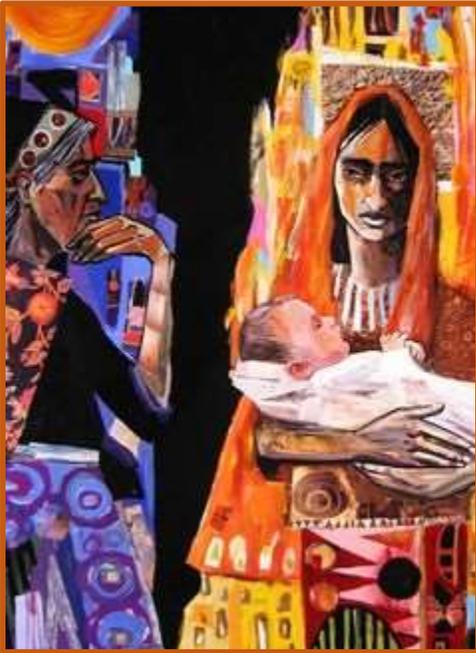


Faithful Living in a Fallen World: A Study in the Life of Abraham

Lesson #7: *Genesis 16*

When “Helping” God DOESN’T Help Us



Living in times when there’s pretty much an avenue to acquire an “instant” whatever it is you want, we have acquired a “microwave mentality” often reflected in the prayer, “Lord, give me patience, and I want it right now!” [We do NOT like to wait! We agree w/the popular theologian Tom Petty who in 1981 reminded us of what we all know only too well, “. . . the waiting is the hardest part . . .” (The song is used at [Philadelphia Flyers](#) home games, when a goal or other play is being reviewed by the official. The song can also be heard during an official review at [Wisconsin Badgers](#) sporting events.)]

There’s basically 2 speeds at which everything in our world works. What are they?

[OUR SPEED, OUR Timing / GOD’S speed, His timing.] HOW MANY OF YOU WOULD CONSIDER YOURSELVES TO BE “CONTROLLING” PEOPLE? It’s when WE think something SHOULD happen in conflict w/God’s SOVEREIGNTY over time. It’s actually a misreading of Psalm 31:15, “MY times are in YOUR (God’s) hands” not “My Times are in MY hands” (& God just sits passively watching OUR timetable work itself out).

**** In our lives, there WILL be times when our THEOLOGY and God’s CHRONOLOGY conflict with each other! ****

And when the conflict happens, we want to “help” God do His work in our lives and fulfill His promises – according to OUR timetable. Big mistake. Still, the tension between God’s timing and our expectations is a real one. Just ask Abraham and Sarai. And their offspring (*cf Galatians 3:29*).

1. God’s Word is SYMPATHETIC to our dilemmas.

We see this in **16:1-3**. What often seems well-intentioned (and culturally acceptable) may signify a confused lapse of FAITH in the promises of God. And so, we step in and try to “FIX” the problem. The results are pretty much NOT GOOD! [Sarah’s 85 & childless . . . weeks become months & years, and the promise of a seed for Abram doesn’t look like it’s gonna happen. So, it must be time to “fix” the problem. (. . . a wedding where the

groom was late, so the best man stood in the place of the groom, and then things got REALLY confusing ... look on the bride's face . . . should have waited until the groom showed!) This way of securing a son to continue the lineage of a man was culturally acceptable in Near Eastern culture. In that culture, if a wife did not produce a child by her husband in 2 years, the wife could then buy a slave girl, the slave girl would sleep with the husband and have a baby. Then the husband could sell off the slave girl and still have someone to carry on his name. Still, that's not RIGHT according to God's Standard (In **Genesis 2**) of 1 man, 1 wife & those 2 having THEIR children.

- What's often missing in our reading of this passage is the PATHOS and SADNESS underscoring this (wrong) decision. The writer (ultimately, God) is showing **SYMPATHY** for Sarai's dilemma.

It's almost like you can feel the writer's sadness that a proper relationship is being intruded upon by this new relationship. Give Sarai credit for WANTING Abram to have an offspring, even if she went about it the wrong way. The CHRONOLOGY, the passing of time, the waiting, put pressure on the Faith of Sarai, even as CHRONOLOGY puts pressure on OUR Faith so as to tempt us to DO something rather than wait on the LORD.

- Sometimes, the pressures our Faith faces are **CHRONOLOGICAL** in nature. Let's face it, from our perspective, sometimes God seems to have a case of the "SLOWS"! Consider some examples: The marriage "pool", our children, ongoing physical problems.

You want to get married and have children, but a spousal prospect appears nowhere on the horizon [my experience in college and seminary seems to confirm that "Xn" guys in colleges (& seminaries) are hardly prizes to be desired. It IS possible, you know, to both be a Xn and a gold-plated jerk! [It was as if he assumed she was a competent COW who could find her own stall!] Sometimes, the "Xn" "pond" w/all those "good catches" seems to be dried up! For a YOUNG MAN, there IS this real "looker" @ work , fun, "handsy," and maybe IF you start dating her, you can convince her to come to church with you and you can engage in some "missionary" dating and maybe she'll be converted . . . you know . . . OR, you have a grown child you've prayed for, raised in a Xn home, he's in his 30's or maybe 40's and totally disinterested in the things of the Lord. And time just rolls on. Or you have an unrelenting physical condition that keeps your body racked w/pain, you've pretty much prayed yourself out and medicated yourself, and the relief is marginal, at best.

- The Bible **UNDERSTANDS** the pressures God's people feel. This does not **ENDORSE** the decision taken, just an understanding by the Lord of the **PRESSURE** and **DISAPPOINTMENT** people sometimes feel!

We don't have to AGREE w/what people have done to SYMPATHIZE with them! "If feel for you, I understand why you did what you did . . . even though what you did was the wrong thing to do." Yes, your husband is a clod, your wife is a witch, but still, you have to trust God in this situation and NOT take the situation in hand and do what you FEEL is right!

2. God's Covenant people are a **DISAPPOINTING people.**

Vv 4-6 offer a description of a textbook "DISFUNCTIONAL" family, but preceded by a **THEOLOGICAL** "twist"!

- Note the dysfunction and resulting problems in **Vv 4-6**. Sarah's "Hagar plan" worked. **NOW** there's friction! Sarai looks on mistress Hagar w/contempt, and she even lays into Abram (Vs 5) Oh . . . & I thought Hagar was only obeying orders! Nevermind (Emily Latella). There's outrage. And Abram, being the "take charge" man that he was, sticks out his hairy chest and . . . wimps out (Vs 6). "Sarai, Hagar's YOUR problem; do w/her as you will." And she does(6b) ***CULTURAL NOTE*** The laws of the surrounding culture specified that concubines (1 of my brothers once called them "porcupines") could be dealt w/by scouring out their mouths w/a quart of salt. We don't know if Sarai tried the "saline solution" on Hagar, but we **DO** know she laid into her husband's mistress quite severely!
- There is, however, more going on here. The "shading" and "coloring" of this account is deliberate!
 - **Verse 2 and Genesis 3:17...** In Vs 2, the word for "listened" is used **ONLY** in 1 other place in the OT, **Genesis 3:17**, where the LORD accuses ADAM of ". . . LISTENING to the voice of his wife . . ." instead of obeying the Lord.
 - **Verse 3 and Genesis 3:6...** One calls to mind **Genesis 3:6** where Eve "**TOOK**" some of the fruit and "**GAVE**" the fruit to her husband! **SAME TWO WORDS USED IN GENESIS 16!**
 - In other words, in our dysfunctions, we often **repeat** the **DYNAMICS** of the original fall of mankind! The shadow of **Genesis 3** hovers over us at all times! **We continue**

to LISTEN to other voices over the voice of the Lord speaking dia Scripture, and we not only DISOBEY but SHARE in that disobedience with other people!

- The MOTIVATION for the fall (which is **discontentment**) seems eerily similar to what happens in our lives.

The Serpent's innuendo is that Eve should NOT be satisfied w/the GIFTS God gives; & that God is somehow holding out on the good life she COULD have if she would only determine for herself the right thing to do! We may LIVE in Genesis 16; but Genesis 3 explains us! We reenact the fall every day!

*O Lord,
My every sense, member, faculty, affection is a snare to me.
I can scarce open my eyes but I envy those above me,
or despise those below me . . .
If I behold beauty, it is a bait to lust
or see deformity, it stirs up loathing and disdain . . .
Am I comely (attractive)? What fuel for pride!
Am I deformed? What an occasion for repining!
Am I gifted? I lust after applause!
Am I unlearned? How I despise what I have not!
Am I inferior? How much I grudge others' pre-eminence!*

-- from The Valley Of Vision

- How should we respond to this reality? Cf **Matthew 5:4; Ezekiel 36:31; Colossians 3:5**.

We should GRIEVE, with a HOLY grief, and be in a healthy way sad over our sin. If we DON'T and ARE NOT, we need to question if God has given us a new heart! Is the engine (heart) misfiring, or did you not get a new engine after all?!?

3. Our Covenant God is a **MARVELOUS God!**

Vv 7-16 reveals 4 times "*the angel of Yahweh*". Who would that be?

HE is YAHWEH in some kind of visible form. Vs 13

- God is a marvel, and what He does fills us with astonishment and wonder! And we should feel the "pull" of this God!

- He's a marvel in His **MERCY**, **Vv 7, 8**. This is the only known instance in Near Eastern Literature where the deity addresses a **WOMAN** by name! And an Egyptian **SERVANT WOMAN** @ that!
- He's a marvel in the **DIRECTION** He gives, **Vs 9**. He says, "Go back & stick it out!" [*World Magazine* article under the heading of "overlooked significant events of 1988" about 'Vic & Cindy Jones: "Vic & Cindy Jones stuck it out for another year of a marriage that is @ best **DIFFICULT**. Vic, 'It's not easy, but it's the right thing to do.' Cindy, 'We don't particularly like each other right now, but we made a promise to God and to each other we are not **ABOUT** to break. And we figure real love means doing what's right, and **NOT** just having warm feelings.'"]
- He's a marvel in the **COMFORT** He gives, **Vv 11, 12**. Ishmael means "God Hears". God has listened to your affliction. Of course, you **KNOW** what nationality "Ishmael" is part of, don't you? (**ARAB** nation!) But for now, the boy's name itself is a post-it note to Hagar that God has **LISTENED** to her afflictions!
- He's a marvel in His **GRACE** towards **SINNERS**, **Vs 13**. "You are a God I have been able to see, **AND** you're a God who has seen **ME**. I have seen the one who sees me!" What a comfort it is to know God sees us, and what an even **GREATER** comfort it is to know that **THIS** God Who **SEES** us in time & space & history became the **GOD** we could **SEE** (*John 1*), the God who **COMES AFTER** us (like He did Hagar), Who **FINDS** us and Who **SEES** us! God's grace doesn't dry up just because we're stupid!

What J.C. Ryle said about George Whitefield, and what that says to us . . .

Whitefield was a man of a singularly happy and cheerful spirit . . . he was so cheerful he almost tempted me to become a Christian. To read of this God wants me want to give myself to Him.