

Genesis 16:1-16

Introduction

Not having the patience to wait for primer to dry when redoing cabinet doors on kids' bathroom

1. One of the things we seem to be plagued with in the American Church is the inability to wait on the Lord; or, maybe it's just an unwillingness to wait
2. In the Old Testament, the imagery of waiting on the Lord is ultimately used to portray someone who seeks the Lord by placing his or her trust and hope in Him, patiently WAITING on Him to address their need or situation, and often with eager expectation (READ Psalm 25:1-5, 21)
3. Waiting on God isn't always easy, and sometimes—like the church I mentioned—instead of continuing to wait and simply rely upon God, we resort to some other means or action to get what we want or feel we need
4. Today's passage depicts such a struggle:
 - a. Sarai attempted to resolve an affliction through her own wisdom and a common custom
 - b. The Lord is a God who sees and responds to our affliction

A. Sarai attempted to resolve an affliction through her own wisdom and a common custom (READ Genesis 16:1-6)

1. Our passage begins with a burden that weighed heavily upon Sarai (16:1a): **“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife had borne him no children...”**:
 - a. To understand the weight of this issue we have to keep a few things in mind:
 - 1) First, in the ANE a barren wife was looked down upon; it was considered a disgrace not to be able to have children, and this disgrace extended to her husband and sometimes even to their extended family like parents
 - 2) Second, Sarai was 75 years old and if she wasn't already past the age of childbearing, she was getting close (when she finally does conceive 14 years later at age 89, Genesis 18:11 and Hebrews 11:11 say she was past the age of childbearing)
 - 3) Finally, by this point it had already been 10 years since God had promised Abram and Sarai descendants; they had been waiting a LONG time but God had not yet made good on that promise
 - b. So, not only was there the emotional weight of being childless and the shame or disgrace that came through the culture, but it appeared she was convinced that God's promise to give Abram a son would not happen through her (16:2a): **“So, Sarai said to Abram, ‘Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children...’”**
2. So, Sarai and Abram resorted to what was normal and customary according to the cultural custom of the day to resolve the affliction (READ 16:1b-4a):
 - a. In the ANE, if a wife couldn't provide her husband with children, it was customary for her to provide one of her maids or servants to her husband as a concubine or second wife
 - b. Any children produced through this relationship were considered to be the children of the first wife (in essence, they were her children by proxy)
 - c. This was the cultural norm and something Abram and Sarai were familiar with, so it was what they did:

- 1) Sarai gave her maid, Hagar, to Abram as a wife “**wife**” (Genesis 25:6 implies she was a concubine)
 - 2) Her hope was that she could “**obtain children through her**” (plural), and thereby fulfill her cultural duty to her husband, remove the shame and guilt of being childless, and potentially help God fulfill His promise to Abram
 - 3) As a result, Abram “**listened to the voice of Sarai**” and “**went in to Hagar**” and she conceived
3. However, before we even finish v. 4 we see the unintended consequences of their actions:
- a. When Hagar realized she was pregnant, she despised Sarai (16:4b): “**her mistress was despised in her sight.**”
 - 1) Other English translations use words like “**dishonored**” and “**looked down upon**” here which is likely what’s intended
 - 2) Proverbs 30:21-23 may hint at what was happening here (READ): a concubine or extra wife who believed she was equal to (or maybe better than) the first wife
 - 3) The Hammurabi’s Code (a Babylonian legal text from around the time of Abraham) actually refers to this as well: “When a [free man] married a [priestess] and she gave a female slave to her husband and she has then borne children, if later that female slave has claimed equality with her mistress because she bore children, her mistress may not sell her; she may mark her with the slave-mark and count her among the slaves”
 - b. Sarai’s response was to blame Abram and treat Hagar so harshly that she fled (RE-READ 16:5-6)
4. Takeaway: human solutions and cultural customs are never a substitute for waiting on God and can lead to unintended consequences:
- a. What we see with Sarai here in these first six verses (and Abram as well) is an opportunity to wait on the Lord to make good on His promise, but rather than wait they tried a shortcut by resorting to a popular custom
 - b. The result was nothing but conflict and sin: Abram fathered a child with someone other than his Biblical wife, Hagar became prideful and despised her mistress, Sarai resented Abram and blamed him for something she initiated, and she even mistreated Hagar and drove her away
 - c. We shouldn’t expect anything different when instead of waiting on the Lord or relying on Him, we resort to doing what the world does or what the world thinks is acceptable

The demise of the Evangelical Church in America according to Tim Alberta

B. The Lord is a God who sees and responds to our affliction (READ Genesis 16:7-14)

1. One of the keys to understanding the intent of these 8 verses (e.g. why the story is included in the Bible) is found in the three names that are given:
 - a. Names are given to Hagar’s child, to God, and to the well
 - b. These three names all have something in common and that they highlight a singular theme and reveal something about God
 - c. This repetition tells us what we are to walk away with from these verses

2. I want to highlight four things we see in these verses which ultimately lead to the revealing of the names:
 - a. The first thing we see in these verses is that the angel of the LORD finds Hagar at a well near the city of Shur (8):
 - 1) This phrase “angel of the LORD” is often a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ, and that is certainly the case here because in v. 13 Hagar equates seeing the angel of the LORD with seeing the LORD Himself
 - 2) Verse 13 also suggests that this event was a physical appearance and not simply a voice from heaven
 - 3) It’s also important to note that the description of the LORD finding her at the spring indicates that He initiated the encounter; He found her at the well, not the other way around
 - b. The second thing we see is that the LORD is genuinely interested in her plight (9): obviously, the LORD’s question is rhetorical because He’s all-knowing; He obviously already knows what’s going on, but His questions reveal a genuine interest in her pain and suffering
 - c. The third thing we see is that the LORD’s response to her isn’t necessarily changing her circumstances (9); He sends her back to Sarai and tells her to submit herself to her authority; so often we seek relief from whatever we struggle with through a change in circumstances, but God often has other plans in mind
 - d. The fourth thing we see is the LORD’s blessing to Hagar in the midst of her struggle (10-12):
 - 1) Hagar would have a son and God would “**greatly multiply**” her descendants through Ishmael so that “**they will be too many to count**” (Hagar is the only woman in the OT who which such a promise is made; the others are all men, Abram, Isaac, and Jacob)
 - 2) Genesis 25:12-18 records the fulfillment of this promise with Ishmael having 12 sons who ultimately populated the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula
 - 3) V. 12 indicates, however, that just as there was conflict between Sarai and Hagar, there would be ongoing conflict between the descendants of Hagar and those of Sarai:
 - a) Ishmael would be “a wild donkey of a man” which suggests a solitary or Bedouin existence
 - b) “**His hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand will be against him**” indicates ongoing conflict with the nations and people around them
 - c) The last phrase, “**he will live to the east of all his brothers**” is difficult and none of the English translations seem to agree with each other on the best way to translate it; some suggest it means to live close to their brothers, others suggest it means to live away from their brothers, while others like the NIV treat it as an idiom meaning to live at odds or conflict with their brothers (I favor this rendering based on the context, as well as Biblical and modern history)
3. So, what we have here is a beautiful picture of God seeing and responding to Hagar’s plight and this leads us to the three names that are given in the passage which all emphasize this theme:
 - a. The first name originates with God Himself in v. 11 and it’s the name He calls on Hagar to give her son: “**Ishmael**”:
 - 1) This comes from two Hebrew words—“**hear**” and “**God**”—and therefore means “**God hears**” or “**God will hear**”

- 2) God even provided the reason for giving him this name: **“Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction”**
 - 3) As we’ve noted many times before, in the Bible for God to hear someone’s plea or hear them in their time of needs means that He acts on their behalf; as it says here He heeds their affliction
 - 4) The reason God told Hagar to name her son Ishmael, God hears, was so that she would always have a reminder of God’s character and how he heeded her in her time of need
- b. The second name originated with Hagar and it’s the name she gave God (RE-READ 16:13): **“You are a God who sees”**:
- 1) The Hebrew phrase she used was “El-roi” which is a combination of the word **“God”** and the noun **“seeing”**, thus **“the God who sees”** or **“the seeing God”**
 - 2) Just like the concept of God hearing above refers to His heeding or acting upon one’s behalf, the same is true of God seeing; He doesn’t just see, He acts
- c. The last name is found in v. 14 and it’s the name given to the well where God met Hagar (14): **“Beer-lahai-roi”**:
- 1) Essentially, this means **“the well belonging to the Living One who has seen me”**
 - 2) Here Hagar emphasizes that God sees (and responds) because He is a living God, which differentiates Him from the false, dead idols of the Canaanites and Egyptians (Hagar’s ethnicity)
 - 3) It is precisely because He is the Living God that He can see and respond to her affliction
4. Takeaway: when we find ourselves struggling to wait on the Lord, we should remind ourselves that we have a living God who sees us:
- a. He may not always respond in the way we expect, or by changing our circumstances, but He does hear our cries and sees our afflictions
 - b. READ Psalm 34

<p>Conclusion (Genesis 16:15-16)</p>

1. Our passage this morning ends with this (READ 16:15-16)
2. Just as God had promised, Hagar bore a son which would ultimately lead to His other promise that Hagar’s descendants would be too many to count
3. I wonder what might have gone through Abram’s and Sarai’s minds when Hagar returned and shared about her encounter with God:
 - a. It was their failure to wait on God and instead rely upon their own wisdom and a man-made custom that created the resulting mess
 - b. Did they feel a sense of rebuke in the reminder that the LORD is a living God who see and hears and responds to those who wait on Him?
 - c. Were they encouraged with Ishmael’s name, a constant reminder that “God hears”?
 - d. It’s hard to say in the short term, but later in Genesis it’s clear that neither Abram or Sarai thought God could give the two of them a child; in fact, when God tells Abram that’s exactly what He was going to do, Abram and Sarai both laugh and Abram tells God to fulfill His promise in Ishmael