



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: A Vibrant Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 2

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Have you ever thought of what it would be like to be able to go back into history and knowing what we know now, go back into history and offer people some wise counsel? For example, what if you could go to the White House that evening when Abraham Lincoln was headed to the theater and say, Mr. President, I just don't think this is a good idea. I really don't think this is a good night to go to the theater. You know, maybe, maybe we should call up some folks and go bowling or something, but ... Or maybe you could go to Pearl Harbor on that Sunday morning and see, you know, I just feel like today we need to be extra careful and let's put our very best people on alert. Let's scramble some planes and let's just be overly sensitive this morning.

Or what if you could even go back to 9/11 and go to a few specific airports and say, you know, I just feel like today we need to be very, very cautious and let's be careful of this and let's watch for that. And we think about what wise counsel you could offer, if you could go back to the past knowing the future.

Think about it in terms of your own life. Wouldn't you love to be able to go back to certain points in your life and certain decisions you made that turned out to be disasters and knowing what you now know go back to that point in your life and choose differently? I mean that would be significant wisdom if you could see how it all ends and make decisions accordingly.

Well, the reality is we do have that made available to us because we do have a God who sees tomorrow as clearly as today and yesterday. We are limited. He is unlimited. We see only the present, but to him the future is as clear as the present. Therefore, He is able to offer you counsel and guidance based on what He knows will happen and where He knows this is all going. God has given us His spirit, His very presence to dwell within us, to guide us, to advise us, to lead us through life because He does see that whole picture.

But to live that way, we do have to be a people of faith. We do have to trust that God knows, and God has a plan and He works things out in His time. Really what has to happen for us to be a people of faith is we must understand what it means to exercise patience. The Bible would use the terminology to wait on God. In Psalm 40 verse one David is the Psalmist in the Hebrew literally reads 'Waiting, I waited'. I've often thought that's just a beautiful poetic way of saying what we sometimes feel. Waiting. I waited. It just seems like it goes on and on and it becomes very, very hard sometimes to wait. As a matter of fact,

if I think of all the things that God calls me to do, and be, there's maybe nothing more difficult than when God just asks me to wait. Just wait. That's not who I am. That's not how I'm wired. I don't want to wait. I run away and I want to fix it. I want to get it done. I want to take charge and God says Bryan just wait.

If I look back in my life and I think about some of the most significant blunders I've made that just made a mess of things, a fairly high percentage of those come down to times when I just got tired of waiting. I just ran out of patience and so I decided I'm going to take charge. I'm going to fix it. I'm going to control. I'm going to manipulate. I'm going to do something to fix this thing, and I just made a mess.

When I read through the Old Testament and I look at the great heroes of faith and you look at some of the disastrous choices they made along the way, in almost every case, it's the same. They just got tired of waiting. They get tired of waiting. They ran out of patience and they made disastrous choices. There's no question that Abram and Sarai, are heroes of faith. They have made incredible choices by faith. They've had their ups and downs. Yes, they did go through their time in Egypt, but by and large, they've made very significant steps of faith. And as a result of that, they've experienced the promise of God. And one of the promises was that they would have a son, and through that son would come to seed through whom the families of the world would be blessed.

Now, this wasn't a young couple that this promise was made to. By this time, Sarai was in her sixties, Abram was in his seventies they had never had children. And now they hear this news that you will have a child and this child will be this promised seed. And through that seed, the families of the earth will be blessed. Can you imagine the excitement? Can you imagine what must have talked about and experienced in those weeks after that promise that they're finally going to have a child? And what is special promise that child would be! And so a month passed and nothing happened, and two months passed and nothing happened, and three months and four months in five months. And you can almost imagine the frustration level at this great excitement, but nothing's happening. And then it was a year and then it was two years, and then it was three years in four and five and six and seven and eight and nine and 10 years. 10 years. And nothing happened. They had to have gone from this incredible excitement and anticipation, just absolute anguish and frustration. Abram must have looked at Sarai at times and thought, this is what stands between me and this promise? And probably Sarai looked at herself and felt the same way. She looked into the eyes of her husband and realized year after year after year, all there was between Abram and this magnificent promise was her, and she just couldn't have a child.

It's into that emotional climate that they get tired of waiting and they make a disastrous choice, a choice so disastrous that tonight when you turn on the nightly news, you will hear the effects of their choice today.

You have a Bible turn to Genesis Chapter 16 and let's see what that choice was. Genesis Chapter 16: 1. *"Now, Sarai, Abram's wife had born him, no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar."* Now let's pretend you don't know the rest of the story. Wouldn't we agree that verse one sounds like trouble, and that's exactly the writer's intent. Sarai could not give Abram a child, but she did

have this young Egyptian maid. Now when you read the word maid, don't think of kind of a European model. This is a slave girl. She's a piece of property. I mentioned when we went through chapter 13 when Abram went down into Egypt and it seemed like he came back and it actually worked out pretty good for him. And I mentioned that there were, would be residual effects of that journey to Egypt. He would experience the rest of his life.

One of them relates to his nephew Lot. While Abram was able to get Lot out of Egypt, he was never able to get Egypt out of Lot. But this is another one of those residuals. There's probably a little doubt that it was while in Egypt they picked up this servant girl by the name of Hagar who would dramatically change the rest of history.

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"So, Sarai said to Abram" ... just before we look at what she said, it's interesting that even though Sarai has been a main player in this story, this is the first time that any recorded dialogue comes out of her mouth. In Hebrew narratives, dialogue is very important. It's always important to notice the first time anything comes out of a main character's mouth. The very first time Abram spoke, they were the the words of doubt. It was a voice of doubt. Now here we are the very first time that anything comes out of the mouth of Sarai, and it is the voice of doubt.

"So, Sarai said to Abram, now, behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go into my maid. Perhaps I shall obtain children through her." Literally the Hebrew reads, perhaps I shall be "sonned" through her. There's no question that Sarai was thinking, this is maybe the way we can have this son of promise. Notice the first thing she says is behold. When you read through this text, one of the things you see is the concept of sight is very important in this particular story. There's a great emphasis on what we see versus what God sees. What we see is limited. What we see are the circumstances. And that's exactly what Sarai says. She looks at Abram and she says, look, this is the way it is. I'm old, I'm barren. For whatever reason, God won't let me have children. You can hear the anger in her voice. Then maybe this is the solution. And from a human standpoint, that does make sense. She had the, the circumstances correct. That's what she could see.

I know this may seem rather bizarre, but it's helpful to know that in the ancient near east, this was not uncommon that if a wife could not have a child, she may use a servant girl to have a child. And then when the child's born, it immediately becomes the wife's and not the slave girls. Another way of saying that is this was a socially acceptable solution. But just because it was socially acceptable doesn't mean it was acceptable to God. But sometimes when we're tired of waiting and our circumstances just look the way they look to Sarai, we start to consider culturally acceptable options that are really not part of God's plan.

Just imagine the emotional frame of mind that Sarai was in. From this excitement of believing she was going to have this son of promise in her old age, to just the anguish of year after year after year, the disappointment and not being able to have a child. And finally, she resigned herself to the fact that this will never happen. She was so excited and now she realized it's never going to happen. And the best I can do is offer my husband my servant girl. I mean, she must have been in unimaginable pain. And what she needed at that moment is for a godly husband to say, honey, I know you're hurting. I know you're in

pain and I know that you mean well with this, but God promised God promised. And he promised it would be us. Let's just wait. But that's not what she heard.

The end of verse two says, *"And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai."* Maybe Abram had been looking at Sarai for years, and maybe there was a building resentment or a feeling that it's never going to happen, and as soon as Sarai offered an alternative, he was ready.

It's interesting how similar this is to Genesis chapter three. In Genesis chapter three the serpent gets Eve to doubt the goodness of God. She takes the initiative, takes the forbidden fruit, gives it to her husband, and he very passively takes it and eats it. Now in Genesis Chapter 16 you have Sarai, doubting the goodness of God. As a matter of fact, she blames God. For whatever reason, it's God's fault. He's prevented this. She takes the initiative and she takes the forbidden fruit and she offers it to Abeam and he passively takes it and he eats.

Verse three, *"And after Abram had lived 10 years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai, took Hagar, the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife, and he went into Hagar and she conceived and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight."* There was no longer a question who the problem was. It was Sarai and as soon as Sarai was out of the way than Hagar became pregnant with Abram's son. And Hagar looked at Sarai, Sarai, and she despised her. There's probably a whole lot of baggage that goes with what's going on there. At this point. Again, what we need is a godly husband to come to Sarai.

Verse Five, *"And Sarai, I said to Abram, may the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the Lord judge between you and me."*

Sarai was angry with God. Now she's venting her frustration and her anger on Abram and saying, this is your fault. You did this to me, and Abram must've looked at her and said, woman, what is your problem? This was your plan, not mine. I'm just kind of doing what you wanted me to do. I thought this would make you happy. And now she's unloading on him. And again, what she needs right now is that husband to say, honey, we may have made a huge mistake. We didn't trust God, and now we've got a problem and everything's coming unraveled. We need to come before God, and we need to get this thing solved. But that's not what she heard.

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Cara: Well, Bryan we've just come to a dramatic point in your series and it's something every married couple can relate to. Sometimes we get ourselves into messes and we don't know how to get out of them. And then the finger pointing starts, right? What can we learn from Abraham and Sarah's example?

Bryan: You know, this is such a heartbreaking part of the story. So, you think about Abraham and Sarai were longing for a child. God makes a promise. Days turn into weeks, turn into months, turn into years

and no child. It is just hard to imagine the pain and the doubt and the confusion. So, they decide to try and solve the problem. That's a huge mistake. And it turns into conflict in the marriage and finger pointing and doubting of the goodness of God. Sounds a little like Genesis three. You know, Adam and Eve doubted the goodness of God sinned. Pretty soon the finger pointing, and blame starts. It just turns into a mess. But it all comes back to this thing we've talked about so often, this determination to be their own God. It's not working. Plan B, we need to be our own God. What's the human solution? And it just creates so much pain and heartache in this story.

Arnie: You mentioned that the first time Sarah's voice was recorded in the Bible, she was speaking words of doubt. And you notice that the story even progresses further where doubt turns to bitterness. There's a lot of fear and frustration going on there.

Bryan: Well, I think there is, I think there's so much pain. It starts to create this doubt. So much time has passed. The biological clock is ticking even by this point. It's unlikely it's ever going to happen. So, it's easy to understand why they turn to plan B. You think about it, Abraham has relations with Hagar and the way the text reads almost immediately she becomes pregnant, which would clearly indicate it was Sarah's fault. She was the problem. And just think about the pain and the heartache, the anger that's stirring up inside of her. I just find this a really heartbreaking story trying to imagine the pain all these players are in.

Cara: Bryan, your first teaching on this program was from Genesis, and you talked about how Satan convinced Eve that God wasn't good after all. It seems like this ploy might've been working on Sarai as well.

Bryan: Yeah, it's exactly the same thing. You begin to doubt the goodness of God, and I mean again, you go from the excitement - believing God tells the truth - to we're 10 years down road and nothing has happened. Again, you think about how much pain that must have caused, you know, seeing lots of other women get pregnant and have children and you're not having your child. So then you start to doubt the goodness of God and then it's just a series of bad decision from there. It's a lot like our study in James. It's conceived in the mind. Then it gives birth to the action and brings forth heartache.

Cara: If we're under trial, is that a perfect time for temptation to rear its ugly head?

Bryan: Yeah, I think it certainly can be. Especially if we've bought into a, let's make a deal theology and I've been a really good boy and everything's falling apart and I'm going through a trial and now I feel like God didn't keep his promise. God's not good. God's not faithful. I can't trust Him. You can hear it in the language - I'm really in a very vulnerable place in my life. If I'm going to trust Him to meet a legitimate need, but I'm feeling like I can't trust Him - He let me down -- He's not going to be there for me. Then it's very common that I'll be my own God and I'll meet this need myself.