



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

**By Pastor Bryan Clark**

**Message Title: Faith and Patience pt. 2**

**Release Date: Wednesday, 8/07/19**

*"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."*

Just imagine the emotional frame of mind that Sarai was in, 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.

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'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 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. And again, what she needs right now is a husband to say, honey, we may have made a huge mistake. We need to come before God, and we need to get this thing solved. But that's not what she heard.

Verse six. *"But Abram said to Sarai, behold, your maid is in your power, do to her what is good in your sight. So, Sarai treated her harshly and she fled from her presence."* That word harshly could be translated, abused. It's a pretty strong term. Abram really wasn't a lot of help. And he said, listen, this is your maid, you deal with it. Do whatever you want to her. And so, she unloaded on Hagar. She's angry with God. She's angry at her husband and now she's venting on this little servant girl that frankly had no choice in any of this.

Now imagine to be this young maid in a foreign country and now she is experiencing such abuse and harassment that as a young pregnant girl, she just leaves and begins to head home. She must have been incredibly frightened. If you don't know the rest of the story, one of the questions we would ask at this

point is what's going to happen? There's no question the main characters of the story are Abram and Sarai. I mean, they're really the main characters of this whole drama. So, at this point, is Hagar just kind of a casualty of their lack of faith? And poor Hagar and she drifts into the wilderness.

Verse seven, *"Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness by the spring on the way to Shur."* So, she was headed home. She had a long, difficult journey as a single pregnant woman, but she had nowhere else to go. I'm sure frightened and all alone, she was headed home.

But it was there that the angel of the Lord found her. It isn't an angel of the Lord. It's THE angel of the Lord. Lord: Capital L. O. R. D. That's Yahweh Jehovah. We believe the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is God taking on human form on various occasions throughout the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, most scholars think it was the second member of the Trinity, God the Son who was appearing in human form before He became flesh and dwelt among us. Very significant appearing. But it's worth noting, this is the first time in all of human history that it's recorded that God became flesh and met face to face with someone. The first time the angel of the Lord has appeared, and it wasn't to Noah, it wasn't to Abram, yet. The very first time was to a seemingly insignificant pregnant Egyptian slave girl who was frightened and alone.

Have you ever thought about how close Hagar came to this magnificent promise? I mean, she was right there. She was in Abram's home. She was headed in a direction with Abram and family, where they together would experience this magnificent promise of God. For 10 years, Abram and Sarai must have talked about their God and who He is, and why they were on this journey. But now what they had taught her is this God is powerless. This God can't come through in the end, and she must've fled with all kinds of mixed up ideas and what she was doing is heading back to Egypt. Egypt represents the system of this world, the system apart from God. She came that close to the promise, but because of Abram and Sarai's lack of faith, she was now going back to Egypt and she would be assimilated into that pagan culture and she would never come out again. Except, God came looking for her!

----

This story is very much like the story of the lost sheep in the New Testament where God went looking. I don't know if you ever struggle with whether or not God cares about you, whether you feel like maybe you're just so insignificant God could never really care. God could never really notice. You know, I understand God with the Noah's and God with the Abraham's and God with the Moses's, but that's not me. That's not me. I'm more like the insignificant little pregnant Egyptian slave girl. What would God want with me? It is interesting that God shows up in human form to rescue this little girl and bring her home and so he does.

Verse Eight, *"And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid [ notice in verse three she was given to be Abram's wife, but God in a sense is saying, I'm not buying that. You're still Sarai's maid] and he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going? And she said, I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai. Then the angel of the Lord said to her, return to your mistress and submit yourself to her authority. Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count. The angel of the Lord said to her further, behold you are with child and you shall bear a son and you shall call his name Ishmael because the Lord has given heed to your affliction."*

The angel of the Lord God Himself comes before Hagar and says, I want you to go back. I want you to go back home. In a sense of what He says is I'll take care of it. I just want you to go back and I want you to

submit to this authority, and I want you to know you're going to have more descendants than you can even begin to count. And you're going to have a son. And I want you to name the son, "God Hears". That's what the name Ishmael means. It means God hears because he said God has heard your anguish and he's going to take care of you.

Isn't that what this whole story has been about? Abram and Sarai in their anguish, convinced themselves God doesn't hear. God doesn't hear, God doesn't care, God isn't doing anything. Therefore, we need to fix it. We need to take charge. And so, Hagar took off and she's convinced that, whoever this God is, he doesn't hear. He doesn't care. And, and so God says, I want you to name your son, "God Hears". Don't ever forget that.

Verse 12, *"And he will be a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand will be against him and he will live to the east of all his brothers."* Probably not a description every mother wants to hear of her son. Describing him as being independent, being a very stubborn and being in conflict as a way of life, not just in conflict, but in conflict with his brothers.

Tonight, when you get home and you turn on the nightly news, that's what you'll hear. Ishmael was the father of the Arab people and they would forever be in conflict with their brothers, the Jews. They can sign a hundred peace treaties in the Middle East, but there won't be peace because the problem is not geographical. The problem is theological, and it goes back to Genesis 16 and God said, this is the way it's going to be. It is a constant reminder of Abram and Sarai's choice.

We do have to be a little bit careful with that though. It's not to say that every Jew hates every Arab and every Arab hates every Jew. We have Jews in this church and we have Arabs in this church and through the life changing power of the Gospel they love each other, but what it is saying is as nations, as a people, they will constantly be in conflict and history certainly bears that out.

Verse 13, *"Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, thou art a God who sees."* In the Hebrew, it's the name El Roi, R-O-I, and it means you are a God who sees. You're a God who hears. You're a God who sees. For she said, I have even remained alive here, after seeing Him. It was believed that if you saw God face to face, you could not live and that's true. If you saw God in all His glory, you couldn't, but she did see God face to face and she lived and she's realizing this was an incredible moment that she's experiencing.

Verse 14, *"Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi. Behold it is between Kadesh and Bered."* The name of the well means the well of the living One who sees me. From now on every time somebody came to the well, they would remember this is the well of the living One who sees me. Again, you remember the big emphasis in this text on sight. If I live by sight and I make my choices based on my circumstances, I'm going to make some bad choices. But there is a God who sees the beginning from the end, sees the big picture, He sees, He hears, we trust Him.

Verses 15 and 16 imply that Hagar went back home, explained what had happened to Abram and Sarai. They understood the error of their ways and everybody got back on track. So, Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. And Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

Hagar went back. Hagar had his son and as God had directed, they named him "God Hears". So that every time they invited Ishmael to supper, they said, "God Hears". Every time they called his name, they were reminded, God hears. Let us never again make such a disastrous choice because we believe God no

longer hears our prayers. Why would that be important? Because after Ishmael was born, another month passed and Sarai was not pregnant, and then two months and then three months and then a year and then two years, and then three years, and four years, and five years, and six years, and seven years, and eight years, and nine years, and 10 years, 11 years, and 12 years and 13 years beyond when Ishmael was born, Abram and Sarai continued to live with no son of promise. And every time they began to feel the anguish of that, they needed to remember Ishmael. God hears, God hears, God knows. We've just got to wait. We've just got to wait. Let's not make another choice like we did before.

For some of you, that's right where you're at. You would say with the Psalmist, that's what I feel, waiting, I waited. I just keep praying. I just keep asking. It feels like God doesn't hear. It feels like God doesn't see. I'm getting tired of waiting and maybe some of you were thinking about taking charge. I'm going to figure out some way to take charge. I'm going to fix this. I'm going to control it. I'm going to manipulate it. I'm going to take a socially acceptable way to resolve this. When you know God has said, just wait for me. Just wait. Tonight, when you turn on the nightly news and you hear of the conflict in the Middle East, that should send the message that says, God hears. God hears, don't do that. Don't make that disastrous choice. Just wait. Just wait. You can never be a person of faith if you don't understand what it means to wait on God.

----

Arnie: "Just wait." Bryan, those are the two killer, hardest words for me ever to deal with. I'm like double parked, always on the move and always trying to make things happen. But honestly, I can look back in my life and see how important it is not to get ahead of God in anything you do.

Bryan: Yeah, it is so hard. And I think those of us wired up to be leaders, it's really hard just to wait. You know, Psalm 40:1 says "waiting, I waited." I love the Hebrew there because we find ourselves in that situation all too often. Sometimes it's just so painful to wait. But you know, it's so common in these stories. We've talked about it. Noah had to wait. Abram and Sarai had to wait. Isaac had to wait. Jacob had to wait. Joseph had to wait. David had to wait. Hannah had to wait. It's just part of the story.

Cara: So, we usually define waiting as sitting around then. But the Bible's different than that waiting.

Bryan: Yeah. So, I don't like that passive definition. Sometimes you hear people say, let go and let God, I don't like that phrase because I don't think we're called to be passive. So, when I'm waiting, I'm still active. I'm praying, I'm trusting, I'm learning, I'm growing, I'm changing. It's like every day I wait. I still want to know what does God want from me today? I want to keep learning and growing and changing. So, it's still active. I'm just waiting on God.

Arnie: That's so tough. I mean, I even have this thing: If you snooze, you lose. So Bryan, why does God require us to wait? I mean, really, what does it accomplish?

Bryan: Yeah, so go back to, your saying, I agree -If you snooze, you lose. And that's why it's not passive. He's not asking you to snooze. He's asking you to pray, to learn, to grow, to trust. Those are all active verbs. It's not possible to answer that question definitively, but I think a lot of it's just to grow our dependence on Him, to learn to trust Him. With all these great stories, there's something far more significant coming. So, they're having to learn how to trust God, how to surrender to God. It's like they're in leadership school and they're going to need to know this for what's to come. I think also

sometimes there's reasons we don't know. We don't know what God's up to. We don't know why He's asking us to wait, but just because we don't know doesn't mean there aren't good reasons. In this story, and it's pretty common in the Old Testament, it's creating an environment where everyone will know God did this. It's not that Abram and Sarai who did this, God did this. So, you have to wait until physically they were beyond any human possibility to have a child, for everyone to know God did this. So how could Sarai have understood that? She couldn't, but that is what God was up to.

Cara: Could it be okay theology-wise then to say, I'm sitting here waiting, I've been praying scripture, feeding me, that it's potentially because there's something up around the bend that God knows about. [Absolutely. Yes].

The idea that God hears and sees, and He comes looking for us is pretty comforting. It also seems to show us the importance of seeing the people around us and listening to them the way Jesus would.

Bryan: Yeah. So again, this Hagar story is just so painful. You think about this little Egyptian girl, she comes up with Abram after his visit Egypt. She doesn't have any say in this matter. She can't say no. She gets pregnant really through no fault of her own. And then Sarai takes out her anger. So, then she sent away, I mean Abram should have stepped up and should have done something, but he lets Sarai have her way. She's hurt, she's angry. So, here's this little Egyptian girl, she's pregnant and she's traveling all the way back to Egypt. And there's this reminder that there's always a story behind the story and we often don't know what's going on. We don't know what's been done to whom. And it's like we need to have more compassion and understanding. Maybe what we're seeing is just a little bit of the story. Maybe there's a whole lot more to the story that would raise some compassion and kindness in us.

Arnie: So, to me it still seems kind of bizarre. Can you talk to me about what Sarai and Hagar represent?

Bryan: Yeah, so, great question, and I'm going to defer to Paul on that. So, he uses this story in Galatians chapter 4 and says that Hagar represents the old covenant and what can be done in the flesh, meaning through human effort. And Sarai represents the new covenant and what will require a fulfillment of the promise. So, one is by the flesh, one is by the spirit. So, the real question in Galatians 4 is not, "Who's your father?", which is typically how the Jews thought of it, but, "Who's your mother?". Spiritually, are you coming from Hagar - religion of the flesh? Or are you coming from Sarai - salvation by grace through faith?