

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 16

LET'S RECAP THE JOURNEY WE HAVE BEEN ON WITH ABRAM SINCE WE FIRST MET HIM IN GENESIS 11:26. GOD HAS CALLED HIM TO LEAVE HIS COUNTRY AND HIS FATHER'S HOUSE AND JOURNEY TOWARDS A LAND GOD WOULD SHOW HIM. ALONG WITH THIS CALL CAME GOD'S PROMISE TO BLESS ABRAM AND SHOW TREMENDOUS FAVOR TO HIM. ABRAM BELIEVES GOD AND "WENT" (OUT OF HIS COUNTRY TOWARDS THIS NEW LAND). GOD IS GOOD TO ABRAM, CARING FOR HIM AND LEADING HIM. AS THEIR RELATIONSHIP GROWS, GOD EXPANDS UPON HIS INITIAL PROMISE TO ABRAM. HE SPECIFIES THE LAND HE IS GIVING (CANAAN AND THE SURROUNDING REGIONS) AND THAT HE WILL CAUSE ABRAM TO HAVE BIOLOGICAL DESCENDANTS COMPARABLE TO THE NUMBER OF SAND GRANULES AND STARS IN THE SKY.

BUT ONE THING THAT ISN'T LISTED ABOVE IS THAT ABRAM IS OLD AND HIS WIFE SARAI IS BARREN. IN OTHER WORDS - NOT ONLY DO THEY HAVE NO CHILDREN, THEIR PHYSICAL ABILITY TO HAVE CHILDREN DECREASES DAY BY DAY AND YEAR BY YEAR. IN GENESIS 15 WE SAW ABRAM GO TO THE LORD WITH THAT INFORMATION TO GET SOME CLARITY ON GOD'S PROMISE. HE ASKED GOD "HOW CAN THIS BE SINCE YOU HAVE GIVEN ME NO OFFSPRING?" AND THE LORD ANSWERS "DON'T WORRY, I'M AT WORK." THE END OF CHAPTER 15 SEEMS TO END PEACEABLY WITH GOD SHOWING ABRAM SOME THINGS THAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE AND CONFIRMING HIS COVENANTAL WORD TO HIM AS THE FIRE PASSES BETWEEN THE DIVIDED ANIMALS (GENESIS 15:17-18). NOW ABRAM AND SARAI WILL SIMPLY FAITHFULLY WAIT FOR GOD'S WORD TO BE FULFILLED.

EXCEPT THERE'S ONE PROBLEM. THAT'S HARDER THAN IT SOUNDS. AND SO WE READ ON.

GENESIS 16:1-4 - SARAI'S BRIGHT IDEA

SARAI SUGGESTS ABRAM HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH HER MAIDSERVANT, HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN. SARAI HAS CONCLUDED THAT THE LORD HAS SHUT HER WOMB AND FOR HER AND ABRAM TO "OBTAIN CHILDREN" PERHAPS IT COULD HAVE BEEN THROUGH HAGAR. ABRAM AGREES AND HAGAR CONCEIVES. WHEN HAGAR CONCEIVES, SHE BEGINS TO TREAT SARAI WITH CONTEMPT. THE MAID CAN HAVE ABRAM'S BABY, BUT THE OLD LADY CAN'T. OH BOY.

Q - WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS WHOLE IDEA? WHAT DO YOU THINK MOTIVATED THIS IN SARAI AND ABRAM?

THIS BEGINS TO REVEAL THE GREAT LESSON FOR US FROM THIS CHAPTER. SARAI IS TRYING TO BRING ABOUT THE WORD OF THE LORD BY HER OWN WORKS. "THE LORD HAS PREVENTED ME FROM BEARING CHILDREN...PERHAPS I WILL OBTAIN CHILDREN THROUGH HER..." IT'S ALMOST LIKE SARAI IS THINKING SHE CAN BRING ABOUT GOD'S PURPOSES BY HER PLANS. YOU CAN JUST IMAGINE WHEN HAGAR HAS ISHMAEL THAT SARAI WAS TEMPTED TO THINK - "WELL THERE YOU GO, THE FIRST SON OF ABRAM! NOW WE CAN GET ON WITH THIS WHOLE SAND OF THE SEASHORE THING..."

IT'S TRUE THAT WE, BY OUR ACTIONS, OFTEN ARE INVOLVED IN BRINGING GOD'S WILL TO PASS, BUT THIS RECORD IS NOT AN EXAMPLE OF THAT. PERHAPS SARAI WAS MOTIVATED BY FEELING BAD THAT SHE COULDN'T BE THE WIFE/MOTHER ABRAM NEEDED OR WANTED. PERHAPS SHE FELT LIKE HER BARRENNESS WAS THE REASON GOD'S PROMISE HADN'T COME TO PASS YET - LIKE IT WAS HER FAULT. MAYBE SHE EVEN MADE COMMENTS ABOUT THAT TO ABRAM. MAYBE ABRAM HAD MADE COMMENTS TO HER ABOUT THAT. CLEARLY ABRAM WAS NOT THE REASON THEY COULDN'T HAVE CHILDREN BECAUSE HE HAS NO PROBLEM THROUGH HAGAR. IT'S INTERESTING TO CONSIDER THE EMOTIONAL MOTIVATION FOR SARAI'S IDEA.

"THE MORE CLEARLY GOD'S PROMISES WERE SPELT OUT TO ABRAM, THE MORE CLEARLY SARAI SAW HERSELF AS A FAILURE...EACH PASSING YEAR DIMINISHED HER HOPES OF BECOMING A MOTHER AND OF GIVING TO ABRAM THE SON OF THE PROMISE. SHE SAW NO ANSWER TO HER PRAYERS AND MAY EASILY HAVE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT SHE HAD FOR SOME REASON FORFEITED THE LORD'S FAVOR. IF SO, SHE WAS WRONG. THE VERY (OPPOSITE) WAS TRUE, BUT REASON, IN CONFLICT WITH FAITH, FOR THE TIME BEING WON THE DAY" (JOYCE BALDWIN, "THE MESSAGE OF GENESIS 12-50", PAGE 57)

AS FOR ABRAM'S PART IN THIS, HE SEEMS TO BE LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF HIS WIFE AND NOT CHECKING IN WITH THE VOICE OF THE LORD. WE HAVE MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY THAT ABRAM AND SARAI REPRESENT A NEW ADAM AND EVE OF SORTS, USED BY GOD IN HIS REDEMPTION FOR THE WORLD. IN THIS CASE WE SEE THAT REPRESENTED IN THE NEGATIVE QUALITIES OF ADAM AND EVE. SARAI (EVE) HAS AN IDEA THAT IS REALLY A TEMPTATION TO DO WRONG AND ABRAM (ADAM) JUST GOES ALONG WITH IT WHEN HIS WIFE HANDS IT OVER TO HIM. GENESIS 16:2 SAYS "ABRAM LISTENED TO THE VOICE (LITERALLY MEANING OBEYED) OF SARAI.

GENESIS 16:5-6 - HAGAR GOES AWAY

SARAI, THE LADY OF THE HOUSE (TENT?) WILL NOT PUT UP WITH HER SERVANT TREATING HER POORLY, REGARDLESS OF THE BACKSTORY. SARAI COMPLAINS TO ABRAM THAT SOMEHOW THIS IS ALL HIS FAULT AND THAT THE LORD WILL BRING TO LIGHT WHO'S REALLY WRONG IN THIS SITUATION. ABRAM RESPONDS THAT HAGAR IS SARAI'S SERVANT AND SHE CAN DO WHATEVER SHE WANTS WITH HER. SARAI THEN BEGINS TO TREAT PREGNANT HAGAR POORLY AND HAGAR RUNS AWAY.

SIN LEADS TO MORE SIN WHICH LEADS TO MORE SIN. NO ONE IS TAKING RESPONSIBILITY. NO ONE IS ADMITTING FAULT OR WRONGDOING. THERE IS BLAME BEING PASSED AROUND LIKE A HOT POTATO. SUCH IS THE HUMAN TENDENCY FAR TOO OFTEN.

GENESIS 16:7-14 - GOD CHASES AFTER THE RUNAWAY

DID YOU EXPECT THIS? HAGAR RUNS AWAY AND AN ANGEL OF THE LORD IS SENT TO FIND HER. THE ANGEL APPEALS TO HAGAR TO RETURN TO SARAI AND TELLS HER TO "SUBMIT TO HER AUTHORITY" WITH THE IMPLICATION OF "STOP BEING A JERK TO HER TOO". AND THEN THE ANGEL SPEAKS THE WORD OF THE LORD OVER HAGAR'S LIFE AND HER CHILD.

GENESIS 16:10-12 (NLT) - THEN HE ADDED, "I WILL GIVE YOU MORE DESCENDANTS THAN YOU CAN COUNT." 11 AND THE ANGEL ALSO SAID, "YOU ARE NOW PREGNANT AND WILL GIVE BIRTH TO A SON. YOU ARE TO NAME HIM ISHMAEL (WHICH MEANS 'GOD HEARS'), FOR THE LORD HAS HEARD YOUR CRY OF DISTRESS. 12 THIS SON OF YOURS WILL BE A WILD MAN, AS UNTAMED AS A WILD DONKEY! HE WILL RAISE HIS FIST AGAINST EVERYONE, AND EVERYONE WILL BE AGAINST HIM. YES, HE WILL LIVE IN OPEN HOSTILITY AGAINST ALL HIS RELATIVES."

ISHMAEL, THOUGH NOT THE GOD-INTENDED ONE, IS A CHILD OF ABRAM. AND AS A RESULT, THE BLESSING OF ABRAM IS UPON HIM. THE ANGEL TELLS HAGAR THAT THROUGH HER SON SHE WILL BE A GREAT MULTITUDE OF DESCENDANTS. ISHMAEL WILL BE AN INTERESTING FELLOW, A WILD-DONKEY OF A MAN (CP. KJV), VERY CONTENTIOUS AND HE WILL LIVE TO THE EAST OF HIS BROTHERS (PRESUMABLY ABRAM'S OTHER CHILDREN).

GOD'S BLESSING TO ABRAM IS SO SURE THAT IT EVEN SUPERCEDES ABRAM'S OWN BEHAVIOR. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY OF HAGAR'S FLEEING GOD TOOK NOTICE OF HER AFFLICTION. HAGAR RESPONDS BY RETURNING TO ABRAM AND SARAI AND "CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD" A PHRASE USED IN GENESIS TO DESCRIBE SOMEONE WORSHIPPING YAHWEH. SHE WILL NAME HER SON "ISHMAEL" WHICH MEANS "GOD HEARS". AND SHE RENAMES THE PLACE THIS HAPPENED HEBREW PHRASE WHICH MEANS "THE WELL OF THE LIVING ONE WHO SEES ME." WOW. HAGAR'S HEART HAS CHANGED AND THROUGH THIS WE SEE INTO THE HEART OF THE AMAZING GOD.

GENESIS 16:16-15 - ISHMAEL IS BORN

HAGAR WILL GIVE BIRTH TO HER SON AND ABRAM WILL CALL HIS NAME "ISHMAEL". ABRAM, IS NOW 86 YEARS OLD. IT HAS BEEN 11 YEARS SINCE GOD FIRST CALLED HIM (GENESIS 12:4).

WE DON'T LEARN THIS FROM GENESIS 16 BUT BIBLICAL HISTORY WILL RECORD ISHMAEL BECOMING THE FATHER OF A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS JUST AS THE ANGEL HAD SAID. IN FACT, THE LINE OF ISHMAEL WILL INCLUDE SOME OF NATIONS THAT WERE OFTEN ADVERSARIES OF THE LATER NATION OF ISRAEL (CP PSALM 83:6). SOME SCHOLARS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF MODERN HISTORY, THE NATIONS OF ISHMAEL BECAME THE PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM ARAB NATIONS. ONE LIKELY KNOWS THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF THOSE NATIONS AND PEOPLES. AND TO THINK THESE RIPPLE EFFECTS WERE ALL SET IN MOTION BY THE SMALL PEBBLE OF SARAI AND ABRAM'S IMPROVISED WITH HAGAR AND BIRTH OF ISHMAEL.

IT SEEMS THAT ONE OF THE GREATEST LESSONS OF GENESIS 16 IS THE FOOLISHNESS OF IMPROVISING. ABRAM AND SARAI *SHOULD HAVE* WAITED FOR THE LORD TO FULFILL HIS WORD - REGARDLESS OF HOW LONG IT MAY HAVE TAKEN. BUT AS WE SAID IN THE OPEN, WAITING CAN BE EASIER SAID THAN DONE. WE GET RESTLESS EASILY. TO THINK IT TOOK 11 YEARS FOR THEM TO DEVISE THIS PLAN "B" IS REMARKABLE CONSIDERING WE PROBABLY WOULD HAVE TROUBLE WAITING 11 DAYS.

BEFORE WE REMARK AT HOW WEAK IN FAITH ABRAM AND SARAI WERE, WE SHOULD PUT OURSELVES IN THEIR SHOES. 11 YEARS OF WAITING. 11 YEARS OF ONLY ONE PINK LINE ON THE PREGNANCY TEST RESULTS. 11 YEARS OF WONDERING IF YOU'RE THE PROBLEM. 11 YEARS OF WONDERING IF YOU REALLY HEARD GOD RIGHT. 11 YEARS OF LOOKING AT YOUR SERVANTS AND RELATIVES CONCEIVING AND RAISING THEIR CHILDREN. 11 YEARS DEEPER INTO OLD AGE.

THINK ABOUT WHERE YOU WERE 11 YEARS AGO. THINK ABOUT HOW MUCH HAS TRANSPIRED SINCE THEN. AT PRESENT WRITING, 11 YEARS AGO I HAD NO CHILDREN, MY IN-LAWS WERE NOT GRANDPARENTS. 11 YEARS AGO I WAS A YOUTH PASTOR. 11 YEARS AGO MOST OF THE PEOPLE IN THIS ROOM DIDN'T KNOW EACH OTHER. 11 YEARS AGO, THIS ROOM WAS A DECK.

11 YEARS IS A LONG TIME AND WAITING IS HARD.

BUT HERE IS THE REAL TEMPTATION THAT WE ALL FACE WHEN IT COMES TO WAITING. WE ARE TEMPTED TO SETTLE FOR OR IMPROVISE TO CREATE SITUATIONS THAT ARE *VERY CLOSE* TO WHAT GOD HAS PROMISED BUT NOT THE SAME AS WHAT GOD HAD PROMISED. THAT'S WHAT SARAI AND ABRAM DID. THEY CREATED SOMETHING THAT SEEMED *REALLY CLOSE* TO WHAT GOD HAD PROMISED - A SON, AN HEIR, A DESCENDANT! BUT THEY CREATED IT THEMSELVES RATHER THAN WAITING FOR GOD TO BRING IT TO PASS. AND AS RESULT, THE VERY THING THEY THOUGHT WAS SO CLOSE TO WHAT GOD HAD SAID WILL END UP CAUSING TROUBLE FOR THEIR FUTURE.

SARAI AND ABRAM SETTLED FOR WHAT THEY COULD DO TO BRING ABOUT RESULTS THAT WERE LESS THAN GOD'S BEST AND WHAT GOD HAD PROMISED. AND WE DO THE SAME THING.

INSTEAD OF PRESSING IN AND FIGHTING IN PRAYER FOR GODLY MARRIAGES, WE SETTLED FOR A FEW WEEKS OF NOT HAVING MAJOR BLOW-OUTS AND SO WE STOP PRAYING. INSTEAD OF TRUSTING GOD TO WORK IN HEARTS AND LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN OR LOVED ONES WHO DO NOT KNOW CHRIST, WE SETTLED FOR THEM BEING FRIENDLY WITH US OR COMING TO CHURCH EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE AND SO WE STOP PLEADING FOR THEM AT THE ALTAR. INSTEAD OF FULL AND TRUE HEART TRANSFORMATION IN OUR LIFE THAT INVOLVES HARD WORK AND HONESTY AND HUMILITY THAT SOMETIMES BRINGS UP PAIN, WE SETTLE TO JUST SUPPRESS THINGS AND TRY HARD TO IGNORE THINGS THAT ARE HARMING US AND OTHERS. WE ACCEPT LESS THAN GOD'S BEST. WHY?!

BECAUSE WAITING IS HARD.

WHAT WE NEED TO REMEMBER AGAIN FROM THIS RECORD AND FOR OUR OWN LIVES IS THAT TEMPORARY SATISFACTION THAT COMES FROM SETTLING AND IMPROVISING AND QUITTING BEFORE GOD IS DONE WORKING PALES IN COMPARISON TO GOD COMPLETING HIS WORK IN AND AROUND AND THROUGH AND FOR US. THE JOY ABRAM AND SARAI WILL RECEIVE WHEN THEIR OWN SON IS BORN IS EMPHATICALLY MORE THAN THE EMOTIONAL CHAOS OF THIS CHAPTER. GODLY MARRIAGES ARE WAY BETTER THAN GOOD-ENOUGH MARRIAGES. BORN AGAIN FRIENDS AND CHILDREN ARE WAY BETTER THAN FAKE SMILES AND SURFACE-LEVEL RELATIONSHIPS. HOLY-SPIRIT TRANSFORMED HEARTS AND LIVES AND BEHAVIORS ARE WAY BETTER THAN SETTLING TO JUST MAKE PEACE WITH THE DYSFUNCTION IN YOUR LIFE.

SO YES, WAITING IS HARD. BUT WAITING IS WORTH IT. DON'T SETTLE FOR CLOSE TO WHAT GOD SAID, PRESS IN AND FAITHFULLY WAIT FOR WHAT GOD HAS PROMISED TO COME TO PASS. DON'T ACCEPT CLOSE ENOUGH, CLAIM GOD'S BEST FOR YOU. GOD LOVES YOU AND HE HAS PLANS AND PROMISES FOR YOUR LIFE THAT ARE GREATER THAN ANYTHING YOU COULD IMAGINE OR PLAN FOR YOURSELF. IT'S WORTH THE WAIT.