

## *The Pain of Impatience and Submission of the Flesh* **16:1-16**

Abraham was a man of faith. We have called him the *father of faith* because he is so often referred to as a Biblical example of a man of faith (e.g. Romans 4; Hebrews 11). As we look at the life of this man of faith we learn how God builds faith. Biblical saving faith has only God as its object. The world teaches us to put faith in ourselves or faith in others, but doing so is only a setup for disappointment. The only One reliable enough and properly suited for us to put our faith in is God. You can't live without putting some trust in people or yourself, but such trust should always be tempered and supported by the greater faith we have in God. God is always seeking to have our faith in Him grow. In chapter sixteen the LORD teaches Abram the pain of impatiently acting apart from faith in God.

God is our only reliable and faithful Object of faith. God alone is totally capable in all situations. There is nothing too hard for Him to accomplish (Jeremiah 32:17). He demonstrates His power, reliability and capability by bringing us through seemingly impossible situations. In Genesis 16 Abram is 86 and Sarai was 75 years old. They were both well past childbearing years. Abram and Sarai remembered the promise of God to give them an offspring from their own bodies (15:4-5). But they could see and feel that they were getting old and their bodies were breaking down. God was teaching them to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith building involves patience. As they saw the aging process progress, they felt the promise of God slipping away and they started to think of ways they could *help* God fulfill His promise.

There is a popular worldly saying that is often wrongly attributed to God. That saying is, "God helps those who help themselves." That is a faith killing saying and found nowhere in the word of God. In fact, God often withholds His help from those who try to help themselves. God waits until those who rely on their own strength exhaust themselves and come to the realization that *you can't help God, your efforts to do so only complicate and bring pain to the situation, and your faith must rest in God alone.* This is not to say that we should not live out or act on our faith. We certainly should "walk by faith" (see also James 2). But our actions and "walk" need to be directed by God. If God has not given us clear instruction then it is likely He wants us to wait while *He* works on our behalf.

Waiting requires patience. When we try to help God by impatiently acting, (even with good intentions) we are exposing our attitude of impatience. When we act impatiently we are saying, "God isn't working as fast as I think He should. He must be waiting for me to do *my part* first before He does His part." This is only a rationalized version of "God helps those who help themselves." True mature faith knows that if God promises something, He will deliver. When we act impatiently it only leads to complications, chaos and painful consequences. Sometimes those consequences are a long lasting reminder that it would have been better to walk by faith than walk in our flesh. That is exactly what we see in this portion of Genesis.

### **Impatiently Turning to the World**

## Genesis 16:1-2

**Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. Genesis**

**<sup>2</sup> So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.**

Things weren't proceeding like Sarai expected. Yes, God had promised that she and Abram would have their own offspring, but nothing was happening. God was taking so long. Evidently she and Abram were trying to have children, but nothing was happening. As her biological clock ticked away, she grew impatient. Impatience is not an uncommon reaction to God's calling us to wait. Naaman got impatient with the process prescribed by Elisha for his healing (2 Kings 5:11-12). Jonah grew impatient with God's patience to wait for the sinful Assyrians to repent (Jonah 4:6, 9). The disciples of Jesus grew impatient at the begging of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:23). James and John were impatient with those who would not receive Jesus (Luke 9:54). Martha grew impatient when Jesus did not pay attention to all her hard work (Luke 10:40). In all of these examples God was indeed at work and had a plan to do a wondrous thing (Psalm 72:18). *Impatience is a sign of spiritual immaturity. Patience is required by God of His people in the process of fulfilling His plan and building the faith of His servants.*

What would Sarai do? Unfortunately, Abram's previous lapse of faith in going down to Egypt (12:10-20) now created a seedbed for temptation and sin. A slave girl acquired in Egypt (which is a type of the world) would serve Sarai's impatient purposes. Sarai blamed the LORD for her condition (16:2a). Her impatience to get her will done caused her to blame God and do things her way. It's as though she said, "It's God's fault I can't have any children. If He's not going to come through on His promise, then I'll do things my way and get what I want." It's always wrong and dangerous to blame God and act in impatient impulse. No good ever comes from that attitude and motive for acting. The impatience of Sarai coupled with the spineless heeding of her plan by Abram led to a plan that was outside the will of God and that would lead to millennia of conflict and pain.

An interesting side note here is that while we find polygamous relationships in the Bible, God does not endorse them. He overlooks such things during times of ignorance (Acts 17:30). But polygamy was never a part of God's best plan. *There were no happy polygamous marriages in the Bible. God's plan for marriage is one man with one woman (2:18, 24).* Marriage is intended by God to be for life because it was intended to be a beautiful illustration of God's faithful and patiently loving relationship with His people (Ephesians 5:21-33). Marriage is intended by God to be a life commitment, even during difficult and hard times (see the book of Hosea).

### The Consequence of Impatience

## Genesis 16:3-6

**<sup>3</sup> Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. <sup>4</sup> So**

**he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.**

**<sup>5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, “My wrong *be* upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me.”**

**<sup>6</sup> So Abram said to Sarai, “Indeed your maid *is* in your hand; do to her as you please.” And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.**

Abram should have known better but he was not walking in faith in God. Because of this he went along with Sara’s plan and had sexual relations with Hagar. Hagar conceived. Hagar was from Egypt, a type of the world. And the impact of these fleshly ways had on her should be noted. It says, “And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes” (16:3-4). Hagar grew proud and haughty. She probably thought, “Humph, Sarai is my mistress and rules over me, but she is not even able to conceive. God’s hand is on me, not her. I should have her position.” When godly people act in their flesh around the unsaved inhabitants of this world, it drives them even further from God.

Sarai soon discovered that her plan was flawed. Now not only did she know for sure that their lack of a son was due to her infertility problems and not Abram’s, but now she had a proud slave that threw this reality in her face. Sarai experienced the consequence of her fleshly plan, but it did not drive her to repent. Instead, she blamed Abram who must have felt he was in a no win situation by this time (16:5). Abram washed his hands of the matter and threw all the parts of this impatient fleshly plan back into the lap of Sarai (16:6). Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar and the result was further break up of the family by Hagar taking Ishmael and leaving.

Ill conceived plans impatiently enacted outside of the will of God always lead to hard feelings and division. Ishmael, the product of the union of Abram and Hagar, was the progenitor of the Arab peoples. The Arab people have been a constant threat to the existence of Israel throughout history.

### **Submission – Strategy to Overcome Fleshly Impatience**

#### **Genesis 16:7-16**

**<sup>7</sup> Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. <sup>8</sup> And He said, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?”**

**She said, “I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.”**

**<sup>9</sup> The Angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand.” <sup>10</sup> Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, “I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.” <sup>11</sup> And the Angel of the LORD said to her:**

**“Behold, you *are* with child,  
And you shall bear a son.  
You shall call his name Ishmael,  
Because the LORD has heard your affliction.**

**<sup>12</sup> He shall be a wild man;**

**His hand *shall be* against every man,  
And every man's hand against him.  
And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.”**

<sup>13</sup> Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, **You-Are- the-God-Who-Sees**; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?”<sup>14</sup> Therefore the well was called **Beer Lahai Roi**; observe, *it is* between Kadesh and Bered.

<sup>15</sup> So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, **Ishmael**.

<sup>16</sup> Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Who is “the Angel of the LORD”? This is the first appearance of the Angel of the LORD in scripture. The context indicates that when the Angel speaks He speaks with the authority of God. The Angel of the LORD was able to find Hagar (16:7). He commanded her to return to Sarai (16:8-9). He spoke in the first person a promise to multiply her descendants (16:10-12). Then Hagar attributes the conversation she had with the Angel of the LORD to having a conversation with “the LORD” (16:13a). She then gives a name to the LORD, “You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees” (16:13b-14; literally, Beer-Lahoi-Roi). She finally concludes, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?” (16:13c).

The Angel of the LORD appears in numerous instances in the Old Testament (e.g. Genesis 17:1–22; 18:1ff.; 22:11–18; 31:11, 13; 32:30; 48:16; Ex 3:2; 14:19; 23:20; 32:34; 33:2; Josh 5:13–15; Jud 13:21). In the New Testament it states that no one has seen God the Father (I Tim 6:16). In light of that, the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament is identified as Jesus in what is referred to as a Christophany (also Theophany). A Christophany is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus who is the Second Person of the Triune Godhead. Such appearances also testify to the eternal nature of Jesus. After the incarnation of Jesus, there are no more pre-incarnate Christophanies of Jesus in scripture. Jesus appears in His resurrected body after His crucifixion and rising from the dead. 1

Why did Jesus appear to Hagar in the wilderness? Hagar seems to have been an innocent victim in the fleshly scheme of Sarai. But God is faithful to comfort and heed the call of those who come to the end of themselves. Hagar was pregnant and all alone. Jesus gently came along side of her as she contemplated her plight. He reasoned with her, (“Where have you come from, and where are you going?” –16:8). Later God, through the prophet Isaiah, will tell His people to come and reason with Him so that He might cleanse them of their sin (Isaiah 1:18). God was showing this Egyptian maid that He, not her Egyptian gods, was the One True God who was dependable and faithful to help her in her situation. This “God-Who-Sees” was not prejudiced, but willing to help even someone from a pagan Egyptian background. God is impartial (Romans 2:11). He turns none away who call out to Him for salvation (Psalm 145:18; John 6:37; Romans 10:12-13).

What can we learn from what Jesus instructed Hagar to do? Notice what Jesus told Hagar to do. He said, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand” (16:9). Abram and Sarai

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1Jerry Falwell, executive editor; Edward E. Hinson and Michael Kroll Woodrow, general editors, *KJV Bible commentary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1994.

had grown impatient and took things into their own hands. In effect what they did was rebel against God's required patient waiting and chose to follow their own ill conceived plan. Even though Sarai had treated Hagar harshly, she was instructed by God to return and "submit yourself" to her mistress. God was directing Hagar to return and be an example of faith in God to Abram and Sarai who had lapsed from faith to their flesh. This is because *submission or obedience to God is the key to defeating the flesh.*

The phrase "submit yourself" comes from one Hebrew word (Strong's #6031 - אָנָה *ânâh*, *aw-naw*) which means, "to depress ; abase self, afflict (-ion, self), . . . chasten self, deal hardly with, defile, exercise, force, humble (self), hurt, ravish, submit self, weaken, × in any wise."<sup>2</sup> The Angel of the LORD, Jesus, told Hagar to deal ruthlessly with her self-centered attitude. Our *flesh* is that part of us that rebels against the will of God. The flesh is that part of a person which exalts self to the throne of their heart. Your flesh is that part of you which wants to rule in your own strength, your own wisdom, and all for your own benefit even if it means disregarding or outright disobeying the LORD. Even though the plight of Hagar was the product of the fleshly actions of Sarai and Abram, it was no excuse for Hagar to respond in kind. Hagar was instructed and exhorted to turn away from her fleshly reaction (16:4) and return to her situation. By doing so she would grow in faith and learn to trust in "The-God-Who-Sees" and she would also learn that He is the God who is able to help her.

### **Fearfulness; the Flesh; Impatience versus Faith**

We have seen that fear is the enemy of faith. In Chapter sixteen we see that such fear often grows into impatience. Actions taken because of fear and impatience always lead to calamity and hardship. This is demonstrated clearly in the last two chapters. Let's summarize what we've seen happen since Genesis 15.

- People have fears (Genesis 15:1).
- Fear is caused by focusing on circumstantial risks in God's plan. When we focus with a fleshly perspective on the circumstances around us, it leads to impatient and impulsive actions. These actions take the form of the following thought processes: "God is taking too long. I can't wait any longer for Him to act." Therefore, "How am I going to work this out?" "How am I going to reach that goal?" "How am I going to accomplish this task?" "How am I going to attain that reward?" "How am I going to get what I want?" etc.
- Responding to fears in the impatience of our flesh (our own will, whim and efforts, self-reliance) only leads to chaos, confusion, and lasting negative counterproductive consequences (Genesis 16:1-6). Abram and Sarai feared they would die before God

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<sup>2</sup>Strong, J. (1997, c1996). *The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words* (electronic ed.) (H6031). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

fulfilled His promise. They impatiently acted in their flesh and the consequence was the continued historical animosity between Jews and Arabs.

- God is merciful and will forgive acts of the flesh, but the consequences of fleshly decisions often continue.
- FEAR is the enemy of faith.
- Faithful submission to God is the God-ordained means to overcome fear and impatience (Genesis 15:1, 6; 16:9).

How about you? Are you growing weary and fearful that God's timing is not perfect? Are you wondering if God has forgotten about you? Are you concerned God is not going to follow through on His promises? Maybe you've acted impulsively and are reaping the painful consequences of your fleshly impatient actions. Whatever your case, Jesus calls all of us to return and submit to Him. He is all too eager to get on with His project of building our faith.

In the New Testament letter of James, James (the brother of Jesus) addresses the cause of "wars and fights" amongst the body of Christ and attributes them to fleshly "desires for pleasure," "lust," "murder and covet," and prayer that was focused on self indulgence (James 4:1-3). James referred to the fighters in the body of Christ as "adulterers and adulteresses!" (James 4:4). He points out to them, "that friendship with the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4). He explains the folly of being fleshly and worldly when the Holy Spirit so desires to have a relationship with them that, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously" (James 4:5). The inspired words of James to these warring factions fit well with the circumstances of Genesis 16 where actions based on impatient fleshly impatience have led to division. James is inspired to state:

#### **James 4:6-10**

**<sup>6</sup> But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."<sup>7</sup> Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.**

God sees our works of the flesh but is willing to be gracious toward us. If we stay proud, He will resist us. But if we repent humbly before God, He will be gracious to us. We *must* submit to God, draw near to Him in genuine repentant sorrow. When we do that, "He will lift you up." God hears your call. God knows your situation. God knows what He is doing. God is able to deliver on His promises. He is faithful. Trust Him.