

In the Beginning, God...

Introduction

We are in the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings. The beginning of creation, the beginning of humanity, the beginning of sin and death, the re-beginning of humanity after the flood and now the beginning of the story of redemption and the family through which redemption will flow.

Last week we asked the question “Why does God make us wait?” And we concluded that, waiting is not wasted time. Waiting is where God refines us, proves us, rewards us, and matures us.

As we come to Genesis 16, we discover something sobering:

This chapter is not about rebellion against God’s promise—but about trying to help God keep it. It is an illustration of the bad choice of listening to good advice when things are dark and we are having to wait.

Waiting becomes most dangerous when it is combined with darkness—when God’s promise is clear, but God’s timing is not.

So allow me to ask a different question tonight. What should we do, when we are in the dark regarding God’s will and purpose for our lives?

Before Genesis 16 ever unfolds, Moses takes us back to a moment in Genesis 15—a moment that explains why waiting in the dark can be dangerous.”

Genesis 15:12 (ESV) 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

God has given to Abram a vision of his offspring. The nation that will one day be held as slaves under Egyptian rule.

Whenever God gives a vision to a saint, He puts him, as it were, in the shadow of His hand, and the saint's duty is to be silent and listen carefully to God's instruction.

O. Chambers

A key truth: When we light our own candle instead of waiting for God's light, we usually end up burned.

Genesis 16 shows us exactly what happens when that candle is lit—when human wisdom tries to illuminate what only God can reveal.

Message:

Genesis 16:3–6 (ESV) 3 So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. 4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.

5 And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!”

6 But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

I. A Familiar Promise, A Fatal Shortcut

Abram and Sarai have lived ten years in Canaan—still no child. God’s promise is becoming distant, almost impossible to imagine at this stage of their lives.

So, Sarai offers Hagar as a surrogate wife, following common pagan and cultural practices. This practice was permitted by culture, legal by custom, but never sanctioned by God.

What felt reasonable in theory now begins to reveal itself in reality—because human solutions never remain contained.”

Brief Background: Hagar likely entered the household during Abram’s compromise in Egypt.

Pagan ideology viewed marriage as a civil arrangement, not a covenant before God.

The slave was given considerable position in the family when she gave birth to a child, and this made the practice all the more appealing to any woman who has grown up as a slave in a wealthy household.

It was likely a point of honor for Hagar to find herself in the “second” wife position and she embraced it as an opportunity to advance her own personal freedoms.

What culture permits, God may still forbid—and what seems reasonable can still be ruinous.

We see the same pagan ideology today, with the loose practice of marriage, divorce and the state’s involvement. It is no longer considered important that a pastor marry the couple, anyone can, because it is not between the couple and God, it is a contract between the couple and under the state’s oversight.

II. Human Solutions Always Create Human Conflict

Take notice of what happened when both Abram and Sarai and now Hagar attempt to shape God’s plan and move His agenda faster than He is willing for it to move forward.

Hagar conceives where Sarai could not.

Hagar despises her mistress and holds her in disdain. Her attitude toward Sarai is one of growing contempt. “An old woman who never had a child.” “God honors me, and not you.”

This happens over a period of time, and with that time, Hagar’s pride grows while Sarai’s dignity erodes.

Conflict always demands a response—and how leadership responds in moments of tension determines how deep the wound will go.”

When we rush God's plan, the blessing we seek often becomes the burden we bear.

III. Passing Responsibility Never Removes Consequences

Sarai is hurt and as a result of the hurt, she becomes angry.

Things have dramatically changed within the family dynamic. Sarai no longer has the control over Hagar she once held, because Hagar has become a second wife.

Hagar has influence that she once did not possess, and believes that she can use that influence to elevate herself and her baby.

Whatever she did, Sarai uses a word for violence (הַמֵּתֶת hā·mās). It carries the idea of destructive force or intentional injustice. Hagar was triggering Sarai and conflict was rising in Abram's tent.

Sarai now turns her hurt toward Abram. "May the Lord judge between you and me!" She is asking God to decide, will it be Sarai or will it be the child that is about to be born into the family of Abram.

Abram responds with passivity not leadership and with one sentence, Hagar is stripped of protection, position, and future hope. "Behold, your servant is in your power/hand; do to her as you please."

He abdicates his responsibility, he retreats rather than repent and because he refused to exercise godly authority, his silence empowers injustice, and sets in motion events that will plague his offspring for thousands of years.

This decision will have profound consequences for ages to come!

When leaders retreat, the vulnerable suffer first—and Scripture now shifts our focus from the tent of Abram to the heart of a wounded servant.

IV. Rushed Decisions Lead to Deep Affliction

For Hagar there is no position, no future, no possibility of elevating her status now. She will be a slave, not a second wife. She will live with injustice, not security.

The Bible says that Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar. The Hebrew word נָגַע, ânâh describes oppression, humiliation, and suffering.

It is the same word used when Moses wrote about the affliction of the Children of Israel while they were forced to labor under harsh conditions for Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

Exodus 3:7 (ESV) 7 Then the Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, . . .

Now Hagar is facing similar affliction and she flees—not because she is innocent, but because she is broken.

What began as an attempt to fulfill God's promise ends in suffering that God never intended.

Genesis 16 does not end with resolution—it ends with a warning. And that warning is meant not just to inform us, but to slow us down.

Conclusion

Let me share a story with you that illustrates what happened with both Abram and Sarai.

In 2018, a construction company in the southeastern United States was working under pressure to finish a highway project ahead of schedule. Weather delays had pushed them behind, and the deadline loomed.

One evening, as daylight faded, a supervisor made a decision to keep moving heavy equipment rather than shut things down for the night. The lighting on-site was partial—good enough to see something, but not enough to see everything.

A bulldozer operator, relying on that artificial light, drove forward—and struck a buried gas line that had been clearly marked on the plans but was missed in the darkness.

The explosion didn't kill anyone, but it destroyed equipment, halted the project for months, and cost millions of dollars. When investigators asked why work continued after dark, the answer was simple: “We thought we could see well enough.”

Later, the company president said this in an interview:

“If we had just waited until morning, we would have finished later—but we would have avoided disaster.”

Waiting Is always safer than rushing God’s purpose.

Genesis 16 teaches us the same lesson. Abram and Sarai thought they could see well enough. They had a plan. They had precedent. They had cultural approval. But they did not have God’s light.

It is better to sit quietly in God’s darkness than to race ahead in man-made light.