

Genesis 15-16 • Faith and Unbelief

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Genesis, chapter 15. We're continuing here on Wednesday night, our study through the Old Testament. The Book of Genesis is where we are right now and the 15th chapter. This is really good stuff here in these next couple of chapters so, let's pray and ask the Lord to open our hearts and speak to us.

Lord, even as we just sang, even as we were just singing speak what is true, Lord that, we just want to express that verbally, that's our heart. That you would speak to us as the teacher and we are the students and we desire to learn and grow and understand. But Father I want to pray this evening for those who are with us tonight who are looking for answers, for those who are kind of at the end of the rope, for those who are discouraged, for those who are hopeless, for those who are fearful, for those who are confused and frustrated, for those who don't know which way to turn, I ask my Father God that you would have plenty of answers this evening in your Word.

And we look to you to do that, not to the world, certainly not to the wisdom of this world, but we look to you, Lord God, for the wisdom from on high. And we pray that you would speak to us, to each and every heart who is longing to hear your voice tonight. And we ask it in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and all God's people said, amen.

All right, Genesis chapter 15, you'll notice that there are 3 very important words that this chapter begins with and those are, "*After these things...*" (ESV) And I know it's been a few weeks since we've been in Genesis, but you'll remember in the last chapter that these things points us back to Abram's defeat of the kings who had come and conquered and taken captive the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, where his nephew Lot and his family happened to be living at that time. And Abraham, you know, it was a powerful defeat of those kings, God gave Abram the victory.

But more importantly, what we want to be remembering here as we go into chapter 15, is the fact that the king of Sodom offered Abram a reward and he basically said, listen, give me back the people that you recovered and you can take everything, all the belongings, all the stuff, that'll be your reward. And you remember that Abram refused, he said, no, I won't accept anything from your

hand lest you should ever boast and say that I made Abram wealthy, and so, he turned it all down.

You have to, and I know that Abram was a wealthy man, but you know, still, wealth is a temptation. He refused it though, he turned it down, and now, *“After these things, (it says,) the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”* And I got to tell you, I love that, I love that the Lord responded to Abram's determination not to take from the ungodly.

And we know that Sodom was a place of great ungodliness, but the Lord responded by saying, I am your shield, in other words, I am your protector, but I am also your reward. And you know, when the Lord is your reward, you have everything, when the Lord is your portion, you have everything. You might be a person living life in this world who can't really say that you have a lot, you might even say, I don't have much. But you know what? If you have the Lord, then He is your portion and you have everything, you truly have everything.

You know, we're living in a world today where, you know, the people of this world are absolutely wearing themselves out to get whatever the world can offer and even once they get it, it doesn't satisfy. Once they gain the things that they were looking for, it still doesn't satisfy. I've told you guys the story, speaking of muscle cars, I've told you guys this story before. You know, when I was in my late teens, I guess I was, yeah, I was in my late teens, I wanted a particular car so badly. It was a 1969 Plymouth Roadrunner for you gearheads, you know exactly what I'm talking about and probably even know why I wanted it, I mean, I coveted that car. Well, guess what? I bought one, I found one, I bought it, I never had more trouble with a car in my entire life.

I never got more tickets for speeding and I never paid more for gas. I mean, that thing drank gas like it was going out of style and I couldn't, you know, of course, I always had my foot in the oil pan, that means I went fast. Because, you know, hey, when you have a roadrunner, what are you going to do with a roadrunner? Go 35 miles an hour? No, I drove it around 110, 120 most of the time and I paid for it. And I tell you, after I had that car, which was the dream of my life, I couldn't wait to get rid of it. I really, seriously, you know, it's just like, I wanted it so bad and then it just didn't satisfy. And that is, that's just a picture, you know, of the things of this world that people long for and covet and desire and it just doesn't satisfy.

But you know, there is a provision and there is a satisfaction that the world knows nothing about and that's why the author of the Book of Hebrews said this. Up on the screen, let me show you this from Hebrews chapter 13, he said,

Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he (and that's God) has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

And that's just an important reminder for those of us who can be drawn away by the things of this world and how beautiful and alluring those things can be. But anyway, Abram turned it down and the Lord turned right around and said to him, I am your reward.

The conversation goes on, though, look in verse 2. It says, *"But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"*³ *And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."* See, God's been telling Abram that he's going to become a great nation, and he's going to inherit the land but Abram has no children at this point, and so he's saying, is this what you have in mind? I mean, at this point in time, there's this man who happens to be a servant in my home, and when I pass, he's going to get it. He's in line to receive the inheritance of all that I have, because I have no son for, you know, for whom I might give this.

And it says, *"And behold, (verse 4) the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."*⁵ *And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. ..."* I think it's fascinating that God said at the end there, if you're able, if you're even able.

Do you know there have been men through the years who thought they were able? And they came up with a number, they said, well, we know exactly how many stars there are and they made these ridiculous claims, which are nowhere near the reality of how many stars there are. But what the Lord is saying to Abram here is, you can't number the stars, neither will you be able to number your offspring.

"⁵...Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And I want you to take note of verse 6 and maybe even underline it in your Bible because this is

important. It says, “*And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*” And I want you to focus on those very simple words in verse 6, “*And he believed the Lord.*” Isn't that great? How simple and yet how profound.

Can you imagine how different our lives would be if that was a description of us every time we read something in the Bible or God spoke something to our heart or we heard some truth from the scriptures that was stated to us? If it simply was a response of our hearts, and he or she believed the Lord. Can you imagine?

Do you know how often that doesn't take place? Do you know how often we hear the Word of God and we don't believe the Lord? Do you know how often we read promises in the scripture and we even admire those promises and we'll quote them, maybe even memorize them, but not believe them.

There are so many wonderful promises and you know, we, most of you guys who have been around the church for a while, you've been around the Word of God, you know, I'm not telling you anything you don't know when I talk about the promises of God. And yet what happens when we go through a difficulty of life? What happens when we're faced with the temptation to doubt and to be afraid in the face of a very challenging or scary circumstance, what do we do?

We let go of what we know to be true and we give in to fear instead. Even though God says, fear not and how many times did He, does He have to say it before we'll listen? And I'm talking to myself too, I'm preaching to the choir here, this is me just as much as it is you.

But what powerful and what incredible words, he believed the Lord. People, that is a key to so much in our Christian lives, a key to so much. We are to live lives of faith; the righteous shall live by faith, right? It's all about, it's all about faith. Do you know the apostle Paul quoted this very verse 4 times in 2 of his letters: Romans and Galatians, 4 times. James, in his letter, quotes it once. This is a pivotal sort of a verse, “*And he believed the Lord*” and it was counted or credited to him as righteousness.

The Lord continues, verse 7, “*And he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.”* ⁸ *But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”* ⁹ *He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”* So this is what the Lord told Abram to do. Now, if God told you or me to do that, we'd go, okay, but why? Abraham didn't have to ask the question because he knew exactly what God was asking for him to do.

This was the way they cut or made a covenant in Abraham's time. I found an interesting quote from a man by the name of David Barron, let me put it up on the screen for you. It kind of explains this process, he says,

According to the ancient Eastern manner of making a covenant, both the contracting parties passed through the divided pieces of the slain animals, thus symbolically attesting that they pledged their very lives to the fulfillment of the engagement they made.

– David Baron, The New Order of the Priesthood

According to the ancient Eastern manner of making a covenant, both the contracting parties passed through the divided pieces of the slain animals, thus symbolically attesting that they pledged their very lives to the fulfillment of the engagement (or the agreement, if you will) they made.

So, here's what they would do, again, they would take these animals and slay them and cut them in half and set the pieces parallel to one another, but with room enough to pass through. And as each person making the covenant would speak their side of the covenant, in other words, their portion, I promise to do this, right? They would pass through the pieces of the slain animals and it was a way of saying, may my life be like this if I go back on my word, okay. And we actually know this because in the Book of Jeremiah, God calls to account the leaders of Judah and their unfaithfulness and He speaks of this very process. Let me show you this from Jeremiah chapter 34, it says,

Jeremiah 34:18-19 (ESV)

And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts— the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf.

So He says, I'll make them like that, in other words, they will pay with their lives for their unfaithfulness. And that's what the whole idea of cutting this covenant with these animals and I know this sounds bizarre. You know, we do things with a handshake, we write things on a piece of paper. We might file it with a clerk of court or something like that or with an attorney to show that we've made a contract or a covenant with someone and those things can be legally binding. But in this day, this was the way of showing your sincerity that I'm going to follow this.

All right, so let's read the rest of the passage, it says, ¹⁰ *And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.* ¹¹ *And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.* ¹² *As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.*

¹³ *Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years."* And this of course, refers to the time that Israel will spend in the kingdom of Egypt and eventually become enslaved under the Egyptians.

Verse 14, *"But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions."* ¹⁵ *As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.* ¹⁶ *And they shall come back here (meaning your descendants shall come back here) in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."*

All right, this is a very important statement that explains why Abram and his descendants were not going to possess the land of Israel right away. Have you ever wondered that? I mean, God brought Abram into the land of Canaan and said, I'm going to give you this land. Well, why wait? Why wait? I mean, give it to him now, God can do that, big deal, you know.

Well, He explains it here in verse 16. He says, when they come back here, they're going to do that in the fourth generation, but it's going to take some time and the reason is the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. In other words, He's explaining to them, or to Abram I guess, why these hundreds of years are going to pass before this promise is fulfilled. God's going to give the people living in the land of Canaan time to repent.

Now does He know whether or not they will repent? Of course, God never has to wait to find out anything, like we do. So He knows that they're not going to repent and yet He gives them time and opportunity. And you might say, well why, if He knows that they're not going to repent, why don't you just nuke them right now and get it over with? I mean, just rid them from the land, why let them go on? Well, you know, I've said this before and I'll say it again, no one will ever stand before the judgment seat of God and say, you didn't give me a chance, that wasn't fair, no one. Everybody's going to get a chance, everybody gets a chance with God, that is His mercy. Even though He knows the outcome, He still gives them a chance. Because you see, God's knowledge of the outcome doesn't dictate the outcome. That is one of those things that I find a lot of

Christians cannot get past. They believe that somehow, if God knows how things are going to turn out, He makes them turn out that way, nothing can be further from the truth. God simply knows because He's not bound by time, He doesn't wait for anything to happen, He dwells in eternity.

It's kind of like sitting on top of a really, really tall building and watching a parade, but you're so high up you can see the beginning of the parade and the end of the parade all in one view. Now, the people standing down on the street, that's like you and me, they have to watch the parade as it goes in front of their eyes. They can't see, after the beginning goes by, they can no longer see it and they cannot yet see the end, but if you're up on that tall building, you can see the entire parade. That's a very crude, but fairly good illustration of how God sees time. It's all in view for Him, but He doesn't force things to happen just because He can see time. So God is a God of mercy, even for those who will not come.

Verse 17, let's keep reading. It says, *“When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot (I would have loved to have seen what that looked like) and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.* (now listen carefully to these words) ¹⁸ *On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.””* There you go.

So God cut or made a covenant, if you will, with Abram and his descendants, and it's all very cool. But wait, there's something very interesting here about the way this covenant was made. Did you notice, remember I told you that when a covenant was made back in those days they would do this weird crazy thing with the animal parts and then each person who was part of the covenant would pass through the animals stating their side of the covenant and what they would, they promised or pledged to keep as it relates to that covenant. Did you notice Abram didn't pass through the parts of the animals?

You see, God knew that Abram would naturally get up and do that, so He put him to sleep and yet at the same time allowed him to know that this was going on. So this dreadful darkness comes over Abram, he can't move and God singularly passes through those animals in the form of this incredible fire, you know, flaming fire pot. Again, I have no idea what that would even look like. And He speaks the words of the covenant that are all on His side, Abram is not allowed to participate, except in the sense of being a recipient, alright? And that means that the covenant is entirely dependent on God to keep.

People, hear what I'm saying, there's nothing Abram can do, or his descendants, to nullify the covenant, God made it alone. Now, what are the implications of that? You know, there's a lot of interesting teaching within the body of Christ about the nation of Israel and how God no longer is dealing with the nation of Israel in any way, shape or form. That's all been passed along to the church and we are now the recipients of all of the blessings bestowed upon Abraham and his descendants and there is no Israel anymore, the church is the Israel of God. It's called replacement theology, and it's wrong.

The church does not replace Israel and God still has a plan for Israel. We've seen that in many other studies that we've had throughout the scriptures and this verse, this passage right here, is one of the most beautiful proof texts that we can share with someone who might have been sucked into this idea or this belief that somehow God is done with Israel.

Listen, God made a covenant with Israel and Israel did not participate in the making of that covenant. And God said, this is what I'm going to do and He's going to do it. He has done it, He will continue to do it and it's a beautiful thing. So chapter 15 is really a chapter of faith, you know, where God makes this incredible or reiterates this incredible promise to Abram and Abram believed Him. He believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness.

But now we're going to get into chapter 16 and we're going to find out the chapter 16 is about unbelief, let's do it. And as we move on we kind of remind ourselves here that, you know, God made a promise that that Abram's own child, right, would be his heir. From that child, God would bring forth a great nation who would be a blessing to the entire world and of course, that is a prophecy of the work of Messiah and the Savior who had come from the Jews. But human nature being what it is and the impatience that often comes with it, we get into this chapter.

Chapter 16, *“Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.”* They probably picked up Hagar, you know, when they went to Egypt when they weren't supposed to. We talked about that in the previous chapters.

It says, *“² And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. (I want you to take note of that, the Lord has prevented me. So she says) Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 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.”* I want you to take note

of that phrase, *“as a wife.”* Now, keep in mind, this is not something the Lord directed them to do. Just because we're told something in a narrative doesn't mean that God was behind it, and He was certainly not. In fact, we're going to find out here toward the end of the chapter, God didn't even recognize completely this union and we'll see this.

So, Sarai allows Hagar to become, at least in her understanding, Abram's wife. And in verse 4 it says, *“And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.”* In other words, Hagar began to gloat, nobody likes a gloater. As if, you know, she had triumphed over Sarai by conceiving this child.

I love this response in verse 5, *“And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you!...”*” You dirty, you know, can you just see this? This is called marital difficulty, right? *“⁵...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!”* This is just great, this is wonderful stuff here. And you know, even though we understand that this was a very painful situation for Sarai as a woman, because remember, in that day, if a woman could not conceive, she was considered to be cursed by the Lord and that was just the belief of the people.

So she can't have children, Hagar, you know, she's a baby factory, she just gets pregnant just like that and then starts to gloat about it. So we understand her pain, but you know, still, this is an incredibly hypocritical response for her because she's blaming her husband for something that was clearly her idea, it was of her own doing. And isn't that way sometimes our own actions to try to fix things often go.

“But Abram said to Sarai, (verse 6) “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.”” Now there's some interesting things about what Abram says to Sarai here. I want you to notice that his solution is not to go to Hagar and talk to her and say, listen, I don't want to hear one more denigrating word out of your mouth, which he could have done. He didn't do that. What he chose to do was essentially to demote Hagar from the position that they gave her which is a position of a wife and I want you to notice what he says to Sarai. *“⁶... “Behold, your servant is in your power;”* He didn't say, behold my wife is in your power, he said, behold your servant. He's demoting her back to the position of servant, which is, again, not only hypocritical, but it's cruel.

Even though God has not even fully recognized, and again, we'll see this in a minute. This union they gave it to her, and now they're yanking it away, in

essence, because of the way she's been acting. And then, we're still in verse 6, and it goes on to say, “⁶...Then Sarai dealt harshly with her,...” And that, we can take from that, that Sarai was just cruel back to her, she was cruel to Hagar. And it says, “⁶... and she (Hagar) fled from her.” So she felt like the only thing, the only option available to her was to leave, I just got to leave.

So let's read down through verse 14, let's see how this plays out. “⁷ The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.” And by the way, the angel of the Lord, this is the Lord Himself and you'll see that in the way He talks.

“⁸ And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, (I want you to hear that, notice He didn't say, Hagar, wife of Abram, okay) where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.” ⁹ The angel of the Lord said to her, “Return to your mistress and submit to her.” ¹⁰ The angel of the Lord also said to her, “I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.” ¹¹ And the angel of the Lord said to her, “Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction.

¹² He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.” ¹³ So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, “You are a God of seeing,” for she said, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.” ¹⁴ Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.”

Now, there are several things that we need to bring out from this section of verses that I feel like we need to touch on. But first is the command of the Lord to return to Sarai and submit and I know that those are very hard words for a modern audience. Because Hagar, even though she made some mistakes and she gloated, she was being abused by Sarai, she was being abused and that's a trigger word in our culture, that word abuse or abused. And yet the Lord says to her, submit or return first, and submit to Sarai. But what I want you to understand from this, even though these are hard words to hear, is that the Lord, you'll notice, doesn't address to Hagar, the behavior of Sarai, or even Abraham for that matter.

He doesn't go, yeah, I know they were kind of, you know, treating you pretty rough and I understand it was hard and you were being abused and you felt like the only thing you could do is run, I get it, I get it. Notice that God didn't say that, He just said, go back and submit. And by saying, submit, what the Lord is saying to Hagar is, I want you to go back and I want you to change your attitude

toward Sarai. And instead of acting all superior and condescending, I want you to go back and I want you to respect the woman and I want you to submit to her. That's hard, isn't it?

You know, in situations like this, where somebody's being mistreated, and obviously this still happens today, in situations like this, it's very common to talk about all the ways that I've been wronged and you know, to be the victim and to really emphasize and capitalize on the idea of I'm a victim here. And yes, you know, I'm not perfect, I know, and people will say that all the time. I know I'm not perfect, but, and then they begin to list all of the offenses that have been laid at their feet and you know, by others and so forth. And that's usually what happens when we start talking to people who've been badly treated, and honestly I get emails quite often for people wanting my advice.

Email is not a good way of giving people advice, but, and I usually tell them so. I usually write them back and say, well, you really need to go talk to a pastor, somebody you can talk face to face to. But people often are wanting advice about how they should respond in a situation or what they should do in a situation where they've been mistreated or ignored or unappreciated and in sometimes even abused.

But one thing they rarely ever want to talk to me about is their attitude, they don't even bring it up. You know, they don't ever say, well, I, you know, my attitude has really been bad, honestly. But you know, when you're talking to somebody, when you're having a conversation with someone who's been mistreated, you can't change the situation. You can't speak to the person who's doing the abusing or mistreating or whatever, that person isn't in view right now. Who are you talking to, you're talking to the person who's been hurt, right? So you can sit all day long and you can talk about the other person or the other people who are doing the hurting, but how is that going to help?

Well, I've noticed that this is what God does with people. When He, when we begin to bring our complaints, you know, to the Lord, I'm not being treated, you know, the way I should be, this is unfair, and the Lord begins to speak to us about our own attitude in the midst of what's going on.

And you know, so many times we pray, we go to the Lord in prayer because we want Him to change our circumstances and what God wants to do is change us, He wants to change you. Well, we're not up for that, we're certainly, you know, open for Him changing our circumstances and quickly, please. But when it comes around to changing what's going on in our own hearts, we're a little more resistant.

And it's funny, you know, the times that I have done counseling, and I'm not a counselor, but, the times that I've done it and I've said to someone who has just gotten done laying before me a litany of offenses that someone else has committed and when I say to them, well, what have you done to contribute to the problem, they're always taken aback by that. It's kind of like you slapped him in the face, well, I didn't expect that, I expected you to comfort me and agree with me. So I send you away from here all comforted, but you're still a victim and you still haven't looked into your own heart, so what good have I done?

The next thing that I want to point out is the fact that the Lord tells Hagar in verse 10 that I will multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude. In other words, the child that she was carrying at this time would also become a many people and in fact many nations, Ishmael would produce many nations from that single individual.

And next, the Lord spoke prophetically to Hagar, saying that she would bear a son and that she was to name him Ishmael, which means God hears, God hears. That's a beautiful thing, you know, for the Lord to name him frankly, because the Lord heard her distress and that's important for us to remember. When we go through difficult times and we have been mistreated and we have been hurt, God knows, He hears, He was there. You don't need to inform Him and fill Him in on what was happening while He was looking the other way, He knows, He sees.

But the Lord, you'll notice, add some interesting information in verse 12. He says, he should be a wild donkey of a man, isn't that interesting? How'd you mothers, how would you like to have God said that about your son that you were pregnant with? He's going to be a wild donkey of a man, it's kind of like, oh good, you know. In fact, He says his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, in other words, his life is going to be marked by hostility. He is going to be hostile toward his brothers and they're going to be hostile to him. And He says, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen and that's just another way of repeating it. He's going to, he's going to dwell in hostility with all of his kinsmen. So, he's going to be a father of a great but wild and hostile nation or people. Do you think we've played that out in the Middle East at all? Have you seen any of that in the Middle East, by the way? Do you think that this is something that was a flash in the pan? Or do you think that there's some truth to this?

Finally, we read a rather beautiful praise that comes from Hagar. In verse 13 it says, *“So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God of*

seeing,” for she said, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.”” So as Hagar praises God for His concern and His care, she calls Him the one who sees, isn't that great? So you've got 2 namings here; the naming of Ishmael, God hears, and the naming of God by Hagar, the one who sees. God hears and God sees. This is the good stuff, there's some good theology in there, guys, God hears and God sees, all right?

And then the chapter ends with the 2 final verses saying, *“¹⁵ And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.”* So Ishmael, guess what, is the firstborn son of Abram, it's the first child he ever had, Ishmael. But what's really interesting about Ishmael is that he is a figurative person for us in the sense that he represents self-effort. Because what is it that Sarai was trying to get Abram to do? She wanted to, they felt like they needed to help God.

She came to Abram at one point and she said, listen, God made a promise to you that He would give you a son and from that an entire people, right? Right. Well, obviously that isn't happening in me, so let's make a plan. I've got an idea, here's Hagar, she's not terrible to look at, why don't you just take her as your wife, it'll be okay with me, I promise and you can have a baby through her, but I'll take the baby and raise the baby as my own and that's how God will fulfill His promise.

Can you imagine God just kind of shaking His head while He's hearing this conversation going on? You kind of almost expect Him to shout from heaven going, I don't need your help! But you know what? This is classic, isn't it? Because we do this all the time, you guys, we think we got to step in and help God out and what do we do? We create our own Ishmaels and Ishmael ends up being a problem in our lives. So, Ishmael is this picture, if you will, of self-effort, self-effort, he also represents the effort of self to be saved.

You know, the apostle Paul used these pictures in his letter to the Galatians. We'll end with this, let me put this on the screen for you. From Galatians 4 it says,

Galatians 4:22-23 & 28 (ESV)

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman (and you'll notice that Paul refers to Hagar the way God referred to her, as a servant) and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. (in other words, by supernatural means, and then he says,) Now you, brothers, like Isaac, (who's the son that Sarah will eventually give birth to) are children of promise.

So you see, all effort of the flesh. Really, this is a picture, what Paul is doing in Galatians, is he's showing the incompatibility between the law and grace. Because by the law, people are trying to be saved by trying to be good, you know. I'm going to be good, I'm going to follow the rules, I'm going to keep the law, I'm going to keep the law, and then God's going to love me and accept me, I hope. But then again, you never really know for sure, because you never know if you've really kept the law good enough, but what is that? Just self-effort.

It's the work of the flesh to try to be saved, you cannot be saved by self-effort. You can't get into heaven by self-effort and so Paul says, Ishmael is this picture of acting through the flesh to try to make something happen. Whether it's your salvation or whether it's helping God in some other way, you know. Because this can, even we as Christians who accept our salvation by grace through faith, we can still create Ishmaels. I've made a few in my life, after being a believer, I have created some Ishmaels. I have stepped out in the effort and the strength of self by the flesh to try to accomplish things that I felt like God wanted to get done.

But the message to me is the same message to Abram or to you or to anyone else. God doesn't need our help and when He makes a promise, He will fulfill it. He is able and He is faithful to do what He said, our job is to believe the Lord and Abram believed the Lord, amen. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you so much for the powerful lessons that we see in these chapters. Lord, the first chapter, just one of just a beautiful faith that rose up when Abram was told all that God would do and then the expression of unbelief and flesh and self-effort that came out of Sarai's recommendation that they try to help God fulfill His promise. Lord, you don't need our help and I thank you, God, tonight for the reminder of that.

And I just pray tonight for all those who are waiting on you to fulfill your Word. I pray, Lord God, for those who are waiting patiently, who are patiently enduring the passage of time and we know, Lord, that impatience can rise up so quickly in our lives. And so I pray, Lord Jesus, that you would speak to your

children tonight of your great power and your incredible faithfulness and your wonderful mercy and that you would speak to them in the depth of their hearts and say, I am the Lord God who will fulfill my promise.

We thank you for your goodness and grace and mercy and we love you. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and King. All God's people said together, amen.

God bless you, have a good rest of your evening.