

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM GENESIS 16.

Chapter 15 of Genesis was a chapter of faith.

In contrast, chapter 16 is a chapter of flesh.

In chapter 15 Abraham is at his faithful best.

In chapter 16 he is at his fleshly worst.

In chapter 15 he responds to God's voice and guards the sacrifice.

In chapter 16 he responds to Sarah's voice and gives in to expediency.

{I'm obviously not suggesting that you should never listen to the voice of spouse!! In this instance however, Sarah wasn't exactly the fountainhead of Divine wisdom}

In spite of all the glorious assurances, the promises and the Divine visitations, nothing had really changed.

Days, weeks and months went by. Sarah's infertility seemed to stretch out before the horizon like an endless desert.

Verse 3

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So she gave Hagar to him to be his concubine. (This happened after Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years.)

Ten years had passed. Sarah was 75 years old by this time. You can only imagine how this problem had dominated her thinking.

Finally she ‘snaps.’

It’s all too much for her. She comes to Abraham with a course of action in mind. She’s thought long and hard. She has resolved to give up her most precious right as a wife the right to have her husband’s sole affection.

This is a genuine and costly, though misguided sacrifice. She offers her maid to her husband that he might have a child by her and thus; fulfill the Word of God.

While that seems strange to us, it wasn’t to them. It wasn’t seen in a sexual light at all.

Sarah’s solution wasn’t some sexually promiscuous excursion on Abraham’s part.

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It was a socially acceptable act at that time in history.

{Obviously it wasn't God's ultimate intention in terms of marriage, but God accepted with merciful tolerance the limited perspectives of the fallen race at this time.}

I Ancient tablets from Mesopotamia tell of the custom. If a wife was unable to have a child, she could choose to give her maid to her husband so that she might produce the heir for her.

{Perhaps equivalent to today's practice of surrogate motherhood.}

This child would be recognized as the couple's heir unless and until they subsequently had a child of their own who would necessarily displace any servant or maids son.

The issue of failure in this instance wasn't primarily a sexual one.

We tend to view these situations through 'Western eyes,' where we see the sexual aspect as the damning one.

It wasn't, as it wasn't the major factor in David's sin with Bathsheba either; looking through 'Eastern lenses' the

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major issue with David was an abuse of his power and position.

In Abraham and Sarah's case what went wrong was that they tried to achieve, in the strength and energy of the flesh something that God had promised to do.

Rather than wait for God to fulfill His Word, they set out to help Him get it done.

Sarah had good intentions, but good intentions don't necessarily produce good fruit in the will of God.

Sarah allowed her thinking to be shaped by the cultural standards around about her rather than by the Word of God.

"Others are doing this, why not us?"

She had no doubt reasoned that God had said that Abraham would have offspring from his body, but He hadn't specified that that offspring would come from Sarah's body.

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She failed to realize that a promise to Abraham was also a promise to Sarah since the two are one in the sight of God.

If we 'throw' these thoughts around long enough we can end up justifying our fleshly alternatives to the will of God.

This foolish reasoning, fed by impatience and carnal haste, led to an act of appalling folly which resulted in endless sorrow and heartache.

They reasoned, "Ten years have gone by and nothing has happened. Maybe we just don't understand how God means to fulfill this promise."

Together they weigh up their options, take stock of their resources and develop a plan to help the Lord to work this thing out.

They listened to the voice of expediency and tried to secure for themselves the thing that God had promised. Simple-hearted faith waits for God to unfold His purpose, sure that He will not fail.

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Mistrust, panic and impatience lead us to take matters into our own hands.

- Remember Saul did the same when he took it upon himself to offer the sacrifice rather than waiting for the arrival of Samuel. It cost him the Kingdom.
- Remember Moses, fresh out of the University of Egypt, degree in hand, decided that he would initiate this great crusade of deliverance that he was called to. He tried in the strength of the flesh to do the will of God. It was a costly act. He spent 40 years in a burnt out desert of barrenness.

Verse 4

“So he went into Hagar and she conceived.”

Note that it says that Hagar was, **“An Egyptian maid.”**

She obviously joined this household while Abraham was muddling his way in the will of God. {Chapter 12}

Although that episode of failure was forgiven, it is instructive to see how its consequences provided an ingredient in this new mistake.

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As soon as Hagar falls pregnant the whole situation took a downward turn.

One sin always leads to another. Abraham's troubles had just begun.

This was a culture in which for the woman, childbearing was everything.

It was the evidence of her fruitfulness, her fulfillment, her favour with God, her very worth as a woman.

Hagar now sees herself in one light and sees Sarah in quite another.

Proverbs 30:21-23

“Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: a servant who becomes king, a fool who is full of food, an unloved woman who is married, and a maidservant who displaces her mistress.”

Abraham's house certainly trembled and couldn't bear up.

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Hagar began to despise Sarah and hold her in contempt. This leads to the sin of pride and haughtiness in Hagar.

In Sarah it produces a cauldron of wounded pride and seething jealousy which quickly becomes hatred, malice and cruelty towards Hagar.

She begins to blame Abraham for this mess and their relationship is clearly soured.

In Abraham it produced the sin of withdrawal from responsibility; a false neutrality that wants to wash its hands of the situation.

It's a callous indifference that was prepared to leave Hagar to face her fate.

Verse 6

“Do as you please.”

Anything for a quiet life. This seems to be a particularly masculine sin.

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Beyond the immediate confusion it brought to the household, this course of action produced long term fruit that has been as equally devastating.

The offspring of this pathway of human expediency was a boy called Ishmael.

Galatians 6:7

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Abraham and Sarah sowed to the wind and they reaped the whirlwind.

That whirlwind tore up the harmony of their household and has continued on through the generations wrecking havoc.

The descendants of Ishmael {the Arab nations} are still in conflict with the descendants of Isaac {the Jewish nation} to this day.

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This is mute testimony to the longevity of sin and its consequences.

Forgiveness may be forthcoming but the fact that you are cleansed and forgiven doesn't necessarily erase, or ensure that the consequences will be eliminated.

- Abraham was the father of faith and the patriarch of people and nations, but when he sowed to the flesh, he reaped a harvest.
- Moses spoke to the Lord 'face to face as a man speaks with his friend, but when he indulged his anger, he reaped a harvest.
- David was a man after God's own heart, but when he sinned he reaped a devastating harvest with many tears over many years.

Quit dabbling with the flesh, because if you don't there will be many more 'Ishmael's' born to you and a harvest of pain may even outlast your lifetime.

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What is the answer to this temptation to take matters into your own hands and resort to the flesh to see the promises established?

You need to remind yourself that God isn't 'holding out' on you. He loves you and is more concerned with you coming into your inheritance than you are.

He's not prepared to 'short change' you and allow some 'watered down' version of what He intended because you get it too quickly.

A very good definition of sin is; **“the attempt to take by force that which God would give to you by grace.”**

In order to come into God's promises you need two essential ingredients;

1. Faith.
2. Patience.

Hebrews 6:12-15

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We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Vs 15

And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

Both ingredients are needed.

Faith believes that God will do it.

Patience waits for God to do it.

The fruit of God's purpose takes time to mature and ripen.

James 5:7 -8

“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.”

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The opposite of this spirit is reflected in **Isaiah 17:11**
{Moffatt} It speaks of

“Forcing the growth {of your plants} the very day you plant them till they bloom for you the next morning. All that you get from them will vanish on your day of dole and desperate pain.”

Isaiah tells us how to respond in these settings and what will happen if we fail.

Isaiah 50:10-11

Who among YOU fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.

Psalms 27:14

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“Wait {to bind together by twisting} on the Lord. Be of good courage {be strong, fasten upon, seize, prevail} and He will strengthen {fortify, make strong} your heart. Wait I say upon the lord.”

I don't know the situations that you face. I can't tell what temptations of the flesh you battle with to take matters into your own hands and produce the thing you felt you were promised.

It could be anything from ministry to marital bliss, from career advancement to carrying children **“Be warned, God is not mocked. What you sow you will also surely reap.”**

Don't seek to take by force that which God seeks to give you by grace.

Wait His season, wait His timing.

If you get what you want on your terms, it will always have a price tag and an interest rate that will cripple you now and into your future.

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We have no idea why God makes us wait, but be assured of the wisdom of His purpose.

One of the things we need to remind ourselves of is the fact that our present struggles are often necessary for our future achievement.

“A young viewer watched with awe as the top of the cocoon broke open and the moth struggled to release itself. As he watched the moth struggle to exert its newly formed muscles, he observed that its progress was very slow. In an attempt to help, he reached down and widened the opening of the cocoon to make it easier for the moth to get out. Within minutes it was free from its prison. Its shriveled wings were wrapped close to its body. Soon the wings would fill out and it would be able to fly. But as the boy watched its wings remained shriveled. Something was wrong. What he did not realize was that the struggle to get out of the cocoon was an essential means of developing the muscle system of the moth’s body. The pressure of these muscles working together was necessary to push the blood out into the wings and fill them out to their full dimension. In an

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effort to relieve a struggle, the boy had crippled the future of this creature. He realized at the expense of the moth that present struggles are essential for future achievement.