

14. Apathy+Human solution=What a mess!

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I don't know about you, but it happens to me a quite often, because I am so impatient. When I drive in Tucson on my errand day which usually is Tuesday, I get in the lane which I think it is gonna move faster than other lanes. What happens? You guessed it. The guy in front of me cannot find his gas pedal. A 90 years old grandma can ride a bike faster than this guys. So, I change the lane to pass by him. Guess what he does? Somehow he duplicates himself in to my new lane. There is another person who drive 20 miles per hour in 45 mile zone. Then I decide to run over that guy with my truck, but I see a TPD cruiser is pulling up next to me.

OK, I decide that I will take a detour to get to my destination faster. I was trying to help myself to get there a little faster, so that I can sit and wait for my appointment. After all, I have lived in Tucson for 24 years and I know my way around. What do you know? Right in my new route, they are doing a road construction. There are about 12 construction workers on the road. Ten of them are standing around under the shade and smoking and laughing. The other two are holding "Slow" signs from the both end of the construction site. It just is not my day. You know what I am talking about.

Someone wisely said, "The detour is always worse than the main road." What a brilliant idea, huh? Didn't they say somewhere in the Bible, "God helps those who help themselves"?

If you can find that verse printed in the Bible, I will give you \$20. As a matter of fact, God prefers us not to get in His way. He doesn't want us to help Him. He has a very big sign in front of our lives, "No help wanted."

This morning we are going to see Abram and Sarai making a major mess in their lives that still effects our lives, too.

Genesis 16 records a painful detour that Abram and Sarai made in their pilgrim walk, a detour that brought conflict not only into their home but also into the current world. What today's journalists call "the Israeli-Arab conflict" began right here.

A. LET'S HELP GOD

Genesis 16:1-3 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. 2 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. 3 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.

One of the principal themes in Genesis is the quest for children, especially sons. In Abram and Sarai's lives this theme gets a lot of attention. In the world of the Old Testament, infertility caused great distress. At that time, the woman was always blamed. When a woman was not able to conceive a child, her husband might divorce her. Sarai's desperate effort to have a child through Hagar was fully in accord with the Semitic tribe's practices of those days.

Why did God wait so long? He wanted Abram and Sarai to be physically “as good as dead” so that God alone would get the glory. At age eighty-five, Abram was still capable to father a child by Hagar. So the time for the miracle baby had not yet arrived.

We should remember that it is through faith and patience that we receive God’s promises.

God’s timing is as important as His call and will. God has a perfect timetable for all that He wants to do for His glory. But Sarai was not concerned about the glory of God. Her only goal was “*perhaps I shall obtain children by her*”. There is a hint of disappointment with God and even blaming God. It has often been said that God’s delay is not God’s denial, but satan whispers to us, “God is holding out on you! If He loved you, things would be different! Blame Him!”

Sarai probably felt it was time for her to do something. Wrong, very wrong. God wants us to completely depend on Him for everything.

Willingness to wait on the Lord is evidence that we are walking by faith. Whenever we stop trusting God, we start to make our own decision, we end up in a serious mess.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Heb 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

God does not have a suggestion box in front of His Pearly Gate in heaven. He doesn’t want us to give Him our advices. He really doesn’t want us to insist our ways over His. The fact is that we are stupid and we don’t know anything about the future, but He is infinitely wise and He knows everything. How are we going to advise someone who knows all things with our puny brains? But we sure do try it, though.

B. LOOK WHAT YOU HAVE DONE

Genesis 16:4-6 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. 5 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.” 6 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.

It had been more than ten years since the promise was made regarding Abram’s descendants. By most accounts, ten years is a long time to wait for the promise of God.

The long waiting for the promise discouraged them and made them vulnerable to acting in the flesh. Yet, even after this, it would still be more than 13 years until the child of promise came.

When we impatiently try to “help God out” in the flesh, it accomplishes nothing and may even prolong the time until the promise is fulfilled. Jacob had to live as an exile for 25 years because he thought he had to “help God out” to get his father’s blessing. Moses had to tend sheep for 40 years in the desert after he tried to “help God out” by murdering an Egyptian. I am sure that we all have our own stupidity like these people.

It is much better to receive God’s help than to try and help Him out in the flesh and make a major mess.

Abram was certainly in the flesh also when he agreed with Sarai’s idea and not trusting in God’s ability to provide an heir through Sarai. Note that he didn’t pray and seek to God about this.

Now the result of the men’s solution for God’s-seemingly-unfulfilled-promise raises its ugly head. Hagar’s contempt for Sarai started the problem. She couldn’t resist displaying an inappropriate haughtiness, thinking her pregnancy somehow showed her to be better than Sarai.

Sarai blamed the whole situation on Abram, and for a good reason. However, he took a stance of apathy. He should have acted as the spiritual leader and told his wife God was able to perform what He promised, and they didn’t need to try to “help God out” in the works of the flesh.

Abram should have not listen to his wife’s ungodly counsel. He should told her to trust God’s promise no matter what. But he didn’t.

*Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;*

Abram seemed to make a bad situation worse by turning the situation over to Sarai and not taking care of the child he fathered and the woman who is pregnant by him. Abram’s solution was to give in to his wife and relinquish spiritual headship in the home and became a spiritual wimp.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are many spiritual wimps in America’s born-again Christian homes. Instead of following the Word of God and leading their families to the path of our Lord Jesus, they’d rather take backseats and let their wives to be the spiritual leaders of their homes for whatever the reasons are. Gentlemen, that is against the Word of God. I am not saying that you should be male chauvinists.

Eph 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

To be worthy of our wives’ submission, we must first submit to our God and His Word. Then it is not that difficult for our wives to respect us and submit to our decisions in our homes. Yes, God put more responsibility to husband than wife.

This situation also reminds me about deadbeat fathers and guys who get women pregnant and not taking a responsibility. If that person is a man enough to get a woman pregnant, he should been a man enough to take care of the child and the mother of that child. Having a child out of wedlock is a sin itself, when that person doesn’t take care of the child and mother, it is additional sin against God.

When a spiritual person exercises apathy and depends on human solution for the problems he or she is facing, the result is absolutely a confusion and mess.

C. I AM OUTTA HERE

Genesis 16:7-9 Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8 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." 9 The Angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand."

This is the first appearance in Scripture of "the Angel of the Lord", who is generally identified as our Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that the Son of God took on a temporary body, left heaven, and came down to help a rejected servant-girl surely reveals His grace and love. Jesus is always out looking for the lost.

God tells Hagar to do something very difficult: go back to her terrible situation and to submit herself to Sarai. Probably Hagar was thinking, "I'd like to have a second opinion."

D. THE BEGINNING OF THE ARAB NATIONS

Genesis 16:10-12 Then the Angel of the Lord said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." 11 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. 12 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."

God then told her that she was pregnant with a son whom she should name Ishmael which means "God hears". While he would not be Abram's heir in the blessings of the covenant, Ishmael would still enjoy blessings from God since he was Abram's son. God promised to multiply Ishmael's descendants and make them into great nations, and He did. Because Ishmael is the founder of the Arab peoples.

Ishmael would be a "wild donkey of a man" in NIV translation, which is not a very flattering description. It identified him with unruly character with defiant attitude.

He would be a hated man and living "his hand shall be against every man". While we must not apply these traits to every descendant of Ishmael, the centuries-long hostility between the Jews and the Arabs is too well known to be ignored. The Arab nations are independent peoples, dwelling in the desert lands and resisting other nations, especially Israel and her ally U.S.A.

You think about it, how many nations in the world can cause so much troubles as this particular countries do and still get by? Not only that, but also they are blessed with the wealth of oil to control the world economy. It is because the promise of God to Hagar, since she is with a child from Abram.

I am not making a racial profiling here. But I cannot stop thinking about how much trouble these lunatic Arab terrorists caused whenever I go through airport security checks.

E. THE GOD WHO SEES

Genesis 16:13-16 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?" 14 Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Ishmael is the first man in the Bible to receive his name before he was born.

If we seek to change our circumstances without God's guidance, we will jump from the frying pan into the fire. It is not a change of circumstance we need, but a change of heart. Our human mindset wants to run away, but God wants to demonstrate His power exactly while we go through difficulty.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Willingness to wait on the Lord is evidence that you are walking by faith.

Isaiah 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Gal 6:9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

2) We must know that God's delay is not God's denial for our prayer.

It depends on His perfect timetable. During the waiting period, we get to learn to depend on Him.

3) Let's remember that whenever we run ahead of God, there is trouble.

Our doubting mind loves to help God out, but true faith is shown in patience. We cannot mix faith and doubt, promise and self-effort.