

“Haven’t We Been Here Before?”

Genesis 16:1-16

July 24th, 2016

The term "déjà vu" (French for "already seen") describes the experience of feeling that one has witnessed or experienced a new situation previously. We’ve all had déjà vu moments while walking around a corner, driving down a street, or simply putting away dishes whereby we ask ourselves, “*Haven’t I done this before? Haven’t I been here before?*”

When Billy Martin was hired in late April 1985 for the fourth time as manager of the New York Yankees, replacing Yogi Berra, Yogi added to his well-deserved reputation as an amusing user of the English language when he said, "It's Deja vu all over again."

As we come to Genesis chapter 16 this morning, we have a similar déjà vu moment with the next chapter in the life of Abram and Sarai. We continue today our weekly sermon series through the Bible’s first book, Genesis, in a series I’ve entitled, *The Book of Beginnings: God’s Grace in Genesis*. God’s grace is always with God’s people, though sometimes it can be harder to detect than other times, *can’t it?*

In Genesis chapters 13-15, Abram was depicted as a man of great faith. But, now, with chapter 16, he comes across as a man of little faith. Though Abram would be the father of a great nation – encompassing believing Israelites in Old Testament times, and Christians in the New Testament order and beyond – Abram was, at times, a man of doubt, fear, and passivity.

Genesis 16:1-16:

“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. ⁴ 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.

⁷ 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.”

¹⁰ 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.”

¹³ 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.”

I'll approach this text from a cause and effect outline. That outline is provided for us by today's verse of the week (found in the bulletin, bottom right hand corner) - **2 CORINTHIANS 5:7** – “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” – **2 CORINTHIANS 5:7**

MP 1 – The Problem(s) – Abram and Sarai complicate matters because they walked by sight;
MP 2 – The Solution- Waiting on the LORD – walking by faith.

Even though it was addressed in the previous chapter (15 - which we studied last Lord's Day morning), Verse 1 begins with the core problem – Sarai was without child. “Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no *children*.”

Even in our drifting, rudder-less culture, motherhood is held in high esteem. Because Sarai was barren, by all human calculations the heir of God's promise to Abram could not come through her. And, according to Sarai, time had already run out on God's promise to make Abram into a great nation! She was now 75 years old-well past child-bearing years!

This core problem spawned another problem – Sarai blamed her barrenness on God. Verse 2 begins, “So Sarai said to Abram, “See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing *children*.” Ultimately, this statement is true as God preserves and governs all His creatures and all their actions (WSC 11). But, Sarai's resignation to her childlessness does not demonstrate her contentment with God. She didn't seem to understand that God's delays are not God's denials.

Perhaps it was Sarai's bitterness toward God that led to a third problem- Verse 2 also shows it in her words to Abram, “Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.” Sarai took matters into her own hands suggesting that Abram take Hagar as a wife and through that relationship, bring about God's promised heir. After all, such a practice of fathering children by handmaidens (having multiple wives) was accepted by the culture in that day.

Sarai was in a very dangerous spot at this point. She was not looking to God in faith, but was instead walking by sight. She looked at her circumstances from a human perspective, not a heavenly one. Simply because the culture declares that some practice is good, even enacting laws to get the point across, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is.

So, how does Abram fathering a child by Sarai's handmaiden fit with God's Word?

* **Genesis 2:22-24** – “Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. ²³ And Adam said:

“This *is* now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

* **Matthew 19:3-6** – “The Pharisees also came to Him (Jesus), testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?”

⁴ And He (Jesus) answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

The Bible teaches that sexual relations between a man and a woman are to take place within the context of holy matrimony. And, the context of biblical marriage is one man and one woman for life. Sarai had no warrant to suggest Abram take to himself a second wife. And, surely Abram had no business listening to his wife’s instruction when it took them away from God’s will!

As time passes, our culture moves further away from God’s Word in what it teaches and lives. There are many practices in our day that are accepted, and sometimes exalted, by the culture – like the adultery Abram committed with Hagar. Some unholy deviations are contrary to God’s will for us. Among these practices:

* Lying to/about others to get ahead;
* Falsifying income taxes – not reporting income to the IRS or State Department of Revenue;
* Stealing time/income from employers – not giving them a full, honest day’s work;
* Robbing God of His tithe and our offerings, and spending it instead on selfish gain;
* Treating Sunday, the Lord’s Day, as just another weekend day for our own enjoyment;
* Pursuing unwarranted divorce – God gives only two possible rationales to allow marriage between two Christians to dissolve – desertion of the union by an unbelieving spouse or sexual immorality.

What did Abram do in response to Sarai’s suggestion? He didn’t make the situation any better. Verses 3 and 4 – “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. ⁴ So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived.” Abram acquiesced to his wife’s suggestion! He rationalized his adultery as his wife’s desire for them. What weakness at a time when moral courage was needed! Instead, Abram should have been a godly man! He should have taken Sarai aside and assured her of his love and that she was first. He should have accepted the full blame and responsibility!

Husbands, our wives need us to stand up! The church needs us to be masculine! No more absentee fathers, at home or in the church! No more *weak* men – stop treating your wife like one of the guys, or one of your children, or your personal slave! Your wife is God’s gift to you – she is your helpmate, your soulmate, and she requires your love, attention, and spiritual leadership!

Haven't we been here before? Déjà vu! The shadow of Genesis 3 falls across this account. What takes place in Genesis 16 parallels what took place in Genesis 3. "Sarai's action was parallel to that of Eve. Here Abram listened to his wife, just as Adam listened to his. Here Sarai took Hagar, just as Eve took the fruit. Here Sarai gave Hagar to her husband, just as Eve gave the fruit to hers. And in both cases the man willingly and knowingly partook." (Hughes, 239)

The story gets worse. Hagar conceives, her pregnancy makes Sarai jealous, and she seeks relief from her husband Abram. He wants nothing of getting in between two warring women, so he washes his hands of Hagar and tells Sarai she can do with her what she pleases.

Verse 6 shows Hagar having left Abram and Sarai, on her way back home to Egypt. (*Don't you just feel for Hagar at this point?* She evidently has done nothing wrong, certainly nothing to warrant the treatment she's received, yet she was victimized by both Abram and Sarai!) All alone now, the Angel of the Lord (probably a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ) appears to her and provides comfort in the form of the promises in verses 11 & 12. Because she conceived a child with Abram, her firstborn would also be the recipient of God's promises.

With the birth of her child Ishmael (which means "God has heard"), Hagar gave a name to God (the only human to do so in Scripture) – "The God who sees." Abram was 86 years old.

Ishmael's offspring are Arabs. They would become a thorn in the flesh to God's people under both the Old and New covenants. Through Ishmael, the firstborn, they claim Abram as their father and affirm that they are his truest representations!

We've discussed **what's wrong with this passage, fraught with many problems. What is the solution?** Walking by faith. Waiting on the Lord. Both of these are severely lacking in this 16th chapter of Genesis. And, if we're truthful with ourselves both of them are often lacking in our daily walk with the Lord and His people, aren't they?

What can we do? Go back – even as the Angel of the Lord instructed Hagar to go back to Sarai – we must go back to God's Word. We must believe it and stand upon it in all of the circumstances of life in a fallen world!

* **Psalm 27:14** – "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!"

* **Psalm 37:7** – "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass."

* **Psalm 130:5** – "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope."

What is the result of such waiting on the Lord? Again, we find such answers in Scripture.

* **Psalm 25:3** – "Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed..." No guilt and shame!

* **Psalm 40:1** – "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry." The assurance of answered prayer!

* **Proverb 20:22** – "Do not say, "I will recompense evil"; wait for the LORD, and He will save you." Salvation from wickedness, sin and despair!

* **Isaiah 25:9** – “Behold, this *is* our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This *is* the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” Enjoying God in all of His fullness and grace!

“So here (in Genesis 16) we see the messes the people of God make. But into our arrogance and waffling and nastiness comes the God who finds and who hears and who sees. Our case is never hopeless so long as He hears our affliction and sees us in the wilderness.” (Davis, 77)